

Through fact and fancy, students glimpse Eskimo life

By Teresa A. Parsons

Kindergarten students at St. John the Evangelist School in Spencerport glimpsed life in the far north last week without ever leaving their building.

With imagination and the help of a few props — including a bearskin rug, some animal hides, a totem pole, and a carved whale's tooth or two — first-year teacher Mary Martell and her 35 five- and six-year-old students celebrated Eskimo Week by transforming their classroom into the closest thing to an igloo this side of the Arctic Circle.

Using Eskimo designs, the students created their own ceremonial masks and totem poles. They also compiled a scrapbook on Eskimo life using pictures clipped from magazines.

"We talked about how the Eskimos lived, their customs, how they hunt and travel and the animals they use for food and clothing," Martell said. "The children like to hear lots of details, so they can go home and tell their families."

Parents plunged into the project with enthusiasm as well, providing many of the props and even a sample of what they imagined an Eskimo diet might consist of — smoked salmon and venison. To everyone's surprise, most of the children readily ate both delicacies and asked for seconds.

Weather caused the week's only let-down. On Thursday, students donned their mukluks and ventured out to build a real igloo, only to find that there wasn't enough snow for more than a block or two.

Martell's educational aim was to introduce her students to a different culture. "They learned that there are people who live in other places who don't do things the way we do them, who don't have grocery stores or refrigerators or go out to



Jeff Goulding/Courier Journal

Mary Daily, second from right, quizzically examines the stuffed head of a whitetailed deer, as Hannah Nezezon (far left), Jeremiah Tracy (second from left) and Nichole Powless (far right) make their own investigations.

dinner," she said. "It's good for them to know that other places are different from what they know here."



Alphonse Prioa (left) and Joe Siracusa snuggle with a red fox pelt.



From left to right, Mary Daily, Valerie Griffin, Katie Vella, Adam Salamone and Maggie Morganti explore the texture of a carabou hide.



Kindergarten teacher Mary Martell shows Joey Sekel (left) a whale's tooth, while Gary Borrelli (right) looks on.

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