Carnivores in the Classroom grants — 2024 teacher reports

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In 2024, the ICPS awarded grants to 15 classrooms in the U.S., one in Canada, and one in China. This was an awesome opportunity to connect kids with carnivorous plants and botany. Following are some examples of the teacher reports. The reports have been edited.

Our school boasts a beautiful outdoor space where I cultivate vegetable, herb, and butterfly gardens with kindergarten students. My unique "classroom" is entirely outdoors, providing a hands-on learning environment for these young minds (Fig. 1).

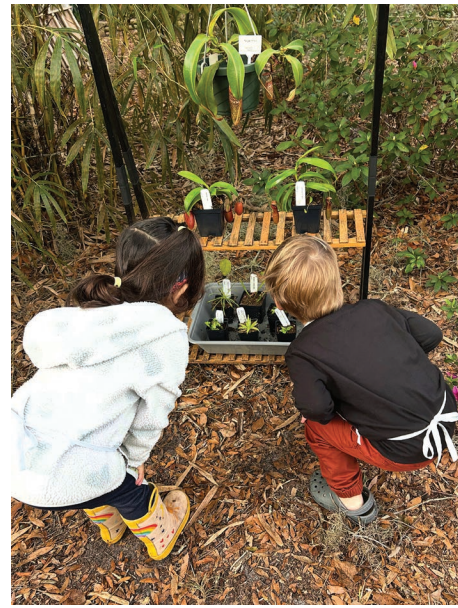

Figure 1. Observing plants in an outdoor classroom.

Upon arrival, we conducted an in-depth study of each plant, exploring their common and scientific names, natural habitats, and unique trapping mechanisms. A follow-up lesson included information on the specific care each plant required. Most plants arrived bare root and the students helped to pot them as we discussed the proper potting medium for each.

The carnivorous plant lessons captivated the students' attention, fostering a deep engagement in learning. This invaluable experience allowed me to share my passion for these remarkable plants with my young learners. Without the generous support of the ICPS Plants in the Classroom grant, my students would have been deprived of the opportunity to experience the wonder and joy of these fascinating plants. This was many of my students' first experience with carnivorous plants. Thank you for making this enriching project possible.

Sharon P.
Florida, United States

I would like to extend our sincere thanks to The International Carnivorous Plant Society, its Carnivores in the Classroom project, and especially the donors who make the project possible. We received a beautiful 3D-printed Sundew, *Drosera magnifica*, from Carnivorex and an array of live

plants, from the Carnivorous Plant Nursery (https://carnivorousplantnursery.com/). These generous donations provided invaluable hands-on learning experiences for my students, who often struggle to connect academic content to the real world.

The Carnivores in the Classroom project allowed my students to explore topics such as life cycles, food webs, habitats, patterns in nature, and potential career paths. We planted, tended, measured, and compared plants, becoming scientists, readers, writers, and mathematicians in the process. This project provided an exciting and novel entry point into learning, sparking curiosity and engagement in ways I never anticipated.

Our journey with carnivorous plants began at a community outreach event at West Virginia University in Morgantown, WV, where I met a friendly ICPS member who recommended starting with a sundew. My students were captivated. None of us realized how many varieties of carnivorous plants existed, let alone how many were native to the East Coast. That semester, we learned firsthand about the challenges of underwatering and overfeeding tiny Sundews. Despite my initial lack of knowledge and many eager little hands tending to it, the plant survived and flourished over the summer on my windowsill.

Becky S.
Special Education Teacher
Pennsylvania, United States

Sticking to the theme of the evolution and adaptations of carnivorous plants, we purchased multiple plants from different families and genera from local hobbyists and nurseries. Our lecture gave a brief overview of carnivorous plants. First, we explained the environmental pressures that led to the evolution of carnivory, and the convergent evolution of trap types. Then, we introduced all the carnivorous plant genera based on phylogeny and included potentially carnivorous liverworts. For each genus, we introduced their trapping mechanism, distribution, species-specific adaptations, and other interesting information. We displayed all the types of plants that we were able to buy, and let other students interact with them. The students were very intrigued by the fruity smell produced by the *Heliamphora* plant, and many of them were really interested by the snake-like traps of *Darlingtonia*. Many seemed to be quite disturbed by the texture of the *Drosera* mucilage. Many enjoyed the texture of *Sarracenia* lid hairs and some even tasted the sugary substances produced by the lid. The students were all very surprised to find that the flytrap's trapping mechanism is more complicated than the touching of a single trigger hair but requires touching the hairs many times in a certain time frame.

In addition to the lecture, we also hosted a lunchtime exhibition of endangered *Nepenthes*. In addition to our prior collections, we used the funds to purchase some seed-grown plants from a local nursery. We exhibited a poster containing information about *Nepenthes* poaching and the club's conservation efforts, and displayed species with varying levels of endangerment, including *N. spectabilis*, *N. campanulata*, *N. chaniana*, and *N. burbidgeae*. Many students noted the exquisite beauty of the plants and were surprised to learn about the issues that are driving them to extinction.

Donations to the ICPS' education funds provide the initiative and financial support for events like these, that help students around the world learn more about the fascinating world of carnivorous plants. This awareness aids the future biodiversity conservation. Moreover, donations to conservation funds directly aid professional projects to protect endangered carnivorous plant species.

