

SCHOOLS

WHAT'S NEWS IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

Class gets a look at underwater world

By ANDREW HACKMACK

Children in Guy Jacob's fifth grade class at Wheeler Avenue School don't have to go very far to study marine life — they have a small ecosystem right in their own classroom.

The students visited the Town of Hempstead's Marine Nature Study in Oceanside last month, and they were able to bring back some of the creatures they found. Jacob explained that the class went seining, where they cast a giant net and walked through the salt marsh to catch sea creatures.

A first-time catch for his class was a sea horse. Jacob said initially they were going to put the sea horse back into the water, but was assured by experts at the marine study that it was not endangered and OK to bring back to the classroom.

Unfortunately, Jacob said, the sea horse has since died but the class did get to observe it in the classroom tank for a few weeks. Jacob explained that he took water directly from the bay to put in the tank. "They do better with the water from the marsh itself, much better," he said of the sea creatures the class brings back.

Jacob explained that visitors are not supposed to take animals from the water at the



Courtesy Guy Jacob

STUDENTS IN GUY JACOB'S fifth-grade class at Wheeler Avenue School went seining at the town's Marine Nature Study in Oceanside on Sept. 24 and are now observing some of the sea creatures they caught.

marine study area, except for classrooms. Having the tank in the classroom has encouraged the students to do research and learn more about the sea creatures. "It motivates many to take an interest in reading about the natural world," Jacob said.

For example, Shannon Hartman learned that there are 32 species of sea horses. The largest can be more than a foot while babies are a thin a piece of thread. Danny Sanky learned that the kind of sea horse that lives in the bay in Oceanside is the Lined Sea

Horse. And Zena Abdelwahed studied the types of sea horses that are endangered.

Justin Lazaar talked about the blue crab that the class caught. One day, they noticed a molted shell in the corner of the tank, but no crab. In fact, he said, the crab got too big for its old shell, left it behind and went into hiding until it was able to grow a new one.

The class doesn't just learn about sea animals but also plants that live in the water. Matthew Wang explained that on the trip to the marine study, he found an edible plant called a glasswort, also known as a sea pickle or a salt pickle. He even took a taste himself. "It's pretty good," Wang said.

For the next several months, the children will be studying their own marine ecosystem. "A lot of the fish will live throughout the whole year," Jacob said, "and [then] I'll return them to the marsh."

Jacob said every day the children come in and check on how their sea creatures are doing. He said he appreciates that the District 13 administrators allow him to take the students to the marine study area every year: "It's a terrific resource that the town offers to schools, clubs and residents," he said. "It really provides for a terrific observation you can't get anywhere else."