

Ukraine

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“With this, it all came together and they made these connections,” Peton said. “Suddenly my students were like, ‘Oh, this is why you wanted us to know about NATO. This is what alliances do when things happen on the world stage today.’”

Peton has continued to give students time to discuss, process and ask questions, as well as incorporating what is happening in Ukraine into her recent lessons. In the last couple weeks, she’s covered the end of Apartheid, tying discussions of how economic sanctions were used against South Africa back then to how nations are using them against Russia now.

“These connections between what is happening in the world and what has happened are important. Those echoes from the past really influence things that happen today,” Peton said.

Fostering curiosity

Daniel Correa, a social studies teacher at South, spent a class period in the days leading up to Russia’s invasion taking a deep dive into Ukraine and Russia with his students. Students were assigned questions to research and present, like what NATO is. Then they were given the space to ask questions themselves.

“They showed a high interest in [discussing the war]. They understood that this doesn’t happen over the course of two weeks and they were able to ask: how did we get to this point? What events took place that led us to Russia wanting Ukraine?” Correa said.

Since then, Correa has started every class period allowing his students to ask questions and giving them time to discuss things they had seen or read about the war.

“I can’t say enough how important it is for kids to discuss things happening in the world around them and understand what is going on,” Correa said.

The human element of war

Correa and Nickel found that their students are drawn most to the human elements of the war. Framing the invasion through that lens and discussing viral stories, helped students better understand what was happening, Correa said.

More coverage:Salem couple from Ukraine joins rally for peace: ‘We cannot sleep, we cannot eat’

Students wanted to know if Ukrainian farmers were really stealing tanks or if the videos of Russian soldiers calling their parents were real. And these stories can lead to important larger discussions.

A few classes ago, Correa’s students had questions about the Ghost of Kiev, which sparked a discussion about propaganda. In Nickel’s class, one of the students has Type I Diabetes, which led to a discussion on how people in Ukraine are dealing with medical conditions that require specialized medication.

“Numbers are numbers, but bring in first-person accounts, people who are talking about what it was like in Uk-



DJ Correa teaches a U.S. history class at South Salem High School on Thursday. PHOTOS BY BRIAN HAYES/STATESMAN JOURNAL

raine... That’s the thing that matters,” Nickel said.

Fighting misinformation

Peton, Correa and Nickel all pointed to social media as a huge influence on students and their understanding of the events in Ukraine. Coming into class, many of the students had only consumed information from their social media feeds and that posed a hefty set of challenges.

For one, students have little control over what is in their feeds – it’s all algorithmic.

So, information flooded students’ social media in the first days of the war, without them having to do anything, and now it’s almost completely faded from many of their accounts, Correa said. For Correa’s students, the shift in the amount of Ukraine content being shown to them was so dramatic that they discussed it in class.

“We talked about how all of a sudden now we don’t see as much about the war on social media and we were trying to figure out why. Is it because it’s been going on for a longer time? Is that just how fast the news cycle turns over?” Correa said.

On top of this inconsistency in the amount of content, it’s extremely challenging for students to be able to verify the validity of things they see on social media.

Nickel has used the war to help teach students how to find and verify information they see online. They’ve discussed the unreliability of social media and the

importance of thinking critically about how and where they get their information.

“We talked about what makes news sources good and why social media is a bad example. I had students sharing examples of things that they had found on social media that their own devices had been pushing to them,” Nickel said.

Nickel’s students have learned how to confirm stories across multiple platforms and they’ve come up with systems to sift through the information they find.

Continuing the discussion

As the war and discussions have progressed, Nickel has seen engagement in his students grow. The other day, one student pulled out notes she had taken on things she’d seen about the war in the past 48 hours.

“My job is to get them to become critical thinkers and to give them information that they can take to then draw conclusions for themselves. And they’ve come up with great questions,” Nickel said.

The students want to know about refugees and what was happening to them. And they’re curious about native Russian perspectives and what they think and know about the war.

They want to know what the possibilities are going forward in the war, and what could happen afterward. And they’re curious about how to verify if organizations asking for donations for Ukrainians are actually providing them to Ukraine.

“These are great questions that

they’re asking, and, as a teacher, I get to count that as a big win because they’re doing the critical thinking piece,” Nickel said.

An important opportunity

Correa noted that the kids lack of knowledge when the crisis started pointed to a larger gap in the current social studies educational model. There are more than 30 years of modern history – from the Cold War on – that are rarely taught in classrooms, Correa said.

But, incorporating current events into social studies classes can help close that gap.

“Some of them were like, well, we remember learning about the Cold War, but then their history in high school stops there... There’s 30 something years of modern history that they don’t get a whole class on. So, this is kind of filling in those buffers,” Correa said.

Nickel is using the refugee crisis in Ukraine to pivot and discuss other refugee crises across the globe in recent years – Afghanistan, Syria, Columbia. And he doesn’t want them to stop drawing connections there.

Nickel, Correa and Peton all want their students to take the information and skills they’re learning as they talk about the war in Ukraine and use them to understand what is happening, even when they aren’t in class.

“The door to our classroom is not a barrier, it’s a gateway. And when we learn something in here, you don’t leave it behind,” Nickel said.

Trees

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The guided tree climb, open to anyone 8 and older, typically takes about four hours and starts at \$149 per person. There are more exotic options, including a sunset climb, an advanced climb, and a kid’s camp.

The business is on a special use permit from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department that seeks to diversify recreation at state parks. Each business gets a 1-year pilot year to see if the recreation is a good fit for the park. If not, the agency can cancel the contract.

“The goal is to have multiple things for people to do while they’re here, and this adds a nice new option,” interim park manager Chris Gilliland said. “Everybody knows and loves the Trail of 10 Falls, but this is a way to bring people out and take them into a different part of the park.”

