

# Asombro Insights



A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 30, ISSUE 3, JULY - SEPTEMBER 2021

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## Building Community through Virtual Teacher Workshops

By Abigail Miller

We have had the pleasure of hosting eight virtual teacher workshops since June and are preparing for two more in September. How do teachers describe Asombro's virtual teacher workshops? Interactive, engaging, exciting, and collaborative, just to name a few. A teacher shared that one workshop "made me excited to teach after a year of burnout," while another said, "this is the best virtual workshop I've been to... my first time with Asombro and I am so impressed."

When teachers attend an Asombro workshop, they become part of a community of scientists and educators working in tandem to provide our students with high-quality, relevant science education. Creating opportunities for teachers to experience hands-on activities virtually has allowed us to expand our impact, this summer reaching teachers in 19 counties in New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

During Asombro workshops, teachers take on the role of students and experience activities as their students will. We achieve this by mailing supply kits to participants in advance to do activities together, like using lenses to look at plant samples or collecting data on a model of the greenhouse effect. Workshops frequently include presentations from science content experts whose enthusiasm for their work is infectious. After these experiences, teachers shared their appreciation for "the lessons and the passion in which they were delivered."

The dedication and creativity of teachers we work with is inspirational, and we are thrilled to have this opportunity to build relationships with even more educators beyond southern New Mexico.



*A group of enthusiastic educators from across New Mexico spent three days learning about climate change.*

## Notes from the Director

By Stephanie Bestelmeyer

After more than 15 months, we are so excited to work with students in person again, in local classrooms and schoolyards and at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. We also recognize an incredible opportunity to capitalize on the new skills and programs we developed last year. Using video conferencing, science kits sent to teachers in advance, and new remote-learning lessons (<https://asombro.org/remote/>), we can now bring our science lessons to students throughout New Mexico.

Expanding Asombro's reach promotes equity. We will prioritize our remote-learning lesson delivery to some of the most underserved parts of our state. Asombro lessons can be accessible for all students, not just those who happen to live in southern New Mexico.

As we transition out of the pandemic, we don't want to just go back to where we were before. We're challenging ourselves to be even better, reach even more students, and expand our geographic reach. We can't wait to get started!

“ This made me excited to teach this year after a year of burnout. ”

THANK YOU!!!!

-Teacher Workshop  
Participant

## Protect Our Native Plants

By Ryan Pemberton

The Chihuahuan Desert is home to approximately 300 species of cactus. Many of these species can be found within the boundary of the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. The Asombro staff looks forward to watching the succession of blooms each spring, but this year, we received an unexpected surprise. Someone had trespassed onto our private property and illegally harvested many of the small cacti around our paved mini-trail.

It may be tempting to add some of these beautiful cacti you find in the desert to the landscaping around your home, but illegal harvesting of cacti depletes wild populations, disrupts ecosystems, and deprives wildlife of their natural habitat. There are rules regulating plant harvesting throughout the southwest, so it is important to understand the regulations in your area. More information can be found in this Ethics of Native Plant Acquisition brochure (<http://agrillife.org/el Paso/files/2011/10/Plant-Acquisition-Ethics1.pdf>) provided by the TexasAgriLIFE Extension Office of El Paso County.



*Many cactus species are found at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, including this Turk's Cap Cactus.*

## Upcoming Workshops

Educators, please join us for interactive virtual educator workshops this fall!

Apply today at:  
[asombro.org/teacher-workshops](https://asombro.org/teacher-workshops)

## Curious About Cows?

Discover how ranchers practice sustainable ranching with heritage cattle.

 3rd grade teachers

 NGSS-aligned lessons

September  
15th  
4PM – 6PM



## Wonder Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service: Julie Boxer

By Kelly Steinberg

The last year has been full of change, but one constant has been the “Yes We Can!” attitude of our volunteers. One of our most enthusiastic “Yes’s” always comes from this month’s winner of the Asombro Wonder Award for volunteer service - Julie Boxer!

Julie started volunteering with Asombro at our monthly volunteer gatherings in 2019, and soon after, she was eager to join us in the classroom. When we started asking for volunteers to help assemble science kits for remote learning in 2020, Julie was there to help. Not only did she respond to almost every request, but she always asked what *extra* things she could do to help!

Over the last year, she has cut, folded, taped, and assembled an incredible number of supplies for grateful students and teachers. As we head into the next school year, we know that we’ll continue to need plenty of help from dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers like Julie; we just hope we get to do more of the work together. Thank you, Julie! We think you’re WONDER-ful!



Wonder Award recipient  
Julie Boxer

## Terrific Technologies for Ranching

Bring research on heritage cattle and precision ranching into your classroom.

 9th - 12th grade teachers

 NGSS and AFNR-aligned lessons

September  
18th  
9AM – 11AM



# Data Jams across the United States

By Stephanie Bestelmeyer



What do data on lobster populations off the coast of Massachusetts have to do with Asombro? Students in Foxborough, Massachusetts used this dataset to create the award-winning "Lobster Tales" video for the Northeast Shelf Data Jam, modeled after Asombro's Desert Data Jam. This is just one example of how Asombro's Data Jam concept has spread across the United States.

When we invented the data jam concept in 2012 to engage students in interpreting actual data and then communicating it creatively (e.g., videos, games, songs, physical models), we never imagined that the idea would spread so far and wide. In the last two years alone, students in Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Puerto Rico have "jammed" with data from their region. Science educators in all these states have used Asombro's model and made Data Jam experiences that work for their areas. We're delighted that an Asombro innovation is helping promote data and science literacy here in New Mexico and throughout the country.



This year's Desert Data Jam winners interpreted a dataset about leaf litter decomposition.

They used video game characters from 'Among Us' to create an interactive infographic showing which location has quicker decomposition rates.

See the Northeast Shelf Data Jam Winner's Ring here:  
<https://sites.google.com/view/nes-lter-schoolyard-datajam/home>

See the 2021 Desert Data Jam Winners and Honorable Mentions here:  
<https://asombro.org/desert-data-jam/>

 **1st Place**  
"LitDecomp Us"  
Emma M.  
Jordynn H.  
Richard A.

 **2nd Place**  
"No Rain, Much Pain"  
Ishan B.

 **3rd Place**  
"Dust Debris Crayola-Melt"  
Sophia T.

## THANK YOU!

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

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Asombro Institute

FOR SCIENCE EDUCATION

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## 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](mailto:information@asombro.org) for more information.



El Paso Electric



Thanks to our funders for their generous support of our Desert Stories program!

YES! I want to support the  
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