

GIFTED LINKS

A Newsletter Connecting the Charleston CUSD #1 Gifted Community

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Special Points of Interest

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Literature Circles

Cindy Goodchild, 5th Grade Teacher, Jefferson Elementary School

If you were to walk into a classroom in Jefferson during Readers' Workshop, you might see small groups of students spread out around the room. Each group is clustered around a book, and as you step closer to one, you see a student frantically thumbing through her book. "I'm looking for the part you just talked about," she tells her classmate. "I have a question about that part too."

Wandering by a second group, you hear a student raise the question of "I wonder why Paul would want to return to Tangerine Middle School. He hates that place and everyone is mean there." Three members of his group try to respond at once—this is a question that doesn't have a simple answer, and they are all eager to share their thoughts. Next to that group, another cluster of students is discussing a novel about World War II. One student has read an extensive amount of nonfiction about the war, and he is enthusiastically sharing how his background knowledge connects with the text.

These students are engaged in literature circles.

What is a literature circle?

A literature circle is similar to a book club that an adult might participate in. The teacher chooses several books which have a variety of reading levels and topics. Students select which book they would like to read, and are placed into literature circle groups. They read their book throughout the week, usually independently but sometimes aloud within their groups. As the students read, they respond to the text with a variety of questions, connections, and predictions. Sometimes it will be one student's job to identify new and unusual words and bring them to their group; another student may be in charge of developing different questions. The students meet (usually once a week) to discuss their books, and they discuss everything from confusing parts to favorite characters to themes of the book.

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ISBE Gifted Advisory Council

Todd J. Vilardo, Asst. Superintendent, has been appointed to the ISBE's Gifted Advisory Council (GAC). The role of the GAC is to advise "regarding all rules and policies to be adopted by the State Board relating to the education of Gifted and Talented Students." At the March 15, 2011 meeting, the GAC discussed the best ways to address twice-exceptional students and received an overview of the ISBE's revised Gifted Education Seminar. Congratulations to Mr. Vilardo on this prestigious State appointment!



Literature Circles, Continued from Page 1

How do literature circles benefit gifted students?

The beauty of Readers' Workshop is that it allows students to self-select text and read at their own level. Just because a student is in fifth grade does not mean they have to read fifth grade level text. However, most students benefit from a small push to try something new and more difficult. When a teacher chooses books for literature circles, they choose books with a variety of levels and can steer gifted students toward reading books that will challenge them. Not only that, literature circles introduce students to genres they may not be used to reading. For an advanced reader who is used to reading realistic fiction, even difficult texts, giving them a fantasy or mystery to read presents them with new themes, vocabulary, and text structures.

Literature circles also encourage gifted students to develop more sophisticated responses to literature. Students involved in weekly discussion quickly learn that questions that begin with "why" generate more discussion than those that start with "what". Not only are gifted students thinking more deeply while they read, the discussions often lead to new thoughts. By working together and questioning each other in small groups, gifted students have their thoughts challenged. They have to be prepared to defend *why* they think something. Students often walk away from a discussion group with new information or a different perspective.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of literature circles for gifted students is that not only is it an activity that engages and challenges them, but also that literature circles are a natural part of Readers' Workshop. All students in the class can be engaged in them at once, or they can be an option offered to all students. Gifted students are not being pulled out or working away from their peers. There is no separation from their class, and they are still being challenged. However, if you walked into that classroom described earlier and asked a gifted student what the best part of a literature circle is, they would probably tell you simply that it's fun to talk about a book they love.

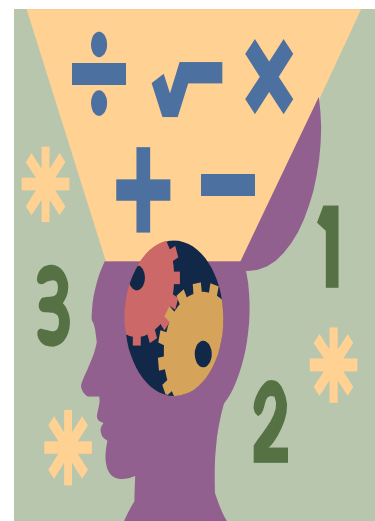
Mathscapes

Pam Evans, 6th Grade Teacher, Jefferson Elementary School

For my advanced 6th grade math students, I have had them working out of the book *Mathscapes* during the 2nd and 3rd quarters. This series provides a more challenging curriculum for these students. They work together in groups to solve higher order thinking problems. They are doing a lot of hands on activities/games throughout each unit.

The primary focus of the 6th grade units is Number Sense. Students study fractions, decimals and percents. They also investigate geometry and proportions. The lessons are very interactive and exploratory which creates a dynamic atmosphere among the participants. The students were very eager to work on their math each day. They work independently on their assignments and I am their resource when they have a question. They work very well in this environment and thrive on that independence. It teaches them to search for answers on their own and with their peers, rather than asking the teacher each time to give them the answer.

I feel that it has been a good addition and challenge for my advanced math students.



Through the Eyes of the Parent

Brittany Meyer, 5th Grade Teacher, Jefferson Elementary School

Parents reached out to teachers to share what they think about the Gifted Program in the Charleston School District.