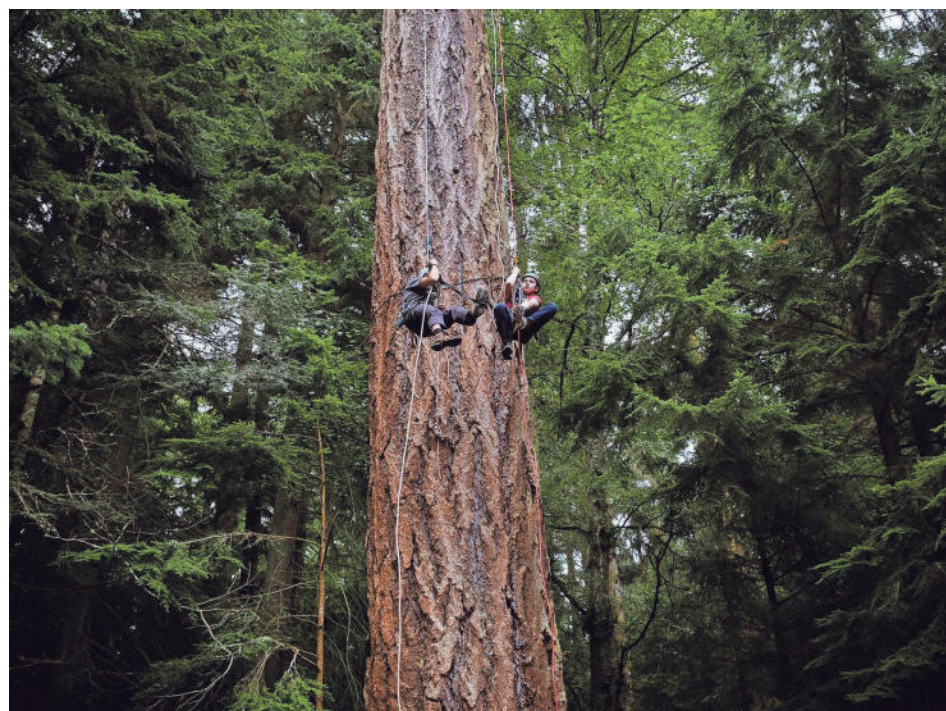
A guided horseback riding trip, which started in 2019 and was also on a special use permit, was impacted by the COVID-19 shutdowns and hasn’t returned to business, Gilliland said.

Rosen-Fischer has offered guided tree climbing for over 10 years in Washington — and he still runs trips up there — but said the chance to expand to Silver Falls was too good to pass up.

“Silver Falls is an amazing place to begin with, and it has some glorious and huge trees in the backcountry,” he said. “It’s some of the best old-growth located closer to big, urban centers like Salem and Portland, so it was a really good location for this.”

There are usually two trips offered per day — one beginning at 9 a.m. and another at 1 p.m. There’s usually four people per climb, plus the guide.

The trip starts in the Howard Creek and Buck Mountain trailhead parking area. That’s where Rosen-Fischer gets climbers used to the harness and equipment, does demonstrations and even



Climbers ascend into the canopy at Silver Falls State Park following a new business that takes people to the tops of nearly 300-foot trees.

PHOTOS BY LEO ROSEN-FISCHER / TREE CLIMBING AT SILVER FALLS

How to get started

Website: <https://www.treeclimbingatsilverfalls.com/>

Email: info@treeclimbingatsilverfalls.com

Phone: 206-914-8613

has them practice climbs on a smaller tree, working on ascending the ropes and rappelling back down.

Then, it’s onto the big trees, with a five- to -15 minute walk to one of four trees that rise to heights that range from 200 to 300 feet tall. The tallest is about 280 feet, Rosen-Fischer said.

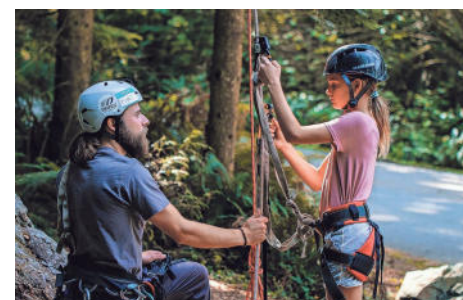
Climbers use hand and foot “ascenders” to move up ropes that are set up in the trees.

“It’s kind of like doing a squat to move up the rope,” Rosen-Fischer said. “Most people can do it, but it does take

some physical work. We have extra equipment that includes a battery-powered ascender if someone isn’t physically able, that basically pulls you up the ropes.”

(The battery powered ascender costs an extra \$75 since it can eat up the ropes more rapidly.)

The view from the top includes the forest, rivers and mountains in the distance — and the sun setting over the Willamette Valley if you take the sunset climb. None of the waterfalls are visible, however.



“Everybody knows and loves the Trail of 10 Falls, but this is a way to bring people out and take them into a different part of the park.” Chris Gilliland said.



Climbers ascending into the canopy at Silver Falls State Park.

Rosen-Fischer said he takes the time during the climb to talk to guests about the ecology of old-growth forests and canopies.

“It really is one of the most unique adventures that you can have,” he said. “A lot of people don’t think about climbing trees, but there really is nothing like being at the top, especially in a place like Silver Falls.”

Zach Urness has been an outdoors reporter in Oregon for 15 years and is host of the *Explore Oregon Podcast*. To support his work, subscribe to the *Statesman Journal*. Urness is the author of “Best Hikes with Kids: Oregon” and “Hiking Southern Oregon.” He can be reached at zurness@statesmanjournal.com or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @ZachsORoutdoors.