

## Cutting edge science: Students observe shark dissection

SOUTHPORT — Southport Elementary School students came face to face with a shark Wednesday.

But instead of in the Gulf waters, students got to stare at and touch a dogfish shark at school as part of a dissection presentation.

Fourth- and fifth-graders in the after school Bay BASE program experienced “Science After the Bell,” an interactive science program provided to Bay District Schools by the Science and Discovery Center of Northwest Florida (SDC). Shark dissections also were held this week at Callaway Elementary School and Parker Elementary School.

--- **VIDEO: STUDENTS GET HANDS-ON KNOWLEDGE»»**

--- **PHOTOS: MORE FROM THE DISSECTION»»**

The shark was dissected at Southport by Amy Wetzel, SDC education coordinator. Wetzel said she is self-taught when it comes to dissections. As she cut open the stomach of the dogfish shark, a small shark native to the Atlantic Ocean, students overcame their initial squeamishness at the sight of the shark’s heart and liver and touched the organs.

“It has to be hands-on or they won’t remember it,” Wetzel said.

The program, made possible with a grant from the St. Joe Community Foundation, was a surprise for students, who didn’t know beforehand they would get to watch a dissection happen. The students were engaged and interested as Wetzel explained the shark’s biology.

“It smells nasty,” 10-year-old Zachary Wages said when he first stepped into the room to watch the dissection.

The smell, Wetzel said, came from the shark being preserved in chemicals so its flesh didn’t rot.

Zachary appeared curious about the shark’s anatomy as Wetzel passed around the shark so students could touch the teeth and heart.

“Do they have veins?” Zachary asked Wetzel, who replied that sharks do.

On Monday the Southport students will learn about the digestive parts of animals in class. During Wednesday's presentation, though, Wetzel already taught students how the shark stored energy in its liver fat so it didn't have to use so much energy swimming. The stored energy, Wetzel said, kept the shark from sinking to the bottom of the ocean.

--- **PHOTOS: MORE FROM THE DISSECTION**»»

Wetzel also told students about how the shark pulls in water through its nostrils and expels the water through its gills. The children ran their hands over the shark's skin, which was smooth when rubbed in one direction and like sandpaper when rubbed in the opposite direction.

Piper Messick, 10, intently watched as Wetzel cut through the shark's skin with a scalpel. When Wetzel talked about why sharks detect electrical impulses other animals send out in the water, Piper was quick with an answer.

"If they're a predator, you can know when they're coming," Piper said.