I believe that more members should support these efforts to create a better future for carnivorous plants and the carnivorous plant community.

Jonathan X.
Shanghai High School International Division, China

All of my students have some sort of communication disability, and the majority are on the autism spectrum ranging from level 3 to level 1.

Even my students who cannot yet talk really appreciated looking at and learning about carnivorous plants. For those of my students using augmentative and alternative communication devices, I was able to customize the vocabulary to include specific carnivorous plants. There is an example of a communication app called Touchchat with a Venus flytrap button (Fig. 2).

For my students that have difficulty with producing clear speech, we practiced a variety of words on the topic of carnivorous plants that have their target sound. For example, students working on clear 'L' sounds could practice saying "plant, Venus fly trap, bright light, living, leaves, sunlight, pitcher plant, distilled water, no minerals, and blood worms."

My students from general education and special education classrooms were able to work together to learn about and care for the carnivorous plants. These collaborative activities help foster an inclusive environment.

My school services low-income students have access to less learning opportunities overall, especially outside of the classroom. My students were able to learn about and see a carnivorous plant for the first time in their lives. Many of my students have anxiety about novel experiences. Seeing carnivorous plants up close helped to ease their worry that a plant was going to eat them. Students are excited to see how the plants will change as they come out of dormancy with the coming warmer spring weather. We are so grateful for your donations, which are making a lasting positive impact in the lives of over a hundred students.

Maureen F.
New Jersey, United States

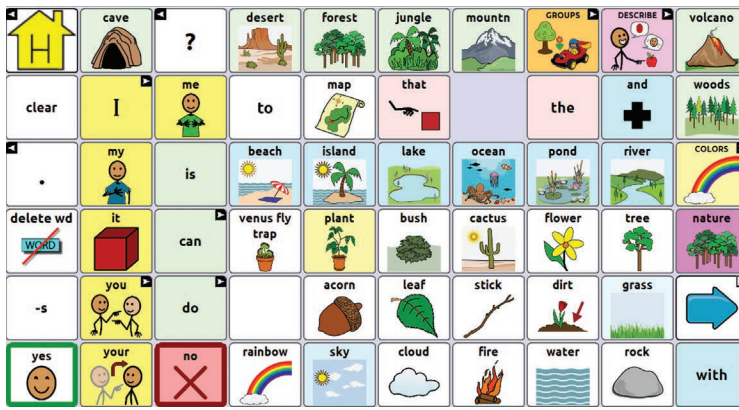

Figure 2. Touchchat.

I have loved plants my entire life, but unfortunately my students rarely share that interest. Carnivorous plants intrigue me, so I have used them over the years as an adaption phenomenon in class and students always wanted to know more. The Carnivores in the Classroom Grant was the perfect opportunity to do that. Students could not only discover why these marvels do what they do in unique ways but also see and interact with them. Over 100 students spend time in my classroom in a day, and about 20% of them check on them daily to see what they have done, what they have caught, and how they have changed. I hear them talk about them on their own, they randomly ask me questions – this is what we teachers envision in our classroom but rarely see. These conversations are learning opportunities to discuss these unique specimens and their roles in the environment.

Danielle W.
Oklahoma, United States.

Our school and the Montessori pedagogy emphasizes student led exploration and discovery of the natural world (Fig. 3). We have had multiple students interested in carnivorous plants, especially since some varieties are native to Georgia and the southeast. This grant allowed us to create a container bog consisting of mainly native varieties of carnivorous plants like pitcher plants and Venus flytraps. The students have enjoyed learning about all the different plant varieties, as well as planting and maintaining the bog.

This grant has given us the opportunity to study, create and observe a bog right outside our classroom! The grant funds covered all our plants, and we repurposed an old rain barrel, so we were able to create a self-contained and sustainable classroom garden for around sixty dollars! We appreciate being able to provide this to our students and we would not have been able to do so without the generous funding from the Carnivores in the Classroom grant. Programs like these are so valuable and important for elementary educators because it allows us to explore student interests to help instill a lifelong love of learning, interacting with nature and taking care of the earth. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to be a part of this wonderful program. We hope to participate next year!

Spencer Kyle J. and Jamie H.
Georgia, United States

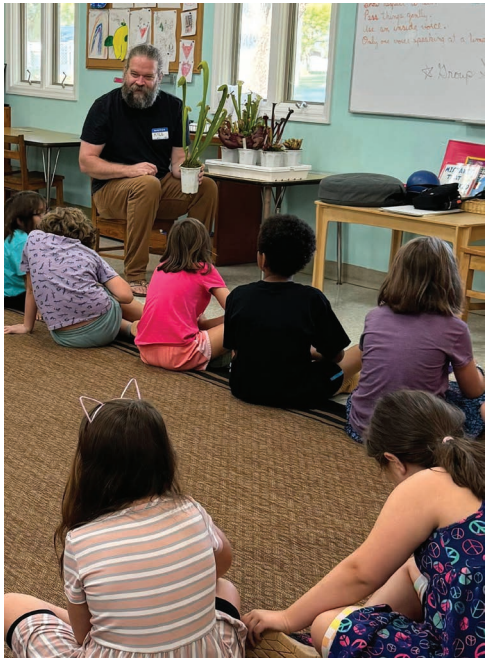

Figure 3. Classroom container bog at Montessori school.