

The Dunehoppers' Big Earth Day

A Sea Oats School Earth Day Celebration



Outer Banks, North Carolina

Forward

This storybook was created by the Outer Banks Coastal Conservation (OBCC), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster environmental stewardship and a deeper connection to the Outer Banks of North Carolina through outreach, education, and conservation efforts.

We believe that small stories can spark big change. That is why we have made this book available as a free resource for parents, teachers, and community members.

All materials in this book may be freely downloaded, shared, printed and used for educational or nonprofit purposes.

To learn more, access additional resources at: www.theobcc.org.



It was Earth Day—April 22, 2025—on the Outer Banks of North Carolina, and the morning sun rose slowly over the dunes, warming the sand grain by grain.

Inside their sandy burrow, the Dunehopper family was already awake.

“Happy Earth Day!” Scoot cheered, bouncing on his toes.

Earth Day was a very important day for the Dunehoppers. Papa and Mama Dunehopper worked hard all year to teach Sandy, Scoot, and Shellby how to care for the beach, the water, and all the creatures who called the Outer Banks home.

“The Earth takes care of us,” Mama said as she packed reusable bags.

“So today,” Papa added, “we return the favor.”



A Bright Idea at the Burrow

After breakfast, Papa led the children outside, where a sunny patch of dune grass shimmered in the light.

“This year,” Papa announced proudly, “we’re celebrating Earth Day by installing solar panels near our burrow.”

Shellby’s eyes sparkled. “Sun power?”

“Yes,” Papa said, drawing a sun in the sand.

“Solar panels turn sunlight into clean electricity. They work quietly, safely, and without polluting the air.”

Scout thought for a moment. “So no smoke? No mess?”

“Exactly,” Papa replied. “Solar energy is renewable energy.”

“What does renewable mean?” Sandy asked.

“It means the energy comes from natural sources—like the sun and wind—that don’t run out,” Mama explained.

“And using clean energy helps protect the climate, the ocean, and animals.”

The children looked up at the bright sky.

“The sun helps power our home,” Scout said softly.

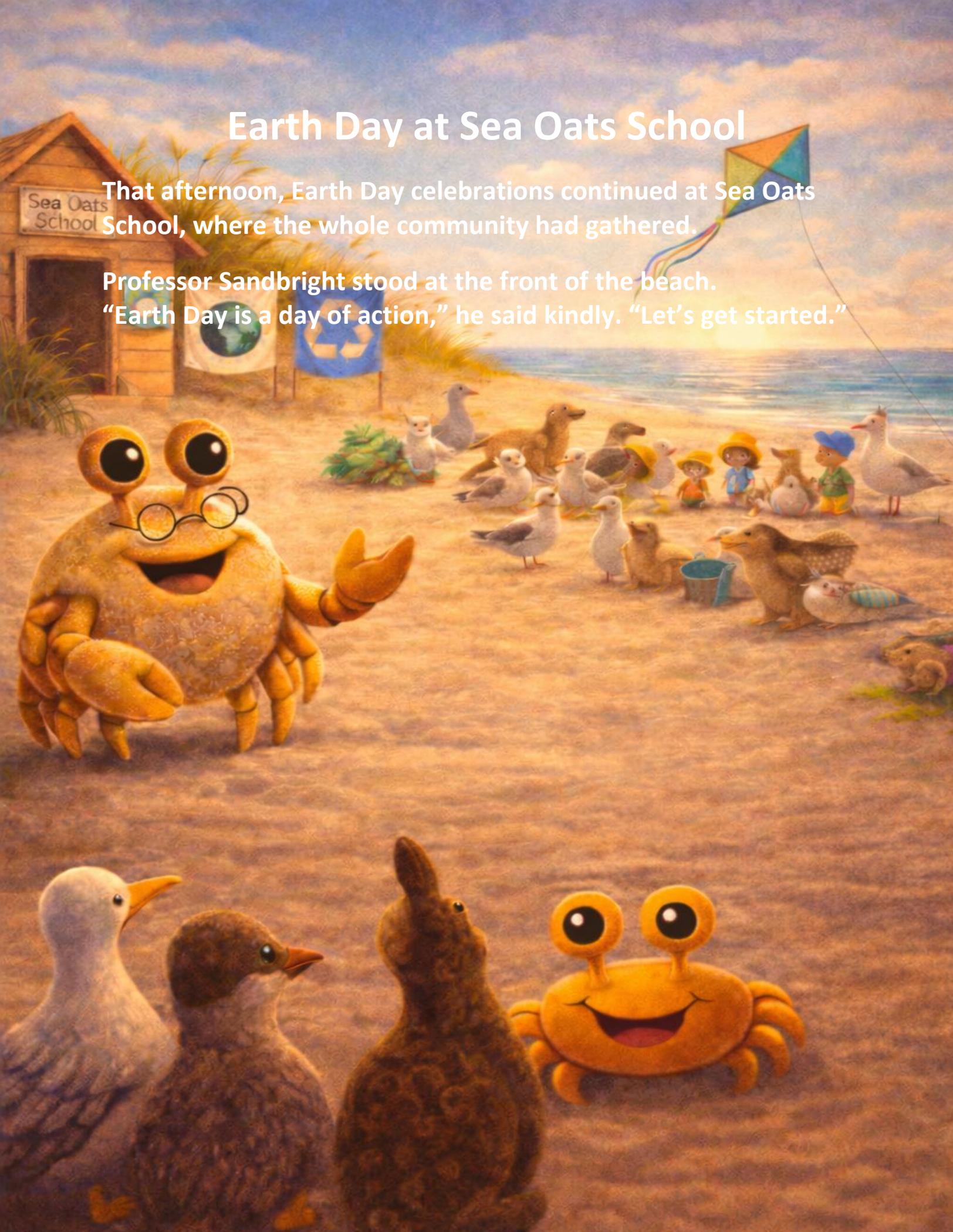
“And helps the Earth,” Shellby added.



