

Mustapha Tucker:

Eighth Grade

Compass School

Quechee, VT

Mushrooms at School and in the World

The reason that Compass and Windham Elementary School voted for *Hericium americanum* whose common name is Bear's Head Tooth mushroom is because we decided that if Vermont is to have a state mushroom then it needs to represent us as an independent and distinct state.

In terms of Compass there were two different wild mushroom experts that came in and took us on foraging trips near our school at Bald Hill Reserve. We found 6 types of mushrooms. Then we had a wild edible potluck at school using the mushrooms we found at Bald Hill. We had stirfry, pasta with mushrooms, mushroom soup, shepherd's pie and many other dishes.

In the fall Representative Michelle Bos-Lun came in to introduce the idea of a state mushroom bill and describe the legislative process. During her visits we considered many candidates and their properties, but finally we decided on the Bear's Head Tooth. We voted on which mushroom to designate (first with a voice vote and sometimes by division) and in the end we had a nearly unanimous vote on what should be our state mushroom: Bear's Head Tooth won.

Some of our considerations about having a Mushroom as Vermont State Symbol were:

- Including mushrooms as a state symbol is very important to recognize because mushrooms are decomposers , which means they turn the dead trees and leaves into food they use to make more of themselves and to nourish others in the environment.

- Another important quality of mushrooms in general is that their mycelium help more than 90% of plants and trees to get nutrients from the soil. We should acknowledge their important environmental role.
- Vermont has many state symbols but the Kingdom of Fungi has not been represented and deserves its place in our state symbols.

We thought about Bear's Head Tooth that:

- The Bear's Head Tooth mushroom, is one of the few mushrooms that can both be cultivated and also be found naturally in the woods of Vermont which makes it unique.
- the way it looks is very cool and has some elements that look like parts of our landscape; like waterfalls or ice sheets
- The biggest living organism & one of the oldest (at least 2,400 years old) a 3 1/2 mile square patch of Honey mushrooms and their mycelium in Oregon. Mushrooms are exceptional in many ways!
- IfThere is a mushroom that merged with a caterpillar and is a delicacy in Tibet. Mushrooms are neither plants nor animals but somewhere in between.
- Mycelium networks beneath the forest floor send messages to each other and to plants to trees about moisture and other conditions, functioning almost like a thinking

brain. Mushrooms are sophisticated and advanced in ways we are only beginning to understand

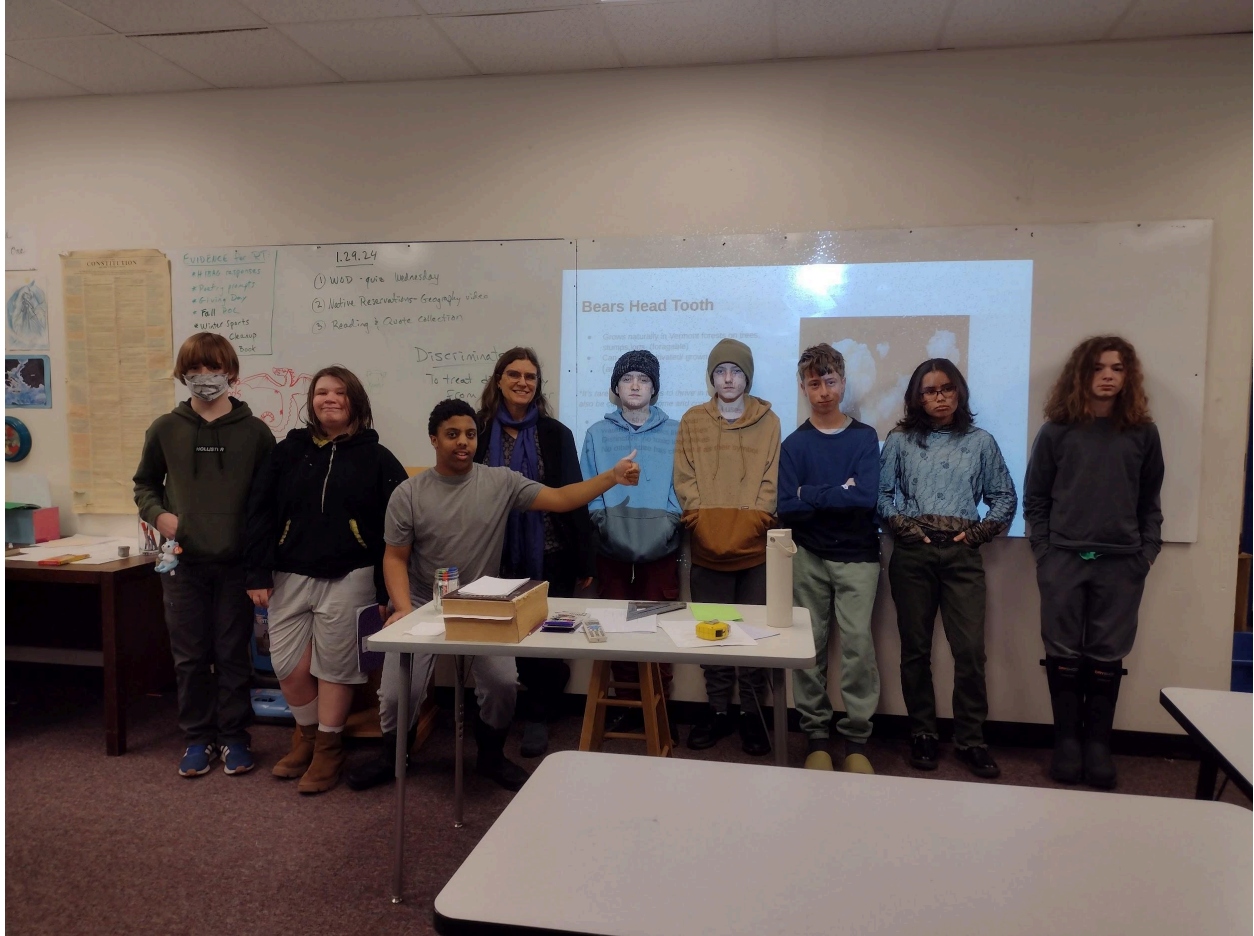
On behalf of my school and other Vermont students I hope that the Committee considers this testimony of the importance of mushrooms and decides to support the bill to designate *Hericium americanum* as Vermont State Mushroom.







Photos from a Compass Bald Hill Reserve foraging education walk led by naturalist Christopher Denette in 2021. (They found a Bears Head Tooth on that walk).



Some of the Compass Middle School students who voted to designate Bear's Head Tooth as the Vermont State Mushroom.