

## Erdkinder Class Investigates Benefits of Stewardship in October 25th Whitewater Watershed Field Experience

Erdkinder students recently participated in a Watershed Field Experience outing hosted by Whitewater State Park. The Watershed Field Experience is designed to introduce students to



a comprehensive watershed education through observation, hands-on exploration, discussion, and use of field equipment in order to foster a conservation ethic. Following the trip, students did reflective journaling. Excerpts are included in italics.

Prior to the trip, students completed classroom investigations and background research on watersheds in general, the Whitewater watershed history, including the 28 floods in 1938 of the town of Beaver, buffer strips, sustainable land use and water uses, pollutants and protection.

On October 25th we traveled to Whitewater State Park and the Whitewater Wildlife Management Area to look first hand at water chemistry and quality indicators, the watershed aspects and the Beaver Cemetery, where the history and culture of the valley were explored. The day started with an overview at the Whitewater Visitor's Center where students were engaged in a trivia session on background information. Our students were enthusiastic, informed participants.







We spent the remainder of the day in the field at Whitewater State Park and the Wildlife Management Area (WMA) assessing two locations of the Whitewater River branches for water quality, including macroinvertebrate surveying to check for number and diversity of species, water chemistry and using waterproof digital cameras to document general stream bank and water conditions. *“My favorite part was looking for invertebrates in the water. Today was so fun!” “I really liked going into the water and finding invertebrates and stuff.” “We learned about testing water chemistry. That was neat.”*



Following the water stops, we drove through the WMA to the Beaver Cemetery, where students located and read about various historic families from the area, the hardships they suffered, and why they ultimately left, primarily due to the extensive flooding brought on by uninformed watershed use practices such as overgrazing and burning hillsides for agricultural use. *“I love the idea of figuring out who the people really were.” “The cemetery was cool, but sad, because you found out how people actually lived and what they went through.”*





Included in the Beaver Cemetery graves was that of Richard Dorer, promoter of land conservation and stewardship, who began working for the Minnesota Department of Conservation in 1938. He stood out as a leader for sustainable land use, purchasing tracts of land for the State that would eventually become the wildlife management area. With others, such as the Izaak Walton League, he helped transform the devastated watershed into the beautiful place it is today.

*"My group got to find the grave of Richard Dorer. He was really important to conservation efforts in SE MN. We learned a lot about the flooding that happened." "Richard Dorer - he's kind of a hero."* Students toured the area where the Richard J. Dorer retaining pools are located, seeing



former homestead locations, birds of prey, swans, pelicans, a trout raising pond, and various waterfowl. *"The land around us seemed dry with everything dying in the fall, yet the watershed was filled with life."*

Of note, Richard J. Dorer is the grandfather of Storytelling Montessorian Michael Dorer, who worked in Winona for a time. One stewarding the land, the other our children.



*"It was nice ending the day with the overlook of the watershed."*

*"The valley was really pretty with all the bluff prairies."*

*"I had a lot of fun. I really enjoyed myself and it was nice to be in nature all day."*

The watershed study incorporated numerous science standards as well as social world standards and reinforced the concepts of stewardship and responsible land use. Thank You to Sara Holger, Lead Naturalist at Whitewater State Park for organizing a great day!