



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Hermiston sophomore Jenna Wallace teaches a class about the life cycle of a pumpkin plant to a classroom of third-graders at West Park Elementary School on Tuesday in Hermiston.

# On a mission to ag-vocate

Hermiston High School students bring science, fun to elementary schools

By GEORGE PLAVEN  
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Hermiston High School sophomore Jenna Wallace stood Tuesday morning in front of a class of third-graders at West Park Elementary School, unfazed by her sudden role reversal from student to teacher, and enthusiastically launched into a carefully planned lesson about the life cycle of a pumpkin.

It all starts with a seed, Wallace explained, which later grows into a sprout and then a vine. The vine produces bright yellow flowers, which eventually become small green pumpkins and, finally, the big orange pumpkins everyone knows and loves to carve into jack-o'-lanterns at Halloween. The kids followed along by drawing pictures of each life stage on their worksheets, and numbered them one through six in order.

Wallace was joined at the head of the class by fellow HHS students Logan Sinor, Garrett Hills, Maleena Moore, Jayda Hoston, Ellen Jakobsen and Diana Egerer as part of the high school's annual fall Agriculture in the Classroom tour. More than 50 high-schoolers participated in the event, visiting every elementary school in the Hermiston School District and giving agriculture-themed lessons to 946 first, second and third grade students.

Once the kids finished coloring their perfect pumpkins, Wallace and the rest of the group helped to serve a tasty snack of graham crackers topped with pumpkin pie filling.

"This is something I look forward to each season we do it," Wallace said. "It's fun to see their faces light up when we walk in."

As a statewide nonprofit organization, Oregon Agriculture in



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Hermiston sophomore Jayde Hoston, left, and junior Maleena Moore, second from right, help third-graders Maddex Caballero, Fadhili Ibochwa and Jacob Linkel make pumpkin pie in a bag on Tuesday at West Park Elementary School in Hermiston.

the Classroom strives to educate students on the importance of farming and natural resources by providing lesson plans to K-12 teachers that highlight agriculture, while also promoting skills in math, science, history and nutrition.

Jessica Jansen, the group's executive director, said they are supported through grants and donations from the agricultural community. Their mission is to work with local partners — such as Hermiston FFA — to improve agricultural literacy, provide a basic understanding of farming and help to bridge the urban-rural divide.

"It's a small portion of Oregonians involved in the actual growing and producing of food and other agricultural products," Jansen said. "We want students to think of agriculture as an opportunity for them in the future."

Last school year, Oregon Agriculture in the Classroom reached more than 190,000 students in all 36 counties across the state, according to stats provided by the organization. Jansen said she is always impressed with the level of involvement in Hermiston.

"Hermiston does a fantastic job, and they have an ability to reach

so many students with so many elementary schools in the district," she said.

Brianna Smith, agriculture teacher at HHS, developed Tuesday's pumpkin lesson through tools provided by Agriculture in the Classroom. She watched from the back of the classroom with a wide grin as her pupils took charge, leading the discussion and calling on kids to answer questions.

"It makes me so proud," Smith said. "I just get butterflies inside, and I can't stop smiling."

Smith, who taught second and third grade at Rocky Heights

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— Logan Sinor, sophomore at HHS

Elementary before moving to the high school earlier this year, said Agriculture in the Classroom literacy programs are about the only science some of these younger students will receive as teachers are constrained by other required standards.

As for the high school kids, Smith said they too gain valuable educational skills and experience.

"I want them to walk away with just the importance of teaching and advocating for agriculture," she said.

Smith said HHS will do an Agriculture in the Classroom tour this spring as well for fourth-graders, only this time it will be entirely up to the high-schoolers to plan, prepare and conduct their own lesson plans.

Sinor, a sophomore at HHS, was quick to point out that Hermiston is an agricultural community, and said it is important for kids to understand from an early age where their food comes from and why farmers are so necessary.

"The world wouldn't survive without agriculture, and it's important for kids to know how much work it is and how much we need it," Sinor said.

Hills, a fellow sophomore, said Agriculture in the Classroom allows kids to be creative, while possibly planting a seed for the next generation of agricultural leaders.

"Helping kids to learn about agriculture, it could spark some ideas in their head," Hills said. "They could help feed the world, and make the world a better place."

Agriculture in the Classroom is another way, too, to show kids that modern agriculture is more than just sows, cows and plows, Wallace added.

"Really, agriculture can branch out to these students as well," she said. "Anyone can be involved in that."



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Hermiston sophomore Logan Sinor reads the book "How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin?" to a class of third-graders on Tuesday at West Park Elementary School in Hermiston.



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Hermiston senior Ellen Jacobsen listens to third-grader Alesia Fairlay while helping teach a class Tuesday at West Park Elementary School in Hermiston.

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