

They Studied Fire Safety

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Sometimes a class undertakes a project in an area of immediate and pressing need—and finds, much to its surprise, that this can open many avenues to learning and growth, not only for its members but for other classes in the school.

FIRE! What a horrible word this is for people whose lives are in danger or when hundreds or thousands of dollars worth of property is going up in flames.

The fire safety project described in this article had its beginning when the principal of the Fairview Public Schools of Cullman County, Alabama, made a statement that our school needed to do something about providing fire drills with wider participation by students. He felt that some group might profitably work on a solution to this problem. Accordingly, such a project was discussed by the pupils of the seventh grade core class. This group of thirty children decided it would like to try to work out a solution to the problem.

Fairview School is located in a productive farming area thirteen miles from Cullman, Alabama. In this school, due to its lack of access to modern fire fighting equipment usually found in cities, much stress must be placed on fire prevention. The students are housed in two main buildings, one for high school and the other for grades one through six. There are eight buildings on the campus including four homes for teachers.

The seventh grade children decided that their main problem was to plan a fire drill which would enable the students in all grades to leave the build-

ings as quickly and efficiently as possible after the signal had been given. Further discussion presented additional problems which they felt required as much attention as the fire drill. As problems were suggested, the children discussed why these should or should not be listed. From the resulting list the children made an outline to guide their work.

Uppermost in the minds of the students, however, was the organization of the fire drill. Closely related to this were the cause of fires and their prevention. Interest was shown in the part fire has played in the civilization of man and in the use of fire in our present day civilization. The great loss caused by forest fires each year was a major area. Another important topic was that of fire fighting equipment and methods of fighting fires.

Children Conduct Research

After the class had made an outline, it organized into five small groups of five to seven members each. Each small group was made up of members interested in one specific problem in the

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outline. Group members then selected a chairman and planned their work.

The committees began their work by searching for materials which would give them information that would be helpful in solving their problems. They checked books, pamphlets and charts from the central library and the libraries of other rooms. After reading what they could find about their problems they began to engage in activities related to the solution of their problem.

The group planning the fire drill drew a large map of the campus and buildings. All possible exits were marked. They then discussed thoroughly the information gained through their readings. Along with other members of the class, they next planned the routes the students should follow in case of fire. The principal approved the plans with only two minor alterations. The next activity was to make signs, with the directions on them, to guide the students in the drill. The signs were placed in conspicuous places in the rooms and all exits were clearly marked.

This group also felt that the students needed a set of rules or regulations to guide them in emptying the buildings. Following is the list of rules drawn up by the group.

1. The signal for the fire drill is three taps of the bell.
2. Each class should select two people to close the windows when the bell sounds.
3. The teacher is to carry the following records from the room: register, grade book, ledger and receipt book.
4. There must be no talking, running or pushing. Keep in a single line.

5. The first person in line should open the door, remain with it until everyone is out of the room, then close the door and join the group.

6. No student is to stop to get personal belongings from lockers or other rooms. This would only cause confusion.

7. Remain outside until the all clear signal has been given.

8. Listen carefully to any instructions which may be given and follow these carefully.

9. The teacher should be the last to leave the room so that she can check to see if all the students are out of the room. She should also check to see if all the students under her supervision are safely out of the building.

10. The boys, who have been appointed to do so, should go to the office to help carry out records when the drill signal has been given.

The students now asked their teacher to present their plans to the other faculty members so that they could help by instructing their classes.

Safety Demonstrations

The group studying fire fighting equipment invited the other members of the class outside to see a demonstration of how to use a water fire extinguisher. After the demonstration this group refilled the extinguisher and replaced it in its proper location. The group also made charts and painted pictures to help explain what it had learned. It also made a survey of the buses, home economics department and buildings to see if fire extinguishers had been placed in the best possible places for use. Several fire extinguishers were still needed so the group made

recommendations that more be provided. Some of the extinguishers on the buses were found to be not in proper working order. This fact was called to the attention of the drivers of these buses.

One group prepared a list of fire hazards to be found around the home and the farm. Each member of the class made a check of his home and eliminated these hazards or made plans with parents to bring about safer conditions.

What to do in case a person's clothing catches on fire was studied by another group. Its members presented their information to the class in the form of a skit. They demonstrated how to extinguish a fire in a person's clothing. This they did by rolling the person in a blanket or a rug. Two of the boys demonstrated how to rescue a person from a smoke-filled room. They also demonstrated how to give a person artificial respiration when he has been overcome by smoke or fumes.

During the project the children engaged in activities which required the use of many skills. They used the skill of writing in making stories, lists of rules and signs. As the unit progressed the children found some new as well as some old words they needed to know how to spell. These words became the spelling lesson for the group.

Instruction in art was needed in lettering the signs, arranging bulletin board displays and painting pictures.

Reading was needed in finding information in books and pamphlets.

In asking for information, making reports and giving directions, oral composition was improved. The need for

clear enunciation was also emphasized.

The children gained scientific knowledge through their study of fire extinguishers, spontaneous combustion, smoke and conservation of natural resources. In their science class, the children studied which fuels are used today and the way they are used, while at the same time they studied fire safety in the core class.

Only a little skill in mathematics was gained. The use of linear measure was needed in making signs and displays. Liquid and dry measure were used in determining the ingredients required in refilling the fire extinguisher.

The group ended its unit by presenting a dramatization of the things its members had learned in this project. Other students in school were invited to the play. The school also had its first fire drill. All were glad to learn that the buildings could be emptied in three minutes. All the students followed well the instructions given them. One child, after a long sigh, remarked, "You know, the whole school had to do what we planned for them to do!"

This study resulted in a better understanding of the danger of fires, fire hazards, fire prevention and fire safety. Many parents, too, through the checks the students made of their homes, had been alerted to the danger of fire. The whole school benefited through the fire drills which resulted from this unit. The children in the seventh grade gained skill in planning and organizing their findings into things which could be used by all. The children were quite confident that they had profited by their study of fire safety.

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