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## Fake Earth, real connections for students

By CATHERINE BAUM  
Staff Writer

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Friday, December 12, 2008

EASTHAMPTON - White Brook Middle School students widened their perspectives of the world this week as they learned about it in a 374-square-foot replica of the Earth.

"Globes don't give perspective of how big things are," said Tom Barry, of Mobile Ed Productions Inc. of Michigan.

His job is to give students a more accurate understanding of the planet in his presentation, "The Earth Dome."

"It shows the Earth as it is," said Barry, who travels the East Coast with his globe. Barry arrived in Easthampton Tuesday morning at 7:30. He opened a small bag, unrolled the built-to-scale model and inflated "The Earth Dome." Within 10 minutes, the replica was up (it nearly touched the ceiling) and ready to be used for a science lesson in the White Brook Middle School gymnasium.

Students learned about the continents, oceans, mountains and rivers as Barry pointed to them with his red laser light. The group of 40 sat in front of South America and then moved in front of Africa and then moved again to see Australia. The assembly, available to all White Brook students Wednesday and Thursday, provided an excellent tool, said teachers.

"If they can see it or touch it they make real-world connections," said Meredith Balise, seventh-grade health teacher.

Outside the earth, Barry talked about the wildest wildlife in Australia - from kangaroos and koalas to platypuses and Tasmanian Devils - the driest and wettest parts of the world in South America and the world's longest river in Africa. Students nodded their heads in agreement, laughed at his jokes and listened intently. Only Barry spoke until it was time to enter earth.

Boys and girls took off their shoes in excitement and lined up to enter Earth through the International Date Line. The students at the end of the line outside appeared to be curious about what their peers were seeing inside.

"It's cool - the size of it," said Tom Palaschak, 12.

Inside, the continents appeared backward.

"We are on the inside looking out," Barry explained.

Still, Barry said, the image was more true. Above, Greenland didn't look as big as it appears on most maps.

"When you take something long and try to put it on something flat it doesn't work," said Barry.

Flat maps "squish" the North and South Poles, Barry continued, to provide the viewer a sense of direction.

"Direction is at the cost of great distortion in size," Barry said.



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Students identified countries as Barry pointed to them and gave clues like "Bonjour," "Guten Tag," and "the queen lives here." Constructed and painted into 24 panels, the replica represented a different time zone in each panel.

When one group's time was up, Barry welcomed the next set. He greeted each group with his rules.

"Don't poke my planet, it won't poke you," Barry said, as students stared with wide eyes.

Catherine Baum can be reached at [cbaum@gazettenet.com](mailto:cbaum@gazettenet.com).

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