“My child is more than a test score!” That bumper sticker proudly adorns my car. Here in East Lyme we work hard to ensure that all of our students can perform well on standardized tests, but more importantly, we also make certain that our students experience engaging and innovative activities that inspire and challenge them. This month’s issue of the *East Lyme News and Notes* includes stories and photographs of many of these exciting learning activities.

Read about the ELMS “One Million Bones” project in which Ms. Lovell’s art students created bones out of clay and paper mache to add to the moving genocide display on the National Mall. Appreciate several other community service accomplishments by our students, including ELHS art students’ “Empty Bowls” project, Junior Danny Munch’s 180 hours of service, and the successful ELHS Blood Drive.

Enjoy articles on several activities designed to broaden our students’ awareness of the world: Ray Gawendo’s moving presentation at the high school on her holocaust experience; the exciting East Lyme-Guangzhou, China cultural relationship; and the summer language and culture camp that will bring more than 30 Chinese students to East Lyme for two weeks.

In addition, this issue features lots of stories about our students’ successful art work and the many exciting activities that fill the days of our Niantic Center, Haynes and Flanders students.

As author Tony Wagner states in his book *Creating Innovators*, the best schools ensure that students have the freedom to pursue their passions in ways that ultimately will benefit mankind. Here in East Lyme, we try to model this approach.

James D. Lombardo, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
East Lyme Public Schools will inspire, engage and educate each student to become a contributing citizen and a responsible, independent, and critical thinker.

Thank you to our staff who contributed articles for this edition.

East Lyme High School
Student EXPO
Tuesday, May 13th
6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

The East Lyme High School Student Expo has been showcasing student work for the past 13 years and highlights student accomplishments in art, music, and culinary. Numerous works of art are displayed throughout the commons from AP Art, Studio Art Honors, Drawing, Painting, Crafts, Ceramics, Sculpture, Art & Design, Art Co-Op and Photography classes. Music and vocal performances are also conducted throughout the evening and the culinary classes prepare food for all to try.

Please join us on
May 13th!
ELPS
Art Awards

Visit Link
East Lyme High School
Fine Arts Department
2013-2014

Visit Link
East Lyme Public Schools
Mystic Art Center
Young-at-Art
2013-2014
East Lyme Middle School Participates in One Million Bones

Students from Mrs. Lovell’s art class at East Lyme Middle School participated in the One Million Bones project. After borrowing a skeleton from a science classroom, students studied each bone, their shape and their function within the body before creating many bones out of clay and paper mache which were sent to Washington DC to be placed on the National Mall.
East Lyme will host thirty (30) visiting Chinese high school students for approximately 13 days from July 7-19.

We are currently seeking families who are willing to share their homes and American lifestyle with Chinese high school students. Host family children will have the opportunity to join their Chinese guests during the day camp which features workshops learning about American life as well as tours to a variety of cultural activities. Past trips have included Brownstone Adventure Park, Project Oceanology, The Basketball Hall of Fame, Lake Compounce, Yale University, the Nautilus Museum, and McCook’s Park.

A stipend of $100 per student will be provided to host families.

When you spend time with people from other countries, your whole world expands as you learn about another culture and language. Hosting an exchange student is a rewarding experience for your whole family.

**To Apply or to Learn More**
If you are interested in participating in this wonderful cultural program, contact Jen Brush at [jen.brush@eastlymeschools.org](mailto:jen.brush@eastlymeschools.org)
On Thursday, February 27, 2014 three second grade classes at Lillie B. Haynes took the stage to perform Haynes’ Annual 2nd Grade Literacy Plays, part of the Haynes Enrichment program, sponsored by the PTA. Mrs. Douton, Mrs. Packard, and Mrs. Abbott’s class performed storybooks chosen by the teachers to fit the second grade curriculum. This year’s plays included *Horton Hatches Some Eggs* by Dr. Seuss, *Jamie O’Rourke and the Big Potato* by Tommie DePaola, and *The Bad Case of Tattle Tongue* by Julia Cook.

