

Asombro Insights

Science education for eager minds

A Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 27, Issue 2 (April - June 2018)

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Desert Data Jam Wraps Up Its 7th Year

By Libby Grace

The idea of Desert Data Jam was born in 2011 with the discovery of an interesting book, Flip Flop Fly Ball: An Infographic Baseball Adventure. Author Craig Robinson takes a myriad of baseball statistics and uniquely presents them throughout 160 pages of charts, drawings, and photos. Inspired by Robinson's novel approach to data representation, Asombro and our partners at the Joranda Experimental Range wondered if students could accomplish what Robinson did in his book, but with science rather than baseball. Could students analyze science data and find creative ways to portray their findings?

Having just wrapped up the 7th annual Desert Data Jam, we have found the answer to that question to be: absolutely they can.

The goal of Desert Data Jam is for students to design a creative project and presentation board that explains a dataset to an audience that may not be familiar with the concepts involved. What started out as a high school project, evolved over the years to include both high school and middle school. For the past two years, the project has been solely focused on middle school.

In total, 476 sixth through eighth grade students participated in Desert Data Jam during the 2017-2018 school year, with 49 projects represented in the final competition at the end of April. Memorable projects included beautiful watercolor paintings, leaves hanging playfully from umbrellas, delicious smelling baked goods, and many more. The final projects were truly outstanding, making those that rose to the top even more incredible.

Asombro awarded 12 honorable mentions and the following three top prizes:

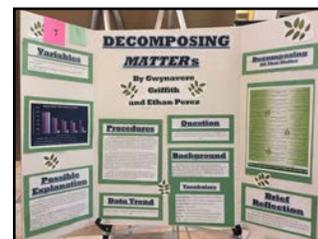


1st Place - Shrub Shenanigans by Grace Longwell from Vista Middle School. Grace demonstrated coyote and jackrabbit abundance in two habitats using homemade view-masters, a Desert Data Jam first!

2nd Place - Summer: Dust's Time of Bummer by Jordan Gladstone and Clara Tomicek from Las Cruces Catholic School.



3rd Place - Decomposing Matters by Gwynavere Griffith and Ethan Perez from Sierra Middle School.



Below: Asombro created a Data Jam project about the 2018 Desert Data Jam. The presentation board is color coded and scaled to represent the types of creative projects at the final competition.



*Pink = physical models
Yellow = games
Green = videos
Orange = creative writing
Brown = painting/drawings
1 in² = 0.06% of projects*

2nd Quarter 2018 Wonder Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service, Justin Van Zee

By Stephanie Haan-Amato

Asombro staff members appreciate almost nothing more than the volunteers who make it possible for us to do what we love: bring exciting science education to students. As a small gesture of our gratitude, we choose one of our amazing volunteers to receive the quarterly volunteer award. The award is called the **Wonder Award** because, just as we hope to inspire wonder in our students, our volunteers definitely inspire wonder in us!

The recipient of our 2nd quarter 2018 Wonder Award, **Justin Van Zee**, rose to the forefront of our minds given how much of his time and expertise he has shared with us over the years.

Justin began volunteering with us 23 years ago, making him the longest-serving volunteer in the history of our organization! All of the ways that he has helped Asombro over these years are too numerous to list, but here are

some highlights. He serves as our Board President, assists with infrastructure planning and construction at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, helps develop curriculum, serves as a science consultant, and teaches at public events, such as Butterfly Flutterby.

For all five years of our Desert Dash Trail race fundraiser, he spent countless hours behind the scenes, clearing and marking trails, and behind the camera, providing race day photos.

There's no doubt about it; Justin is truly WONDER-ful!



Education Programs

Thanks to your support, Asombro staff provided 363 hours of science for 8,267 students so far in 2018!

Here are the programs from the first quarter of 2018.

