



The Gifted Gull

Great Neck Middle School

Students Examine Economy While Learning About The Great Depression

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Seventh grade students on the Beachcomber and Dolphin teams spent time in February analyzing our current economic crisis during their unit of study on The Great Depression. Through this interdisciplinary unit, students had the opportunity to not only understand how our country survived The Great Depression and how those lessons learned might carry us through today's tough economic times, but they also took a look at how individuals were affected by the events of the Depression and how some of those same issues are being repeated today.

We began in English classes by using John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* to give students the opportunity to understand how the Depression affected Americans. We jigsawed the chapters so that each student was responsible for reading only one excerpt, and then they shared their readings with the entire class. Next, students created a concept map that identified 4 concepts that emerged in their reading: **Change, Conflict, Humanity, and Government/Society**. Students were asked to demonstrate how those concepts were portrayed in the novel by pro-

viding specific examples. Once students had a clear sense of the difficulties Americans faced during the Depression, we then connected it to today's world by examining how today's economic crisis has affected the people living in a small town in Ohio. Students saw that, just like the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath*, people today are being forced to relocate to find work, make sacrifices for their families, and face numerous hardships as a result of tough economic times.

Once students had a sense of how an economic crisis can affect people, they then took a more in-depth look at the causes of the Depression and how America was able to recover from it. Students began by examining current events. They collected articles relating to today's economic conditions and then sorted those articles into categories, helping them to identify the major causes and effects of today's economic crisis. Students then compared those causes and effects with ones of the Depression. Teachers used Kaplan's Depth and Complex-

ity model to guide students to make connections between what happened during the Great Depression and what is happening today. The results of the work with the collected articles were used to then place students into differentiated teams for the next part of the task.

Once in their teams, students took on the role of an economic advisor to President Obama. Their area of expertise was the time period leading up to and during The Great Depression. The teams were asked to identify the patterns that existed between today's economy and the economy during the Depression. They were then asked to use those emerging patterns to advise the president on how to handle today's problems. The basis of their advice came from President Roosevelt's New Deal programs. Students identified which programs were most beneficial during the Depression and which programs might still be beneficial today. The end result was a 2009 New Deal Program that addressed the issues we are facing today.



Getting To Know Our Gifted Cluster Teachers Featured Teacher—Eileen Frey

Welcome to our new feature—Getting To Know Our Gifted Cluster Teachers. In this section, we will highlight gifted cluster teachers at Great Neck, giving you the opportunity to get to know them and see just how hard they work for their students.

This issue features Eileen Frey, 8th grade English teacher on the Islander Team. Mrs. Frey has been teaching 28 years, with 15 of those years at Great Neck, and many of them have been spent teaching gifted students. In addition to teaching 8th grade English, Mrs. Frey has also taught 7th and 9th grade English.

As a cluster teacher, Mrs. Frey is constantly challenging herself to look for new and better ways to keep her students excited about her subject. “One of the most difficult things about teaching gifted students can be capturing and keeping their interest; most students don’t tout English as their favorite subject, and even if I can’t make them adore the subject, I really want them to remember this year of

English fondly,” explained Mrs. Frey. While teaching gifted students can be a challenge, there are many joys that also accompany gifted education. “Gifted students have a wealth of background knowledge and such good attitudes about learning. Because of this, I feel free to dare to try different approaches to broaden their worlds yet further,” stated Frey.

Mrs. Frey is the type of teacher who is always willing to try new things in order to meet the needs of gifted learners, and for that matter, all learners in her classroom. Some of this year’s strategies included writing “how-to” books electronically, allowing students to research topics based on interest and to choose the product they would use for presentations, blogging, and teaching students how to be global citizens who make a difference in the world around them.

Frey has seen several changes in education over the years, and one of the most

important trends in gifted education today is the issue of real-world relevance for students. “Now we are focusing on bringing real-world applications to the lessons we try to impart. No longer are subjects taught in isolation and/or for no reason.” With this shift in gifted education Frey feels all of her students benefit. “It’s funny, but strategies offered for gifted students work well for all students because they are all ‘best practices’. Often my gifted students delve deeply into a subject, and then I ask my non-gifted students to either follow suit or at least hop on board for whatever project we’re developing or whatever reading set-up we have. There is a nice trickle down effect, and in classes with no gifted students, we still use gifted tools often.”

