

Landfill project spurs Biology students' interest in ecology, community and the future

Students in Linda Tompkins' Regents Biology class have tackled a year-long project that they hope will raise their own and their community's awareness of both the benefits and hazards that go along with having a landfill in the community. Not coincidentally, they are also learning about the scientific method, research, and the knowledge they will need to pass the "Living Environment" Regents Exam in June.

Working with Mrs. Tompkins and her students is Tania Schussler, a Ph.D. fellow in the Cornell (University) Environmental Inquiry Research Partnership (CEIRP), which provides support for teachers and students conducting original research or inquiry-based projects in the environmental sciences. Ms. Schussler's dissertation research includes youth engagement in actions to improve the environment in their com-

munities. "I am especially interested in how adults can enable young people to ask and seek answers to their own questions about the world around them. In my mind, this is the essence of the scientific process," Ms. Schussler said. Her research and the work of CEIRP is funded by grants from the National Science Foundation, with additional support from Cornell University.

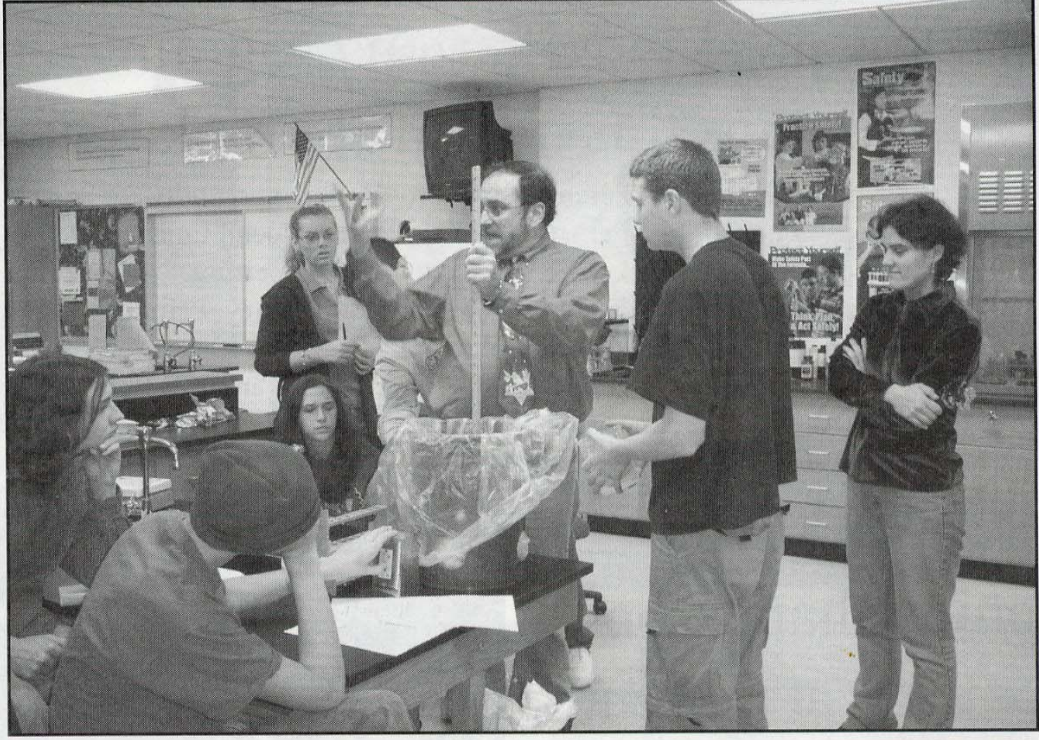
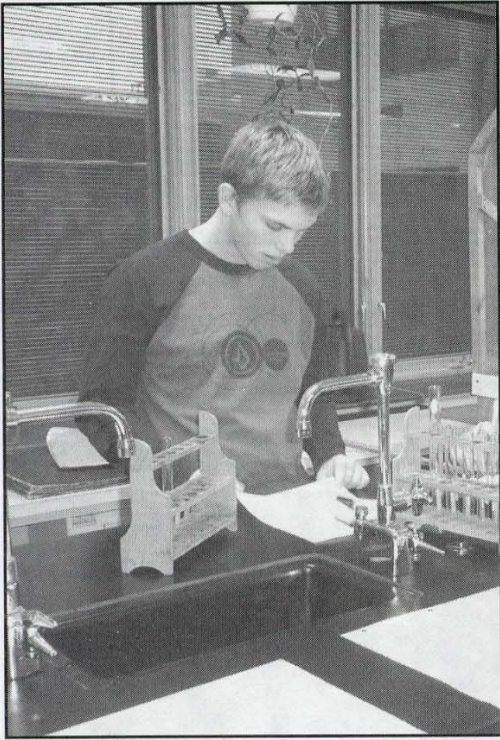
Ms. Tompkins met Ms. Schussler through her own graduate work at Cornell University. "Tania has been an invaluable asset in this project," Ms. Tompkins said. Also working with Mrs. Tompkins is Resource Room Teacher Ford Knight.

The landfill project was selected from several ideas presented by students. They believed it would most effectively relate science directly to their community. "Education is contagious, and we

have high hopes that we can in some way help influence the future of Seneca Falls," students wrote in a letter explaining the project.

Students are not promoting the pros or cons of the landfill or its attempted expansion, but rather are simply trying to raise awareness. Their project includes a panel discussion that is to be conducted this spring, as well as creating environmental impact maps; posters about alternatives to landfill disposal of trash and the environmental impacts of landfill gas and leachate; a PowerPoint presentation; a fact sheet about the local Seneca Meadows landfill; and guest speakers.

"This project is engaging students in biology learning that goes beyond the classroom and textbooks. I believe it will have an important impact on them and the future," Ms. Tompkins said.



The photo on page four shows students with the year-long timeline for their project. This page, top, shows students working on a lab assignment about building a landfill. At top right is Mr. Knight, center, and Ms. Schussler, far right, as students construct mini “landfills” in wastebaskets. Below left are views of Seneca Meadows Landfill from the students’ recent field trip to the landfill (far right). Below right is a Global Positioning System unit students used while visiting the landfill.

