

# Seneca Elementary Learns and Builds Together

This winter has been a mild one in Seneca. We didn't see our first real snow until mid-February, which means most of our learning has unfolded under open skies, muddy boots, and the steady rhythm of rural life.

Inside the school, that rhythm continues in its own way.

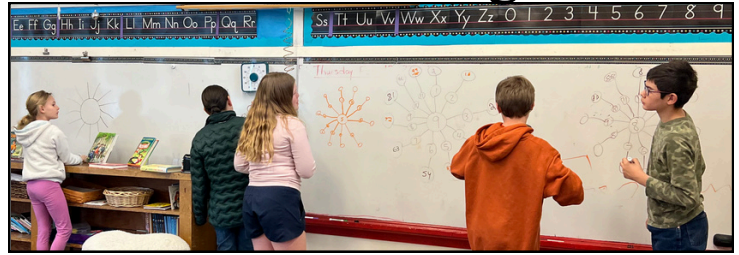
Students have been extending our Seneca Historical Timeline — the growing visual story of our town that stretches down the hallway. This season, they are researching and illustrating the most recent 25 years of local history. They've been interviewing longtime residents, flipping through archives, and sketching scenes that will soon become painted panels. It's one thing to read about history. It's another to realize it lives in your neighbors — and that you are part of what comes next.

In February, we welcomed the Burns Paiute Preschool and Elders for a Valentine Tea. Our students helped set tables, carried teapots, and assisted with pouring. There were cookies, conversation, and plenty of movement. What stood out most was watching children play together. You don't need to share the same name or even the same language to understand play. The preschoolers and our students quickly found common ground in games, laughter, and simple curiosity about one another. It was a reminder that connection often begins in the simplest ways.

We continue our conversations about incorporating Paiute language elements into our timeline, helping students understand languages carry culture and history, and learning about culture and history can build bridges across communities.

Our studies also connect directly to the agricultural roots of our region. A recent visit to a local cattle operation gave students a first-hand look at ranching practices and rural economics. An upcoming trip to Windy Acres Dairy in Prineville will allow them to compare beef and dairy operations — observing organic milking practices, learning about cheese production, and exploring how science, geography, and business intersect in real life. (Cheese tasting tends to make those lessons especially memorable.)

Back in the classroom, colorful string boards are taking shape. Thanks to a generous \$500 donation from



Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative, we were able to purchase wooden boards, nails, vibrant string, and puppetry supplies that now support hands-on learning. What may look like art projects are lessons in symmetry, patterning, skip counting, and early algebra. Students stretch thread into geometric designs and quietly build strong mathematical thinking in the process.

Puppetry has also become part of our learning rhythm. A puppet might introduce a new phonics sound or pose a math challenge before students participate with puppets of their own. When two hands are needed for writing or manipulatives, the puppets are gently "laid to sleep," only to be awakened again for storytelling and discussion. In collaborative puppet lessons, students design and build a character together, learning to coordinate movement, make the puppet "breathe," and communicate clearly enough that an audience understands the story being told. It becomes an exercise in teamwork and awareness — skills that reach far beyond the classroom.

In our small, multi-age setting, older students guide younger ones, leadership develops naturally, and subjects connect in meaningful ways. Learning feels less like separate pieces and more like one steady, growing story rooted right here in Seneca.

As spring approaches, the timeline continues to expand, the paint will soon be flowing, and projects will move from sketches to finished work. The story of Seneca is still being written. We are grateful to be learning — and building it — together.

-Stacy Durych, Head Teacher at Seneca Elementary

