

College Students take Middle School Pupils on Cemetery Field Trip

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Needwood Middle School's eighth-grade students took part in a unique social studies lesson on Tuesday, ditching the classroom to learn about Georgia's Civil War history at the Palmetto Cemetery in Brunswick.

Teaching candidates from College of Coastal Georgia led the field trip, a project they have been preparing for all semester.



College of Coastal Georgia teaching candidates took Needwood Middle School students on a field trip to the local cemetery.

Lauren McDonald/The Brunswick News

Sarah Hartman, assistant professor of teacher education at CCGA, organized the project for her class of 14 teaching candidates who are on track to graduate in May with a degree in social studies education, with a focus on teaching middle school students.

“(My students) came out here once a week, every week, to practice, to work and to prepare,” Hartman said. “Then today’s the culminating event.”

Each teaching candidate chose a gravestone at the cemetery that has a connection to post-Civil War history and then crafted a lesson around the person buried there.

On Tuesday, groups of students traipsed through the cemetery and examined the tombstones. Many of the teaching candidates had their group of students complete gravestone rubbings.

Justin Ray, a CCGA teaching candidate, told his students that many slaves were first brought to Georgia to grow mulberry trees to make silk.

“But the wrong kind of mulberry tree grew in Georgia, so silk was a bust,” Ray said.

Planters then moved on to growing rice, despite that being a difficult crop to grow in Georgia, which created more work for the slaves who were forced to grow it.

Ray also taught his students about the spirituals that slaves would sing during the workday, and he even treated them to his own rendition of “Swing Low Sweet Chariot.”

Libby Burton took a different approach with her students, focusing her lesson on the hardships of sharecropping.

She illustrated the injustices of sharecropping by handing each student a contract, written in a foreign language. She only gave them a couple of moments to read the document before telling them to sign it.

“At the time, the newly freed slaves or poor people, they were illiterate so they couldn’t read,” Burton said. “But if they didn’t sign the contract, they couldn’t work.”

Burton then told the students to find the 20 apples she had hidden nearby. She kept one, so that at the end of their “workday,” when they only returned with 19 apples, she accused them of stealing.

“It taught us about bias, racism, segregation and slavery,” said Wan Thorpe, an eighth-grader at Needwood. “This helped us see how these people felt and how they had to sign a contract just to help get money for their families.”

Coastal has made a big push in recent years to expand its service-learning opportunities, and this year the college is offering more service-learning courses than it ever has before.

Cody Cocchi, the assistant director of service-learning at the college, said this project was a perfect example of service-learning, which is meant to provide real world experiences outside of the classroom.

“The service itself is our students teaching these kids,” Cocchi said. “Our students are getting the experience to teach a live group of students and coordinating a field trip.”

The lessons taught on Tuesday tied directly into the state-mandated eighth-grade learning standards.

The middle school students returned to Needwood with a new breadth of knowledge about the Civil War and how Glynn County fits into its history. The college students also returned to their campus having learned a few lessons about how to be a teacher.

“I learned that education can be fun,” Ray said. “Not everything has to be a lecture.”