



Cultivating Mindfulness Outdoors – Round 2

by Sabrina Carlson

On September 28, 2016, 22 students from Mr. Doerfler's 5th grade class from Kinsey School headed out for a walking field trip on the Flagstaff Urban Trail's Sinclair Wash. To

cultivate a mindful and peaceful community for the students in the class, we started out on a simple trip to begin the year on the trail closest to school.

After discussing our expectations for outings and an introduction to the Arizona Trail, we chatted about how to be a peacemaker instead of a peacebreaker. We then grabbed our backpacks and headed out with our first stop at a section of the Urban Trail near their school. This is where thick patches of western poison ivy are abundant. Without touching, we paused to look at the plant carefully and learned to identify its specific characteristics, and the consequences of getting the oils on your skin.



Carrying the bell.



Making a sound map.

After examining the poison ivy, the students became interested in each plant that we saw along the trail. I knew many, but a few I did not. I encouraged these budding naturalists to do some investigating later. I explained that whenever I see a plant I don't know, I take a picture. Then when I get home I can look it up in one of my plant guides that I keep on my bookshelf.

Once we arrived at a quieter section of the trail, we practiced mindful walking. We timed ourselves for 5 minutes to walk slowly and silently, just listening to the sounds of our feet on the dirt and the world around us. We were amazed at how many things we noticed when we walked without talking! When the 5 minutes were over, no one wanted to stop. They must have walked quietly for 15 whole minutes! It was a new 5th grade record!

A bit farther up the trail, we found a good spot to play the bell game. The object of the bell game is to carry the bell from your spot to a friend on the other side of the circle without the bell ringing. Everyone stays very quiet to be able to hear if the bell makes any sounds. We added a little extra difficulty by having to walk over a raised cement cap. Everyone really enjoyed the game and loved the challenge of trying to keep the bell silent.

Next we made a sound map. Facing north, students drew a compass rose on their paper to show direction. Then they placed an X in the center of the paper to represent themselves. As they sat silently and listened to the world around them, they made symbols to represent each sound they heard. A chirping bird might be a check mark, or wind in the trees might be swirls.

Our last activity before we walked back to school was a game called helium sticks. A group of participants must lift a tent pole up over their heads and return it safely to the ground with each person only placing once extended finger on the pole, and with no team member losing contact with the pole at any time. This is the kind of activity that can really bring a group together, or spark some unfortunate arguments. While they didn't quite get the hang of it, they were bettering their peacemaker skills to communicate.

We returned to school feeling centered and peaceful, excited for many more outings to come this school year!



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