

## Read, Explore, Create

Reading a book has become a very creative experience in a number of Twin Cities Metro Area schools, due to a special program that received funding from the Minnesota State Arts Board Arts Learning Program.

Marine 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes with Tracy Kempenich and Chris Getchell are participating in Read, Explore, Create (REC) this year! Read, Explore, Create is a partnership between Milkweed Editions, a publisher of books for youth and adults; COMPAS, which brings artists into schools and Watershed Wisdom, a watershed education program for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades in the St. Croix Watershed. Through REC, students read a Milkweed book, meet with the book's author in-person or via a live web chat and explore the book's themes through arts and science residencies.

Marine 4<sup>th</sup> grade class selected Milkweed's *Stories from Where We Live: The Great North American Prairie*. This anthology gathers the literature that best conveys the region's natural heritage. Students readings might include songs and narratives from Plains Indians, stories of nineteenth-century settlers and contemporary stories, essays, and poems about coyotes, meadowlarks, farm life, wild places in the city, and efforts to restore native prairie. As they dip into this book, they'll hear the whistle of prairie dogs, witness the dance of sandhill cranes, catch the white flash of a pronghorn's tail, and revisit the massive buffalo. Anthology contributor Marybeth Lorbiecki enriched students' readings with a visit on January 13 to talk about her life, the writing process and lead students in a writing exercise.

In October, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade began reading Milkweed's *Morning Earth: Field Notes in Poetry*, where poet John Caddy advocates poetry as a physical act—a morning practice or devotion, a decision to record quickly and without forethought the direct, momentary experience of each new day. Mr. Caddy presents a selection of his own daily poems, each followed by a brief prose comment setting the poem's ecological context. In November Mr. Caddy conducted two workshops to help students hone their poetry skills.

From February 3-17, students will work with COMPAS artist Anne McFaul Reid to create garden sculpture inspired by nature. Anne will guide students in planning, sketching and revising their ideas. Students will work with strips of cured, flexible paint and metal wire to assemble their final structure—a Native American totem (4<sup>th</sup> grade) or an animal found in the watershed (5<sup>th</sup> grade). As they work, students will discuss life forms in all of varied shapes and sizes, consider what requirements are needed to keep different organisms alive, integrate concepts of life science, physical science, measurement, weight and balance. Students' work will culminate in a public display of their garden

creatures and a corresponding writing or poem reflecting their connection to the sculpture.

With 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Watershed Wisdom educator Sally Leider, will use *Morning Earth* to integrate literature, art and nature studies. Through hands-on exploration, students will study what is a watershed, how water flows, watershed species such as macro invertebrates, insects, birds, and mammals and bio indicators that show the health of the environment.

Milkweed Editions is a fiscal year 2011 recipient of an Arts Learning grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board. This activity is funded by the arts and cultural heritage fund as appropriated by the Minnesota State Legislature with money from the Legacy Amendment vote of the people of Minnesota on November 4, 2008 and RBC Dain Rauscher.

Milkweed Editions ([www.milkweed.org](http://www.milkweed.org)) was founded in Minnesota in 1979 and is now one of the leading independent, literary nonprofit presses in America and one of the very few to publish children's books in addition to fiction, poetry, and nonfiction for adults. Through the Alliance for Reading, Milkweed has worked in Twin Cities Schools for more than fifteen years.

COMPAS ([www.compas.org](http://www.compas.org)), a statewide nonprofit arts organization, lets people experience and create the arts by connecting communities, cultures and artists. For over forty years COMPAS has worked with schools on creative arts projects that practice professional art techniques, build connections with classroom curriculum, and explore global history and cultural diversity.

Watershed Wisdom ([www.watershedwisdom.com](http://www.watershedwisdom.com)) links St. Croix Valley 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders with educators, artists, scientists and naturalists to inspire stewardship of the St. Croix Watershed. The program is a model of place-centered experiential education where learning about one's own "backyard" builds a lifelong commitment to preserving watershed health. Watershed Wisdom, now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year, is funded by the Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix Watershed District.