



Finding Nature in Our Own Backyard

by Sabrina Carlson

On September 16th, Seeds of Stewardship took its very first outing with 22 students from Mr. Caslin's 5th grade class from Kinsey School in Flagstaff. Mr. Caslin's class is part of a brand new magnet program focused on place-based and hands-on learning for their students. We couldn't be more thrilled to be part of this incredible blossoming project.

Our original plan had been to take the class to Marshall Lake along passage 31 of the Arizona Trail for a hike and to view the riparian area after a healthy monsoon rainstorm.

Unfortunately, as sometimes happens with the district busses, our transportation was canceled with little time to make a new plan. But the best part about place-based education is that we can find pieces of nature all around us if we just take a moment to look.

Kinsey School is ideally located at the junction of three sections of Flagstaff Urban Trail System (FUTS), one of which comprises part of the Arizona Trail's Passage 33. After a brief introduction to Arizona Trail history and trivia, and a discussion on safety, we set out on foot to meet up with a section of the FUTS that winds up Bow and Arrow Canyon towards Fisher Point and the Flagstaff Loop Trail.



Along our hike the youth identified several invasive weed species that they could help remove and learned the difference between the noxious Scotch Thistle and the native Arizona Thistle. Some of them viewed the highly invasive knapweed growing in large patches but were warned not to try to pull it without gloves since it secretes a skin irritant. There was also an impromptu lesson on what poison ivy looks like when our lunch spot was found to be surrounded by it. Yikes! Don't sit there!

Not all the plants on our hike were the unwanted kind. We also viewed native gilardia, Mexican hat, purple aster and bachelor's buttons. The youth learned to look for reefs of sedimentary rock, more common on this side of town, in which fossils might be hiding.



After lunch we played a teambuilding game called “The Anti-Gravity Stick.” Each team member had to keep one finger, and only one finger under a tent pole at all times. Then the team had to lift the pole overhead AND back down without anyone losing contact with the pole. The kids were surprised at how difficult it turned out to be. Each team worked through several problem solving huddles before finding a solution that worked.

As we enjoyed our experience outside we looked up at the curious and eclectic collection of clouds in the sky, from overhead white cumulus to distant nimbus clouds, and made stories about the figures we saw. On our return walk to school we practiced making whistles from blades of grass. It became a very popular activity that earned peer admiration for those who mastered the skill quickly; their friends clamoring to know the secret.

Back at school the young participants reflected about what things surprised them and what they were excited about for next time. One boy said he couldn’t believe there was so much nature so close to his school! Another wanted to explore ALL the trails so he could know where they all connected. A girl who had walked near me to hear more about the plants we saw told me she really hoped we would learn more about plants this year.



It was a perfect school year starter outing to bond as a group and get to know nature together as a team.

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