

Forward to Educators

Thank you for your time and effort to bring wildfire education into your classroom. Education is a key component of the Butte County Fire Safe Council's mission to build wildfire resilience in Butte County. Each sixth grader can play a valuable role in their family's and community's wildfire preparedness. Wildfire in the Foothills is most relevant for students who live in fire-prone areas in the wildland urban interface, with an annual fire season that puts their communities at risk. Education can move people towards living better with fire and, if a wildfire does occur, residents are better prepared to stay safe. This program gives your students the opportunity to take positive action and reduces the potential anxiety or the feelings of helplessness when living in an area repeatedly impacted by wildfires. This updated curriculum is relevant for those living outside the foothills as well. We strive to have more schools across the county bring fire and emergency preparedness topics into the classroom, because fire impacts everyone in the region.

About the Program

The program in this format is intended to be used in the classroom and not as distance learning or independent study work. This program serves to give students an introduction to wildfire, with an emphasis on community and personal fire preparedness. Wildfire in the Foothills is broken into seven lessons with accompanying presentation slides to be projected overhead in the classroom. The lesson plans contain key slides with speaker notes and background information. Each lesson is approximately one hour with the option to extend the lesson with assessment activities. Some activities can be completed in class, while others have the option for multi-day projects or homework assignments. Activities are written with variations, and you are encouraged to adapt the activity to best fit your students, class goals, and time available for the program. The activities allow students to show their learning in a variety of ways including art, media, written responses, and oral presentations. Many of these activities can be shared with the Butte County Fire Safe Council, students' families, or others at your school, to grow community awareness and preparedness. You may elect to spread the program out across multiple weeks or months or to focus on it for a more concentrated amount of time.

At the end of the seven lessons, you have the option to use a Jeopardy-style review game before continuing to the culmination activity. In the culmination activity, students will represent a stakeholder or community member that has something important to share about wildfire preparedness, response, or recovery at a mock Firewise community meeting. Students will each receive a character card with information to guide their presentations.

Program Extensions

Apart from this program, there are other fire education programs fitting for Butte County elementary and middle school students. At the end of each lesson plan, you will find links to suggested resources that connect or build on the Wildfire in the Foothills lesson you just completed. Two suggested programs you will see linked are FireWorks and the nature journaling REDI Jedi Master Program.

FireWorks is designed for students in grades K-12 and provides students with interactive, hands-on materials to study wildland fire. While many of the activities can be used in any ecosystem, many are applicable to specific regions. FireWorks has specialized curricula to learn about the Sierra Nevada and Northern California Oak Woodland. Lessons can be accessed through the FRAMES website: <https://www.frames.gov/fireworks/home>.

The REDI Jedi Master Program has eight journaling exercises to develop a sense of place and enhance situational awareness related to fire. Ready Raccoon's Great Aunt will teach students to observe the nature signs and signals that inform us of the seen and unseen forces influencing fire. If you continue through the whole program, students will end with a story zine of eight sketches forming their own fire story.

Program available in early 2022.

Bringing in a guest speaker is another way to increase learning and engagement with the program. Please contact the Butte County Fire Safe Council if you are interested in learning more about connecting with a subject matter expert who could speak with your class.

Supporting Students

As Butte County residents, students in your class have been negatively impacted by wildfire and may be suffering from community or personal trauma. Student experiences could range from losing a home, person they know, or the employment of a parent, to the effects from wildfire smoke and evacuations. The lessons steer away from potentially triggering questions, photographs, and videos, but some of your students may have a difficult time. Starting lessons with a grounding activity such as stretching or physical movement, a breathing exercise, a visualization activity, or a simple game can help lower stress and begin lessons from a calm place.

It is recommended to let your school administrators know when you begin this program and have a school counselor on hand, if possible. Some students may need additional support during or after lessons. It is advised not to talk about specific past wildfires in your area and to keep discussions more general, as students may have trauma associated with a particular fire.

On the next page, you will find web resources that can support you in teaching this program and creating a safe space for your students to learn about fire.

Class Community Rules

It is important that you set the tone for the program and make ground rules with your class. Creating agreed upon rules can help students feel safer and more comfortable talking about fire. Have students brainstorm ideas for rules and record them on a large piece of butcher paper. Some ideas could include, “No jokes or sarcasm about fire.” “Respectful comments only.” “It is okay to not share or to take a break.” You may want to make a signal with your students they can show you if they want to step outside or are feeling anxious. Post the class rules up front and bring the poster out each time you start the next lesson. You can add to the list as new ideas or situations arise. Revisit your rules poster before starting the more personal lessons on family preparedness and emergency response.

Feedback

Finally, we would like to know who is using this program and to receive your feedback about how it went with your class, as well as recommendations for improvement. If you are willing to take our post-program survey, please email the Program Coordinator, Lauren, at Laurendeterra@buttefiresafe.net.

Educator Resources

FireWorks Oak Woodlands: Fire Preparedness Lessons Teacher Training Webinar
(Recorded on YouTube)

Guest Speaker: Mackenzie Skye (Watch video minutes 11:27-44:35.)

Mackenzie is a private consultant and licensed mental health practitioner with 20-years of experience helping survivors of natural and human-made disasters.

This recorded webinar training aims to support teachers in teaching fire curricula to students who may have fire-related trauma.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1uFHbJ6FOs>

Key Advice from Ms. Skye:

- Stay away from feelings and revisiting personal experiences and trauma. Focus on preparedness and the future and not rumination.
- Redirect students who use the lessons as an opportunity to unpack personal traumas and story tell.
- Focus on thoughts, behaviors, and future actions.
- Stay in an informational and educational role and do not take on the role of therapist.
- Refer out when needed and use mental health professionals and counselors within your school and district for students who need additional support.

Additional Supporting Resources:

Resources for Dealing with Wildfire Related Trauma

The National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network

<https://www.pacesconnection.com/g/sonoma-county-aces-connection/blog/resources-for-dealing-with-wildfire-related-trauma>

How to Get Started with Trauma-Informed Teaching: 6 Resources for Educators

<https://blog.edmentum.com/how-get-started-trauma-informed-teaching-6-resources-educators>

The National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network

Trauma-Informed Care

<https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Helping Teens Cope After a Natural Disaster

https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/teens/helping_teens_cope.html