



Wupatki Outing with Mr. Oelerich and Ms. Hillyard's 4th Grade Classes by Sabrina Carlson

On April 27, 2016, I had the privilege of presenting to the 56 students of Mr. Oelerich and Ms. Hillyard's classes at Puente de Hozho Elementary School on Leave No Trace Ethics, outing expectations, and the Hug-A-Tree curriculum. We had a discussion about what trash really is (yes, your apple core is trash), and what a special treasure places like Wupatki National Monument is for our country. The students were empowered with the knowledge of what to do if they ever get lost in the woods, and they all agreed that staying in one place would be the best plan, even if it might feel scary at times. Many students had concerns and questions about how to know if someone looking for them was Search and Rescue or a stranger. It comforted them to know that Search and Rescue volunteers will always have a radio and identification. When our presentation was finished, each of the students received a basic survival kit to always keep with them when adventuring in the outdoors. The kit contained a poncho, emergency blanket, glow sticks, signal mirror, and whistle. While I hope none of those young people ever need it, I'm thrilled to know that these students now have the knowledge to keep themselves safe if they are ever separated from their families while outdoors.

On May 4, we took our newly found outdoor confidence to Wupatki National Monument to learn about the history and culture of the ancient people who once lived there.

When the class arrived at Wupatki we divided everyone into two groups to start the activities. We discussed the concept of "fundamental human needs," which is the common ground that all cultures throughout history have shared. Material needs like food, shelter, and defense; and non-material needs like love, art, beauty, and a belief system were all examples of this idea. As the students toured the ruins, we looked for evidence of human survival and to see if we could recognize these needs. We wondered if the one petroglyph of a snake was communication, art, or part of their belief system. We took note of the *metates* used for grinding corn and other plants. We learned the pueblo had no doors on the first two stories in order make the houses safe and better for defense. Figuring out a way to direct fire smoke out of the lower rooms sideways made us realize they had seriously advanced engineering skills!



A close-up view of the ruin

We also walked in to the community room to imagine what a ceremony might have been like in such a live sounding room. We tried sampling the acoustics and were amazed at how far a whisper can carry in a well-designed space!

Richard May then led the activity at the ball court. He taught the students about the importance of ball courts throughout villages all over the southwest and what a huge distance there is between Wupatki (the northernmost example of these ceremonial courts) and Chichen Itza (the southernmost). The students were amazed to learn that the quetzal feathers and seashells found at Wupatki were evidence that trade took place between the two separate groups. He also explained how even today, playing games with people from other cultures helps break language barriers and has the ability to create friends anywhere you go. After the short lesson, the students had the chance to play a ball and stick game similar to what children at Wupatki might have played 900 years ago.



Hiking the ruins

Before leaving, we made a quick stop at the blowhole. A fascinating geological feature where an opening to an underground cave will either suck air in or blow air out, depending on the temperature differential between the cave and the outdoor air. Archeologists think this opening might have had supernatural and religious significance to the residents of this home site. One parent that came along for the outing was a Hopi native who grew up on the Hopi Mesa. Describing different ball games he played, he confirmed that the games he learned were definitely significant, and that his relatives taught the children that the blowhole was the opening to the world where Spider Woman lived. She is the creative force of the whole world, and must be respected and never offended. It was a glorious day and we were all very excited to learn some new things!



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