

Classroom visit
Washington Middle School
Darlene Davenport, two 6th grade classes, about 25 students each
Apr 19, 2013

Kirsten Siebach, “Rock my world: The power of volcanoes”

I visited the classroom at Washington Middle School and set up my laptop with the projector- all as expected, no problems. I had a powerpoint, but I focused on making the presentation interactive and helping them think about questions. I started by telling them I was a geologist and asking them/talking through what geologists do with an emphasis on science as a way to ask and answer questions. I introduced my work on Mars briefly, and pointed out that if we have questions about the history of the Earth, we can understand them better by comparing with other planets (Mars and Venus), and this also helps us learn about what makes Earth special. We went through some similarities and differences between Earth and Mars and used these to introduce volcanoes/plate tectonics. Since both planets have volcanoes, we learned why volcanoes exist (heat trapped inside Earth, showed a very short video clip of Earth's formation from BBC Power of the Planet), and then compared the distribution of volcanoes on the surface. Before I showed the video clip, I asked what they thought and had them think about why the Earth was hot, then after it I asked them what they saw and had them describe it back to me, and asked if it was the same for Mars/Venus. They did well and were willing to interact and talk. We then talked about plate tectonics and plate movement (with a video clip again about the crust recycling). We applied this to the volcano distribution we've seen on Earth (lines = subduction volcanoes, spots = plumes/hotspots), and how that is different than Mars. We talked about Hawaii and how the island chain shows the tectonic plate motion. Then, with one of the classes (the other one was a little slower) we did a lava type identification exercise with a'a and pa'hoehoe. I think the interactive focus worked well in their classroom, and I think it really helped them learn about why the heat got trapped inside the Earth (a lot of them wrote about that when they gave their teacher a bullet point of something they had learned today). The class was short, and I had a little bit too much information, but I think that's fine and I prioritized the time so they all got the key points.