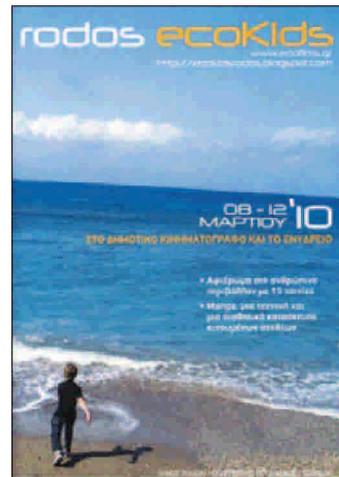




Japanese director Masayuki Kojima's film 'Piano Forest' is being screened as part of the tribute to manga animation at Rodos Ecokids.



Rodos Ecokids gets under way

Fiction, documentaries and animation related to the human environment inspire thinking and action

By VIVIENNE NILAN
 KATHIMERINI ENGLISH EDITION

Ecokids, the "little brother" of the Rodos Ecofilms Festival has grown into a sturdy five-year-old. This year's festival is welcoming 6,000 schoolchildren from Rhodes and elsewhere in the Dodecanese to a program of films at Rhodes Municipal Cinema and the Aquarium, that runs to March 12. Young festival viewers will do more than watch films. Emphasizing active participation, Ecokids offers activities linked to the overarching theme of the human environment. The program of 15 films includes a tribute to manga comics and animation and three animated shorts made by stu-

dents from Greek technical colleges. Each group selects a group of films from six options. With help from their teachers, who have embraced the festival since its inception, they learn about the context of each film and are encouraged to seek further information from the Internet and other sources. An illustrated program gives a brief introduction to each film and suggests ways of talking about it and the issues it raises. Subjects range from a native Canadian myth about the origin of fire, to sea creatures, child labor and dangerous games with guns. There's no shying away from controversial topics, with which young participants are always keen to grapple. An example of the

Ecokids approach is a film on the current program that sparked vigorous debate among adults when it was screened last year at Ecofilms. "Raw," by Dutch filmmaker Anneloek Sollart, is a documentary about a boy who eats only raw food, at the insistence of his mother who believes it is the only healthy diet. Tom is healthy but quite small for his age. Ecokids suggests children first establish whether the film is fact or fiction, then talk about it in class and see the online discussion at ecokidsrodos.blogspot.com. A series of questions prompts them to think about what it would be like to live differently from other people; whether we live as we have been taught or can make changes in our environ-

ment and way of life; and if we do want to make changes how we can do that without bothering others. Children can create a project related to their environment for the online edition of Ecokids. Two entries will be posted on the website, which will invite readers all over the world to research children's environments. Both Ecokids and Ecofilms survive in a time of savage cutbacks, thanks to loyal support from Rhodes Municipality, which shoulders the bulk of the financial burden, the Dodecanese Prefecture and the Culture and Tourism Ministry, as Ecofilms artistic director Lucia Rikaki and coordinator Nikos Nikolaidis acknowledged at the press conference in Athens on March 4.