Earth Day at Sea Oats School

That afternoon, Earth Day celebrations continued at Sea Oats School, where the whole community had gathered.

Professor Sandbright stood at the front of the beach. "Earth Day is a day of action," he said kindly. "Let's get started."



Beach & Community Cleanup

Students spread out along the shore, carefully picking up litter tangled in seaweed or half-buried in sand.

“Let’s sort what we find!” Scoot called.
“Plastic bottles here. Metal cans there.”

Professor Sandbright nodded.

“When trash is sorted, it can be recycled instead of washing into the ocean.”

“Beach cleanups protect wildlife,” Professor Sandbright reminded them. Even one piece of trash removed makes a difference.”

Nearby, students talked about where trash comes from—and where it goes when it isn’t picked up.



Nature Scavenger Hunt

After the cleanup, the students went on a nature scavenger hunt.

They searched for:

- Smooth shells
- Feather patterns
- Tiny crab tracks
- Different textures—sand, bark, grass

“No picking plants or wildlife,” Professor Sandbright reminded them. “We observe with care.”

Shellby wrote notes in her journal.

“Did you know plant roots help hold dunes in place?” she said proudly.



Planting for the Future

Next, everyone gathered behind the dunes to plant trees, flowers, herbs, and native plants.

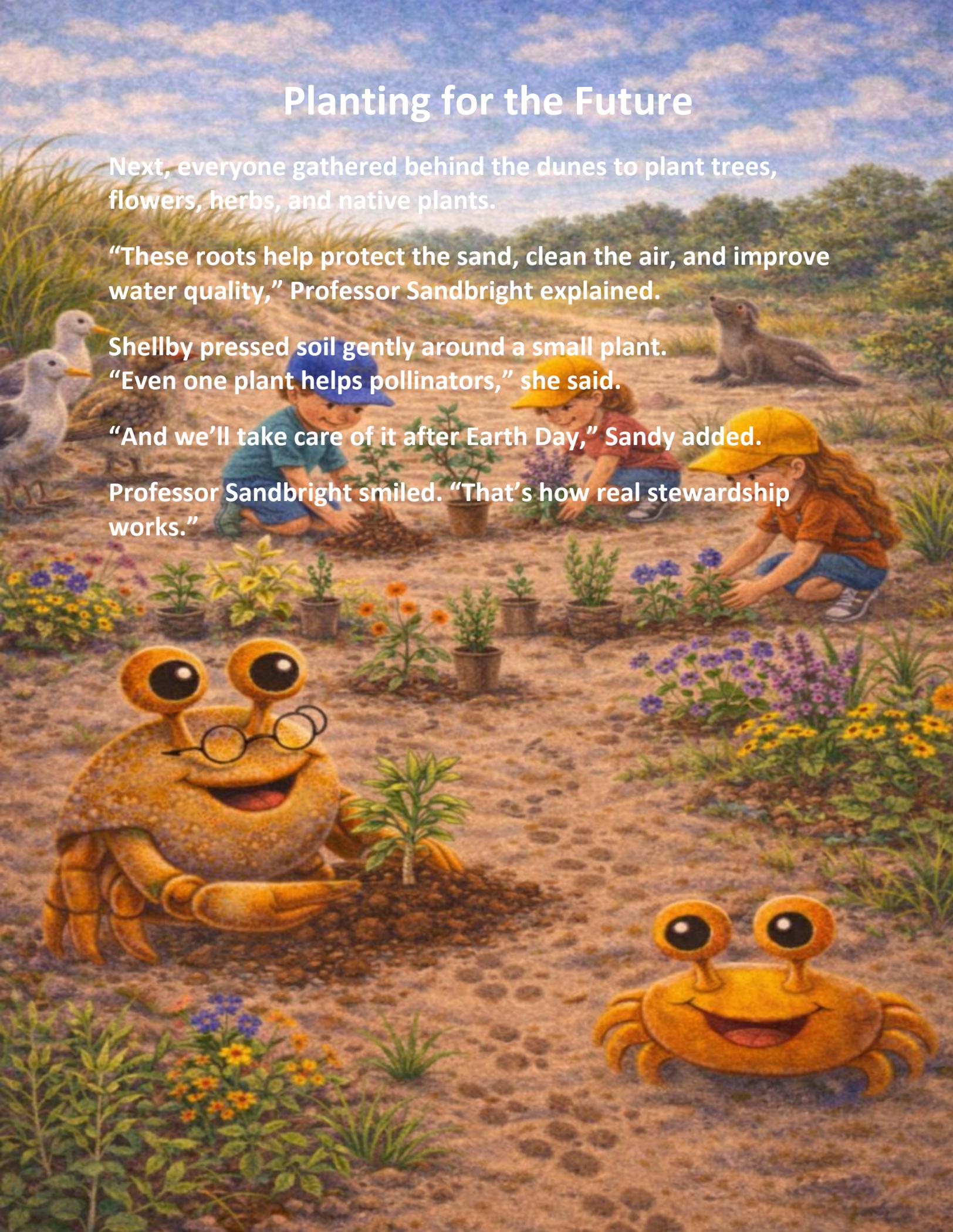
“These roots help protect the sand, clean the air, and improve water quality,” Professor Sandbright explained.

Shellby pressed soil gently around a small plant.

“Even one plant helps pollinators,” she said.

“And we’ll take care of it after Earth Day,” Sandy added.

Professor Sandbright smiled. “That’s how real stewardship works.”



Recycling & Reuse Challenge

Inside the schoolyard, students tackled a recycling and reuse challenge.

They built art from cardboard, bottle caps, and old paper.

“This used to be trash,” Scoot said, holding up a colorful sculpture.
“Now it’s treasure!”

Professor Sandbright clapped. “Reducing single-use plastic keeps beaches cleaner in the first place.”



Power from Nature

To finish the afternoon, Professor Sandbright held up a bright pinwheel.

“This shows how wind energy works,” he said as it spun.

“The wind turns the blades and creates power.”

“And solar energy comes from the sun,” Sandy added.

“Sun, wind, and water can all make electricity,” the professor said.

“And clean energy helps protect our planet from climate change.”

Scout gazed at the spinning pinwheel.

“Maybe one day our school will use wind and solar power.”



