Choosy Teachers Choose Choice!

Here at Lorado Taft, we have a great variety of classes ranging from environmental topics to historical classes to classes that teach practical life skills. If that’s not enough for you, we have another option to add some spice to your schedule— Taft Choice classes! Taft Choice (a.k.a “Taft Time”) assigns a class to a Taft teacher but doesn’t assign a specific topic— the Taft educator will pick his/her own topic to teach about. Our staff offer a wide variety of knowledge, skills, and backgrounds, and often have strengths that are under-utilized in teaching our normal curriculum. Taft Choice is their time to shine! They can pick any topic not already being taught to teach. They can even make up their own classes that they’ve never taught before! This has resulted in some really stellar classes being created. Here is a short summary of some Taft Choice classes that our creative educators have taught:

- **“Tom’s Mad Scientist Experiments”**- This hands-on class included such activities as exploring the properties of salt and water and how they relate to freezing, exploring how clouds are made and how (and why) an implosion occurs when a soda can is heated and then dunked into an ice bath. They even extracted DNA of a strawberry using common household chemicals!

- **“Pioneer Art”**- While we offer a “Pioneering” class, this class focused on the types of artwork that the pioneers would have made. Students were able to take home the artwork they created as fantastic souvenirs.

- **“Wild Edibles”**- This class explored which wild plants are edible. The highlight of the class was the creation (and sampling) of “Garlic Mustard Pesto”- YUM!

- **“Plants!”**- This class explored plant propagation and the kids got to make their own pots and planted seeds in them.

- **“Native Americans”**- While we offer a “Native Americans” class, this class included a few extra topics that are not a part of our normal curriculum. These activities included making cordage out of local plants and learning the process the Native Americans used for making arrowheads.

- **“Nature Art”**- This class was inspired by the famous artist and environmentalist Andy Goldsworthy. Students found art in nature and created “Nature Sculptures”.

- **“Osteology”**- No bones about it, this is an amazing class! Osteology is the study of bones. In this class, students learned about the bones and skeletons of a variety of animals and were able to see and touch a varied collection of animal bones.

- **“Nature Explorations”**- This class included a variety of exploratory activities which helped students see the world around them in a new light using their senses of smell and sight.
Fact or Fiction?
Animal Myths

Fancy yourself a Zoology buff? Think you know more about animals than Dr. Doolittle himself? Better check your facts! The following is a list of amazing animals myths that sound completely plausible, yet are in fact utterly fallacious!

1. **Goldfish only have a 3 second memory.**
   - This has been proven false by a couple interesting sources. The first was a school kid in Australia who trained his goldfish to react to a red Lego block. The second was the “Mythbusters” team from the Discovery channel who trained a goldfish to navigate a maze. Both of these feats show that goldfish can remember things for much longer than three seconds!

2. **Bats are blind.**
   - While it is true that most bats use echolocation to navigate at night, they aren’t totally reliant on echolocation to get around. Bats can see just as well as most other mammals, and those bats who are active during the day (such as fruit bats) rely almost exclusively on their eyes for navigation.

3. **Toads will give you warts.**
   - This may seem plausible since toads have many warty bumps on their skin, but these aren’t actually what we know as “warts.” Warts are caused by a virus, while the bumps on a toad’s skin are totally natural and not caused by a virus. Warts can only be caught from another human being who has warts.

4. **Cut an earthworm in half and you get 2 earthworms.**
   - Everyone’s heard this one, right? If you cut an earthworm in half it will heal and you get two smaller worms! Unfortunately, if you cut a worm in half you only get a dead worm, or at best a shorter worm and half a dead worm. It is possible for worms to heal themselves if injured, but only the head end of the worm will be able to survive this. Yes, that’s right—worms have heads, and just like any other animal, their body can’t survive without their head. So, if a worm gets cut in half the tail end will die, and the head end (if it’s lucky) will heal and keep living as a rather stunted version of itself.

5. **If birds eats rice thrown at a wedding, it will swell in their stomachs and kill them.**
   - This rumor has caused many people to stop throwing rice at weddings anymore (many now throw bird seed instead). The reality though is that if birds eat uncooked rice, they will be just fine— it won’t cause them any adverse effects. On the other hand, most birds don’t find rice to be an appetizing meal anyway and won’t eat it in the first place.

