YCC

Mia's Story

Mia: (Thinking) I'm having such a good day. I wonder if Mark, the environmental educator, ever taught science classes in school. He's so awesome.

Mia: (Thinking) Who's that? He only looks 16. Is he working on the refuge? (To Doug) Hi...I'm Mia.

Doug: Hey Mia. I'm Doug. What are you up to today?

Mia: I'm on a field trip. It's been so fun. All year we were learning about nature and today we actually got to see it for ourselves.

Doug: Yeah we really try to make sure you guys have fun.

Mia: But you're too young. Did you trick them into letting you help out?

Doug: (Chuckling) Nah...I'm from the Youth Conservation Corps or YCC as we like to call it. My friends and I help out each summer on National wildlife refuges, national fish hatcheries, and ecological service field offices.

Mia: So you get to spend all summer here on the refuge. How awesome!!

Doug: Yeah, it's even better than video games, especially since I get to help out a lot. In fact, right now I'm helping plant a pollinator garden.

Mia: What? Is that like the garden my mom planted?

Doug: Kind of, but we don't grow veggies, we grow plants and flowers that attract pollinators like bees.

Mia: Ew. I don't like bees. I don't want to get stung.

Doug: I know, I used to be scared of the bees too, but they help things grow. Bees spread pollen from flower to flower, and that makes plants grow. And it's not just bees – butterflies, birds, bats, and moths help too. They're called pollinators because they help us by spreading pollen.

Mia: Wow so the more pollinators there are, the better things grow. Can I help?

Doug: Sure, just click on a plant to the right. If it attracts pollinators, we'll plant it. If it doesn't attract pollinators, I'll tell you.

(mini-game)

Doug: Awesome. Bee balm attracts hummingbirds.

Doug: Yeah, butterflys love black-eyed susans.
Doug: Nice, sunflowers will get a lot of bees to come.

Doug: A pine tree doesn't flower and won't attract pollinators.
Doug: Ragweed actually spreads in pollen in the wind. It won't attract many pollinators.
Doug: Grass does not produce nectar and won't attract pollinators.

Doug: Thanks, it looks great. As you can see flowering plants attract the most pollinators.

Mia: That was fun. I love the butterflys. I am going to plant a garden like this at home.

Doug: Cool, it would probably even help your neighbors' plants to grow. Now that the garden is planted you can wander around. I will be here to answer any questions you might have.

Environmental Education

Mia: The girl at the help desk looks young like you. Is she in the YCC too?

Doug: Yup, I do that a lot as well. It's fun helping out visitors by answering their questions. It makes me feel like my hero, Mark.

Mia: You get to help out Mark! He talked to us all afternoon. He knows so much about the refuge!

Doug: Yeah he's cool. As the environmental educator he teaches visitors all about nature. He's always telling me that one of the main purposes of the refuge is to teach. That's why he loves working with schools and field trips like yours. It says it gives him a chance to really make a difference.

Mia: How fun! I think I want to be like him when I grow up!

Doug: So do I. I was on a field trip just like you when I first met him. He even helped me to join the YCC so that I could learn more about his job and see if I really liked it. It's been great!.

Mia: Wow, I want to join too. Where do I sign up?

Doug: You have to wait until you're 15 to apply for a YCC position, but you can always keep learning..

Water Quality Testing

Mia: What are those nets for? Do you fish with them?

Doug: Nah you can't catch any fish with those nets. Those nets are used to test the water quality in the refuge. They help us gather macroinvertebrates from the water.

Mia: I know what those are, we learned about those in school. They are animals that don't have a backbone, like bugs. But how do they tell you the water quality?

Doug: Its easy. After they are collected, we separate the different kinds of bugs and then figure out what type of bug they are. By counting the different types we can tell which bugs are growing the most. Scientists can then figure out how healthy the water is.

Mia: You mean scientists actually use the stuff you collect!

Doug: Yeah its awesome. The data that my YCC friends and I collect on the refuge is actually used by scientists to help their research. Later on you guys on your field trip will be collecting macroinvertebrates just like me and the scientists will use your information as well.

Mia: Oh my gosh! I didn't know. How cool.

Everything is Connected

Doug: Well it looks like Marks coming to talk to you. See yah later.

Mark: It looks like Doug was talking a lot.

Mia: Oh yeah! We talked all about the Youth Conservation corps and how much he loves helping you out with the fields trips. We planted a pollinator garden, and he even showed me what you guys do with those nets.

Mark: Yeah Doug really gets excited. He reminds me of me when I was his age. Is there anything else you want to know?

Mia: Well I am still not quite sure why bugs are important to the refuge?

Mark: Well basically it's because everything in nature is connected. When the water becomes unhealthy not as many macroinvertebrates can live. Then the larger animals that eat the macroinvertabrates don't get enough to eat. This is called the food chain.

Mia: Wow, so when there are not enough little bugs to eat bigger animals can die?

Mark: Yes, that's why it is so important that we try and save endangered species. We don't want to lose that link in the food chain.

Mia: Wow, I never would have thought bugs could be that important.