

George Washington Carver Middle School in Coral Gables, Florida, is a typical school in many ways—great teachers, enthusiastic learners, dynamic athletic teams. (Go Cougars!) Bertha Vazquez has been teaching her students at Carver to read critically and research their sources for two decades.

Research is a basic skill at Carver. Students find out facts and think for themselves. In Mrs. Vazquez’s science classes, the students begin by researching the credibility of various sources on climate change. This essential process of science gives students a foundation of process skills and a healthy dose of skepticism about the media. Bertha’s curriculum has produced students who not only inquire and investigate but also now are “Dreaming in Green.” Dream in Green is a nonprofit organization that develops programs to promote environmental sustainability. It conducts the Green Schools Challenge, a program that provides resources for students who are motivated to do something for the planet. Carver’s Green Team took the opportunity and ran with it!

The target of Carver’s Green Team was energy use. Students discovered that their school was wasting enormous amounts of energy and money. They didn’t stop there, though. When those same students looked for a way to act, they developed a project that was not only practical but also profitable. They conducted an energy audit of Carver Middle School and presented their recommendations to the administration and the board. The result: thousands of dollars in savings each year. The idea spread, and now those same students are using their “can-do” attitude to make changes at the district’s high schools.

One of the most impressive aspects of the Green Team’s success was the ease with which the students were able to convince the reluctant decision makers in their school community to become more energy conscious. The key was the money savings that energy stewardship could produce. The kids’ energy recommendations reduced not only their school’s carbon footprint but its overhead too! As the members of the first Green Team moved into secondary school they found it easy to recruit more adult advocates for their energy audit recommendations.

Activity 7.1 is a Web quest loosely adapted from ideas that have been outstandingly successful for the students in Bertha Vazquez’s science classes at Carver Middle School.