

Two Rivers School students go fly a kite

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By Laura Geggel

The sky just got a bit brighter, speckled with spots of orange, red and yellow decorating giant, 8-by-6.5-foot kites. Two Rivers Middle School teacher Joe Burgener introduced the kite project to his class of 17 so they could learn about math, history and nature, but have so much fun they wouldn't even realize they were learning.



Jacob Husman shows a Rokkaku kite that he made with classmates at Two Rivers School. Photo by Laura Geggel

First, he taught them about the history of Rokkaku kites, which are similar to the kites made popular by the Afghanistan-based book, "The Kite Runner."

"Apparently, these were originally Japanese fighting kites," student Jake Newcomer said.

Just like the original Rokkaku models, students got into groups and made six-sided kites using bamboo spars, but they used Tyvek, a house wrap material, instead of Japanese washi paper.

Burgener had them work with local materials, including bamboo. He and teaching assistant Denise Atkinson took the students to a North Bend bamboo grove, where they cut stalks with handsaws, trying to find the straightest ones that could compose the spar, or frame, of their kites.

Burgener cautioned them to cut with moderation, so that there would be enough bamboo left for next year's class. Using bamboo and piping, the student constructed the spar for their kites. But first, they had to paint the front.

"Everybody in our group drew their own design and we put them all together," eighth-grader Jacob Huseman said. Once the paint had dried, "there was a lot of measuring and we had to be precise with everything," eighth-grader Hope Gray said.

They didn't want the kites to lie flat, but to have a bent shape, like a V, so they could catch the wind. Students used string to create tension and maintain the kites' contours.

"You have to get the tension or otherwise it won't fly," Gray said.

On the first windy, non-rainy day, students took their kites outside, wearing protective gloves so the string wouldn't cut their fingers, in case of unpredictable gusts pulling at their creations.

"You actually don't need that much wind," Gray said, but students doubled up on the kite spool, since the wind could easily yank their kites away.

"It will pull you," Huseman said. "You need like four people to hold it down."

Burgener said students had to work closely with one another for the project and practice communicating with each other about their ideas and goals.

"They have to learn in group work and group work is not easy," he said.

Students had a great time flying their kites, and though Rokkaku are traditionally made to cut each other out of the sky, all of the flying at Two Rivers was friendly.

"It was really good we didn't have to fight with these," eighth-grader River Johnson said, saying she preferred friendly flying with the enormous kites.

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