

Wyoming Veterans Memorial Museum

Put a valuable spin on your history and civics lessons! The Veterans' Museum has very strong contexts for every grade from third through 12th. Begin with the powerful contribution of this World War II Bomber Base to Casper's history and discover this base and the other four World War II facilities in Wyoming and understand how our state was never the same after that war.

Teaching Vietnam and Korean War era studies? We have powerful tales of veterans, their families and folks at home about their experiences during those trying times. We can organize veteran encounters so students can listen, ask questions, and visit with the men and women who participated in many such conflicts.

Sally O'Brien, social studies teacher at Kelly Walsh High School, has taken her students to the Wyoming Veterans' Memorial Museum one to two times per semester for the past eight years. "

"When I first learned of the significance of the air base, I thought it was important that the students knew about it, too," she explained.

The Wyoming Veterans'

Memorial Museum (WVMM) is located in the World War II Servicemen's Club at the former Casper Army Air Base, where crews trained on B-24 and B-17 bombers. Students experience the feeling of the old bomber base and an association with the men and women who worked and trained here more than 60 years ago.

Students are fascinated with the Nazi war flags, the propaganda pamphlets dropped during WWII, swords, pictures, and other artifacts on display at the museum. And, most importantly, they get a personalized guided tour by John and Eric.

"When those guys tell the stories, they bring you to tears. They really make a connection with the students," O'Brien said.

KWHS junior Teresa Fuller adds, "When Ms. O'Brien took my class to the Veterans' Museum, many of my classmates and I had no idea the importance of the air base. We learned about equipment, people, and events firsthand which we would have never been able to do sitting in a classroom."

O'Brien has seen a positive response from the families of her students after visiting

the museum.

"The students will talk with their parents and find out that the old air base is the reason their family is in Casper."

The WVMM has often arranged for veterans to address the students while visiting. A recent field trip involved comparing Desert Storm to Vietnam.

"I teach my students that technology drives history, so that comparison was a useful part of that discussion, comparing the desert to the jungle and all the newest technology the soldiers have now," O'Brien said.

John Goss, director of the WVMM, explains, "Duty, service to our country, sacrifice, and history at all levels are powerful themes that have been imparted by a wide range of Wyoming veterans. These stories leave students and teachers with a strong attachment to their Wyoming community."

Max Popp, a senior at KWHS, had an interesting take on field trips and his visits to the WVMM: "When you feel something, like a cold metal WWII pistol in your hand, or a trench helmet, strapped to your head, it gives you a greater

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the Audubon Center is also appreciated by Scharosch. Even during the winter months, when the Alcova students come to town for other reasons, they often enjoy their sack lunches in the Education Center and watch out the huge picture window for birds. Then they can refer to one of the many books available and learn all about what they just saw, or brave the weather and go look at it all outside.

Scharosch has been teaching for 20 years and knows an innovative teaching opportunity when she sees it. She takes her students to many of the museums in Casper, depending on which grade levels she has that year, and what essential curriculum (EC) can be met.

"After we've visited a

museum, we go back to the classroom and use that experience to introduce topics, teach topics, and reinforce topics that we're exploring." The pre- and post-visit materials provided by the different museums also have been helpful.

She likes to take her students to the Tate Geological Museum, where they can learn about adaptations of animals.

"Russell (Hawley, education curator) at the Tate does a super job with the kids. There are a lot of science activities to do after you visit the Tate."

Scharosch likes to help meet third-grade EC at the Casper Planetarium.

"They have designed some new programs where they incorporate the new science kits and introduce some different science concepts, and they're great!"

When she has fourth-

graders, visits to Fort Caspar Museum are a must. And Scharosch likes to check out the educational trunks available there. Scharosch also appreciates the hands-on interactive exhibits of the National Historic Trails Interpretive Center, "where they can actually experience pulling that cart and riding in that wagon. The kids love that."

On a recent Saturday morning, Scharosch answered her front door to one of her young students bursting with pride and anxious to show her his bucket of crawdads and some beaver teeth-shaved wood he found by the North Platte River. It just couldn't wait until Monday at school! So she thanked him for bringing it and the wood is now on display in their classroom for all to see. Her students are adventurous explorers indeed!

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appreciation of the history itself and the people that lived through it. Sure, you can sit in a classroom and read about civil rights, and the people that got sprayed with high-pressure fire hoses or bitten by police dogs. But until you feel the cold water pound your side, or the dogs' teeth bite your arm, you will not really appreciate the history as the people lived it. So in my opinion, the best way to learn history is to go out, into society, and experience it as closely as possible to the way it actually happened. This is the way hands-on learning and field trips benefit me intellectually."

Local, state and national historical themes are all tied together through human

experiences captured in artifacts, photos, and oral interviews. A military library, archives, and photograph collection are available for learning and research. Hands-on possibilities with a wide range of actual military artifacts can be coordinated for educational curricula.

John also explains, "If it's difficult for the class to come out here, we will go to them!" The WVMM provides to teachers, at the museum or in your classrooms, a wide range of specialized lectures or presentations including examples such as military service, historical aspects of war, or the Casper Air Base.

Contact Eric Wimmer, education curator, at ewimme@state.wy.us. Hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. Free admission.