

2023-2024

# Experiential Learning Report

## Forest Grove Community School

---



### Learning in the community

Throughout the year, students at FGCS deepened their scholarship, stewardship and citizenship skills through place-based explorations, visits from local experts and hands-on projects in the classroom, garden and community.

Teaching teams at each level conducted a review of integrated units based on an assessment looking at seven key best practices for place-based learning. Based on our evaluation, projects continued to excel at student engagement. A key goal is to strengthen project authenticity by sharing student work with the broader community. Read below for highlights from each level, and [see our complete assessment here](#).

---



---

## By the numbers: Out & Abouts Levels 1-4

- 207 students engaged
- 150 Out & About activities coordinated
- 35 lessons in the school garden
- 42 different community organizations visited
- 37 visits from community experts
- 26 hands-on science or engineering labs
- 22 cultural arts and music activities
- 6 cooking lessons
- 9 service-learning experiences





---

## Level 1: Learning through the seasons

### Harvest / Salmon

At Level 1, the teaching team used seasonal cycles to structure explorations this year. In September, we became ants in the garden, learning to look closely, work as a team, and build our stewardship muscles by caring for the garden. October brought falling acorns, and we studied how squirrels, as well as humans, gather for the winter. We ventured into local greenspaces, visiting the migrating geese at Fernhill Wetlands and introducing the concept of habitat at Gales Creek. Students collected and preserved indigenous first foods, preparing a special feast of acorn cakes and elderberry jam, while sharing their own cultural food traditions. We also used garden produce to make healthy food to donate to community members through the UCC Blessing Box.

November brought the much anticipated arrival of 200 tiny orange salmon eggs! Students explored the salmon life cycle and, with the help of experts, they practiced their science inquiry skills to ensure the tank maintained the right temperature and pH to keep our small fish healthy. They prepared poems for their joyful culminating December salmon release.



### Light and Shadow

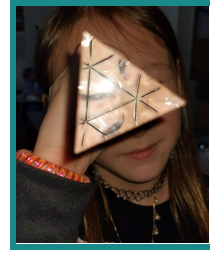
Students brought warmth to the cold, winter months through light science. We began the unit with a series of science labs and light-themed crafts, supported by a parent expert. This prepared students with the knowledge to design beautiful shadow puppets.





---

Students then worked together to retell the “Fletcher” stories for families at Celebrations of Learning. This was an effective way for students to build their collaboration skills and practice literacy concepts.



## Garden Habitat



In February, we received a call for help! A nearby business, Woodfold Manufacturing, posed a problem: they had swallows nesting in their warehouse in dangerous locations. Students rose to the challenge, researching swallow nesting needs and assembling eight swallow boxes to install at Woodfold and the garden.



In April, we learned why native plants are important for wildlife. With a generous donation from Portland Nursery and SOLVE, students were able to plant native shrubs at our garden and local B Street Trail. A visit from the Oregon Bird Alliance helped students think about what birds and other critters need in a habitat. With May's warmth, we returned to Fernhill to learn about mason bees, as well as other insects and the roles they play in our garden. Students then focused on our goal: to invite new bugs, birds and critters to the garden. In teams, they outlined habitat project plans, and got to work crafting snake bungalows, bug hotels and mammal mansions. After a visit

from a real estate expert, they prepared and hosted their open house, showing off the garden habitat to their families at Celebration of Learning. This project highlights the way that community partners can add purpose and meaning to student work.

Additionally, we had the opportunity this year to deepen musical skills through monthly visits from music teacher McKenzie Peterson. Students worked with her to prepare a special song for bridging. We hope to continue music next year!





---

## Level 2: Oregon past and future

### Northwest tribal history

The start of the school year offered an opportunity to introduce 3rd and 4th graders back into scholarship, citizenship and stewardship routines. We visited the garden and Fernhill Wetlands to learn about sensory adaptations while building our classroom community.

Then, classes began their first storypath of the year, simulating a tribal group of Northwest Native people. As students explored the culture and history of Native Americans in class, Out and Abouts invited them to practice traditional hands-on skills, such as edible plant identification at Chehalem Ridge and cordage weaving with a Grand Ronde tribal artist. We hosted an indigenous storyteller, Ed Edmo, who recounted the experience of watching Celilo Fall fishing ground flood, and pulled on Tribal History / Shared History curriculum to debate the impact of dams on salmon and cultural lifeways. We challenged students to consider the injustice of early encounters between Native Americans and white settlers in Oregon, taking a walk to the site of the former Indian boarding school in Forest Grove with Professor Eva Guggemos. We also learned basic Chinuk Wawa, and celebrated the nine federally recognized tribes still creating traditions today, culminating in a potlatch ceremony, campfire and traditional games.



