

Students encouraged to appreciate nature, native plants

New elective course combines art, botany and ethnobotany

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

A new elective class at Seaside High School, offered during the first term, introduced students to a combination of studies, including art, botany and ethnobotany.

Teachers Julie Greene and Dorota Haber-Lehigh offered the art of ethnobotany class as an elective to 33 students, from freshmen to seniors.

Throughout the course, the teachers shared the importance of maintaining a diversity of native plants and their importance to humans and

the ecosystem in the Pacific Northwest.

"It was more along the lines of environmental education, appreciation for nature and for what surrounds us," Haber-Lehigh said. "I'm hoping the students will see some of it and have different attitudes toward nature and also toward being resourceful, being caring and being more sustainable."

Greene has more than 15 years of experience in botany and biology and Haber-Lehigh, an artist, has taught multiple botanical drawing classes and workshops in the community. The two instructors were looking for a new teaching opportunity and the chance to offer something different for students. They decided to collaborate on the



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Students from the new elective art of ethnobotany class at Seaside High School participated in a couple service projects, in addition to taking several field trips.

art of ethnobotany class.

"It's something fun that combines our interests," said Greene, a special education

teacher.

Students could choose to earn either art or science credit for completing the course.

Throughout the class, students were taught the basics of botany, how to identify both native and non-native

plants, discern if they were edible or poisonous and collect written observations. They learned how the plants historically were used by humans of many cultures for various things: food, medicine, clothing, shelter, arts and crafts, construction material and more. The primary focus, Greene said, was on how indigenous people used the plants. Additionally, students learned how various plants are used — or sometimes not used — today.

"It's not just learning botany," Haber-Lehigh said. "Ethnobotany is the relationship between plants and people. And we threw in the art component, because it's fun to learn about plants and nature through drawing and sketching."

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