

Sun Shade For Clark Elementary's Reading Garden by Aryan Patidar

Imagine this: a captivating area where all the students and teachers alike can stop, relax, and enjoy their surroundings. Amid them are the dancing butterflies that flutter through the air, their colorful wings pumping gracefully. They rocket upward, then descend in a whirl as they soar over the inhabited benches which gleam in the sunlight. The busy bumblebees dance through the sky, and emit a reassuring, heartening buzz that stops onlookers in their tracks. Aaaah...comforting. Greenery surrounds this area, where the occupants read their books, their minds swirling with dragons, time machines, and even ancient history. This majesty is the Reading Garden at Clark Elementary. However, our Reading Garden has one major problem: the sun. While we bask in the Reading Garden, our skin is being affected by the sun, exposing us to a dreaded disease...skin cancer.

Skin cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in the United States. An estimated 4,920 state residents were diagnosed with melanoma in 2009. Melanoma is responsible for about 75% of all skin cancer deaths. About 626 people in Florida die of melanoma every year. Each year there are more new cases of skin cancer than the combined incidence of cancers of the breast, prostate, lung and colon. Nearly 800,000 Americans are living with a history of melanoma and 13 million are living with a history of nonmelanoma skin cancer, typically diagnosed as basal cell carcinoma or squamous cell carcinoma. About 90 percent of nonmelanoma skin cancers are associated with exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun and repeated unprotected exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays can cause skin damage, eye damage, immune system suppression, and skin cancer.

At home, I lather up with SPF 30 Sunscreen before going to school or outdoors to play. At Clark Elementary, we also practice being safe in the sun. When outside, we cover up with hats to shield our faces from the sun overhead, douse ourselves in sun block, and clutch water bottles, our only savior to keep us hydrated from that lethal, glowing ball of fire hovering above. Our Physical Education coaches, Coach Mooney and Coach Owen,

encourage us to protect our skin from the sun and both are always ecstatic when we bring hats and water to their class. Constantly, our coaches preach sun safety.

Now, picture Clark's wonderful Reading Garden with a phenomenal sun shade. Students immersed in their books with all the nature surrounding them- the flowers, the bees and butterflies flying about, and the occasional hummingbird, in its desperate search for nectar, flitting around. The students and teachers can relax on the benches, reading or just relaxing, with no troubles in their mind because a sun shade is stretched out over their heads shielding them from the sun. The scene is picture perfect. Kids at Clark Elementary, year after year, will be protected from the sun. So all I ask for is a sun shade. Everyone at Clark Elementary will appreciate this gift for years to come.