

INTEGRATING CONCH IN THE CLASSROOM: A TROPICAL EXPERIENCE

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The queen conch, *Strombus gigas*, has been an important fisheries species throughout the Florida and Caribbean region for thousands of years, however, populations have become severely depleted in recent decades due to overharvesting. Many countries have since adapted fisheries management plans that focus on marine protected areas, aquaculture, stock enhancement, and education programs. As part of a Caribbean-wide conservation education program, the Conch Heritage Network (CHN) was established in 2001, and is headquartered at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution. The CHN is dedicated to the exchange and dissemination of queen conch information on biology, fisheries, culture, research, and education. Several research organizations, academic institutions, and public entities are active partners in the CHN. The CHN has developed a series of outreach materials available to the public, which features a video, informative brochures, posters, and an interactive website.

With support from Disney Wildlife Conservation Funds, the CHN has developed a “Conch in the Classroom” program for middle and high school students. This program includes a collection of lesson plans, educational modules, a virtual queen conch dissection, games and activities such as Queen Conch Jeopardy, and a guide to setting up a saltwater aquarium for queen conch and other species. This program is available online (www.savetheconch.org), on a CD-ROM, or in print format. In addition to the online resources, a supplemental teaching package is available to teachers incorporating conch in their classrooms.

Over thirty middle and high school teachers have adapted the “Conch in the Classroom” program into their marine science and biology curriculum. The queen conch lesson plans are flexible in design and incorporate state and national science standards. At present, a series of eight lesson plans cover queen conch history, socioeconomics, geography, habitat, biology, aquaculture, and current science research. The downloadable education modules include a comprehensive slide presentation in Microsoft PowerPoint®. These modules coincide with one to three lessons, and serve as a great resource for pictures and information.

To ensure the authenticity and effectiveness of the CHN outreach program, a survey is currently being conducted with teachers who have incorporated the queen conch lesson plans and activities in their classroom. This feedback will enable the CHN to revise activities, troubleshoot aquarium problems, and design grade-specific lesson plans. The CHN is committed to disseminating educational materials supporting the conservation of the queen conch.