

# A whale of a time

Greenfield kindergarten science lesson offers perspective on ocean behemoths

By Thomas Sumner  
For The Salinas Californian

When it comes to learning about whales, Jennifer Sena's class of Greenfield kindergartners found out Wednesday that nothing beats the real thing. The students assembled a real, 25-foot grey whale skeleton while learning about how whales evolved from a land-loving prehistoric dog-like animal called a mesonychid.

The kindergarten students from Oak Avenue Elementary School in Green-

field assembled the "whale in a box" as part of a science activity put on at the newly founded Greenfield Community Science Workshop. The Community Science Workshop Network plans to start a similar program in Salinas within the next few years.

Each student at Oak Avenue Elementary has had the chance to visit the science center at least once since it opened at the beginning of the school year.

"I only get to see each class two or three times throughout the year, so I get to be like a grandpa and spoil them," said



Kindergartners look over their handiwork after helping to put together a grey whale skeleton Wednesday at Greenfield Community Science Workshop. THOMAS SUMNER/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

event coordinator Jose Sanchez, 26. "We try to give them the best experience possible each time they come in."

For the past few years the Greenfield

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Unified School District has failed to achieve the goals set under the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. With budget cuts forcing the district to focus on raising test scores, the science workshops supplement classroom time with fun activities, such as creating homemade terrariums out of empty tennis ball cans. The science center is located a short 10 minute walk from the elementary school.

"It's nice for the kids to be able to get that hands-on experience," said Sena as her kindergarten students made whale puppets out of wooden dowels and construction paper. "We don't get a lot of science time in the classroom in kindergarten since it's not in our curriculum; it's nice to be able to have somewhere special to go to do it."

The workshop has applied for additional funding for the upcoming



Teacher Jennifer Sena helps her kindergartners sort out whale vertebrae as a human skeleton stands in the foreground. THOMAS SUMNER/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

school year to host more activities and after-school programs. While the workshop has only been around for a few months, Sena says she sees the impact it has on her kids.

"They focus a lot better here than they do in the classroom," she said as her kids ran outside to explore the whale skeleton. "All of them are participating, which doesn't always happen and is really nice to see."

Sanchez said the goal

isn't to replace classroom learning, but to supplement it. All of the workshop's activities are age-appropriate and geared toward the classroom curriculum.

The most important part of the activities isn't teaching students a specific concept or fact, but introducing them to the world of science, Sanchez said. "They have this attitude now that they can do science — that's such a big deal for these kids," he said.