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Camp Nuhop creates online outdoor lessons

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Online outdoor education sounds like an oxymoron.

But after Ohio's stay-at-home order closed Camp Nuhop in Perrysville, its staff got creative to continue teaching local kids about the great outdoors and ended up reaching children around the world.

The nonprofit launched a free website last month with 16 interactive lessons on topics like geometry in nature, Ohio bird species, predator-prey relationships and wilderness survival. Every module has videos, instructions for outdoor activities that require minimal or no adult supervision, and a quiz at the end.

"I was a little skeptical [at first] because I didn't think it was really pos-

Program reaches thousands of students worldwide

sible to make outdoor education happen online but when I started working on it, I realized that it's actually quite doable," said Sarah Kronz, or "Rainbow" as the outdoor education instructor is called by campers.

She hopes students will gain "a curiosity to go outside."

Matthew Broda, a professor of education at the College of Wooster who worked with the camp to create the online lessons said the in-person experience at Camp Nuhop can't be replaced but the "self-guided inquiries" are necessary in these unprecedented times.

"In each of those experiences, it's meant to tackle some content so that students can learn some new concepts and ideas, but then we want them to take those concepts and ideas and apply it to an outdoor environment and have them come back and reflect on what they just learned and what they did," he said.

In the beginning, the staff created the lessons for the local students who would have normally attended Camp Nuhop on school field trips, said

Trevor Dunlap, the camp executive director. He never imagined the online curriculum would take off like it did. Other websites like the National Association for Environmental Education and even a Hungarian blogger began linking to the resource. Now,

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Submitted photo
Miles Pertee, a sixth-grade student at Central Christian School in Kidron, shows off the shades of green he found in nature as part of a Nuhop "At-Home" Outdoor Education lesson called "It's Not Easy Being Green." Students in teacher Elaine Miller's class post what they find outside while completing Nuhop's lessons on their Google Classroom page.

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the site has reached more than 7,000 users in all 50 states and over 30 countries.

Camp Nuhop, founded in 1974, is a nonprofit with a campground bordering Pleasant Hill Lake. The camp normally teaches about 4,500 local students in grades four through seven each year by providing outdoor learning programs through its education center during the school year. It also hosts residential summer camp for children with special needs. It was named "Nuhop" because that is how a child with different learning abilities might spell "new hope."

The online curriculum is so popular because it is exciting and worthwhile, said Laura Grimm, a Dalton Local Schools teacher. The Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math (STEAM) teacher assigns the lessons for her sixth-through eighth-grade students.

"It's not just a time filler," she said. "The kids are really learning and interacting with nature and science and mathematics. Outdoor education doesn't have to happen at a camp. It can happen in a parking lot, in your back yard."

Grimm said she normally takes her sixth-grade students to a different camp for outdoor education in the spring but that won't be possible this year. She tried to create similar online outdoor lessons for her stu-

dents before she learned about the resource.

Meanwhile, students in Elaine Miller's class at Central Christian School in Kidron post what they found during their outdoor activities on Google Classroom so the rest of their class can see.

"For teachers that are teaching online it's great but also for families that are trying to find something to do it's terrific," Miller said. "This is top of the line activities and they're offering it for free. Nuhop should be commended."

Teachers like Grimm and Miller around the world are contacting Nuhop and asking for lessons on specific subjects.

"We've reached an absolutely massive number and we did not expect that at all," Dunlap said. "It's been motivating for the staff. These people love to teach and they're still teaching — just not how we envisioned in January."

Nuhop adds new content every week. Nuhop is even collaborating on a lesson on the night sky view around the world with an outdoor education center from Brisbane, Australia, called Stanley River Environmental Education Centre, as well as some educational leaders from Brazil.

"It kind of makes this metaphor that we're all in this together during this pandemic," he said.

Nuhop's "At Home" Outdoor Education can be accessed at <https://sites.google.com/nuhop.org/at-home-outdoor-education/home>.