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We asked applicants for the NCSE Grand Canyon Teacher Scholarship to explain, in 500 words, what lessons or knowledge they expected to gain from rafting the Grand Canyon, to enrich their students', colleagues', and neighbors' understanding of evolution, deep time, climate change, and the natural world. Here is part of scholarship winner Crystal Davis's explanation of how her time with NCSE in the Grand Canyon will benefit students in her Los Angeles-area high school. [Davis and Brandon Haught will receive an all-expenses-paid trip down the Grand Canyon](#) [8], thanks to [generous donations from NCSE supporters](#) [9].



I am an avid outdoors-woman and aspiring mountaineer, as well a member of the Sierra Club. These are important aspects of my life that I bring into my classroom at every opportunity. This is of particular importance in my classroom since I teach in the inner-city. The majority of my students have never left the city and immersed themselves in nature because they haven't had the opportunity and therefore the desire to. That's why I take my students out into nature—or bring it to them—whenever I can. I make sure that my students participate in a yearly conservation program from the National Park Service. Last year my students removed crayfish (an invasive species) from the Santa Monica Mountains; in years prior we have planted native plants in Malibu. Although these activities are modest, they've had a great impact on my students.

After one of these trips, two of my students were able to convince their parents to take them to Yosemite on family trips. Their families had never been to a National Park before and in taking this first step, they were embarking on something new that would change their lives. Other students are hiking in their free time and dragging family members along with them. I have students now in college that are pursuing environmental science as a major, because they've seen close up what it will take to preserve the environment for themselves and future generations.

In spite of these successes, it is a struggle to take my students out of the classroom. There is much push-back from my district office due to potential lawsuits and trips must be planned a year or more in advance. Even then, many trips are not approved. For example, I formed a partnership with a woman from the Pacific Crest Trail Association to have my students maintain trails and camp overnight. Two years later, my district still has not decided if legally this is a good idea. However, I keep trying because I know immersing my students in this is important. And I have found other ways to accomplish what I can from the classroom. My students regularly Skype with rangers from Yellowstone to learn about the conservation of the grey wolves in the National Park and how they have shaped its biodiversity. We also Skype with other conservation organizations protecting marine life.

Participating in NCSE's Grand Canyon trip will provide me with an experience I can bring back to my classroom for my students. This will be something they can share with their parents as well. I will also share my experience and knowledge with staff members in professional development and colleagues from other schools that I work with.

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