

Seeing Through the Blindfold

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As I slowly exit the car arriving at Tumalo Creek, I enter a new world. I'm standing in the bottom of a valley covered in a blanket of trees and young vegetation. I look up and all above me I see cliffs surrounded by trees staring majestically down at the landscape below. The ground is covered mostly by rich, brown soil, under a thin blanket of pine needles.

From here, my ears grasp the faint rush of a river in the distance. I listen to the other kids around laughing and talking to each other. But the trees are silent. No chirping birds or squirrels or any animals add their share of chatter.

After a brief circle meeting, we head towards the creek. As the sound of rushing water gets louder, my nose begins to detect some interesting smells. Small rocks that fill my sent with a soft, sandy aroma cover the floor. A gentle breeze blows by, carrying the smell of a freshly sharpened pencil.

As we near the creek, the rumble of its water clearly leaks into my ears. It's like a hose trying to fill up a wading pool on a hot summer day, like a waterslide pouring into a swimming pool, and a bucket being slowly dumped onto the ground. All three of these together would sound just like Tumalo's rushing stream.

I stare into the ice-cold river. The clear and shallow water allows me to easily perceive the rocks and pebbles that have been polished and smoothed by the constant flow of water.

Why do we go to Tumalo Creek? Do we go just to study the wildlife, to study what kinds of plants grow there? To learn how to find the shoreline and how to measure water quality levels? Do we go just to learn new art techniques and how to draw things without using outlines? No. Tumalo was damaged and can't fully recover on its own. We go to offer stewardship, to watch over it, be loyal guardians, to repay for the losses others of our kind have caused. And in return we get a place to sit in solitude and learn to become fully connected to a place.

We 8th graders were born in a world clouded with technology: video games; TV; email. As we continue to come up with new ways to make life easier, we have forgotten what an incredible world we already live in. Tumalo has taught us that there is more to the wildlife than meets the eye, because it has taught us to see through the blindfolds that separate us from nature.