“My kids really enjoy the educational opportunities afforded them.” Jennifer Bommelje, gifted parent of 4th and 6th grader.

Several parents of gifted students in our district stated that their child is being challenged to their ability level in the classroom. Parents consistently notice strong differentiation in both reading and math. One family also stated while differentiation may occur in other subjects it is not as obvious.

Our district has recently adopted a new reading curriculum. The response from our parents is that they have seen a change. “I love that my child is able to pick their own book which is at their level and of their interest,” stated a parent. Jennifer Bommelje stated, “It’s fantastic!”

Parents stated that math within our classrooms has been differentiated in multiple ways. Once mastery of a standard is proven, students are provided with opportunities to work on projects, work ahead in the textbook, and/or work from another textbook. “I love that my child can work at his own pace,” Lori Kuznicki replied in reference to her child’s math class. “I like that my child is continuously challenged and not bored in class,” remarked a parent. As we all know it is very easy for some gifted students to be lackadaisical or bored in class. These positive examples serve as motivators to our district to continue its endeavors to serve the gifted population.

Classroom instruction that challenges our children is essential. However, providing challenges for gifted students outside of school often lies in the hands of the parent.

“I would love to know more about programs that our child can attend outside of school.” Ray Kuznicki

Our gifted committee has worked on providing resources to help parents be more informed about the opportunities that are provided for their children. However parents feel that these additional activities should be chosen at their discretion dependent upon their individual preferences.

Students who are gifted often participate in music, boy/girl scouts, sports, etc. which are all activities vital to a child’s development. These relevant examples can lead to time constraints that limit participation in additional academic programs.

Over the years, our gifted program has changed as our district has faced financial obstacles. As educators, it is our responsibility to rise to the challenges. Our response to these challenges is differentiation within our classrooms. Sometimes differentiation can be complicated to explain and tricky to show on paper. However, it is very obvious to the students working at the level most suitable for them.

Can we be assured that we have mastered all aspects of differentiation? No. What we can do is guarantee that we are life-long learners striving to perfect differentiation based upon the unique interests, abilities, and learning styles of every child.



CHECK IT OUT!

The CUSD #1 Gifted and Talented Website for Resources and Information for Parent:

<http://www.charleston.k12.il.us?GATEProgram.htm>

Looking for more information and resources? Don't forget to check out the lending library located at the Central Office. The online bibliography can be accessed at:
<http://www.charleston.k12.il.us/pdfs/GATE/giftedbibliography2010.pdf>

Cultivating Creativity

Todd J. Vilardo, Assistant Superintendent

Much has been written about the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and its impact on American schools. One of the most thought provoking statements I have read about NCLB considers the irony that, while our government strives to mimic the mandates placed upon China's education system in order to boost standardized test scores, China is striving to attain what our education systems have had for years – support for divergent thinking, encouragement of creativity, tolerance for deviation – “a system in which the government does not dictate what students learn or how teachers teach; and culture that does not rank or judge the success of a school, a teacher, or a child based on only test scores in a few subjects determined by the government” (Zhao, 2009). Many parents and educators are similarly convinced that NCLB has, albeit unintentionally, left our gifted students behind.

I recall teaching high school English when the “whole language” approach was catching on.

The idea, related to “holism,” is based upon the belief that learning was not possible by first analyzing small parts of concepts or skills and expecting students to be able to piece them together. Instead, the emphasis is on learning by first seeing the big picture or “whole” skill, then understanding how the smaller parts fit together. Likewise, teaching the “whole child,” as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) has recently advocated, seems to make a lot of sense. Many people are realizing that the educational “flavor of the decade” reforms that have spun-off of Sputnik's famous first orbit focus on students' achievement in core subject areas (i.e. math, science and language arts). With its strong focus on math and reading, NCLB has been no exception. However, one thing that has made America so unique is our ability to find our individual talents and gifts and to develop them into career and service opportunities that continually improve our society. If students'

talents or gifts, for example, are in math, science, language arts, music or art, those students can excel not by demonstrating their abilities to answer questions on standardized tests about those subject areas, but by using their imaginations *paired with* their gifts in those subject areas. Doing so supports the “whole child” approach. In other words, our nation's history of cultivating its peoples' creativity and innovation is, I believe, one thing that makes us stand out and excel as a people. Cultivating our students' creative capacity, therefore, *in addition* to complying with governmental mandates, should remain a focus for our school communities.

The Charleston CUSD#1 already does much to foster creativity and innovation among our students.

Take, for example, the long-established fine arts programs available in our district and all of the special projects that are implemented by classroom teachers and highlighted throughout the year. But how can we continue to

“Our nation's history of cultivating its peoples' creativity and innovation makes us stand out and excel as a people.”
Todd J. Vilardo

work together as educators and parents to best cultivate creativity among our youth?

