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Fifth-graders learn history by living it during Colonial Days

By Pippa Fisher



Springhill Elementary School fifth-graders during the March 1 Colonial Day. Photo Pippa Fisher

It was like stepping back in time in a corner of Happy Valley last week - students from Springhill Elementary School got the chance to spend a day living as colonial-era children. It was all part of their fifth grade experience, and everyone - students, teachers and parents - dressed the part with bonnets, aprons and britches as far as the eye could see.

Even the pouring rain couldn't dampen the enthusiasm of the 106 fifth-graders and their teachers as they got into the spirit of Colonial Days.

"It seems to rain every year," reflected coordinator-parent Yumi Chelemedos. Fortunately the event takes place in the shelter of a barn located next door to Happy Valley Elementary School, which holds their Colonial Day the following day. The location is perfect for the gathering.

The event is the result of two months planning and preparation by Chelemedos and coordinator-parent Sara Carter. It takes their hard work plus the efforts of around 30 other parent-volunteers to bring it all together.

"Colonial Day is an annual event for the entire fifth grade, where the students can experience what life was like in Colonial times," says Chelemedos. "This ties in well with their history study of Colonial times in America."

The young colonials start the morning off in an assembly, which is opened by "George Washington," otherwise known as fifth-grade teacher Martin Wong. As part of the assembly the students got a chance to practice marching to the tune of a fife.

"It's great that the classes all get to mix together and do things they wouldn't normally experience," said Wong, adding that they are fortunate that Dr. Jon Sammann, a Lafayette orthodontist, allows the school the use of his two-story barn each year.

The children cycle through 25-minute rotations at different stations, staffed by parents, experiencing activities from the era. Downstairs, at the noisiest station by far, children were busy hammering nails into tins to make lanterns, while next to them another group was busy making candles. Upstairs was a quilling station and next to it, joyful dancing accompanied by a fiddle. Nearby, bonneted heads were bent over in concentration at the cross-stitch station.

Parent Kate Mason, working on the lunch station, said that her son Cole had been looking forward to the day. "It is a fun thing to see history in action," she said.

Parent volunteers prepared a turkey lunch with assistance provided from Diablo Foods and Lunardi's.

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