



## Education

# GeraniuMania hits AMSA

By [Olivia Alveshere](#)

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How is watering geraniums with soapy water, lake water or coffee going to affect the way the plants grow?

That's the study question seventh-grade life science students at Anoka Middle School for the Arts will be asking themselves over the next two months.

Malmborg's Garden Center & Greenhouses donated hundreds of geraniums for more than 600 seventh-graders, as the business has for the past two years.

Students each care for a geranium, watering it with either soapy water, lake water or coffee and tracking its evolution.

The project – dubbed GeraniuMania – will help students learn about the scientific method and hone their observational skills.

March 19 and 20, Mary Spivey and Ami Thompson, educators with the University of Minnesota's Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve, presented students with their study question.

Silly scenarios found students trapped in a car wash, ice house or coffee shop until May, tasked with keeping their geraniums alive. The only resources available are soapy water, lake water or coffee.

Students immediately began to speculate what the various liquids might do to their geraniums.

Adam Mishler, with one-third of his peers, will water his geranium with coffee.

"I think it's going to die," he said. "Coffee dehydrates you, and I'm guessing if it dehydrates humans, it's going to dehydrate the plants."

Other students speculated that soapy water, with a very basic pH level, might bring geraniums closer to their ideal growing environment and allow them to thrive.

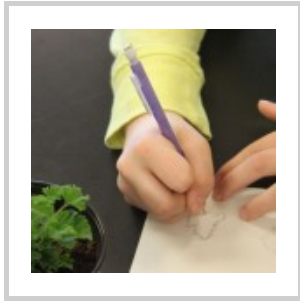
As Spivey and Thompson were discussing the scientific process, science teacher John Jacobson and AMSA Curriculum Integration Coordinator Jolanda Dranchak stepped into other classrooms to encourage artistry in observation.

With advances in technology, many scientists have abandoned the once standard practice of sketching as a way to document studies, Jacobson said. Now, many scientists flash their cameras and call it a day. Anoka Middle School students will take photographs of their geraniums throughout the experiment, but perhaps more importantly, they will sketch, which allows details to pop on the page, Jacobson said.

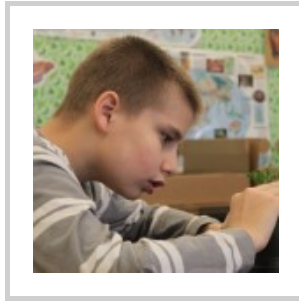
He didn't want students to try and sketch the entire plant in one go; that would be overwhelming. Start with one leaf, he said.

Art education can go a long way to supplement lessons in science because "real scientists are artists and critical thinkers," Thompson said.

"Science is a creative process," she said, emphasizing lessons of process over content. While facts about geraniums will find their way into the unit, the scientific process is the real takeaway. "That's ... going to serve [students] throughout their lives."



*Sydney Gebel sketches the leaves of her geranium plant in class March 20.*



*Austin Hansen examines his geranium plant before putting pencil to paper.*



*Science teacher John Jacobson helps Andrew Fosvick sketch his geranium plant. Sketching helps students hone their observational skills, AMSA educators agree.*



*Malmborg's Garden Center & Greenhouses donated more than 600 geranium plants to Anoka Middle School for the Arts so that seventh-grade life science students can study the scientific method.*

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