Eileen Frey is an exemplary teacher of gifted students and GNMS is lucky to have someone as dedicated to gifted students as she is.

Sixth Graders Offer President Obama Advice

As we all know, America and the world is on the edge of a major energy crisis. Some experts believe we are already in crisis and if something doesn’t change soon the Earth is at stake. With depleting fossil fuels, the issue of global warming, and high energy costs, experts are constantly looking for new and improved sources of energy to meet the world’s increasing demands.

Our sixth grade science students on the Orca team joined those experts recently to analyze our energy crisis and consider alternatives. They began by examining the origin and formation of several sources of energy including: solar, biomass, fossil fuels (natural gas, petroleum, and coal), wind, hydroelectric, geothermal, and nuclear. Through their research, they needed to understand how those various forms of energy could be transformed into other usable forms such

as light, heat, chemical, electrical, and mechanical. They also were required to understand how the energy sources were currently being used and possible uses for the future. Other concerns included the amount of pollution that each source produces, its availability, cost, thermal potential energy and dependence on conduction, convection, and radiation.

Once students had a better understanding of each energy source, they were given one of those sources to support during a panel discussion. Students not only needed to be able to defend their source as the best, but they needed to be prepared to explain why other sources should not become our primary source of energy. Finally, they had to write a letter to President Obama explaining why he needs to support more research for their chosen energy source.

Numerous innovative ideas emerged as a

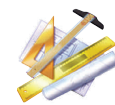
result of the students work, including Adam W’s idea of capturing CO₂ and transporting it to rain forests so that it could be absorbed by the plants instead of being released into the atmosphere.

This type of work is just what gifted students need to be doing. Students need the opportunity to use problem solving skills and think creatively as they work on real world issues. By allowing innovative thinking, we are teaching our students that the world demands new ideas, and we must constantly question existing issues in order to find better solutions.

Ms. Stout was so impressed with the results of the task that she mailed students letters to the President, and we are anxiously awaiting his reply.



Sixth Graders Provide Design Ideas for New School



With construction of our new school scheduled to begin soon, sixth grade math students had the opportunity to think about what the ideal math classroom might look like and then design plans that reflect their ideas. As part of their Geometry and Measurement unit, students were able to see how the skills taught in the unit are used in the real world by working like experts in architecture and interior design.

This differentiated project placed students into design teams and each team was given a task that was geared toward their readiness level.

The tasks included designing a 21st century math classroom for the new GNMS. Teams were expected to first sketch their plans and then draw those plans to scale using proportional reasoning and algebra. Some teams were also asked to create a 3-D model of their designs, which also had to be done to scale. While considering a design, students were asked to think about functionality and learners needs. Once their rooms were designed, they had to equip them with the most up-to-date

equipment to ensure that our new school will be ready for 21st century learners, and, like the school system, they had to be budget conscious and turn in a final cost for their classroom. Some teams were able to create their own budget while other teams had to work within a given budget.

“With the construction of the new Great Neck Middle School, there is no better way to get kids excited about math than through the process of designing a 21st century classroom. This problem based learning activity provided the children with the opportunity to apply their math skills involving geometry, measurement, proportional reasoning, algebra, and budgeting. Now that’s utilizing a wide array of math in real life!!!” explained Mrs. Schultz, math teacher on the Wave Rider Team.

In order to provide students with assistance, Mr. Bill Schwegler with Waller, Todd, and Sadler Architects, Inc. came in and met with students about his work as an architect. Since Mr Schwegler’s firm is designing our new school, he was able to give tremendous insight into the current plans while at the same time giving stu-

dents hints that would help them complete their task successfully. One thing he urged students to consider as they worked is the fact that students learn in a variety of ways and that they needed to design a classroom environment that would allow teachers to meet the various learning styles of the students in their class. The highlight of his visit was a slide show of current plans of our new school. By seeing the artist’s renderings, students were able to truly visualize the current concept for the school and then incorporate that concept into their own plans.

