



The Full Experience

by Treven Hooker

On September 18, 2017, 50 4th grade students from Coronado Elementary School in Sierra Vista embarked on an adventure into Coronado National Memorial. The large group was split into three smaller groups, the Coatimundi, the Gila Monsters, and the Great Horned Owls. Each group had a different mission, from removing trash in caves to hiking mountain peaks. The whole class will have three expeditions during the fall semester, and each smaller group will participate in a different adventure for each individual trip into the Memorial.



The Gila Monsters had a big day. Once organized into their group of 16, the students were led on a small hike. Students were asked to describe their five senses, then encouraged to use each of those senses. From blindly feeling the world around them, to listening to distant birds and leaves rattling, to licking rocks and smelling the air. To truly learn anything, we must use all of our senses to understand it. The students were brave, and wielded their natural born discovery tools to their best ability. After our discussion and test run of our senses, I described the adventure we were about to have. We loaded into the vehicles and drove to Montezuma's Pass.



Once there, the Gila Monsters hiked up to Coronado Peak. Along the way students explored and discovered an incredible wealth of natural objects, from rocks, to plants to animals. Students were instructed to collect one "non-living" object which they were supposed to study with their senses. At the top, after a 10-minute period of silence and lunch, each student took turns using descriptive language to verbalize their sensory observations of their object. It was a wonderful opportunity for

students to show passion and interest in something natural, and convey their relationship with that object to their peers. After their presentations, we hiked back to the vehicles and drove to the visitor center to wrap up the day.

The Coatimundi were grouped together, and led to a wonderful picnic area immersed in the forest. There, Park Ranger Kimberly Wentland showed a wonderful display of natural animal parts and representations to the students. The display was of animals who are local to the area, providing an opportunity for students to understand just what lives here and who's home they are visiting. This was intended to spark their imagination as they moved to their next objective, phenological observations.

Students then hiked along an *arroyo* near the visitor center for three miles. Once they reached their stopping point, pens, pencils, and paper were distributed to the students. The youth were

encouraged to find an object or scene of particular interest that related to the landscapes' current relationship to the season. Students spent over an hour drawing and labeling their visual of choice, and with the help of staff completed a wonderful example of the landscape and their objects during this time of year.

The Great Horned Owls gathered at the visitor center, and began equipping themselves with helmets, gloves, and headlamps. With their gear, students marched two miles up a steep trail to the entrance of Coronado Cave.



It is an intimidating looking scramble down into the cave, but each student embraced the challenge with courage and excitement. The students explored and learned about cave systems, animals that call these places their home, and visitors that have disrupted and damaged these caves forever. In response, students became hyper aware and sensitive to any and all human made disruptions. With trash bags in hand, students altruistically began collecting trash of all shapes and sizes. In order to live a healthy life, we must keep that which lives around us healthy. The students understood this, and worked very hard to clean the cave of litter.

They returned with small piles of garbage, doing incredible work for Coronado National Memorial and for the local animals in this high desert mountain range. Each group congregated back at the visitor center one more time. In a large circle, some students took the opportunity to share their favorite moments and experiences. Sad to leave, but excited for next time, students left after high fives and smiles. Next time, the groups will rotate, and the same expeditions will be entirely new adventures.

This Seeds of Stewardship outing made possible through an Active Trails Grant through the National Park Foundation, funded by the Coca-Cola Foundation.

