



## Cultivating Mindfulness Outdoors – Round 3

by Sabrina Carlson

On September 29, 2016, 22 students from Mr. Caslin's 5<sup>th</sup> grade class at Kinsey School, headed out for a walking field trip on the Flagstaff Urban Trail. It had been steadily

raining all morning, and was still coming down pretty hard at our appointed time to start hiking. As we waited out the rain, we spent a bit of extra time in the classroom learning about Leave No Trace practices and the types of choices that help us become peacemakers instead of peacebreakers. We were relieved when the rain stopped and we could go outside.

Since the 4th graders were heading out to Sinclair Wash on the same day, we walked out to the Bow and Arrow Wash. It was a longer walk in order to get away from the road, but definitely more quiet. It was worth the effort, since we wanted a simple trip to begin the year to help cultivate mindful and peaceful community for the students in the class.



Malachi shows off his bell skills.  
This guy always has a smile!

Once we arrived at Bow and Arrow Wash, we noticed a few native plants at the head of the trail. They observed a large overgrowth of diffuse knapweed (an invasive species), and some patches of poison ivy here too. Thankfully the poison ivy was farther from the trail on this section and we were less concerned about someone accidentally sitting in it.



Sharing our observation with the group.

As we hiked on, we practiced mindful, silent walking for 5 minutes. We noticed all sorts of bird sounds. Some were short chirps, some longer songs, and some the rattling hammer noise of the Northern flicker digging out insects from trees.

While we were snacking, a few of the students found a tiny horned toad. A Navajo student explained his traditional prayer when they find these fellows. They refer to them as "Che" or "grandfather," and ask for their blessings.

After a little snack break, we played the bell game. The object of the bell game is to carry the bell from your spot in a circle to a friend on the other side without the bell ringing. Everyone stays very quiet to be able to hear if the bell makes any sound. 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.

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

Feeling more peaceful and connected to the nature close to their school, we walked back to the classroom to share the lessons of mindfulness with others.



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