

Asombro Insights

A Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 30, Issue 2 (April - June 2021)

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The Benefits of Outdoor Learning Shine Even Brighter During the Pandemic

By Stephanie Haan-Amato

Recently, the New Mexico Legislature passed Senate Memorial 1 (SM1), Task Force to Promote Outdoor Classroom. At Asombro, we think this is just what the children of our state need after spending most of the school year learning remotely indoors because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of SM1, a task force will be established to promote the use of outdoor classrooms, and the memorial includes a request that the governor declare an "Outdoor Learning Day" in 2021.

Asombro has provided outdoor learning opportunities for local students for 30 years at our Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park and in schoolyards throughout southern New Mexico. We incorporate outdoor learning into our programs regularly because research demonstrates that it benefits students' emotional, mental, and physical



Third grade students conduct an Asombro experiment in their schoolyard.

well-being. Students who spend more time outside tend to exhibit increased creativity. Also, the health benefits of getting outdoors translate to academic gains; healthier children have higher educational achievement.

Outdoor learning can simply mean taking students outside to conduct the same lesson a teacher was planning to do indoors, or it can involve incorporating the local area into the activity to help students understand a topic. Either way, children receive the benefit of

breathing fresh air and getting up to move. Integrating the local area into lessons enriches learning and helps bring the content to life for kids. It could involve a walking tour of an historic neighborhood as part of a social studies lesson or going outside to measure wind speed and temperature in different areas of the schoolyard during a science lesson.

Now that more students have returned to schools, maintaining proper distancing in existing classrooms can be challenging. By contrast, students can spread apart outside, and fresh air is constantly moving, making it safer because coronavirus transmission occurs primarily through the air.

We're hopeful that outdoor learning practices adopted during the pandemic will remain in place after it ends and that the task force resulting from SM1 will find ways to make that happen. Why confine learning to four walls, especially when we live in the land of enchantment?



Middle school students take plant measurements with their teacher on a field trip at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park.

Desert Discoveries at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park: Free and Fun Plant Scavenger Hunt

By Emilia Linley

In our neighborhoods, many native plants have been removed and replaced with lawns and exotic ornamental plants. We receive fewer than 10 inches of precipitation annually in our local ecosystem, and removing native plants to plant lawns depletes our already low water resources.

In order to bring awareness to native plants and their benefits, Asombro created the free Plant Scavenger Hunt with funding from the Native Plant Society of New Mexico. This activity provides an opportunity for children and the young at heart to make discoveries about native plants at our Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. To participate in the Plant Scavenger Hunt, pick up a free journal from the visitor information box near the restrooms and trailhead. Fill out the journal as you tour the paved Mini Desert Discovery Loop Trail, looking for the green plant signs to guide you. Once you complete the scavenger hunt, mail it in or email us a photo to receive a free certificate and prize!

The City of Las Cruces declared April 18-24 Native Plant Week, and Asombro celebrated with our partners at the Las Cruces Chapter of the Native Plant Society of New Mexico. Together, we promoted native plants with our Plant Scavenger Hunt and other activities.

As the school year nears the end and before the heat of summer, head on over to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park to get out and enjoy the hunt - the Plant Scavenger Hunt, that is! The Park is open Tuesday-Sunday 7:00 am - 5:00 pm. We look forward to hearing about your desert discoveries!



Complete the free Plant Scavenger Hunt journal as you stroll along the paved Mini Desert Discovery Loop Trail near the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park parking lot. Look for the green plant signs to guide you.

Join the Club, the Asombro Booster Club!

We'd like to invite you to join an exclusive group of loyal supporters, the Asombro Booster Club (ABC). ABC members give a monthly donation.

With the commitment of ABC monthly donors, we can better plan for the delivery of our award-winning education programs and are able to share the wonder of discovery with more students. Relying on donations only during campaign drives and fundraisers makes planning more difficult for year-round delivery of engaging science programs in classrooms, in schoolyards, and on field trips to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park (once allowed again after the pandemic).

Can you help by donating \$5, \$10, \$15, or \$20 per month? It's easy! Just visit our giving [website](#), and choose "monthly" for the donation frequency.



asombro.org/donate

Donation frequency: monthly

Join ABC with a monthly donation to help provide unforgettable moments of discovery for students.



