

# Teaching Chemistry

- Shanna Smith

Learning is an important life task that kids associate with boredom at an early age. By the time students reach middle school, they have already decided that learning is an unpleasant, dreadful task that is not worth their time. Elementary school students pay less attention to classes that bore them, and therefore lose their chance of succeeding in them. Science is just one example of a subject that many immediately stereotype as boring, difficult, and a waste of effort. Marblehead High School A.P. Chemistry students have found a way to change this: make science fun!

After the AP Exam in early May, A.P. Chemistry students redirect their focus from the rigorous course load of an advanced placement class to working hands-on in a fun, joyful environment. A few times each week, each A.P. Chemistry class ventures to an elementary school and teaches young students the cool and exciting characteristics of certain chemicals by means of labs. MHS A.P. Chemistry teacher Debra O'Reilly leads her students to teach elementary school students fun chemistry labs to change their outlooks on science.

"For me I feel it is important to expose kids to science as young as possible and I enjoy watching how excited they get," Ms. O'Reilly says.

Each year, an MHS student organizes these chemistry labs for his or her senior project, while Ms. O'Reilly is there for guidance and assistance. A.P. students learn to step up and apply what they have spent more than eight months studying to everyday use. This year, we have taught labs to students at the Gerry School in Marblehead and the Bricket School in Lynn. Classes range from kindergarten to third grade – the primary years essential to creating a basis for learning in the future.

Coming from someone who spent her elementary school years studying rocks and the water cycle, this was tremendously exciting. We do labs such as make slime, make silly puddy, tie-dye shirts, and recover messages in invisible ink; this is not only messy and fun, but it also subconsciously teaches young kids science. To tie-dye shirts, kids drew a sharpie design on a white shirt and poured droplets of water towards the center of the figure, which spread the design outwards in a circular pattern. The students don't know it yet, but they have just used an effective method of separating homogenous mixtures called chromatography. Also, the invisible messages, written by the students in "invisible ink" on acid-base paper, were recovered upon reacting the acid-base paper with a base, commonly known as Windex. Students unknowingly just performed an acid-base reaction.

When we walked inside a classroom and immediately heard students shout out with glee, "Yay, science!" we knew we were doing our job. We not only made science fun, but we potentially set the base for students to pursue science.