

MUSEUM VISIT: Sisters students learn about fire

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behavior. And then we built a tree and all of us joined our trees to make a forest, and we burned it down.”

Nesbitt made sure her lecture on fire wasn’t a one-way street, and invited the students to answer questions and give their opinions in a way that got them to the key points of what fire is and how various elements affect its behavior.

A fire triangle experiment was carried out by placing a small candle under a glass and measuring the time before the flame went out. Nesbitt made sure the science the students used was read from the same instrument used by all, not one student counting it out his/her way and the next students his or hers. She allowed them to come up with the idea to use the measurement of time taken from someone’s cell phone.

The slope tool was a flat piece of metal, perhaps four

by five inches, with equidistant holes in it that would hold wooden matches. The matches were placed in holes with their heads well away from the plate (to represent the tree trunk) then the plate was set up against a steel rod at an angle to demonstrate a steep slope. One match was ignited at the downhill side of the plate and the students watched the behavior of the fire at various angles.

To provide an additional demonstration of wind and slopes, Nesbitt had each student group build a wire “tree” with a steel rod as a trunk, and attach pieces of thinner wire for limbs; then they adorned the limbs with pieces of paper to represent leaves and needles. She placed all six pans close together then asked the students about slope and wind affects on fire behavior as she set the trees ablaze.

Each student was supplied with a field guide put together by the HDM educational department staff, titled “Fired Up!” in which a full glossary of 36 fire terms was printed; everything from “Adaptations” to

“Dendrochronology,” “Fire Scar,” “Hypsometer,” “Mean (mathematical average),” and “Wildfire.”

The field guide was used when the students went out behind the museum to observe an area of the forest where a controlled burn had been carried out on one side of the main trail, and not on the other. She divided the students to study the areas where no burn was carried out (Survey Area #1) and the burned area (Survey Area #2), then switched them as they went through the curriculum set up by the staff.

After measuring density and tree growth, the students were asked for their opinions: “Based on the data, which survey area do you think is healthier?” and “Why do you think this one is healthier than the other?” and “If you had to guess, which survey area had a controlled burn 10 years ago, which do you think and why?”

The field guide also took the students into post-fire research by asking: “What do you see as evidence of fire activity?” This was accomplished with a discussion of four pertinent points about the effects of different types of fire in a forest.

At that point the ticking clock brought an end to the time in the burn area, and the class returned to the classroom for the closing comments. All the way back from the museum to the middle school the bus was filled with the sounds of students reviewing the fire-science points Nesbitt and her staff revealed to them.



Teacher Tanya Young helped students Soleia Planty and Kayla Root measure the diameter of a pine tree.

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Blasting off...

PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

NASA's Gabe Gabrielle inspired local youth with a visit to Sisters Elementary School last week.

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