



Caroline and Northeast Third-Graders Visit Cornell Plantations

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Third-graders from Caroline and Northeast Elementary Schools visited the Cornell Plantations together May 9 as part to the Kids Discover the Trail! program. Caroline students and their Northeast buddies spent the day exploring spring wildflowers in the Mundy Wildflower Garden. KDT! is a collaboration of the Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI), the Discovery Trail, and the Ithaca City School District (ICSD).

"I look forward to this each spring," said Raylene Ludgate, Youth Educator at Cornell's Plantations. "It's fun to see the kids bloom along with the wildflowers."

Through KDT!, Discovery Trail educators collaborate with teachers and visit classrooms to present curriculum-based activities prior to the site visits. In preparation for the Plantations trip, Ludgate and her volunteers visited Caroline and Northeast to teach students about the lifecycle and underground structure of wildflowers. Students also dissected native flowers. "I liked taking the flower apart," said Zoe Zhang, a Northeast third-grader. "I saw the petals with the brown lines that attract bees. I liked those petals the most."

Each third-grader also received a "passport" booklet to record information about their assigned wildflower. The classes researched facts about different flowers, wrote poems, and exchanged pen pal letters from their "buddies".

At the Plantations, students took a guided tour of the wildflower garden, ate lunch with "buddies" from the other elementary school, and participated in a map exploration exercise. "It's expanding on what they do in the classroom to a real outdoor situation," Ludgate said.

On the tour, small groups identified the flowers they studied in the classroom and at home. Jonathyn Thornton, a third-grader from Caroline, immediately recognized the flower he researched, the toadshade trillium. "It has 'tri' in it because it has three leaves, three sepals, and three petals," he said.

Next Surya Amundsen, a third-grader from Caroline, identified a white trillium. "It grows in rich woods and turns pink before it dies," she explained.

Groups examined other plants, including wild ginger, Virginia bluebells, and fiddlehead ferns. Students looked out for robber bees and smelled the leaves of a spice bush. Thornton said he liked "everything." "There's lots of interesting flowers," he said. Amundsen said, "I liked seeing how the flowers looked in real life."

After lunch, students and their "buddies" went back into the wildflower garden on their own to complete a map exploration exercise. The "buddies" together searched for answers to questions like "What's the color of the deer fence symbol?" or "How many bridges are there?"

"What I love about this program is the excitement the kids have about meeting a new friend," said Diane Hallett, a Northeast third-grade teacher.

"I've watched them in a whole new environment," said Judy Steele, a third-grade teacher at Caroline. "They've surprised me."

Ruby Wilson, a third-grader at Caroline, said she enjoyed the trip because she wants to be a botanist when she grows up. "I like looking at plants," she said. "It's interesting." "I got to see a lot of my favorite flowers,"

said Cady Austin, a Caroline third-grader. "I like the sounds of the birds chirping. I like nature and my favorite color is green so I get to see a lot of green."

Esther Racoosin, a volunteer tour guide for six years, said she likes working with students through the KDT! program. "They're really enthusiastic," she said. "They are excited when they are outside; it's infectious."

Created in 2005, KDT! gives every student in the district the opportunity to visit all eight sites of the Discovery Trail during elementary school. The program has grown to include paired-classroom learning experiences with planned curriculum, KDT! books, and KDT! "buddy-up" trips. This year ICSD fifth-graders will become the first class to complete the entire KDT! program. A community event, "Full Circle Celebration," is set for Saturday, May 12, 10:00 am-1:00 pm at all eight sites.

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