

503 bryan avenue
fort worth, texas 76104



PHONE : 817.348.8102
FAX : 817.348.8680

realschoolgardens.org

Media contact: Margaret Ritsch
Balcom Agency, 817-877-9933

ACCLAIMED AUTHOR, NATURALIST TO SPEAK ON JOURNALING OUTDOORS

Clare Walker Leslie to share ideas with teachers, parents at REAL School Gardens public gathering in Fort Worth

FORT WORTH, Texas – [January 22, 2009] -- The front cover says it all: tiny pictures of butterflies, leaves, fish, flowers, acorns, shells and dragonflies blanket the front of 3rd-grader Marena Bocanegra's nature journal, and inside she's begun to scribble a world of wonder.

Marena is one of thousands of children in the Fort Worth area whose schools have gardens, and where journaling outdoors is one of many learning activities encouraged by their affiliation with REAL School Gardens.

Because of the practice of nature journaling in these schools, renowned author, artist and naturalist Clare Walker Leslie is coming to Fort Worth as a guest of REAL School Gardens. She will present a free workshop on nature journaling for teachers, parents, and grandparents on Tuesday, Feb. 10 at Westcliff Elementary School in Fort Worth from 4-7 pm.

REAL School Gardens is a non-profit organization devoted to establishing gardens in elementary schools across the nation, with the goal of connecting young children with nature. The organization currently works with more than 28,000 students in 54 elementary schools in North Texas.

It hosts three REAL People events for the public at its schools annually, and this year, with Clare Walker Leslie, it is bringing in someone highly revered in education and environment circles. For more than three decades, students and teachers have benefited from Walker's innovative workshops and presentations around the country. Her books, *Nature Drawing: A Tool for Learning* and *Keeping a Nature Journal*, are key components of numerous outdoor education programs.

At the Feb. 10 event, Leslie plans to give parents and teachers a variety of strategies and tips to help children get the most from journaling. "I just want them (students) to get to know where they live. I want them to think about, list and describe the animals and plants in their town, to consider how they are all part of the web of life – from the two-legged to the four legged to the six-legged – to understand that they live in their town too."

Kathy Cash, a master naturalist with the Forth Worth Independent School District, said Leslie's work has inspired and deepened her personal journaling, as well as workshops she conducts for teachers.

"Journaling helps students learn to write and talk about their thinking, while collecting evidence to support their ideas and learning more about the world around them," she said. "For teachers, nature journaling is a

window to better understand what their students are seeing, thinking and learning about outside in the garden or on the playground.”

Donnette Durham, a science teacher at Alice Carlson Applied Learning Center in Fort Worth, said nature journaling requires both children and adults to observe nature with a more critical eye and to be more focused.

As a naturalist, Leslie says she’s motivated to encourage people of all ages to spend more time in nature, to help people grasp the concept that we are all one and connected. And she credits her passion for nature for her success as an author and educator. “My excitement seems infectious with children,” she said. “We go outside and we don’t know what we’ll find. And I’ve never met a child that wanted to go back inside.”

Leslie hopes her REAL People workshop not only helps students and adults gain more from journaling, but strengthens their connection with nature so it seems less like a fantasy world and more a part of their everyday life.

“At our core, we love and need nature. It’s a part of our ancient structure,” says Leslie. “When it’s taken away, we feel weird.”

“We’re less connected today than ever,” she said. That disconnect has harmed the environment, as a lack of knowledge about and experience in nature have blinded people to the consequences of neglect and abuse of our natural resources, she says.

REAL School Gardens Executive Director Jeanne McCarty eagerly anticipates the opportunity for her staff and teachers in the network to learn from Leslie. “Her work is truly an expression of her deep passion for nature, and she’s making a difference every day in the lives of so many people using that passion.”

The workshop is free and open to the public, but rsvps are required by contacting ifitzgerald@realschoolgardens.org. Leslie will also visit TCU to conduct a workshop with students at the Andrews Institute of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education and hold a book signing at the TCU Bookstore Feb. 11 at 1 p.m.

About REAL School Gardens

REAL School Gardens cultivates relationships with elementary school communities to create learning gardens that raise hope, spark imaginations and connect children to nature. For more information, visit www.realschoolgardens.org.

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