



CHRISTOPHER TOMLINSON/The Daily Sentinel

Reed Struwe, a 12-year-old seventh-grader, right, and Collin Blanchard, a 14-year-old eighth-grader, make a trade at Caprock Academy. The Academy and a local foundation are teaching students about the free-enterprise system, financial literacy and economics. Thursday's lesson addressed open markets with hands-on activities on trade, voluntary exchange, costs and benefits.

Learning the tricks of the trade

Students learn about free market, bartering in economy workshop

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For 45 minutes on Thursday, a Caprock Academy classroom turned into miniature trade center.

Students were handed plain paper bags filled with dollar-store treasures, and they could swap with a classmate if they wanted something else. They bartered fuzzy feather boas and pencil bags, hair clips and tiny notebooks.

Eighth-grader Luke Chandler made an impassioned speech about the quality of his highlighters in an effort to market them, and a classmate agreed to trade him a glasses-cleaning kit.

In between trade attempts

and a few loud negotiations, retired educator Phyllis Hunsinger gave a lesson on economics.

"Trade is a voluntary exchange, and people make choices about trade and about what they value," Hunsinger said. "This is teaching them about free trade and about opportunity cost."

Hunsinger founded the FREE Foundation, a local nonprofit that works to inform students about economics, especially free market economies. Hunsinger has been teaching a weekly class to Caprock middle-schoolers for five years.

"We believe that kids need to know how the economic realities of the world work, so they can understand them and be successful," she said.

Hunsinger called the class to order at different points and asked them to rate how satisfied they were with their items — after they first saw their items, after they saw what other students had, and after two different trades. Student satisfaction went down after they saw what was in their classmates' bags, went up with the first round of trading and went down after the second round of trading.

Seventh-grader Delaney Foes was one of a few students who didn't trade with anyone. She was happy with the screwdriver in her bag. "Compared to what everyone else has, I would say mine is pretty good," she said.

Delaney signed up for the

class because she heard good things about it from other students.

"It's fun to learn about how companies work and economics in different places work," she said. "I didn't think I was going to enjoy it as much as I do."

This is Luke's second year taking the class — he enjoyed it so much last year he wanted to take it again, even if some of the lessons will be the same.

"I think it's going to help me a lot with money and finances, even when I'm in college," he said.

Throughout the semester, students will learn how to create a business and get critiques and advice from local business owners and educators.