



Zoomanity

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High Tech Middle 7th Grade

In this nine-week project, students worked in groups of four to design an enclosure for a soon-to-be-renovated section of the San Diego Zoo called Africa Rocks. Using the actual shapes and dimensions for the planned enclosures, all group members offered input on what the enclosure should contain (structures, vegetation, viewing areas, etc). Each group member had an individual job within the project: Site Plan Designer, Project Manager/Blogger, Education Expert, or Sketch-Up Technician. Throughout the process, students utilized critique from adults in the field (architects, zoologists, landscape designers) to work through drafts/designs of their enclosure. Eventually, each group presented their designs to a panel of volunteers and employees from the San Diego Zoo.

Teacher Reflections

Having the students design an enclosure in the Zoo's Africa Rocks using the actual architectural site plans was a stroke of luck that led to a natural "buy in" for the project. The students became passionate experts about the animals in their enclosures—often having heated debates, based on their research, about design decisions such as water depth, sleeping locations, and number of play structures. When they moved into their individual job for the project, students were able to demonstrate their own strengths, either perfecting an area in which they had previous experience, or pushing themselves to learn a new skill. Having a final audience of actual zoo experts was a powerful experience for 7th graders, which they took seriously. The zoo panelists were able to give authentic feedback and ask probing questions about each group's design choices.

Student Reflections

I could put all of my artist talents in the illustration part of the project, and it showed me how architects draw up buildings and how they work. It was cool to get critique from real architects. —Simran

I liked how we got to use real dimensions and got to see the layout of the zoo. It was really a challenge creating an enclosed space in 3-D, but I really enjoyed it. Now I can design my dream home... —Guy

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