

No Kidding: Teacher Uses Goats To Teach Measurement Lesson

By MEGAN WILLIAMS Daily News-Record

May 10, 2019

HARRISONBURG — Teachers are always looking for new ways to engage students in learning, and finding creative ways to keep students' attention.

It's no secret that kids, especially young kids, are enamored by animals. This was Stephanie Van Nortwick's thinking when she came up with a plan to use her baby goats to teach a lesson on measurement.

Last week, Van Nortwick, a fourth-grade teacher at Smithland Elementary School, brought in her 2-month-old kids to meet her other kids — those of the human variety. The students used what they'd been learning in math class to measure, weigh and document different quantities involved with the goats.

"We looked at how that data could be used in different ways," Van Nortwick said. "They really enjoyed it."

The students analyzed birthing records, tracked growth through weight gain, found and compared the length and height of each goat, and discussed how measurement could be useful to farmers.

The activity was such a hit that on Thursday, Van Nortwick's husband, Adam, brought the two goats back to meet Smithland's kindergartners. Their son, Gavin, is enrolled in kindergarten at the school.

Adam and Stephanie Van Nortwick have been breeding goats for five years. They keep the mother goat for cheese and milk, and in the spring breed her for the sale of the kids.

Because the two goats will be for sale, the couple doesn't name them, Adam Van Nortwick said. However, Gavin has unofficially named them R2 and Han Solo.

"He definitely gets excited in the spring," Adam Van Nortwick said of Gavin.

When asked why he likes the goats so much, Gavin said, "Because they are the softest in the world."

Although the two goats were a little overwhelmed on Thursday by the students, Van Nortwick showed the kindergartners the best way to approach and gently pet them. Two at a time, students carefully pet the small goats.

Gavin and Van Nortwick explained that the goats had their horns burned off by a veterinarian. Not all goats are born with horns, and if there is even one without them, they all have to be burned off. Because if they fight, a goat with horns could injure one without.

Van Nortwick also explained that goats only have bottom teeth and a pad on the top.

“They probably won’t bite you,” Adam Van Nortwick said to the students. “But they will eat your clothes if they have the chance.”

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