### Folk tale engineering

In January, classes' literacy unit focuses on folk tales from around the world, inviting students to compose original fractured fairy tales. We supplemented this with indoor story-themed engineering challenges: from building a bridge for the Gingerbread man, to crafting a pulley system for Rapunzel. These challenges were woven with design





---

thinking skills, collaboration tools and growth mindset practice. Students' final work was shared with families at the Celebration of Learning, along with a fairytale-inspired bake sale.

## Oregon Trail

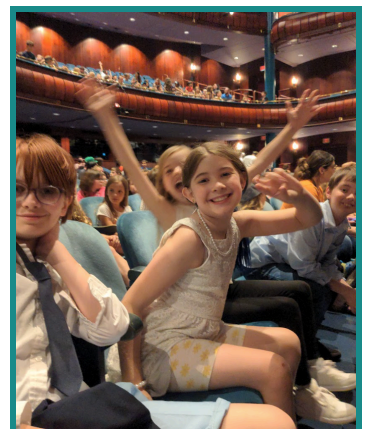
For the second Storypath of the year, students assembled their wagon train to join the 1800s migration westward. Working with Newell Pioneer Village and the Friends of Historic Forest Grove, students explored what life might have been like for the migrants. We walked out the length of the trail through a scaled-down map along the B Street trail, and learned how to care for livestock when a horse visited the garden. Students also discussed the Homestead Act, and how settler land claims changed the lives of indigenous tribes. The unit ended with a Pioneer Day celebration, including making cornmeal flapjacks, dancing the Virginia Reel and trying their hands and jacks and marbles. Both of the historic Storypath units continue to prove deeply engaging for students, while leaving open an opportunity for students to create more authentic final projects through community partnerships.

## Climatology

A final short unit of the year wrapped up Next Generation Science Standards while challenging students to become meteorologists, geologists, paleontologists, and finally, "futuurologists." Out and About activities included gathering weather data, mapping out a timeline of Earth's entire climate history, analyzing the shifting fossil record in stratigraphic layers, and tackling climate change through a collaborative design challenge. We sought to help students to make sense of this complex issue and to feel empowered as change-makers.

With the proceeds from our winter bake sale, students were able to attend "She Persisted," by the Oregon Children's Theater, a perfect complement to the spring biography unit. Our final Out and About was an adventure day at Hagg Lake.

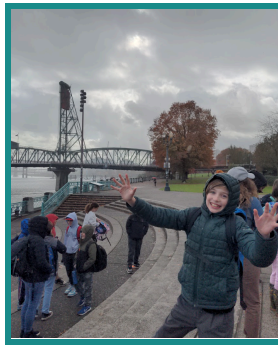
---





---

## Level 3: Sustainable Systems



Level 3's fall unit offered a broad place-based exploration of what makes a system sustainable, and how we can solve environmental challenges in our community. Students visited the school garden, a local organic farm, and met with the Adelante Mujeres farmers market manager to investigate food systems. Through a trip to Hyla Woods Forestry, the Oregon Bird Alliance and Fernhill Wetlands, we analyzed the interrelationships that keep an ecosystem balanced and healthy. Then, on an exciting tour of Portland Bridges, a tour of Pacific's dorms and a chat with our local Power and Light Director, students discussed urban systems, like electricity and transportation. With all this knowledge under their belts, students selected a sustainability problem and came up with an original solution, including a presentation and prototype, to present to peers. While relevant and rich in community partnerships, we hope to support this project in the future with deeper academic connections and an authentic audience.

## Colonial History

In winter, students traveled back in time, using two simulations to trace early European settlement of the modern United States, and the precursors to the Declaration of Independence. While conducting research to better understand the colonial lifestyle, experiential activities immersed them in several aspects of colonial life, from handicrafts like candle-making and cross-stitch, to parlor games and country dance. We sought to elevate awareness around the diversity of cultures that arrived in the colonies, as well as the presence of native



---

tribes. Students made wampum belts, explored the musical culture that emerged out of slave communities, and analyzed exhibits at the Oregon Historical Society. Culminating events included an in-class revolution debate, hands-on exhibits at Celebration of Learning, and a festive Colonial Day in the garden, featuring lawn games. While successfully bringing history to life for students, this unit has the opportunity to deepen relevance by connecting historical events with current events.



