

Iizuna Gakuen Green Hills Elementary School, Grades 3 & 4 (Nagano city)

“Shopping Is Voting!” – Learning to Make Ethical Choices Through Chocolate

Third- and fourth-grade students at Iizuna Gakuen Green Hills Elementary School explored the idea that “the cycle of consumption and production supports our lives” through a project focused on chocolate. They examined how consumer choices connect with global issues, such as labor conditions and child labor.

Understanding the Reality Behind Chocolate

The project began with a comparison of two chocolates – one inexpensive, the other more costly. Students learned that behind these differences were serious issues affecting cocoa farmers, including low wages and child labor. Through videos and classroom discussions, they learned how cacao is turned into chocolate, what daily life is like in cacao-producing regions, and how exploitative systems operate. Then, they began to ask: “What can we do to help?”

Launching the Amaleti Cookie Shop

To take action, the students planned a cookie shop called Amaleti – a name combining the Swahili words Amani (peace) and Chocoleti (chocolate). They learned how to bake vegan cookies without eggs or milk and selected ingredients like fair trade chocolate and dried fruits that support farmers directly.

After creating handmade signs and flyers, and practicing their sales pitches, they opened their shop at the Zenkoji Binzuru Market in Nagano City.

Realizing That Buying Is Voting

The cookies sold out, and students had meaningful conversations with customers about the background of their products. They discovered that their actions, small as they may seem, can help shape a more just world. Their message:

“Shopping is voting. Your choices can hurt or help someone.”

This experience became their first step toward a sustainable society.