



Adventure In Our Backyard by Sabrina Carlson

On May 12, 2016, 80 students from Mr. Craig's 6th grade science classes at Mount Elden Middle School took turns hiking from their school's backyard to the trails in the National Forest nearby.

Each class walked up to the trailheads at the base of Mount Elden to participate in a facilitated journaling exercise, and to wrap up their semester studies on ecology and alternative energy.

After arriving to our lesson spot, each class divided into groups to tackle a specific topic like alternative energy, soil conservation, or sustainability. Everyone was given a set of journal prompts to get started like "what are some good renewable energy sources in Arizona?" or "how does good trail design try to minimize erosion?"



Journaling in the outdoor classroom.



Student teachers giving instructions

After a few minutes to contemplate the questions and write quietly for a while, each group was then asked to discuss and debate various topics related to their journaling. One group discussed sources of sustainable energy and if it should be provided to Arizona Trail users, and if so, what sources of green energy would be best? They debated the merits of bringing electricity to the trail. In case of emergency, would more electrical amenities bring new trail users? And then a list of downsides was discussed. It would be a lot to maintain, current trail users may not appreciate the intrusion of modernity, not to mention it could ruin the wilderness

experience. Another group discussed creative ways to mitigate erosion damage on the trails and the technology that could help alert trail stewards when damage has occurred.

Before leaving our lesson spot, we took out a map of the Flagstaff area trails to see how we were connected to the Arizona Trail. They were all excited to see how their local trail access points also connected to so many places.

After completing the lesson, each group hiked back to school for their next class. The second group to hike up to the trailhead found a geocache in someone's front yard. This caused a great deal of excitement as everyone wanted to see what was inside, and share their own geocaching stories.

After completing our visits to the forest, all the classes joined together in the school courtyard to eat lunch and celebrate the end of a wonderful year!



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