

MS SCIENCE LAB

Owl Pellet Dissection

Skulls and Bones Found in Owl Pellets

One of the most exciting science experiments of the year took place as seventh-grade students dissected owl pellets, searching for the skulls and bones of animals consumed by the birds of prey.

Owls are nocturnal hunters that capture their prey whole or in large chunks. Since they cannot digest everything they eat, they regurgitate pellets containing indigestible parts like bones, teeth, feathers, and fur. Scientists study these pellets to understand differences in owl prey across regions, seasons, and habitats.

So, what did our students gain from this hands-on investigation? Armed with gloves and tweezers, they eagerly dove into the task of dissecting the pellets.

Seventh-graders Richard and Sophie shared their experiences with the experiment, noting how both fun and challenging it was.

"I learned that owl pellets contain a mix of small and large bones, as well as fur," Richard said. As the students searched the pellets, they found skulls, leg bones, hip bones, vertebrae, and teeth, using critical thinking to break apart the pellets and sort everything into categories.

"It was hard to dig through," Sophie admitted. "The fur kept sticking to the bones. We had to figure out a better method, and eventually, we used our hands to clean the bones. We could've used smaller tweezers with finer tips, but we adjusted our approach and managed to clean everything up."

MS SCIENCE LAB

Owl Pellet Dissection

The students also mentioned the challenge of sorting and cleaning the bones. “We had to use critical thinking to separate them by size and shape,” Richard explained. “We started by breaking up the pellet into multiple pieces which made it much easier to clean everything.”

As they carefully sifted through the bones, their teacher, Ms. Jessica, highlighted the importance of awareness in the dissection process.

“When they’re working with the pellets, they have to constantly ask themselves, ‘Is this just fuzz, or is this a bone?’” Ms. Jessica said. “They need to be gentle and thoughtful about each step. They must stay alert to make sure they’re not missing anything and consider how to carefully remove what they find.”

This hands-on experiment encouraged students to think critically, considering their next move and adjusting their approach as they worked to uncover every bone hidden in the pellet.