Bringing a story to life from the pages in a book helps young children see the characters, settings, problems and solutions clearly. As stories are rehearsed and lines are learned, the structure of stories is reinforced, so students gain ownership over being either part of the conflict, the first attempt to solve the problem, or the solution. Integrating acting into early reading skills in the classroom levels the playing field of students’ academic and social skills, making active, often challenging students, leaders for the first time in their school career. Many of them have never experienced positive reinforcement from their peers, for their loud boisterous personalities. Other students, who excel academically, are challenged by the new skills of performing in front of an audience, being loud, and expressive, and building confidence. Dr. Eric Jensen explains in his book *Teaching with the Brain in Mind* that students who are challenged beyond their comfort zone and share their learning experience socially with their peers build dendrites in the brain, or communication pathways for further life learning. For the past decade, Lillie B. Haynes Elementary School has been building a top-notch enrichment program that provides hands-on, curriculolm related, arts in education projects for all students. Arts enrichment is a huge part of the school culture. Younger students look forward to projects they see the older kids presenting, and the older students reflect back on the ones they did when they were ‘little’. They become topics of conversations for kids who have moved on. These projects, by serving as a common goal throughout the school, provide a forum to celebrate the creative and academic achievements of each individual student, each class, each grade and the school as a whole. No one can imagine doing without them. They are part of the Haynes experience and make for unforgettable memories.

Lillie B. Haynes, while meeting the state and national standards for learning and evaluation, stands firmly behind the belief that we are educating ‘the whole child’, and supporting creative, expressive projects, especially when they connect to the curriculum, is exactly what we do best.

The second grade plays are just a segment of the entire enrichment program, that is supported by the efforts of the PTA, who work tirelessly to fund and find supporting state and private grants. Each grade level brings in state vetted Master Teaching Artists, who are artists in their own right, and also gifted in working with children. Our K and Grade 1 students are taught by Artist L’Ana Burton, 2nd and 4th grade students work with artist and author, Carol Glynn, and 3rd grade students work with Brazilian dancer and master teacher, Efriam Silva.

Submitted by,
Carol Glynn, Master Teacher and Artist in Residence
Holocaust Survivor
Ray Gawendo
Tells Her Tragic Story
by ELHS Student, Shelby Kaplan

On March 20, approximately half the school crowded into the library to hear Ray Gawendo talk about her experiences and struggle during the Holocaust.

The Human Rights and Wrongs class hosted the talk and reception to celebrate Ray, her courage and her 99th birthday.

Ray never expected to be celebrating her 99th birthday in America with hundreds of high school students. During WWII, Ray was forced into the Klooga Concentration Camp for three years where she held onto only the hope that she would make it out alive.

“It’s not something that you learn, just do. Somebody had to survive,” said Ray when asked about how she managed to make it through the camp.

Ray only recently started telling her story, but now she has talked to multiple groups and made sure people heard what she has to say. “I owed it to the other victims; their stories deserve to be shared just as mine does,” Ray said as she explained why she started sharing her experience.

“You are (us students) the last generation that gets to hear these testimonies first hand,” said Human Rights and Wrongs teacher Shannon Saglio. “This is how we stop history from repeating itself.”

East Lyme High Saves Lives with Blood Drive
By ELHS Student, Kendall Roberts

On the morning of Monday, May 24th, East Lyme High School’s South Gym was transformed into a well-oiled medical machine.

Bustling with experienced doctors and nurses, equipped with medical beds and eager volunteers, and ringing with the sound of excited donors, the South Gym became the venue of the annual ELHS blood drive.

ELHS has been working with the Red Cross organization and hosting blood drives at the school for more than 20 years. This year, however, had one of the best turnouts yet.

Last year, the drive collected from 25 donors. This year, the Senate made it their goal to reach 45 donors by the end of the day. Not only did the senate reach their goal, they exceeded it by 11 people, resulting in a total of 56 donors in only seven hours.

In addition to the great turnout of donors, the drive also had a great number of student volunteers.

“We can’t do it on our own,” said Senate Advisor, William Reed. “It really can’t happen without the student volunteers.”

Student senators who contributed their time were given jobs of checking people in and making sure donors were following correct protocol before and after giving blood. This included making sure donors were drinking plenty of water before giving blood and eating plenty of sugar after. It also included the huge task of carefully watching donors for signs of paleness or uneasiness and reporting it to the Red Cross nurses.

“It takes a lot of responsibility,” said Mr. Reed. “But the students all took their jobs very seriously.”