Wonder Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service: Jean Davis

By Kelly Steinberg

Everyone needs a person they can depend on to do just about anything. That's why this month, the Asombro Wonder Award for volunteer service goes to Jean Davis!

Jean has been part of the Asombro family for about two decades, since she was a teacher at Jornada Elementary. After retirement, Jean became one of our most dedicated volunteers in the classroom and on field trips, where she expertly leads classes through activities. Her help extends far beyond the classroom and she can almost always be found at public events, like Luminarias each December, where she is a cheerful greeter and amazing saleswoman.

The pandemic hasn't slowed down Jean's enthusiasm for supporting Asombro. Every time we've called on her for help assembling science kits, she replies with a resounding "Yes!" and then makes double or triple the number of kits we requested. Thank you Jean! We think you're WONDER-ful!



Jean shows off her festive finery while volunteering at the Luminarias event at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park.

Upcoming Virtual Teacher Workshops: Opportunities for Educators Throughout the Southwest

This summer and fall, Asombro will be hosting a record-breaking number of teacher workshops, all of which will be held online. While hosting workshops virtually presents challenges, we're excited about the possibilities of expanding our audience throughout the southwest. Participating teachers are eligible to receive supply kits, stipends, curriculum materials, and lessons taught by Asombro educators in their classrooms. Please spread the word to all educators who may be interested. For updated workshop dates, detailed descriptions, and to apply, please visit: asombro.org/teacher-workshops.

Climate Change in the Southwest (6th – 12th Grade) – June 21, 23, 28, and 30

Engage your students in the latest science through hands-on activities about climate change that will help you expand your climate change teaching. Each workshop is focused on a different climate change theme; attend one or all.

Water Conservation Data Jam (6th – 12th Grade) – June 26

The Water Conservation Data Jam increases students' science literacy and ability to turn knowledge about New Mexico water issues into action through flexible lessons perfect for formal and nonformal educators.

A Teacher's Guide to the Desert's Fascinating Flora (3rd and 4th Grade) – June 29

The desert is filled with fascinating flora. In this workshop, you will learn from scientists at the NMSU Herbarium, receive training for hands-on NGSS-aligned lessons developed by Asombro, and start your own classroom plant collection.

New Mexico Climate Champions (5th – 8th Grade) – July 7, 8, and 9

Inspire and empower your students to turn knowledge into community action plans with New Mexico Climate Champions. These hands-on, NM- focused lessons explore the science behind climate change with modules on energy use and water availability in our state.

Curious About Cows? Engaging NGSS Lessons on Current Criollo Cattle Research (3rd Grade) – September 15

Cows may be common farm and ranch animals, but this workshop will help you go beyond the basics to learn how to bring current research on sustainable ranching into your classroom. Discover a heritage cattle breed that may be more sustainable in the dry conditions of the southwest, and meet the scientists studying them.

Terrific Technologies for Ranching: Bring Sustainable Solutions into the Classroom (9th – 12th Grade) – September 18

How are scientists helping to imagine the future of beef production and make it more sustainable? In this workshop, you'll meet and learn from scientists in the cutting-edge Sustainable Southwest Beef research project.

Teachers create a data jam project together during an Asombro teacher workshop.



Educators use magnifiers to examine plant specimens during a recent Asombro teacher workshop.



We Need YOU: Volunteer to Make a Difference

Asombro is seeking volunteers! There is no minimum time contribution. Help when you can. Please call 575-524-3334 or email information@asombro.org for more information.

THANK YOU!

We are grateful to our generous donors from the first quarter of 2021.

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Science Night - Pandemic Style

Science nights at local schools are a favorite event for Asombro staff, but the events had to look a little different this year. We recently got to help with a virtual science night at Cesar Chavez Elementary School in Las Cruces. Young scientists logged on to Zoom with curious minds and a science kit provided by Asombro. On screen, four Asombro scientists appeared, each with a question, a mystery to be solved. By the end of the night, laughs and smiles were seen all around, and the students used their observation skills to solve each of the mysteries through a guided investigation. As we were all waving and saying good-bye, one little girl in the corner of the screen unmuted herself and asked, "when can we do this again?"



Desert Detectives Science Kit distributed to students at Cesar Chavez Elementary School

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Have you considered putting Asombro in your estate plan? Please contact Steph Bestelmeyer (575-524-3334) if you are interested in learning more.

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