Coding comes to life at Gateway

Huntington – Ozobots have found their way to Gateway! The sixth grade is using Ozobots as a coding tool as part of a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) class. This STEM class is new to the sixth grade curriculum this year. Students began working with Ozobots after completing a project in which they had to design a hypothetical way to colonize Mars.

When visiting Joe Hough’s sixth grade classroom, it was clear just how intrigued the students were with Ozobots. It was clear that they were learning, and also having the time of their lives. This program not only teaches, but makes learning fun.

“Ozobot is basically a coding tool,” said Christopher Parker, Gateway’s Technology Coordinator. “It’s an interactive mini robot that teaches kids programming.” The idea is simple. Ozobot follows a black line drawn in marker by a student. Students can insert specific color codes into the line to make Ozobot do different things, like spin around, turn, or “Nitro Boost”. “It can teach kids predictive outcomes”, Parker said, meaning that the small, hemispherical robots teach kids to expect certain codes to do certain things, and plan what Ozobot will do before it does it.

Ozobot coding can teach far more than colors though, and the coding is brought to the next level by Ozoblockly. On a computer, students can drag and drop “blocks”, which represent commands into a sequence for Ozobot to follow. Then, they can upload the sequence to Ozobot, and it will follow their commands without a line. Ozoblockly can teach kids anything from basic to sophisticated coding.

When asked why Ozobot was valuable to the sixth grade curriculum, Parker said “There is an incredibly varied curriculum with them. Everything from music to sciences and English. Ozobot allows students to work at their own pace. It also teaches troubleshooting, how to look at why something didn’t work and fix it. There’s not a lot of opportunity for that in schools.” he said.

Parker also acknowledged that it teaches fundamental and advanced coding. “[Coding] is a growing field”, he noted, adding that it was important for students to be familiar with the technological world we live in.

Parker said he chose Ozobot in particular because it’s “usable from first grade right up through twelfth.” He added that it’s hands-on and appeals to a variety of areas of study, and concluded by saying “It’s simple and fun.”

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Photo: Sixth grade students Mikey Clark and Karson Kruger work with their Ozobot in Joe Hough’s STEM class.