The success of the day will travel beyond ELHS halls. For each pint of blood given, up to three lives will be saved. “It’s a really good feeling knowing that I could help someone in need and maybe even save a life,” said junior and first time donor Shawn Pagano.
Safe Driving PSA Created by ELHS Students
Named CT State Finalist by DMV
By ELHS Student, Drew Bradley

Each year, the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles runs a teen safe driving video contest for state high school students to compete in. Students must work in teams of no more than five to create a 25-second video that promotes a thematic message chosen by the DMV that is related to safe driving.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWT5m5zJ7jA&sns=em
View Finalist Video Created by ELHS Students.

This year, seniors Zach Kosakowski, DJ Rose, and Jay Alpert created a video that was chosen as a statewide Top-10 finalist in the contest.

The theme of this year’s contest was “Teen Drivers: Put Your Brakes on Distractions!” and each member of the winning group will receive an iPad. In addition to that, the winning group’s school will receive $1,000 to use for future projects.

A week of work went into completing the 25-second video project, as Kosakowski had to write and film the video, and Rose and Alpert put the final touches on it and edited the video down to 25 seconds in length. Their hard work paid off as their video has amassed over 1,600 views on YouTube in under three weeks. Although they would love to win the contest, the three group members also hope that the message behind their video is well-received no matter what the outcome is.

“We are honored and humbled to have been selected as finalists and we hope that the message behind our video is carried throughout the community regardless of whether or not we win,” said Alpert.

Records are Made to be Broken

Senior, Jenna Schumacher, stands alone atop the girls’ basketball scoring list.

By ELHS Student, Jordon Edwards

Senior, Jenna Schumacher, had a record breaking year, the most significant of these is breaking the school record for career points. The old record was 1186 points held by Elizabeth Buckley.

As a captain, Schumacher had an amazing season averaging just over 15 points per game leading her team to regular season record of 13-8.

“I was nervous and anxious during the day,” said Schumacher. “I was trying not to think about it.” Jenna broke the record in a 53-18 home win against Woodstock Academy, scoring on her first shot. The game was stopped for her to take in the moment.

“The ref blew the whistle and (Mr.) Handler came out to the court to tell everyone,” said Schumacher. “I teared up a little bit and got a little caught up in the moment.”

Head coach, Colleen Hardison, is very proud of Schumacher accomplishing her goal. “Jenna has been a really hard worker ever since she was a freshman and I was the JV coach,” said Hardison. “She is a great ‘lead by example’ leader and always sticks up for her teammates”

Jack Biggs coached Elizabeth Buckley and has seen Jenna play, as well as coaching Jenna in volleyball.

“What’s intriguing about both players is that they are both lefties,” said Biggs. “They are both great athletes and had great leadership qualities, especially Jenna. She was a great leader in volleyball and an excellent leader in basketball.”
How the exchange program has Principal Susi and Chinese Representative, Avie Huang, going back to School.

by ELHS Student James Kwon

Looking for knowledge about the American school system, Avie Huang, a representative from the Chinese sister school, visited East Lyme High School. Her priority was to get a grasp on the academic side of the United States, as well as for cultural values we have to offer.

Huang’s plan is to improve her international school in China by emulating American academic standards and values. She believes that this change will improve her students’ learning experiences.

“We are willing to change many things so we can have an American school style,” said Huang. “I think by doing this the students will benefit.”

To help her reach her goal, ELHS Principal, Michael Susi, also made a trip to the sister school in China to give them insight on how American schools work.

“I’ve never been to China but I did hear about their collaboration efforts with America,” said Susi. “The kids were polite and would go out of their way to say hello.” Principal Susi also admires how Chinese students handle academics and school work. “They’re very dedicated and focused,” said Susi. “I think we can learn from other countries about work ethic and overall importance to education.”

Using the information she gathered in her three week visit, Huang will also prepare 10 exchange students to come to ELHS by teaching them about the American school system and culture. “It will be very hard for the students to adapt to the culture and language,” said Huang. “Now that we’re moving into a global economy, this generation will interact with more people around the world that I ever am, so this will benefit them.”

The 10 select Chinese students are currently sophomores and will be coming to ELHS their senior year in the autumn of 2015. They are currently learning through a curriculum that is very similar to ours, right down to the same textbooks and lesson plans. “When they get here as seniors, we would hope that they are prepared,” said Global Language Department Head, Laurie Barry. “AP classes are hard enough even with speaking and reading fluent English.”

Host families will host these students for the duration of the school year. In addition, by participating in this American exchange program, the Chinese students will have an edge in the American college selection process. “American college is probably a goal for most of these kids,” said Barr.

