



## **Nature Artist Teaches New Skill**

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During her visits to South Hill Elementary School as an additional innovative component to the "Trout In the Classroom" program, professional artist Camille Doucet helped 51 fourth graders not just to look, but to really "see".

Doucet shared her nature illustration techniques with the students as part of their year-long study of brown trout fry that they raised themselves in aquariums in their classrooms.

'Trout In the Classroom,' which is sponsored by the Cayuga Lake Floating Classroom and Trout Unlimited and implemented at all eight Ithaca City School District (ICSD) elementary schools, teaches students to maintain and monitor a cold-water aquarium and raise trout fry for release to a local stream.

Doucet's scientific illustration classes, funded by a \$1,450 Teacher Grant from the Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI), were added to the program at South Hill this year.

"This has given students a deeper understanding of trout," says fourth grade teacher Jennifer Wilkie. "They learn to be scientists and illustrators, working systematically and creatively to build new knowledge."

Doucet's three classroom visits coincided with important first-year developmental stages of the brown trout. She taught the fourth graders to look carefully—drawing only what they observed.

Working in pencil and crayon, the students sketched heads, fins, tails, gills and eyes, using dots or circles for the trout's mottled skin.



South Hill Elementary School fourth graders release trout fingerlings at Lower Buttermilk Falls State Park as part of the 'Trout In the Classroom' program.

They carefully blended two or more colors, trying to duplicate exactly the hues they saw.

"Children rarely learn to question and then trust what they see," says Doucet, a watercolor instructor whose own work in nature illustration has been exhibited in museums in Minnesota, New York and Connecticut.

"At times children defer to adults and authority figures to understand what they see with their own eyes," she

added. "To look and truly see what is being observed takes time and perhaps a little guidance."

The culmination of Doucet's drawing classes—and the 'Trout In the Classroom' program at South Hill—came when the students released their fingerlings at Lower Buttermilk Falls State Park.

Despite a steady rain, the students formed into small groups and waded into the chilly Buttermilk Creek.

Under the direction of Bill Foster, program director of the Cayuga Lake Floating Classroom, they slowly lowered the plastic containers holding their fingerlings into the stream.

The baby trout hesitated for only a moment and then—in a flash of movement—vanished.

Thanks to their close and careful study of trout and trout habitat, the South Hill fourth graders knew that Buttermilk Creek would make a good home for 'their" fish.

Along the way, they'd also learned to trust their own abilities to record nature.

"By the third class, at the time of the release of the trout," Doucet said proudly, "the children were drawing what they saw, instead of what they thought they should see."

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