

Arizona Trail Seeds of Stewardship Program

Hiking with All of our Senses

by Deborah Oslik

On January 16th, the Arizona Trail's Seeds of Stewardship Program led its second outing with Pima Partnership Academy students. It was the coldest day of winter, with residual storm weather in the sky that morning. However, six brave high school students still showed up to head to the mountains. Our outing was a 4-mile hike beginning at the Gordon Hirabayashi Trailhead in the Santa Catalina Mountains, and ending at the Sycamore



Reservoir Dam, where we enjoyed running water. Although the forecast was grim, the day turned out to be a beautiful sunny day with perfect hiking temperatures.

Throughout the hike, we stopped and did several activities all centered around building a sense of place for the students. Therefore, all of the activities were focused on asking the students to use their senses to be more present during their time in the mountains. This is especially important because it encourages and facilitates an opportunity for the students to connect more deeply with their surroundings. Also, it is through these intentional activities that I believe students are able to forget about the difficult lives they lead back home and feel more calm.

One of the activities we did was creating a "Sound Map." Each student was asked to step away from the group and one another, and sit quietly (preferably with their eyes closed). This silence among the group opens up a world of sounds that we often miss on the trail because we are busily moving along and chatting. With each sound heard, you mark it on your sound map. After sitting quietly, we came back together as a group and shared our maps with one another.

Another neat activity we did is called "Find Your Tree." Students pair up and each one takes turns being blindfolded. The "seer" leads their blindfolded partner circuitously around until stopping at a tree. The blindfolded student takes time to get to know the tree with all of their senses, except sight. They are then led back to home base. Here they take off their blindfold and head out trying to find their tree. Everyone was successful in finding his or her tree! This activity helps build confidence among the students, as well as trust being led around blindfolded. In addition, this also helps build a sense of place, because

how often do we stop and really get to know a tree? Through these connections, we hope that students will feel more connectedness to nature and wild places so that they will in turn become stewards of these places.

One of the students on the hike was a 20-year old young man who was back in school trying to finish his high school education. Although growing up in Tucson, this was his first time out of the city and into the mountains he has looked at everyday. While he contributed greatly to the day's success with his light-hearted and sweet personality, the outing also made an impact on him. He shared that in his life, he often resorts to very unhealthy and destructive behaviors, often for a lack of knowing what else to do that is healthy for him. He shared that this hike helped shed light more light onto the idea of what is healthy, and feels good.

Throughout the day, we did other activities and played some silly games. We ended our hike with a special treat of hot chocolate over the camp stove, which was a nice reward to the students who participated in the outing.

Our outing was a great success! Without support from Recreational Equipment Inc. (REI) and Freeport McMoran Copper & Gold Foundation, these experiences would not be possible for many young people in Tucson who need them the most.

