

Class Visits, 4th grade, Washington Elementary School, PUSD, Teacher Jodie West

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Ajay Limaye and Nina Lin

Ajay:

I visited Jodie West's classroom at Washington Elementary school in Pasadena in April 2011. I talked about weathering and erosion, using part of a presentation put together by Willy Amidon. I spoke for about 30 minutes with two separate 4th-grade classes. The students were very inquisitive—which was actually somewhat challenging, because they asked a lot of questions that were off-topic (e.g., where did humans come from?) It was very tempting to go off on tangents. I would recommend giving the class your email, and suggesting that if they have any burning off-topic questions, they should write them down and then email them later on. I made sure to ask the students a question any time I showed them a picture—for example, when I showed a picture of the Grand Canyon I asked if anyone had been there, and how they think it formed. This kept them engaged and participating for a surprisingly long time!

The materials Willy put together on weathering and erosion are great, and cover way more than one would cover in a single class. In the future it might be nice to go through the whole presentation and worksheet he put together over the course of a few days.

The biggest response came from videos. Both classes got very excited when I showed them a landslide in action. I would strongly recommend ending your presentation with a video as a treat for the students for participating. Moreover, if you do it at the end, you won't be asked to replay the video again and again. There's lots of material online, but the classroom did not have internet, so make sure to bring a downloaded movie.

Nina:

I modified the powerpoint slides what Willy Amidon prepared for this outreach activity quite a lot. Two major changes:

1. Instead of showing the pictures and explaining each weathering/erosion process directly, I use questions first, trying to stimulate the thinking of "what caused this". The questions are designed to be simple, so that the kids don't have to think too hard and can still figure out the right answer.
2. For most of the processes, I try to use animations/videos to give them vivid ideas as to how each process works.

I used i-clicker system on the questions. I-clicker is a super great tool in this situation. It's difficult to attract 4th graders' attention by lecturing them one whole hour. When using i-clicker, even if a kid feels bored, he'll still try to answer the question and get involved. They all love to see the statistics plot. I have 20 i-clickers this time and there were 30 kids, so I asked them to team up into groups of two.