

Big Help for Education Post Internship

By: Vasant Joshi

Date: July 24-25, 2018

I am Vasant Joshi, a 15 year-old non-resident Indian boy from the United States of America, and I successfully conducted a two day internship program on the 24th and 25th of July, with 60+ high school students at Zilla Parishad Girls' High School, in Zaheerabad. Working through the exceptional organization, Big Help, I relayed my experiences from the United States, and in return learned more about the students' daily life here in India.

Zilla Parishad Girls' High School is in Zaheerabad, which is a town located in Sangareddy District of the Indian state of Telangana. It lies about 80 kilometers or 50 miles northwest of Hyderabad. Zaheerabad is primarily an agricultural area, however farming has struggled due to dry lands becoming fallow and the loss of a variety of crop types such as cereals, pulses, and oil seeds. Typical of an Indian town of its size, Zaheerabad has a number of banks, public and independent schools and colleges, shops, hotels, hospitals and other services. Famously, in Zaheerabad, there is an ancient temple of Lord Shiva, called "Jharasangam".

I chose this school not only because it was walking distance from my grandparents' house, but because it was the very school that my grandmother and her sisters attended throughout their childhoods. Because of this very reason, this school holds a special place in the hearts of many of my family members.

I began the day by getting to know each and every one of the students. While working at the same level as all of the students, I established myself as not their teacher but as their friend. The girls were very enthusiastic, sincere, and greatly participated throughout the event. They did an awesome job in sharing their experience and understanding what I was sharing with them.

The students got to know about me as well, and I discussed topics such as sports, holidays, festivals, weather, seasons, school curriculum, methods of teaching, and future careers. I was surprised to learn that most of the girls wanted to be police officers. After asking around, I figured out that they live in a community in which there are many police officers and it is a highly respected position.

After the introductory speech, I let the students engage in an activity which educated them about the effect of oil spills on the environment. I gave an interactive introduction on oil spills and their effect on the marine ecosystem. They learned about the dangers of oil spills and what they can do to prevent them. Some gasped in shock when they saw the horrifying pictures of oil-soaked birds, and volunteers trying to clean up the mess. Next, for the activity, I split all sixty students into groups of three and gave them the task of charting the effects of applying water, oil, and soap to a feather. This activity allowed the students to fully understand the impact of oil on the feathers of a bird and how difficult it is to remove it. After cleaning up, we did a short quiz on oil spills. At the end of the day, as the students were leaving, I passed around chocolate.

On the second day, after a brief introduction, I engaged to students in another environmental activity, in which the students discovered the effect of air pollution on the

environment. We talked about acid rain and its cause, effects, and prevention. The activity that we did after this, using chalk (calcium carbonate), water, and vinegar, demonstrated the effect of acid rain on statues and buildings. In this activity the vinegar, which is acidic, reacts with the chalk forming carbon dioxide gas (the bubbles you see during the reaction are the carbon dioxide gas forming), water, and another calcium compound. The remaining material no longer looks like the original chalk. This simple experiment demonstrated the effects of acid rain on limestone or calcium carbonate-containing statues and buildings. At the start of the activity, I passed around handouts in which students wrote their observations, predictions, and outcomes.

After my second activity we still had time, so I took the students outside and we played some outdoor games. We threw a frisbee, and they taught me various games that they play, including a game called Kho Kho. Kho Kho is played by teams of 12 nominated players out of fifteen, of which nine enter the field, who try to avoid being touched by members of the opposing team.

I felt that I was very sincere about the preparation and put in every effort to connect with the students. Throughout my introduction and activities, I displayed, explained, and passed around many pictures that corresponded with what I was talking about. If something was hard to understand for the students, the pictures cleared up any confusion.

At the end of the second day, the school conducted an assembly with all staff and students. My grandfather Digambar Rao Joshi, a very well known and honorable advocate, was the guest of honor for the assembly. The students and staff appreciated

the work that Big Help has undertaken to allow Indian kids living in America, where all facilities are taken for granted, to see how underprivileged kids their age struggle to get an education in many places in India. The kindness and cooperation of the Principal, Smt. Elizabeth Rani, was key to the success of the event. Without the help of my parents Laxmikant Joshi, and Megha Joshi, this event would not have been possible.

The thing that was very moving to the heart was that the kids didn't have benches and some kids were sitting on jute bags or on the bare floor. There was construction going on on in the school and they had a shift system for Urdu medium, Telugu and English medium students. Because of this, some kids studying in Telugu/English medium whose school started at 1 pm had to come at 10/10:30 am because of transportation issues. And it was moving to see these kids studying under a tree and sitting on bare soil, and 10th standard student teaching 7,8,9 standard students to make good use of time. This is why I felt that he made the right choice in picking this particular school.

In conclusion, I felt that this volunteer experience has taught me many things. I have learned from the students about the differences between our education systems, the holidays we celebrate, the things we do in our free time. Most importantly, I also learned about the similarities. I'd like to thank Big Help for providing me with this opportunity and making this entire process very easy. I would also like to thank Anitha Aunty for mentoring me and reviewing my introduction and activities. It was only through her guidance that I was able to get through with this internship and have lots of fun in the process. Throughout this volunteer experience, I have come to understand

anything, it is that I have been taking many things in my life for granted. My interaction with these wonderful students at this school was really an eye-opener for me.





















