



Trout in the Classroom

Thomas Heath

Bristol Virginia Public Schools, Bristol, Virginia USA (toheath@bristolvaschools.org)

Trout in the Classroom (TIC) is a conservation-oriented environmental education program for elementary, middle, and high school students. During the year each teacher tailors the program to fit his or her curricular needs. Therefore, each TIC program is unique. TIC has interdisciplinary applications in science, social studies, mathematics, language arts, fine arts, and physical education.

In the program, students and teachers raise trout from fertilized eggs supplied by Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VGIF) hatcheries, in aquariums equipped with special chillers designed to keep the water near 50 degrees F. The students make daily temperature measurements, and monitor pH, dissolved oxygen, conductivity, and ammonia levels. They record their data, plot trends, and make sure that the water quality is sufficient to support trout development. The fingerlings, which hatch in late October, are almost an inch and a half long by mid-January. And towards the end of the school year, students will release the fry into VGIF approved watersheds.

TIC programs have been in place all across the country for more than 20 years, and are the result of numerous collaborations between teachers, volunteers, government agencies, and local organizations like Trout Unlimited. The programs were designed specifically for teachers who wanted to incorporate more environmental education into their curriculum.

While the immediate goal of Trout in the Classroom is to increase student knowledge of water quality and cold water conservation, its long-term goal is to reconnect an increasingly urbanized population of youth to the system of streams, rivers, and watersheds that sustain them. Successful programs have helped:

- connect students to their local environments and their local watersheds;
- teach about watershed health and water quality, and;
- get students to care about fish and the environment.

In Virginia, the TIC program is now in its 8th year. Over the past year, the program experienced an amazing growth spurt. Thanks to AEP and Dominion grants and chapter fundraising efforts, we now have more than 200 classrooms throughout the state, ranging from elementary school through high school.