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## EDUCATION

### Does science = fun?

#### Coarsegold students take part in Science Fun Day

 By [Elizabeth Gabriel](#)

(Updated Wednesday, January 31, 2007, 11:29 AM)

Gummi Bears were flying through the air and "elephant toothpaste" was foaming up a storm last Thursday at Coarsegold Elementary's Science Fun Day.

Oh, yes. Established, documented and well-researched principles were being taught, too.

"We do so much academic work these days, it's hard to squeeze in some fun," said the day's coordinator and fourth-grade teacher Stephanie Smittle. "I'm grateful for the day."

This is the third year the school has set aside time to celebrate learning --- on several levels. Kindergarten through fifth-graders had projects and experiments to do, data to gather, words to learn. Science students from Yosemite High School went to Coarsegold help with the project and learn what it's like to have the little kids looking up to them, amazed at the wonders they can perform. Adults, whether volunteers or parents, got to learn what went on in school firsthand.

Each of 14 participating classrooms had stations are set up with science-based projects geared to the grade level of the pupils. Some of the projects: discover whether a catapult set on a sharper or shallower angle throws something (in this case Gummi bears) farther; find out if a sense of smell has anything to do with a sense of taste (the children held their noses and tasted lemons and oranges); see how much weight a "barge" can hold (putting pennies on an aluminum-foil vessel) and use a compass to find something (once accurate coordinates were established and the student followed his arrow, a surprise awaited him).

After lunch, an assembly included YHS students from Rob Nobles' and Carol Calderwood's chemistry and biology classes. That's where the "elephant toothpaste" came in. A bubbling mass of tan goo brought on a chorus of oohs and ahs, liquids turned colors and soft-drink cans collapsed.

All wondrous, all scientific, all fun.

Smittle said that the youngest ones really got a kick out of the fruit-salad experiment. The lesson was on reversible and irreversible mixtures.

Presented with a fruit salad, the audience was asked "Can you pick a banana out of this mixture? Can you pick an orange out of this mixture? Can you pick a grape out of this mixture?"

The response was a resounding "Yes."

Then the demonstrators made Jell-O. "Can you get the powder and sugar back out of this mixture?"

"No."



At a Science Fun Day assembly, youngsters from Coarsegold Elementary watch Rob Nobles and his Yosemite High School chemistry students perform "magic."

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Smittle said it was warming to a teacher's heart to hear young ones shout out the next response: "So what kind of a mixture is the Jell-O?"

"An irreversible mixture," came the chant.

Then they feasted on the experiment's ingredients.

In the happy shambles of her classroom, Smittle said she is already planning for next year. The experiments change each year so there's always something fresh for everyone to learn, she said.



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