

Mansfeld Students Get Their Feet Wet

by Rebecca Patterson-Markowitz



For their first Seeds of Stewardship outing of the school year, 12 Mansfeld 7th graders hit the Arizona Trail at Molino Basin in the Santa Catalina Mountains on September 4, 2015. Because it was our first outing, we talked about Leave No Trace ethics before we headed toward the cool and cloudy mountain. Mansfeld science teacher Mrs. Bittel also asked the students to track plant and animal species as we walked along. The students have just made their transition from being 6th graders to being 7th graders and they are beginning a new science curriculum. Someone asked, double checking that they were also included in the survey, "What about bugs?"



Students at the first stream crossing

Because of the heavy rains we began our trek through tall and abundant grasses. One student, Jordan, immediately made known her fear of snakes. The eruptions of red-winged black grasshoppers from both sides of the trail fueled her unease while amusing the other students. Moments like these always create opportunities to talk about animals, and animal behavior that is perceived as "evil" or "mean." Thinking about the role that fear and instincts present on both sides of human/wildlife interaction hopefully gives a new perspective on the "scary" animals in the wild. We got to address Jordan's fear, and also highlight that a snake also could have a lot to be afraid of as it heard our large group's shouts and many heavy footsteps walking along. We hadn't gone more than five minutes when a garter snake slithered itself off the trail and back into the grass ahead of us.

Everyone had moments that took them a little outside their comfort zones on the trail, but the students consistently rose to the challenge of learning from new experiences. We passed a beehive in full summer swing nestled into a branch of a tree only five feet from our passage. Everyone followed the instructions to quietly pass by. One girl, Odalys, was at the head of the group, and lamented not catching a glimpse of the snake. "This is my first time hiking and I want to see lots of animals!" she told me. Everyone was excited when we encountered a drainage flowing with water where we saw tadpoles and little dime-sized toads hopping all over the trail.

We stopped for lunch near the water, and shoes came off as the more adventurous in the group began to explore. After everyone ate we circled up to do an activity on interdependence in ecosystems. Kimberly



Lilly, Ian and Jordan reflecting on our activity

began holding the end of a piece of yarn. The yarn was passed back and forth across the circle until all the students were holding a piece of the web. Kimberly tugged on the end and then we noted how far the ripple effect went. Almost everyone could feel a little bit of something in their connection because of the way it pushed against all other parts of the web in the center. Then students were asked to let go of their connections, one at a time, to see how they had to adapt to keep the web taught. CJ was perched on a rock and kept scooting further and further back to take up the slack, bearing the burden of adaptation. It only took five students letting go before the web could not be salvaged with what room we had. After we did the activity, students were asked to share reflections on the metaphorical implications of the web. Anthony said that he noticed that every part of the web matters. Lilly and others noticed that when one part changed everything else was affected.

We packed up from lunch and set back in search of the waterfall on the other side of Catalina Highway. We didn't make it there, but we spent our last half-hour enjoying the cool water and doing a two-minute silent listening activity. Everyone was reluctant to leave the beautiful stream, but the enthusiasm to return to the Arizona Trail has been fostered for when it's time for our next adventure.



Kimberly, Anthony and Moses reflecting on the day

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