Yamanouchi Municipal Nishi Elementary School, Grade 4

Growing Maesaka-daikon – Learning About Traditional Vegetables and the Importance of Water

The fourth graders at Yamanouchi Nishi Elementary School explored the deep connection between nature and human life through two key experiences: cultivating the traditional local vegetable Maesaka-daikon and learning about regional water resources. Working alongside third-grade students and engaging with local community members, they gained firsthand appreciation for how farming and water support everyday life and how important it is to cherish both.

Cultivating a Traditional Vegetable and Making Pickles

In rich volcanic soil, the students planted Maesaka-daikon using a unique local technique called star-shaped seeding. Throughout the process, from thinning and weeding to harvesting, washing, and trimming, they experienced the full cycle of farming. More than 200 harvested daikon radishes were then turned into a flavorful pickle called takuan with apple juice, using a recipe taught by local residents. Radishes that could not be used for pickling were made into tsubozuke (another type of pickle) and shared with the entire school. This taught the children the value of minimizing waste and preserving traditional local wisdom.

Understanding the Water Cycle and Everyday Life

The students also studied how water supports agriculture by learning about the systems behind Kenzawa Dam and Osawa Water Intake. During their visits, they discovered how groundwater and rainwater are filtered and reused for agricultural purposes. They were impressed by the blend of natural processes and human ingenuity that make this possible.

They further explored topics, such as wastewater treatment, ways to conserve water, and the role of microorganisms in maintaining clean water. They also turned their attention to local water environments, such as the fireflies of the Yomase River and the natural spring water in the wasabi fields, and realized how important it is to protect these precious ecosystems.