Kids learn scientific method from ASU graduate students

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JONESBORO — Fifth-grade science students at Nettleton Intermediate Center learned about the scientific method Thursday with the help of Arkansas State University graduate students.

Students learned about the physiology and behavior of termites from ASU grad student Bree Fursey, who the students call their "resident scientist." Students formed hypotheses about how they expected the termites to behave when allowed to roam free on a piece of paper, marked with a variety of markers. They then tested the hypothesis and formed conclusions based on the evidence they collected.

"So you guys tested your hypothesis and found that the behavior the termites had basically the same thing that was in your hypothesis," Fursey said to the class. "So you guys did an excellent job. They were following the scent as you all hypothesized."

Fursey explained that termites, like many insects, create chemical trails for other termites to follow. The students used different pens and markers on paper, which mimics the scent of the chemical trail or pheromones termites give off.

Fursey is one of three ASU science graduate students who work with NIC as part of a grant called GK-12 which stands for Graduate STEM Fellows in K-12 Education. STEM stands for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. "It's a five-year grant and this is our last year," NIC principal Debbie Bean said. "The kids just love it. They really motivates the kids to see that these are scientists, but they're also just normal people."

ASU students also work with other school districts in the area, and with grades 5-8.

"It's been great," science teacher Wendy Peppers said. "The kids, it's funny, if you ask them what does a scientist look like? Everyone of them will draw a picture of Einstein. And you know, she's a scientist, and the kids see that she's just a normal person."

Fursey said she enjoys talking with non-scientists about what she's passionate about.

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"Resident scientist" Lana Elkins (left) discusses the findings of an oil spills experiment with students Gabriel Gonzales (center) and Isaiah Aldaco at Nettleton Intermediate Center in Jonesboro on Thursday. The students were getting a lesson on the scientific method. Elkins is one of three graduate science students at Arkansas State University who work with the school's fifth-grade science classes as part of a grant program.

The students were working with this age group, they're great. Those how and why questions that they do every single day, they don't really realize that that's science."

"Resident scientist," Lana Elkins, who is a graduate student in the molecular biologies program at ASU, helped students test their hypothesis, collect data, and run different experiments.

"They're awesome," Elkins said of the kids. "I really enjoy working with them. It helps me learn to communicate in a different way."

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