## Healthy Bodies

Our spring unit invited students to think about health holistically, exploring each body system and how it plays a role in physical, mental and emotional wellness. During Out and Abouts, we had the chance to try out Zumba, Crossfit, yoga and swimming. We also asked them to consider ways to promote wider community health. We met with community health advocates, including the director of Taste and See Local food bank, and manager of the Produce Rx program through Virginia Garcia. Then, with funding support from Agriculture in the Classroom, students planned and planted our seasonal garden with the intention of donating produce. Further, with a visit to Nana Cardoon, they explored meal planning and food preparation, then collaborated to host a fundraiser dinner at Celebrations of Learning featuring whole-grain bowls, colorful veggies and homemade sauces. Students felt accomplishment in helping the community, and the teaching team gained insight on how to further build and refine this project in the future.





---

## Experiential Learning Level 4

Level 4 started the year strong with team building community based experiences. Students in science class were studying the properties of matter, so we went to Pacific University to participate in a matter lab with professor James Butler. We teamed up with City Librarian Lily Hawley at the Forest Grove Library to teach students research methods that would later help them with writing their genocide research papers for their language arts class. Social studies was studying medieval and renaissance times. We had a local reenactment group, Dragon's Mist, create a mini renaissance festival at the school, this year bringing a fashion expert, teaching the students how to felt wool, and learning about armor. We collaborated with the Portland Opera to present *Cinderella* at the school district office. As students moved into studying WW2 and the Holocaust we visited the Oregon Holocaust Museum and Center for Holocaust Education for a guided tour of the Museum and memorial center. We also had Inge Hoogerhuis, child of a Holocaust survivor, visit our school and speak with our students. We also visited the Japanese American Museum in Portland to talk about the effects of WW2 on the city of Portland. Before winter break the organization Portland Jazz presented students with a history of Jazz as it relates to African American artists. Students collaborated with PDX Jazz to create record covers that were displayed at the Portland Art Museum in June.



We were able to participate in many experiences right here in our community. Students were able to visit local businesses on an on-site career day. Students worked with the Forest Grove Companion program to do winter activities with disabled adults. Well renowned Scientist Nate Ball presented to students about energy and its properties. Students were able to make organic body butters and lotions with Virginia from the local business Woman & Wolf.

Our overnight trip to Newport was a success. Students were able to work with Hatfield Marine Science Center to participate in many coastal science experiments. Students also spent the night at the Newport aquarium, sleeping in the shark tunnels. We ended our year with a fun team building activity at Anna & Abby's yard. Overall a very busy and successful year.

---

---

## Looking forward

Research shows that student learning is more profound when they are engaged in their learning, and when their work has meaning. Across the grade levels, our place-based excursions and hands-on activities supported students' growth and sense of purpose.

As teaching teams reflected on our year, engagement surfaced as one clear area of strength, with 9/10 projects rated as "exemplary." Whether acting out animals through garden games, engineering bridges or scrubbing clothes in a washtub, pioneer-style, hands-on experiences made standards-based content fun and memorable.

Another pattern that emerged was the value of authentic projects in elevating projects, giving students motivation to produce their best work. For example, Level One expressed not only pride in the swallow boxes they helped build for nearby Woodfold Manufacturing, but also could explain in detail the difference between barn swallow and violet green swallow habitat needs! Level Three showed enthusiasm and creativity as they planned the "Falcon Foods Cafe," applying real-world skills to plan a menu, set prices, seek donations and consider logistics. Community partners and volunteers, including SOLVE, Adelante Mujeres and Agriculture in the Classroom, made these experiences possible.

Finally, an overview of the year made it clear that project-based learning was most effective when integrated thoughtfully into academic learning. Projects like Level 2's Native American Storypath or Level One's Light and Shadow unit demonstrated how science and social studies concepts can inspire literacy growth and put skills to practice.

Each teaching team recorded successes and ideas for adjusting the project-based units in the future. We will continue adapting these projects to strengthen students' learning and self-efficacy as thoughtful, active community members.

---