

The News-Herald

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Eastlake students catch wind of high-flying hobby

Published: Wednesday, May 12, 2010



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Dismal weather kept the students' homemade kites out of the skies, but no matter.

"We make do in here," said a sunny Marlene Campbell behind the artificial breeze of a box fan.

Each spring Campbell, a teacher for the gifted and talented Zenith Pullout Enrichment Program at Washington Elementary School in Eastlake, spends a week teaching the value of building and flying kites with the help of Bob Lockhart, member of the Ohio Society for the Elevation of Kites, also known as the Cleveland Kite Club.

The lesson features elements of art, math, history, geography, problem-solving and science, they said.

For example, "gravity, lift and drag means pulling the kite down, pulling it back up, and pulling it to keep it stable," recited 9-year-old Joey Frate, busily decorating his creation with markers.

By week's end, about 40 students in second to fifth grades will have crafted their own kites, hoping for better forecasts than Tuesday's 13 third-graders, who settled for a "test drive" with the box fan.

"I'll tell you one thing: it sure is cold!" said Kayla Johnson, 8, whose desk was right in the line of the fan.

Third-graders' Chinese kimono kites, shaped like the letter T, will require more skill to fly than the simpler ones the class built in second grade, Campbell said.

When the conditions are right — that is, when it's windy and their dad says it's OK — Stephen Davies, 9, said he and his brothers still fly last year's design.

"I have the one I made last year, and I bought another one," Stephen said. "People who have never flied a kite should get the experience."

Campbell began incorporating store-bought kites about 15 years ago into science lessons she'd hold at the dunes of Headlands Beach State Park in Mentor.

"It was free, they packed their peanut butter sandwiches, and the day was like Christmas," she said. "Oh, the kids just loved it."

But three years ago busing needs complicated the trip, "so I invited the kites to us," she said. "You would not believe the children today that do not fly kites. I think our culture's changed and it takes time to put it together, time to get it in the air, and there's not total instant gratification.

"I just feel this is their moment with the elements of the Earth."

Abiding by the scientific method, kids studied each finished kite for weight, balance and movement. Casey King, 9, added a black-spotted yellow tail as the rain really began to fall outside. Her design included water, sky and land: pink and yellow flowers, a red fish leaping from the water, a rainbow and a yin and yang symbol.

“It’s fun to fly kites — it’s like ‘wow,’ and then you get to look at it up in the air,” Casey said.

“I just wonder if this will feel different than last year’s kite. I think it should take some more strength to get it up.”