



Sensing the Landscape by Treven Hooker

On March 24, 2017, 40 4th grade students from Coronado Elementary School descended upon the Coronado National Memorial. This report is one of three, as this large class was split into three groups to accomplish grand missions. This report is about the group of 15 students named the Golden Eagles, who explored the tall peaks and low arroyos of the memorial. Our personal goal was to examine our five senses, and compare them between the outdoor classroom and the indoor classroom.

Once each student was out of the bus, we quickly separated into our groups. The Golden Eagles assembled, and attentively listened for instruction. With co-leader Tamara McDonald, we wandered into a nearby arroyo and circled up. There I asked each student to close their eyes, a task typically hard for 4th graders. Surprisingly after some uncontrollable laughter, calmness flowed over the group. I asked the students to listen with their ears, then feel the ground with their fingers, taste a rock, and smell a nearby plant. With eruptive laughter but joyous acceptance the students utilized their five senses in earnest.

After the sensory introduction, we made our way to the van where we ascended to Montezuma's Pass, a saddle leading to our objective – Coronado Peak. The long dirt road delivered us above the steep cliffside, pushing our adventure high into the sky. A safety discussion was had about seasonal wildlife, such as snakes, and what the protocol is for such encounters. Once we were prepared, students bolted up the trail, eager to discover its hidden wonders.

On our way to the peak we stopped to play a game. One student was instructed to find an object that is natural. He returned with a very abstract flower, which had released its seeds, died, hardened, and now looks like a cactus thorn. His job was to describe the item to his classmates, and the first one to guess what it is wins. After the first round, every student began their personal search for what unique natural treasure they discovered.

When we finally reached the peak, we found a shaded ramada made of natural materials. Most students ate lunch there, but some scattered around the peak, seeking personal solitude. The mountain provided 360-degree views of distant mountain ranges, yellow grasslands, and retreating pine forests. "I spy" became the game played up top. Students flexed their sense of sight, seeking distant and abstract features in the landscape. We discussed which animals might rely on the sense of sight, and we imagined we were them.

Once the peak became too small to contain our energy we made our way down, continuing to discover interesting



natural items. It did not take long for us to reach the van. So away we went down the mountain to explore a low arroyo that drops from Coronado Peak. There students found a variety of rocks that were more diverse than they had ever seen before. These rocks were inspected and analyzed, with attempts at digging out what seemed like treasure. In a shady circle we discussed our day, and what our favorite senses accomplished and taught us.

When we were done, we returned to meet the other two groups, creating a mass of students. In a large circle, staff and student thanked each other. Then students were given special Arizona Trail bandanas before they boarded the bus. After some big high fives, they loaded up and left the Memorial to make their way back to school. On the next outing, the same three groups will switch up their activity to experience a new outdoor adventure.



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