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Fact or Fiction?
Animal Myths

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6. A Daddy Longlegs is the most venomous spider on earth, but its fangs are too short to penetrate the skin.
   - It seems as if you could ask any 6th grader you meet about daddy longlegs and they will tell you this amazing “fact.” It’s amazing how widespread this myth has become! The truth is, however, that this myth is false on both counts! Daddy longlegs’ fangs are indeed long enough to pierce human skin, and their venom is no more dangerous than any other household variety of spider. This myth has been proven false by, once again, those amazing “Mythbusters” on the Discovery Channel. (Author’s note: In addition, I personally know someone who was bitten by a daddy longlegs and suffered no ill effects, also disproving this myth of both counts.)

7. Birds will abandon their young if you touch them— they can smell you on the baby birds.
   - This myth was most likely made up by well-meaning environmentally-minded people who wanted to give kids a good reason to leave wildlife be (which is generally a good idea after all). The truth is though that most birds have little to no sense of smell and won’t be able to smell you on their young. Even if they could, they wouldn’t care in any case. If your child smells funny, would that cause you to abandon them? Of course not! Kids (especially young ones) often smell funny— that’s just the way of things!

Choosey Teachers Choose Choice!

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- “Wildlife Jeopardy”- Using multimedia technology, this class tested the students’ knowledge of wild animals while teaching them amazing facts about the creatures with which we share this planet.
- “The Fire Class”- For thousands of years fire has been a useful tool. In this class students learned about the basics of fire, fire starting materials, and safe methods of fire starting. Whether starting a cozy campfire, building a survival fire, or even just lighting the backyard barbeque, everyone can learn something useful from this class!
- “Moss Graffiti”- In this intriguing class, students collected moss from around campus. After mixing it with several ingredients such as water and buttermilk (to act as a growth medium) they used this goopy “paint” to draw on the old water tower next to Poley. This moss mixture is watered daily to help it grow. In time we will have moss growing in the designs painted by the students as a sort of all-natural living graffiti!

Do these classes sound as awesome to you as they did to us? While we can’t guarantee any of these classes will show up again in “Taft Choice” time, this uncertainty is part of the fun! What we can guarantee is that, if you choose to include this class in your schedule, you will see fun and interesting new topics you probably wouldn’t have ever seen otherwise. Still interested? Talk to your Taft coordinator when planning your trip for more information on Taft Choice classes!
New Additions

During your stay at Taft, you may notice many new additions to the Teams Course in North Field. During Washington School’s and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel’s visits in March, they created a few new elements for our Teams Course during their service project section of classes. With the help of the Taft staff, they removed brush, cleaned out areas, and created four new elements that will be used for many years to come. The element pictured on the upper left is located in what was a thick patch of brush, which students cleared using hand-tools. The result of their hard work is Toxic Waste, in which students have to pull on the red ropes to lift the tire off of or on to the wooden spindle. The element pictured in the upper right is a larger version of the Spider’s Web. Students pass between the holes of the ropes. Students helped with the clearing of brush and tying the ropes to create the spider web shape. The element pictured on the lower left is called Passcode or Security Code. Students travel through the maze trying to crack the code without stepping on the incorrect square. Washington students helped build the platform using a power drill and decking. The Whale Watch, pictured on the lower right, is an element in which students try to balance the platform while standing aboard. Students helped by clearing brush from the area, constructing the decking platform, and moving it to the area it is currently in. A huge thank-you to both Washington School and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel for all your hard work!

All Pictures taken by: Vicki Morrison

Zero Ort!

Congratulations to the following schools for having ZERO ORT during a meal at Taft!
St. Rapheal Church School, Holy Family Catholic Academy, Washington Gifted School (x4 meals), Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (x3 meals), Heritage Middle School, South Middle School (East), Thomas Middle School (Delta x2 meals), Thomas Middle School (Gamma), Capron Elementary School, St. Mary’s of DeKalb, Hurley Elementary School, Pablo Casals School of Excellence, Disney II Magnet (6th grade)

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