Parents and teachers both can encourage curiosity and exploration in children. Teachers can identify students' interests and incorporate these into classroom activities. Parents can share their child's interests with teachers, be aware of classroom activities, and supplement the school's efforts with creative activities at home. Among the hundreds of ideas to cultivate creativity in children, one principle stands as most important: parents and teachers who strive toward the common goal of engaging children in activities of interest to them while helping them learn what it is adults want children to know and be able to do to be successful in life. Thank you for supporting the creative efforts of our youth!

Scholastic Bowl: Student Perspective

Editors Note: This article was written by Gina Liu, CHS 9th grader, sharing her experiences and perspective on Scholastic Bowl. Scholastic Bowl is an extracurricular activity offered at Charleston Middle School and Charleston High School. It provides students with an opportunity for academic competition.

In the silence after the moderator has read the question, the pounding of your heart and the breathing of your teammates seem to echo. With thoughts feverishly racing through your mind and adrenaline rushing through your veins, you clutch your buzzer tightly with clammy hands, thumb poised over the red button as you desperately rack your brain for the answer. As you suddenly make a stab at the button, the high-pitched buzz

piercing through the hush, you apprehensively second-guess yourself as the moderator requests your answer. Opening your mouth nervously, you know that from then on, the only two possible outcomes are the thrill of victory or the agony of defeat.

Dubbed such nicknames as Nerd Bowl and Geek Olympics, Scholastic Bowl is “like a game show”, in the words of one player. Participants, with five people on each of the two teams, are read questions by the moderator, or referee; the first person to “buzz in” (using a timed buzzer system) with the correct answer earns their team points. The questions cover a wide variety of subjects, ranging from sports to geometry to fine art. “You learn to play on

your teammates’ strengths,” Niko Tadic, who led Charleston Middle School’s Scholastic Bowl team to 4th place at the State Championship in 2009, said. The sport obviously does its part to increase its players’ self-confidence. “Answering a question and feeling smart afterwards,” said Allie Cromwell with a laugh, when asked what she likes most about Scholastic Bowl. Another participant described the feeling as “pure joy”.

Individual victories are often trumped by a strong sense of team loyalty, however. It’s common practice to see players congratulating each other or rallying around a battle cry. During the course of a season, the players often become comrades.

Many players listed “being near your friends” and “making new friends” as

If your student is interested in the academic competition Scholastic Bowl provides, contact Mrs. Foster at Charleston Middle School or Mr. Juriga at Charleston High School for further information!

their favorite aspect of Scholastic Bowl. Said Tadic, “Often the sense of camaraderie created by being a member of such a team unit was greater a reward than any answered question, any academic or athletic accomplishment.” If his testimony is anything to go by, it appears that Scholastic Bowl is definitely a good thing.



CMS 2011 Scholastic Bowl Team
Regional and Sectional Champs
State Tournament Qualifiers

Summer Enrichment Opportunities

Does your gifted child complain of boredom in the summer months? Is there a subject area that is outside the normal curriculum that your gifted child would love to investigate? It is not too early to research and plan some summer enrichment opportunities for your gifted child. There are many opportunities available both close to home, via distance learning mediums, and even at far away and exotic locales. Here are some examples that might be worth investigating.



Eastern Illinois University, Summer 2011 Kids Camps/Programs. Offering a wide variety of camps and programs including opportunities in Art, Leadership, College Prep, Theater, Science, Crafts, Cooking, Creative Writing, Moviemaking, Robotics, and Engineering. Visit www.eiu.edu/~adulted/summer2011kids.php.

Lake Land College Kids College. Offering a wide variety of camps and programs including opportunities in Science, Art, Computers, Reading, Writing, Math, Nature and more for children ages K-12. Visit <http://lakelandcc.edu/comeduc/youth.asp>.

IMSA: Summer at IMSA. Summer programs focusing on science, math, and technology. Visit www3.imsa.edu/programs/SummeratIMSA.

Johns Hopkins University, Center for Talented Youth, summer programs, online distance learning opportunities for all grades. Visit <http://cty.jhu.edu>.

Northwestern University, Center for Talent Development, summer programs, Saturday enrichment, online distance learning for all grades. Visit www.ctd.northwestern.edu.

CHARLESTON CUSD #1
SCHOOLS

We're on the Web!

Mark Twain School
www.charleston.k12.il.us/mtes/index.html

Carl Sandburg Elementary School
www.charleston.k12.il.us/cses/index.html

Ashmore Elementary School
www.charleston.k12.il.us/aes/index.html

Jefferson Elementary School
www.charleston.k12.il.us/jes/index.html

Charleston Middle School
www.charleston.k12.il.us/cms/index.html

Charleston High School
www.charleston.k12.il.us/chs/index.html

Check Out Your School!

Charleston Gifted Students Need You!

Do you have a special skill, talent, or program you would like to share with Charleston's gifted student population? Would you like to volunteer your time to help facilitate a special program or presentation for gifted students? Let us know at Gifted Links! Charleston's Gifted Students Need You!

Gifted Links is a publication produced by the Charleston CUSD #1 Gifted Committee. Do you have a project or program you would like to see in Gifted Links? Would you like to suggest a story idea? Contact the editors:

Brittany Meyer, meyerb@charleston.k12.il.us

Susan Daniels, suzer15@hotmail.com