Protecting Wildlife

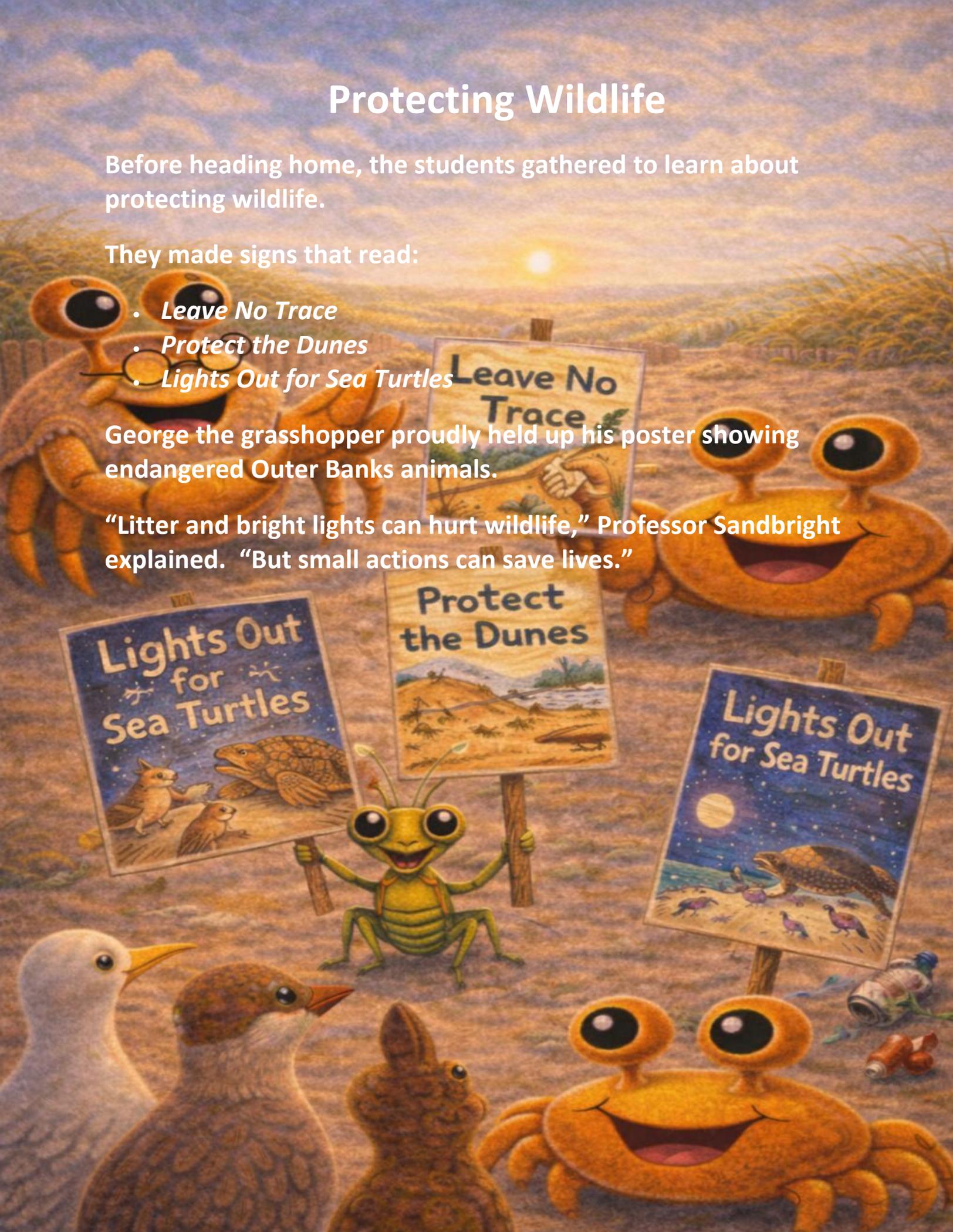
Before heading home, the students gathered to learn about protecting wildlife.

They made signs that read:

- *Leave No Trace*
- *Protect the Dunes*
- *Lights Out for Sea Turtles*

George the grasshopper proudly held up his poster showing endangered Outer Banks animals.

“Litter and bright lights can hurt wildlife,” Professor Sandbright explained. “But small actions can save lives.”



Earth Day Promises

As the sun dipped low, everyone made Earth Day pledges:

“I promise to use reusable bottles.”

“I promise to turn off lights.”

“I promise to pick up litter.”

“I promise to respect plants and animals.”

The promises were written, decorated, and proudly displayed.



Did You Know?

- Earth Day is celebrated every year on April 22 to remind people all over the world to take care of the planet. More than 190 countries participate by planting trees, cleaning up litter, and learning how to protect nature.
- Solar panels don't need fuel or fire to work. They turn sunlight directly into electricity—and even on cloudy days, they can still make power!
- Just one piece of plastic left on the beach can travel far out into the ocean and harm wildlife. Picking up even one item of trash helps keep sea turtles, birds, and crabs safe.
- Plants like sea oats and dune grass help hold sand in place with their roots. Without plants, dunes can blow away—and dunes help protect the Outer Banks from storms.
- Bright lights at night can confuse baby sea turtles when they hatch. Turning lights off near the beach helps turtles find the ocean instead of going the wrong way.