9-Jan Sierra MS - Data Jam	5-6 Feb Riverside Elem (GISD) - Desert Stories	1-Mar Vista MS - White Sands Lizard
9-Jan University Hills Elem - Desert Stories	6-Feb Mesa MS - Data Jam	3-Mar Zach White Elem - Skins & Skulls
10-Jan Camino Real MS - Data Jam	6-Feb Sunrise Elem (GISD) - Desert Stories	5-6 Mar Columbia Elem - Desert Stories
11-12 Jan Ruben Torres Elem - Desert Stories	7-Feb LC Catholic - Arthropod ID & Rock It	5-Mar Lynn MS - White Sands Lizard
11-Jan Zia MS - Data Jam	7-Feb Riverside Elem (GISD) - Desert Stories	5-Mar Picacho MS - Data Jam
16-Jan Mesa MS - White Sands Lizards	8-Feb Sunrise Elem (GISD) - Desert Stories	6-Mar Aldo Leopold MS - Data Jam
16-Jan Sierra MS - Data Jam	8-Feb Vista MS - Data Jam	6-Mar Lynn MS - White Sands Lizard
16-Jan University Hills Elem - Desert Stories	9-Feb Central Elem - Desert Stories	7-Mar Ruben Torres Elem (DPS) - Desert Stories
17-18 Jan LC Catholic - Organic Matter/Biomes	9-Feb Riverside Elem (GISD) - Desert Stories	7-Mar Vista MS - Insulating You/Insulating Earth
17-Jan Mesa MS - White Sands Lizards	12-Feb LC Catholic - Data Jam	8-Mar Loma Heights Elem - Desert Stories
17-Jan Zia MS - Wildlife CSI	12-13 Feb MV Leadership - White Sands Lizards	8-9 Mar Ruben Torres Elem (DPS) - Desert Stories
18-Jan Zia MS - Data Jam	12-Feb Riverside Elem (GISD) - Desert Stories	9-Mar Columbia Elem - Desert Stories
19-Jan E Picacho Elem - Desert Stories	13-Feb Central Elem - Desert Stories	10-Mar AAUW Girls Can! - Wildlife Biology
19-Jan Ruben Torres Elem (DPS) - Desert Stories	13-Feb Mesa MS - Data Jam	12-13 Mar Central Elem - Desert Stories
22-Jan Camino Real MS - Data Jam	14-Feb J Paul Taylor Acad - Weather	12-Mar J Paul Taylor Acad. - Biomes
22-Jan E Picacho Elem - Desert Stories	14-Feb LC Catholic - More Scientific Methods	12-Mar Picacho MS - Data Jam
22-Jan Riverside Elem (GISD) - Science Interns	14-Feb Riverside Elem (GISD) - Desert Stories	13-14 Mar Highland Elem - See It Little/See It Big
23-Jan Crossroads MS - White Sands Lizards	15-Feb Central Elem - Desert Stories	14-Mar LC Catholic - Color & Camouflage / Wildlife CSI / Human Impact
23-Jan Sierra MS - Data Jam	15-Feb Desert Hills Elem - Science Night	15-Mar Central Elem - Desert Stories
23-Jan University Hills Elem - Desert Stories	15-Feb Vista MS - Data Jam	15-Mar Picacho MS - Human Impacts
24-Jan E Picacho Elem - Desert Stories	16-Feb Camino Real MS - White Sands Lizard	16-Mar Loma Heights Elem - Desert Stories
24-26 Jan Sierra MS - White Sands Lizards	16-Feb Sierra MS - vegetation measurements	16-Mar Rio Grande Elem (HVPS) - Career Day
25-Jan Zia MS - Data Jam	20-Feb Camino Real MS - White Sands Lizard	19-21 Mar North Valley Elem - Desert Stories
26-Jan Riverside Elem (GISD) - Science Interns	20-Feb Mesilla Park Elem - Science Interns	26-Mar Aldo Leopold MS (SCS) - Data Jam
29-Jan LC Catholic - Data Jam	20-Feb Sunrise Elem (GISD) - Desert Stories	26-Mar Memorial Elem (DPS) - Desert Stories
29-Jan Riverside Elem (GISD) - Science Interns	22-23 Feb Picacho MS - White Sands Lizard	26-27 Mar Sunrise Elem - Desert Stories
30-Jan Columbus Elem (DPS) - Desert Stories	22-Feb Vista MS - Data Jam	27-Mar Mesa MS - Data Jam
30-Jan Mesa MS - Data Jam	23-Feb Mesilla Park Elem - Science Interns	27-Mar Picacho MS - Data Jam
31-Jan J Paul Taylor Acad - Desert Plants	26-Feb Sierra MS - Veg. measurements	27-Mar White Sands MS - White Sands Lizards / Human Impacts
31-Jan LC Catholic - Weather	26-Feb Zia MS - White Sands Lizard	28-Mar LC Catholic - Solar System / Plant a Seed
31-Jan Riverside Elem (GISD) - Science Interns	27-Feb E Picacho Elem - Earth Movers	28-Mar Mesa MS - Human Impacts
1-2 Feb Columbus Elem (DPS) - Desert Stories	27-28 Feb Mesilla Park Elem - Science Interns	28-29 Mar Sunrise Elem - Desert Stories
1-Feb Virtual Learning Acad. - White Sands Lizards	27-Feb Zia MS - White Sands Lizard	
5-Feb LC Catholic - Data Jam	28-Feb Vista MS - White Sands Lizard	
	1-Mar Loma Heights Elem - Desert Stories	

Meet the Newest Asombro Staff Member, Rachel Szczytko

On May 7, we welcomed our sixth staff member, Rachel Szczytko. Rachel's last name is pronounced sit-co and is Polish in origin. It means summit (either a meeting or a mountain-top).

Rachel grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan and attended the University of Michigan where she received her B.S. in Environment, focusing on terrestrial ecology. After teaching environmental and science education in Southern California and New Hampshire, she went back to school to research environmental education and evaluate programs. She received her M.S. from North Carolina State University in 2017 where her research focused on developing connection to nature among youth and assessing environmental literacy.

We asked Rachel a few questions to help you get to know her. Here is what she had to say:

What led you to your new position at the Asombro Institute for Science Education?



To start way, way back: my childhood playing in the woods, streams, and lakes of Michigan set me on a path to work in an outdoor-focused field. More recently: I had just graduated with my M.S. and was seeking a job that combined everything I love: teaching, working with students multiple times over their K-12 education, being outside, utilizing best practices, and communicating science. Asombro does just that and so much more!

What is your favorite thing about the job so far?

My favorite thing about the job so far is being able to be in the classroom again! After two-and-a-half years (mostly) away from schools, I am grateful to be back. It is wonderful to be a part of students' learning.

New Mexico is the Land of Enchantment. What do you find enchanting about our state?

I love the big sky and the ever-changing colors of the mountains. It is magical to watch the daylight change the landscape. I am particularly grateful I get to see this view every day biking (uphill) home from work - it makes the ride all the more enjoyable!

Red or Green?

Can I take the easy way out and say Christmas? Maybe we can have a chile-inspired cooking contest as our next fundraiser to help me figure this out - I would love to be a judge.

THANK YOU!

We are grateful to the generous donors in the first quarter of 2018.

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Spring is a magical time at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. Around every corner, there are new discoveries, such as this flowering ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*) up near the amphitheater. The ocotillo flowers in the spring, often when the plant lacks leaves. Leaves will emerge following sufficient rain.

YES! I want to support the
Asombro Institute for Science Education!

- Quartz (\$15 +)
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