As a result of their tasks, students were trying to better understand how geometry shapes the world around them while looking at the relationship between 2-D and 3-D objects. Through their work they were trying to determine how geometric shapes are interrelated and to what extent those relationships are important in the world of design. Students were also expected to demonstrate understanding of measurement, including estimation, use of formulas to find area and perimeter, and relationships among units of measure.

Parents Attend Workshop on Valuing Education

Parents of identified gifted students recently had the opportunity to attend a workshop that focused on helping gifted students see the value in education. Those in attendance learned that there are a variety of reasons for underachievement and that motivation is an important component to academic success.

Participants began by considering why education was important to them and how it had affected their life. They then considered whether or not they have relayed the message of the importance of a quality education to their children. As parents, the message we send our children can make a difference in their academic achievement. Next, parents examined four types of motivation: **intrinsic motivation**, when a child works to achieve simply because they enjoy it; **attainment value**, when a child succeeds

because they want to be able to do things for themselves and compete with others; **utility value**, when a student recognizes the value in the work and is able to see how it will benefit them later, and **extrinsic motivation**, meaning they need a reward or enticement to succeed. Keep in mind that no matter how motivated your student may be, there is always something out there that is more appealing than school work. If your child would rather be playing sports or video games to the point that they are interfering with academics, you might want to consider setting limits on those activities. It is also important that if a student is not motivated, that all caregivers work together to encourage the child. A united front will be much more successful than split decisions that send mixed messages to a child. When your student is successful, be sure to compliment him/her.

Help them to see the link between effort and achievement, and never allow children to think they achieved simply because they were lucky or smart. It is important that students realize that the skills they have developed and the effort they applied to a task will ultimately lead to a higher rate of success.

Finally, help your child see a personal connection for learning and avoid allowing them to use the excuse that they are doing poorly because they don’t like their teacher, or they think their teacher doesn’t like them.

If you keep these tips in mind, you are sure to guide your student in the right direction. Nothing can replace an involved parent so when you notice problems at school, talk with his/her teachers right away in order to find a solution.

Great Neck Middle School

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“The best way to learn
anything is to discover it for
yourself.”
Polya

Important Dates/Announcements:

May 19— Gifted Testing at Great Neck for students new
to VBCPS

May 14th–June 8th–SOL Testing

June 18th—Last day of school for students



Gr. 8 English Students Becoming Heroes

Eighth grade Advanced English students have spent the year learning about heroes through a variety of pieces of literature. They began the year by looking at the heroic figure in literature. Next, they examined the heroic figure in history. Their third unit of study taught them about the heroic figure in modern society while their final unit of study has them looking at the heroic figure within themselves. All of this work has led to students becoming a hero for someone who is in need.

Students began the year by reading *Beowulf*. This literary work introduced students to the heroic figure in literature. As a result, students used technology to create their own heroic figure, complete with a chivalric code.

Next, students read *A Tale of Two Cities* or *Don Quixote* to explore the heroic figure in history. Students

also read *To Kill a Mockingbird* to begin investigating modern heroes.

During the third nine weeks they had the opportunity to choose among an extensive list including *Anne Frank*, *The Diary of a Young Girl*; *Night*; *Hiroshima*; *What is the What*; and *Farewell to Manzanar*. These titles focused on modern and historical events such as The Holocaust, WW II, and genocide in Darfur.

As they read these books, they came to better understand just how difficult it can be to become a hero while at the same time they identified issues within the pieces of literature that are still present in today's world. A photo essay taught them that no one is exempt from such atrocities.

Again, students had the opportunity to learn how some people are still treated like second class citizens and that the issues of genocide continue to plague some societies. To encour-

age more in-depth dialogue, students participated in discussion boards. After completing the required reading, students had the opportunity to choose from a list of 15 titles, each dealing with some type of hero. Meanwhile, students had to begin discovering the hero within.

Out of concern for what appeared to be history repeating itself, students used Creative Problem Solving strategies to identify an issue that they were concerned with and to look for the hero within in order to make a difference in their world. After brainstorming, narrowing their options, and analyzing the remaining choices, Islander students decided that they wanted to help abused animals. They have a number of ideas for the team project and are well on their way to becoming a hero for a well deserving cause. Look for more information about the outcome in this year's final newsletter.