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POINT REYES TRIP IMMORTALIZED IN NEW MURAL

Those of you who read our Spring 2009 newsletter know how unforgettable the five-day Point Reyes field trip is for our 6th-graders. Thanks to a new mural outside Miranda Spang and Amy Stauffer's classrooms, if the students ever want to bring that memory back into colorful and sharp focus, they need only walk down the hall and watch the whole trip unfold before their eyes.

"They all knew a mural was going to be a goal that we'd complete for Expo to tell the story of the trip," says Spang. To that end, the kids had art classes at Point Reyes, doing observational drawing, foreground and background study, and more.

Back on campus, bringing the trip to life in mural form – complete with a key that elaborates on each individual painted scene – was a labor of love for Art Teacher Miranda Bergman and the 6th-graders.

"We saw a lot of cool plants and animals in Point Reyes, and we drew them from close-up," says Jose, now in 7th grade. "We drew a lot every day, so when we came back we had it in our heads what things should look like. The hard thing was making everything the exact color to make it look real."

In the ASCEND spirit of arts integration, all of the mural work was aligned with state science curriculum standards. Math got in the mix, too, when the kids used proportions to transfer their small drawings to the long wall.

"Everything was small and then we had to enlarge it," says Sergio,

explaining how the kids transferred their drawings to the mural. "We drew squares in the wall and measured every little square."

7th-graders Selena and Emonee explain the care it took to render everything faithfully. "If you look at the mural," says Selena, "you can see the horse looks to scale. Of course in real life the horse is giant. Ms. Bergman really helped us do this right."

"They also learned the difference between individual and collaborative art," says Stauffer. "They were creating something that would belong to everybody."

"When we finished the mural the principal cut the ribbon and we had a ceremony," says Cesar. "I felt joyful because we persevered through the work, and we were so grateful that we had the chance to go to Point Reyes and also have the experience of making the mural. It was a great opportunity."

Last spring's Point Reyes trip wasn't only memorialized in paint. Every student in Stauffer's class also wrote a reflective essay on the experience. Here is just one excerpt, from Samantha's essay:

The sun started to set. As it was setting I saw pinkish yellowish colors. It's as if they were making a blend of paints... I looked up and I saw one particular shiny star. I thought about myself ever since I was little, with all my dreams and hopes in front of me. ...As I took one last look at my special star, I closed my eyes and captured it in my head. I'll never let that moment go. ...I guess I really needed a chance to get away from the city and see things I usually don't see.

PICTURED ABOVE: ASCEND 6th-grader Sergio in front of the Point Reyes Mural

MILEs of Music

Painting isn't the only art form being integrated at ASCEND. Music integration has long been a hallmark of our campus, a distinction that helped us become one of only five Oakland schools taking part in an OUSD and Harvard University pilot program called Music-Integrated Learning Environment, or MILE.

The program's goal, explains 3rd-grade teacher Brett Wilson, is to explore the intersection between music and traditional academic subjects. MILE sets out to answer the question: **"How can music support literacy, math, science, and writing?"**

Both in the music room and alongside daytime teachers in their classrooms, ASCEND's new music teacher, Mark Rendon, has been hard at work pursuing this goal by incorporating musical elements into traditional academics. "In 3rd grade right now, we're studying animals and how they survive in different ecosystems," says Wilson. "Using their knowledge of the science of ecosystems – such as the rainforest or tundra – the kids are building the qualities of ecosystems through music."

3rd-grader Cesar puts it this way: "If you were in the tundra, what would you see and how would it feel?" he asks. "With drums and other instruments we make the sound of the wind. That way we learn how it feels to be in the tundra."

"We're learning also about the rainforest and making a song about the rainforest," says 3rd-grader Danitza. "First it was an original song and now we're changing the words to make our own lyrics."

"It helps us understand science better," says 3rd-grader Genesis, "because it helps us know how it feels, how it looks,



3rd-graders Genesis, Cesar and Danitza

and how it seems in the tundra or the rainforest or the desert."

"The benefit is that you show that learning can happen in a lot of different ways, and the learning they acquire is something long-lasting," Wilson says. "They're going to remember this years from now because it's meaningful to them."

As proof that the program is having success, in unison the students quickly tick off the four levels of the tundra: "forest floor, understory, emergent layer, and canopy."

At the end of the year, says Wilson, the students hope to present original compositions with original lyrics that express their understanding of habitats, ecosystems, and other science material. "You can really share your ideas with people when you show it through music," says Cesar.

While the program is technically in its first year, ASCEND is a bit ahead of the curve, having done music integration work in the past. Given this, says Wilson, ASCEND staff "hopes to show success and then present a good model for how [the program] could work in other schools."

English Achievement Up at ASCEND

Thanks in part to ASCEND staff's participation in OUSD's RESULTS training, our English Language Learners increased their English Language Arts (ELA) scores by nearly 20 percent on the California Standards Test (CST). School-wide, ELA scores rose by 11 percent. "We were given professional development time to [collaboratively] plan lessons that implemented strategies from the trainings," says Instructional Coach Harriet Saunders, "and we had time to analyze data from ELA benchmarks to determine what standards were still challenging for students and then re-teach those standards."

SUPPORT ASCEND

Due to state cuts, our already tight budget has taken another hit this year, with 2010-11 looking even more challenging. To continue offering our kids rich out-of-classroom experiences like those described in this newsletter, we must appeal to the wider community. **You can help!** To make a one-time or recurring tax-deductible donation, visit

www.oaklandschoolsfoundation.org (designating "ASCEND") or send a check to "OSF/ASCEND," P.O. Box 20238, Oakland, CA 94620.

Thank you for your support!



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