

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND FORESTRY

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Ag In The Classroom lessons add meaning to holidays

A corn cob doll, a cotton boll angel and an okra pod Santa are some of the simple toys kids can make with agricultural products. Ideas for these holiday crafts and many more are found in December's lessons on the Ag In The Classroom (AITC) website at www.agclassroom.org/ok.

Oklahoma teachers who use this agriculture-based curriculum help their students learn about the diversity of agriculture from our state's Christmas tree farms to the annual cotton harvest. They also learn that sorghum molasses gives gingerbread men their special flavor and can enjoy making their own paper to wrap gifts.

Training in using this curriculum is offered free of charge to Oklahoma teachers by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. Math, science and reading skills are enhanced with fun activities that engage students in learning where their food and clothing come from. Various activities from the PreK-12 curriculum are featured each month on the website to add meaning to special holidays and seasons while improving students' understanding of plants, soil and the importance of agriculture to the state's economy.

"Most kids today are not exposed to agriculture, and they do not make connections to agriculture on a daily basis," said AITC coordinator Cheri Long. "They often just think their food comes from the grocery store. Ag In The Classroom is an essential part of a well-rounded education and helps to ensure students learn how they are connected to agriculture and the vital role it plays in their lives."

One teacher who has found joyful ways to bring agriculture into her second grade classroom is Debra Deskin who teaches at Orvis Risner Elementary in Edmond. Her enthusiasm for agriculture spills over into everything she teaches. She recently decided to bring the farm to the state capitol with handmade farm ornaments her students created. Her class was one of 26 elementary classes selected to decorate a Christmas tree on display in the capitol through the month of December.

Burlap garlands on their special tree spell out the theme "Down on the Farm" and white picket fences made of paper take the place of tinsel garlands. The students' carefully hung pigs, sheep and tractors on the branches. The pigs were round ornaments painted pink and the wooly sheep were shower curtain rings wrapped with yarn. Salt dough tractors bedazzled with sequins and glitter completed the tree decorations while cotton bales and hay bales under the tree represented

presents. The students were thrilled with their creation and had fun designing their tree just before Santa arrived in the capitol rotunda.

Deskin's class was fortunate in having multiple sponsors helping with this trip to the state capitol. She contacted several agriculture organizations and businesses for help with materials to make ornaments and do activities that went with the ag-themed Christmas tree. Sponsors included the Oklahoma Soybean Board, Circle E, Inc. feed store, Oklahoma Wheat Commission, P & K Equipment and the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee.

"The students were excited to create ornaments that represented different aspects of Oklahoma agriculture," Deskin said. "I continually incorporate ways to promote agricultural literacy in my daily lessons. Students need to know just how important agriculture is to our daily life."

Deskin has promoted agricultural literacy for several years. She has presented multiple AITC workshops in her school district and has been featured at the statewide AITC summer conference. Her creativity has been recognized at the national level where she has been a presenter for the National Ag In The Classroom Conference in Louisville, Kentucky and has been invited to present again at the 2017 conference in Kansas City, Missouri.

For more information about the Ag In The Classroom program, contact Melody Afill at melody.afill@ag.ok.gov or 405-795-0121. She can arrange a training program for teachers PreK-12 and answer any questions about the curriculum.

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Photo caption: Debra Deskin and her second graders from Orvis Risner Elementary in Edmond proudly displayed their "Down on the Farm" Christmas tree in the Oklahoma state capitol building.



