

Celebrating a Year of Learning with Flagstaff Junior Academy

by Sabrina Carlson



As the school year draws to a close, students and teachers embrace opportunities to celebrate the year and remain engaged for the remaining weeks with field trips and more emphasis on experiential education. The 3 teachers and 35 students from Flagstaff Junior Academy's 5th and 6th grade class dove feet first into learning at Marshall Lake on May 20, 2015 as we celebrated the last outdoor education program of the year.

We began our study of water health by asking our group of students for their predictions about how healthy they thought the water would be based on what they could see. A few kids spoke up right away that they could see the water was brown, so it must be dirty and therefore unhealthy. Then another student politely dissented, pointing out that she remembered an activity from class where they examined pictures of waterways. The polluted water in the activity had lots of farms and factories around it polluting the water with fertilizers and industrial waste. Marshall Lake had none of those, she pointed out, so it should be pretty healthy. Another student also made the observation that we were at a water source at high elevation, which should mean it would be upstream of any possible polluters. A riveting and intelligent conversation and we hadn't even touched the materials yet!



A student from FJA takes a closer look at tiny forms of life within the water of Marshall Lake.

Next, we divided our water testing group into two. One group went with Mr. May to use a chemical testing kit to measure oxygen saturation, nitrates, phosphates and temperature. The other group stayed with me where we fished around in the reeds for macroinvertebrates. We used a dichotomous key to identify the creatures we were looking at. We were able to identify a number of species that signified excellent water quality. While the phosphate and nitrate testing was inconclusive (we made need more practice to get the steps



Mr. May, a Seeds of Stewardship co-leader, assists students with water quality testing.

100% right) the water temperature and oxygen saturation was perfect for supporting freshwater aquatic life. After looking into the health of the aquatic life, the students rotated to two other stations to look for sign of land-based life and to do a color matching activity. After all that fun, we took a quick break for lunch.

Once we were fed and rested we headed south on the Arizona Trail! The kids loved showing all of the things they have learned this year by pointing out various flowers, types of rocks, and their observations of trail conditions as we walked. We hiked for about one-half-mile before we had to turn around and head back toward school. Reaching our turnaround point resulted in loud protests from the kids. "NO!" "We want to keep hiking!" "Can't our parents pick us up late?" "Let's keep going all the way to Mexico!"

I understand exactly how they felt! No to worry guys, we'll have some more fun together next year. Leaving this class so excited for more adventures makes me feel like we have done our job well. I hope that spark of the love of the Arizona Trail will last a lifetime.



Youth from Flagstaff Junior Academy celebrate a year of outdoor learning and stewardship activities with the Arizona Trail Association's Seeds of Stewardship program!

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