Outdoor Education Series—Mt. Lassen 6th Grade

Outdoor Education is fundamental to the school's goal of making knowledge come alive for its students, and is artfully integrated into each grade's curriculum starting in the 3rd Grade.

Parents' contributions to the Class Fund make these rich experiences possible:

Grade	Destination	Curriculum
3rd	Emandal Farm	Practical Life
4th	Gold Country	California History
5th	Yosemite	Botany
6th	Mt. Lassen	Geology
7th	Oregon Shakespeare Festival	Renaissance
8th	Open	

We continue our Outdoor Education Series with a look at the five-day expedition to Lassen Volcanic National Park by the 6th Grade.

"*Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.*"

—John Muir

"Something Magical Happens"—by Steve Kinney, 6th Grade Teacher

One of my students almost did not make the class trip. He was suffering from a sinus infection and missed most of the prior week of school. I assured his mom we would take good care of him and she should send him even though he was not feeling 100%. On Monday, we loaded up his medications and headed for Lassen with the class. It was not only him who was sick; several other parents warned me that their children were not feeling well, and requested I call if they needed to be picked up.

The chaperones, who were also a bit nervous, and I noticed soon after we arrived that the students already felt better just by breathing-in the mountain air. By mid-week, the student no longer needed his nightly sinus treatments, and the other student's colds were mere sniffles.

It is hard to explain, but there seems to be something magical that happens when adolescents are exposed to the outdoors. It can change their bodies...it can change their lives.

The trip was filled with challenging, but achievable obstacles for the students. A dramatic analogy used in the Waldorf curriculum is that the 6th grader embodies the characteristic of a volcano, which have several different types and temperaments.

Bringing together this metaphorical volcano with the actual volcano is quite an interesting venture. We chose to climb Cinder Cone volcano, which rises steeply 800 feet from its base. Listed as a strenuous hike on the Mt. Lassen park guides, it is not only steep and dangerous but "requires one step back for every two steps forward". Every student and chaperone was challenged to complete the hike to the summit, but the rewards were spectacular. The 360-degree unobstructed view from the summit rivaled anything any national park has to offer. We even hiked down into the crater itself, which we initially thought would be too difficult

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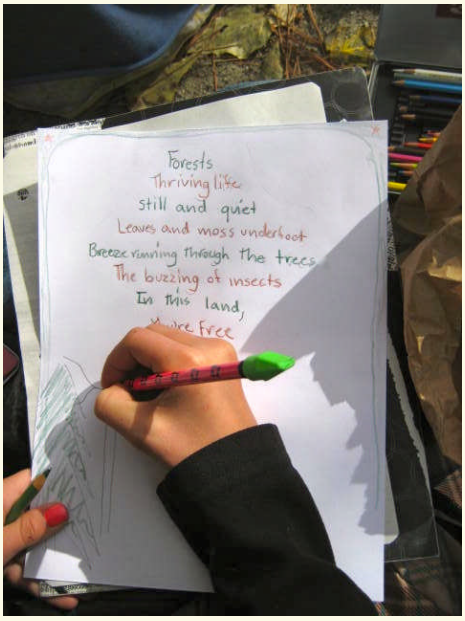
The students were so proud and excited to accomplish this goal, they were overflowing with camaraderie for each other, a much more difficult feat to achieve in the classroom.

To wind down the experience of Mt. Lassen, the day after climbing the Cinder Cone, we debated several choices in the park and then decided to go on a less strenuous, very level walk around Lake Manzanita. It was located near the old visitor center and museum, which were also on our list of stops nearby Camp McCumber. It was another beautiful day. When we were about half way around the lake, we came to an amazing view of Mt. Lassen.

At that moment I knew the time was right to engage the student's artistic abilities. I instructed the students to get out their main lesson paper and pencils and write a "Diamante" poem, something they had never done before. I quickly explained the format of the poem. They each would choose an inspirational theme for their poem, which was one word that the entire poem would be constructed for (student choice is a critical element to a successful assignment for middle school students so they can fulfill their need to directly relate to their assignment). The first line and last line would only be that one word, and then I explained the process of creating the rest of the diamante poem, which meant that there were choices but also rules to follow. In the end, the entire poem would form the shape of a diamond, which they could then illustrate. The students carefully worked on their drafts, helped proofread one another's work, and came up with a final copy. Every student was engaged and challenged and felt successful with their task. The results were inspiring.



Forests
Thriving Life
Still and Quiet
Leaves and Moss Underfoot
The Buzzing of Insects
In this Land
You're Free
Forests