

## STUDENT MASTER

# Student Stewards

Put simply, environmental stewardship is when a person whose actions affect the environment takes responsibility for maintaining or improving the quality of that environment. It's your Earth. It's your water, your air, your oceans and coasts. It's your responsibility as someone who uses and appreciates these things to act as stewards to take care of these things and leave them for future generations to use and appreciate.

In this exercise, you and your classmates are going to meet three students: Tia, Will, and Kylie. These three kids are a lot like you. They live in different parts of the country, but share something in common. In 2010, all three of them were very upset with the tragic events surrounding the Gulf oil spill and were inspired to become stewards of their local estuaries and wetlands.

## Procedure

1. Read your team's assigned story of one of the student's reaction to the 2010 Gulf oil spill and that student's response.
2. Answer the following questions as a team and be prepared to present your answers to your class.

## Questions

Q1. What is your student's name? Where does your student live?

Q2. How did your student react to the 2010 Gulf oil spill? Give specific examples.

Q3. What other events or interests in the student's life inspired the student to care about the oil spill and its impact on the Gulf?

Q4. How is your student a steward of the estuaries or wetlands?



## STUDENT MASTER

# Student Stewards

## Tia Smith

### Oregon - April 2010

The morning that news of the Gulf oil spill first reached Tia, she was making breakfast while her little sister Tess pranced around the room in a ballerina costume. Outside, a cold rain fell on the green blanket of fir and spruce trees that covered the hills around her house. Just another Oregon spring day! In Oregon, liquid April sunshine brings May moss.

Tia was watching a news report on the family laptop. She saw a blazing fire that had erupted from a wrecked offshore drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico. She couldn't believe her eyes. Several boats worked furiously to quell the flames, but as the water spouts arced into the sky and landed on the fire, they seemed ridiculously inadequate to the task. Beyond the ring of vessels, Tia could see bizarre brown streaks snaking their way across the surface of the sea. Oil was escaping from the broken well and was beginning to spread across the Gulf.

Tia's family had visited the Gulf of Mexico two summers ago. Tia had raced with Tess along the beaches near Gulfport, Mississippi on their family vacation. The family had rented a place in Ocean Springs where they could walk to the beach. Man, what a great trip that had been! White sands and beach time every day with warm winds and plenty of time to hang out and watch boys. What's not to like? Now, Tia realized that the whole scene she remembered could change very quickly.

Over the next couple of weeks, as the daily news reports began to show fouled Gulf beaches and oil-covered birds, Tia became sad and frustrated. She found herself looking over her family's Gulf vacation photos. One photo in particular caught her attention. A beautiful brown pelican perched atop a piling gazed knowingly at her with one big dark eye. Tia remembered how she and her family had drifted quietly along the waters of the inlet past a flock of these graceful but awkward looking creatures. The one in the picture had stayed in place the longest and then gently swooped down off the post and glided out across the glassy surface towards the bay.

Tia loved birds. Her heart was breaking as she watched the news from the Gulf. Night after night, she saw the images of oiled pelicans and egrets, and of other wildlife being rescued or simply counted as casualties of the spill. "I wish I could do something to help. But what?" she wondered.

Tia had an idea! What if she created a blog where kids from all over the country could share their thoughts and feelings about what was happening in the Gulf and let kids down there know they weren't alone and that lots of people cared? She often got frustrated at school when she heard her classmates complaining all of the time, but never willing to jump in and do something to make a difference. This time she wasn't going to sit back and do nothing! She was going to take action!



## STUDENT MASTER

# Student Stewards

### Will Ferris

#### Alaska - April 2010

Far to the north, in the tiny town of Homer, Alaska, along the shores of Kachemak Bay, Will Ferris was walking the beach after school. The snow had just barely disappeared from the ground around his house. Will was headed off to meet some buddies to see if they could persuade some spring Chinook to take a hand-tied fly along the bay near Catching Creek.

Will felt proud about the work he and his class had done along the banks of the creek. They had planted willows and hemlock to provide shade for young salmon moving downstream and out to sea. Some of the kids had worked through the summer to put some large logs in place along the creek to create deep, dark pools for the young salmon to hide from predators. Now Will was ready to go back and try his hand at landing a fish or two for the dinner table.

As he walked, Will recalled some bad news he had read that morning. A friend of his from Alabama had posted some pictures and first-hand descriptions on Facebook about the crazy scene unfolding in the Gulf of Mexico. Oil was spreading like a plague through the waters around an exploded oil rig. It sounded too familiar.

Will remembered hearing how hard things were for his family when the Exxon Valdez oil tanker dumped tons of oil nearby in 1989. His Uncle Frank worked in the oil industry, designing drilling rigs. His cousins and older brother had spent most of that summer over in Prince William Sound, working to scrub the rocky shores clean. The pay was good, but later people figured out that the cleanup had done more harm than good. Will imagined that this spill in the gulf was hitting oil workers and their families hard, too.

Now it looked like this new Gulf oil spill was going to be even bigger than the Exxon Valdez spill had been. Will wondered, "What can I do to help people in the Gulf?" He couldn't stop the huge amounts of oil gushing up from the broken oil rig, but maybe he could give some kids down there an idea of how to keep more oil from draining off the land and making things worse. Will remembered the oil he and his friends had found in the water when they were doing bank restoration work at Catching Creek. They figured out that the oil was coming from storm runoff at a huge parking lot, several blocks away. Will and his class decided to organize a native planting project around the storm drains leading into Catching Creek. The plants could help filter out some of the oil before it went down the drains and into the creek. What if people upstream from the Gulf of Mexico, all along the Mississippi River drainage basin, did their own native planting projects? Could that keep additional oil out of the hard-hit Gulf waters?





## STUDENT MASTER

# Student Stewards

## Kylie Simmons

### Alabama - April 2010

“What can I do to help?” That question never really occurred to Kylie Simmons. There wasn’t time. Almost as soon as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill happened, Kylie and her classmates went to work along the beaches near Gulf Shores, Alabama deploying an oil boom to protect the precious young marsh plants from the fast approaching spill. So far the oil had only hit the shore in a few places, but wildlife on the barrier islands off of Louisiana was showing up oiled and it seemed only a matter of time before Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida were hit with it too.

These weren’t just any marsh plants Kylie was protecting. These were her marsh plants. Kylie and her classmates from Jubilee Middle School had spent many hours working on the “Grasses in Classes” program to seed and grow saltmarsh spartina seedlings at her school.

Then they helped plant the seedlings along an eroding shoreline nearby. Now, the threat of oily, black tar balls slowly making their way to shore was threatening to ruin all of their hard work. Kylie and her classmates had to leap into action once again.

Today, Kylie and her classmates had a plan. But what would happen in the weeks to come? The oil spill had already been spreading for days and the end wasn’t in sight. In fact, the oil company was telling the government that the soonest they would be able to stop oil from pouring into the Gulf would probably be August, three months from now! In the meantime, her class had a new crop of seedlings ready to transplant, but they had no idea where to plant them. How would they protect the seedlings they and others had already planted or were about to plant from being overcome by the oil that was moving out across the Gulf?

