



Stars in Their Eyes

DEEC 1st graders view the night sky inside their school

First graders at the Dexter Early Educational Complex recently had the opportunity to view the night sky during the day in an exciting presentation for their Earth and Sky science unit. Beacon 1st grade teacher Maureen Service created and presented the culminating activity using a SkyDome Star Lab Planetarium checked out from the resource center at the Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD).

In the Earth and Sky science unit, students use observations of the sun, moon and stars to describe predictable patterns. They also make observations at different times of the year to relate the amount of daylight to the time of year. Using a flashlight, Service showed on the dome how the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Students discussed how shadows change from long to short and back again throughout the day, depending on the sun's location in the sky.

Switching to the moon, Service projected a crescent, quarter, gibbous, full, and new moon on the dome and reviewed vocabulary learned earlier in the unit. Students talked about how and why the moon follows the same pattern every month, and how changes in the sky are related to the movement of the earth.

When viewing the constellations, Service told the story of Orion and the Scorpion:

When the world was new, the great hunter and giant Orion was feared by all the beasts. He slew many great beasts of the land and sea. None succeeded in staying his arrow. In a fit of arrogance, he proclaimed to the heavens that he would not rest until he succeeded in killing all the wild animals of the Earth.

His insolence angered Gaia, goddess of the Earth and mother of the Titans. She sought the help of a lone scorpion and asked him to slay the giant. Orion was stung with the scorpion's poisonous tail and Orion, the great hunter was himself hunted and slain.

Gaia, in eternal gratitude to the scorpion, ensured that his success and Orion's shame would forever be marked for all to see. The image of the Scorpion was placed in the night sky, with Orion's image next to it. As the stars move – it will always look as though the scorpion is chasing Orion.

As the story unfolded, the constellations of Orion and Scorpius moved slowly across the dome, accentuating the chase. Service also displayed the Big Dipper and other notable constellations,

Making Waves – Stars in Their Eyes

talking with students about how the stars move across the sky in the same direction as the sun and moon due to the Earth's rotation. Students enjoyed talking about how constellations received their names, and whether or not they really looked like their name.

DEEC's 1st grade students thoroughly enjoyed the Star Lab presentation, filling the dome with 'oohs' and 'aahs' upon first entering. To access the dome, students had to crawl through a short, very dark tunnel which they nicknamed the "black hole." An interesting feature of the dome is the way sound travels from one side to the other. Service turned this into a teaching moment, talking about how sound waves usually travel in a straight line, but in the dome they traveled up one side and over the top to the other side. Students sitting on opposite sides of the structure could speak softly and still hear each other's words.

One student commented they loved the StarLab so much, they wished it was in their house so they could sit in it all day long looking at the stars. Another wondered how they might get one for Christmas.

DEEC teachers found the interactive activity to be a fun and beneficial way to solidify the unit for students, and Service intends to repeat the presentation each year.

