

## Students have eyes for science

### Dissection a top draw at West Jeff's science night

By Gabrielle Porter

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The eyeball dissection table was a hot place to be during West Jefferson Middle School's Sept. 16 science night.

Students and parents crowded around to watch as Megan Fritz and Sierra Berger, both 11-year-old sixth-graders, worked on a cow's eyeball together. The two girls themselves were alternately fascinated and repulsed.

"Open that sucker up," Megan told Sierra. "Let's get the blue out."

Sierra pulled out "the blue" — the *tapetum lucidum*, according to a diagram on the table — and set it aside on a tray, shaking her head and averting her nose to avoid the smell.

The science night, which included hands-on activities like using a 3-D printer, creating a Mentos/Coca-Cola geyser or building a foil raft designed to hold as many marbles as possible, was run by West Jeff teachers — science and non-science — as well as community volunteers, said Kathy Fuchigami, the school's science department chair. Supplies and snacks were donated.

Fuchigami's explanation of the science night's origin is simple: "I just decided we needed one."

After dissecting the eyeball, Sierra and Megan peeled off their gloves and ran from the table.

"It was really gross," Sierra said of the experience.

Megan was only slightly more positive.

"It was actually cool and gross," she said.

West Jeff eighth-graders Ande Westerhausen and Josey Nichols ran a jellyfish display themselves. A doodle-inspired brainwave led the girls to decide they wanted to raise money to buy jellyfish for the school.

"I started drawing jellyfish on my paper," Josey added.

"It actually started out as a joke, like what if we got jellies?" Ande said.



Chancey Bush

Eighth-grader Emily Sainz, 13, reacts as marshmallows shrivel up in a vacuum chamber during science night at West Jefferson Middle School.

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Fuchigami said the girls raised about \$600 for the three jellyfish they eventually bought — Reggie, Crescent and Quora. Ande and Josey now know the jellyfish inside and out, and confidently told adults who came to their booth about how they have to change out 20 percent of the tank’s water weekly, and what jellyfish eat.

Inside the cafeteria, an array of glowsticks lighted up a dark corner.

“We’re doing an experiment to see which temperature of water makes them glow brightest,” said language arts teacher Emily Wiechec, pointing out beakers filled with cold, hot and room-temperature water.

Sixth-grader Ashley Fritz, 11, eyed the glowsticks and guessed room temperature would produce the brightest glow.

Wiechec dropped the glowsticks into the water. As the kids watched, the glowstick in cold water slowly dimmed, while the one in hot water grew brighter and brighter.

A few yards away, West Jeff language arts teacher Lauren Headley showed students how to expose the hues hidden in the color black by drawing with a black marker on a coffee filter, then dipping one end of the filter in water. Colors started seeping up through the filter.

“It’s sorting the ink by molecular weight,” Headley told kids at her table. “The light colors have a lighter molecular weight.”

At another table, Tina Mihulka, West Jeff PTA vice president, showed kids how to use Geiger counters to scan objects for radiation levels. Mihulka pointed out the radiation in a few items like a container of Miracle-Gro and a fossil, a Fiestaware plate (the company in the 1940s used a glaze that included uranium, although happily modern Fiestaware is not radioactive).

School principal Becky Brown said the event was designed to encourage kids not to be intimidated by science.

“We want our kids to be interested in science ...,” she said. “(If) they like it, it’s not so hard.”