

# Renfrew Institute for Cultural and Environmental Studies

## Program Overview and Pre-trip Information *Environmental School Programs — Grade 4*

### HOME SWEET HOME

This two-hour program is based on the ecological concept of *community*. Students are invited to attend a special meeting at Renfrew Park, where they are met by Renfrew Institute instructors “Mayor” and “Judge Mopner.” Students take on the roles of plants and animals as they tour three natural ecosystems in the park (field, forest and marsh).

Critical thinking skills and decision making are involved as the “plants” and “animals” consider becoming community members themselves. Each decides which ecosystem would best meet his/her needs for life (water, air, soil, food, shelter, special needs). Concepts of *habitat*, *niche*, *species adaptation* and *interrelationships* are also involved.

The “plants” and “animals” settle into their selected communities and begin getting to know the area and each other. An unexpected environmental change throws the new communities into turmoil, but there is a solution. Judge Mopner holds court where “homeless” plants and animals find new communities using some thought provoking real-life strategies.

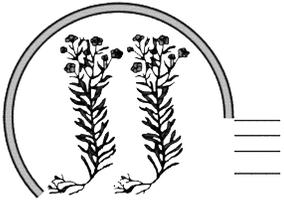
***Home Sweet Home*** was developed and published by the Institute for Earth Education (international center in Cedar Cove, WVa.). It is called a “conceptual encounter” and is part of the three-day earth education program, ***Earthkeepers*** (not currently offered at Renfrew Institute).

At the end of the program students will be given take-home materials to reinforce learning.

**If possible, please bring at least two (2) adult helpers** in addition to the classroom teacher. Adults become “Vice Mayors” authorized to assist students during this program.

*Home Sweet Home* is underwritten in part by grants from Sandy Fisher, in memory of Harry Fisher, and the RBC Foundation USA.





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## HOME SWEET HOME Vocabulary

**Community (in nature)** - a naturally occurring group of native plants, animals and other organisms that are interacting in a unique habitat. Its structure, composition and distribution are determined by environmental factors such as soil type, position in the landscape, altitude, climate and water availability.  
Humans live in communities, too—places that meet all of our needs!

**Habitat** - The natural home or environment of an animal, plant, or other organism.  
Human habitats are our individual homes with the surrounding yard and specific location in a neighborhood or on a farm.

**Interrelationships** - the interactions among plants and animals (humans too!) in a given habitat—how they relate to each other.

**Niche** - An ecological niche is the role and position a species has in its environment: how it meets its needs for food and shelter, how it survives, and how it reproduces. A species' niche includes all of its interactions with the biotic and abiotic factors of its environment. A niche is also thought of as the job a plant, animal or human does in the area where it lives.

**Species** - a class of individual plants or animals having some common characteristics or qualities; distinct sort or kind.

**Adaptation** - a change or the process of change by which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment. Humans adapt to our environment, too!