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Vanderbilt fifth-graders learn science, morality of clean water

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Students at some schools learn about the lack of clean water in African villages.

Other students even learn a little bit about modern efforts to provide pure water.

But fifth-graders at Vanderbilt Charter Academy actually got to build a water filter Monday, with the help of a team from Mars Hill Bible Church.

Bob and Macky Johnson, who work with the church placing water filters in Rwanda, talked to the chil-

dren about their work and directed them in assembling a water filter made only from a plastic barrel, some plastic pipe, a pasta strainer and various grades of gravel and sand.

"The sand takes the bacteria, and then it goes through the pebbles and the big rocks," fifth-grader Ty Gonzales attempted to explain after the presentation.

Classmate Adam Jongkryg wasn't sure if he could make a water filter on his own.

"Maybe," he said. The Johnsons had visited the fifth grade twice before

to explain the situation in Rwanda and how the water filters work.

"(The Rwandans) have a real hard time getting water, and really their only way of purifying the water is boiling it," Bob Johnson said. The local government's regulation of foresting has meant that "the price of wood and charcoal has gone up, and so you find households that have to choose whether to cook their food or boiling it."

The subject overlapped into a number of the students' lessons.

"We have kind of tied it into both social studies

and science, and now the school's moral focus," said teacher Heidi Hulst.

National Heritage Academies, which administer Vanderbilt Charter Academies, requires schools to study various moral traits from week to week. This week, students were studying compassion. Principal Ivan Kraker said.

As a part of the moral focus curriculum, each grade every year must pick a volunteer project to participate in. Most of the fifth-graders planned to participate in the Zeeland Walk for Water on Saturday.



Stephen Kloosterman/The Holland Sentinel
Bob Johnson helps **Jonathan Liz**, a fifth-grader at Vanderbilt Charter Academy, build a water filter on Friday.