

A science teacher, Robert French, stands in a classroom with his arms crossed, wearing a white lab coat. To his left is a human skeleton mounted on a stand, dressed in a purple cape, a red mohawk wig, and large, reflective sunglasses. The skeleton is also wearing a stethoscope. The background shows a typical classroom setting with shelves of supplies, a globe, and a digital clock on the wall.

THE MAV SCIENTIST

Robert French, at Morton Ranch Elementary, takes science to a whole new level by keeping his kids engaged with creative experiments in the classroom and giving them the opportunity to ask big questions

Written by Lacey Kupfer Wulf | Photography by John Glaser

After working 20 years at the Baylor School of Medicine, French retired and decided to teach at the elementary level. This was the age when his curiosity for understanding how the world works was nurtured by his teachers. He says, “My ultimate goal is to be that ‘crazy’ science teacher they tell their children about.”

At the beginning of class, his students put on their lab coats and transform into little scientists. French says, “I can, and have, caused explosions, electrified students, and launched rockets to great heights.” As a result of his exciting teaching, his Pre-K through second-grade students leave with a strong love of science, and a curiosity to know more about the world.

Mr. French’s Future Assistant

Adelina Salazar, a second-grader in French’s science class, loves going around the school to collect germs. After collection, they watch the germs multiply in petri dishes. When asked if Adelina has changed since being in French’s class, her mother Alejandra Salazar says, “Definitely. She is more aware of the science aspect of life. She asks more big questions.” When she grows up, Adelina wants to be a science teacher in order to be French’s assistant.

Creative Lesson Plans

Also in second grade, Leah Monrroy loves that French’s science class feels like playing. She says, “He’s fun. He teaches us new things, and he makes it fun.” So far the static electricity experiment has been Monrroy’s favorite. “I like the one that makes my hair go up,” she says. Morton Ranch Elementary Principal, Deb Hubble adds, “He creatively plans each and every lesson so that students are seeing, hearing, touching, and sometimes even tasting the content or topic for the day.”

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Big Questions Lead to Experiments

In French’s classroom, students are encouraged to ask questions, which can lead to experiments. While in his class, 8-year-old Michelle Do has asked about the moon, jellyfish, why the dinosaurs became extinct, and the number of fish in the ocean. Her father David Do says, “Her energy is there when she comes back from science class. [French] is a great role model.” Someday Michelle would like to become a computer scientist.

Learning About the World

Like many kids in his class, Genesis Morales, age 8, says, “I don’t really know which experiment is my favorite because I really like all of them.” Since being in French’s class, Diego Morales, Genesis’ father, says, “Genesis asks more questions about the environment and plants in nature.”

Always There

The students aren’t the only ones affected by French. Hubble explains that French offers aid to anyone on campus with things like replacing light bulbs, caring for class pets on holiday weekends, and donating needed items. “This is a man who is employed half-time at our school, but gives just as much, or more, time to the school on a volunteer basis,” she says. “He helps anyone and everyone needing anything at all.”

Although his past students are young, French says, “I am constantly getting letters telling me what type of scientist they want to become: paleontologists, archaeologists, chemists, etc. There is no better feeling in life than to change someone for the better.” **KM**

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