As students from different countries meet at ELHS, they will have the opportunity of giving each other a slice of a foreign culture and academic views; living up to the name of an “exchange” program.
Second graders at Niantic Center School have been getting their hands dirty in music class by playing with trash and have learned ways to be more environmentally friendly and thankful for the things we have. The students discussed and considered all the things we throw away and whether these items could be used again. Their teachers, Mrs. Fain and Mrs. Dishaw refer to this as turning “trash-to-treasure.” These second graders have taken this lesson one step further in Mr. Stellner’s music class by creating their own musical instruments from garbage.

The students were shown a video on the “Landfill Harmonic Orchestra” of Caterura, Paraguay. Caterura is a village built on a landfill where many families are too poor to work out of their conditions, leaving their children vulnerable and subjected to the same fate or worse. An environmental engineer/music teacher, Favio Chávez, works to help these children by providing a means out of their situations: music. Mr. Chávez and others in the village have utilized the very trash in the village to create high quality sounding instruments for the children to use. The sound produced is comparable to the sound of an orchestra composed of normal instruments. The result was tremendously successful. The story of the “Recycled Orchestra” has spread throughout mainstream media and has appeared on shows such as “60 Minutes” and has its own full-length documentary. Niantic Center School students immediately began raiding their garbage cans for materials and presented their instruments in music class. The results were astonishing! Instruments of all shapes and sizes were crafted. String instruments were made from boxes and rubber bands; shakers were made from soda bottles and frozen peas; oboes were made from plastic straws; even full-size guitars were made out of scrap wood! Instruments of all shapes and sizes entered “The Fish School” in Niantic and have been making beautiful music ever since. Readers will have an opportunity to see and hear the instruments up close and personal at Niantic Center’s Spring Concert on May 28th at 10:30 and 2:30. Come on down and be prepared for a stinkin’ good show!

Submitted by Nicholas Stellner, Elementary Music Teacher

Go to www.landfillharmonicmovie.com to learn more about this story.
Third grade students at Flanders and their Environmental Science partners from East Lyme High School learned about ecosystems, predators and their prey. The focus of the activity was to determine how an organism’s adaptation(s) help it to survive within an ecosystem (Plant & Animal Adaptations), as well as how predator birds help with the environment (Conservation of Earth’s Materials). Using the grounds at Flanders, students played a game called Predator/Prey. This game focused on how predators face challenges in finding and catching prey. Students learned that animals have developed special adaptations that help them find their prey such as the excellent eye sight of raptors and finely tuned hearing of owls. They also learned that predators benefit the environment by keeping prey population at a level that can be supported by the environment, and that predators also reduce the impact to humans.

As far as prey goes, the students learned that camouflage, the ability to blend in with the surroundings, can determine whether a prey remains hidden or identified by its predator. Fun was had by all!

Submitted by Ms. Vaudreuil, Flanders Teacher and Mr. Harfenist, ELHS Teacher
Since she was 8 years old, junior Jenny Aylward knew she saw seams and needles in her future. Aylward found her love of clothing at a very young age when she would create miniature outfits for her American Girl Doll. Now, nine years later, she is constructing original pieces for herself to don.

“The fashion industry is very glamorous and just has so many possibilities. It’s something I want to be involved in for my career,” said Aylward.

As a freshman, Aylward took Clothing Construction I and is currently enrolled in Fashion World. She plans on taking Clothing II and WISE as a senior to further prepare for her future career.

Clothing I teacher, Linda Foote, said, “She has a good sense of sewing and is a quick learner. I remember her saying her freshman year that fashion was what she wanted to do.”

Aylward gets inspiration from high fashion lines such as Tommy Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren. She hopes to have her own line one day that reflects this couture-style with her own creative twist.

Outside of school, Aylward attends classes at the Barn for Artistic Youth where she works on her portfolio for college. Portfolio requirements differ for each college, but most in Aylward’s interest area call for a number of drawings, clothing designs and actual garments.

Her number one college choice is the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York. Rather than requiring all students to take all basic art courses their freshman year, FIT allows students to begin taking classes related to their major immediately.

Aylward also shows interest in Parsons School of Design, Maine College of Art and Rhode Island School of Design, where she completed a wedding dress design class this fall.

She has created everything from headbands and maxi skirts, to cocktail dresses. Her current project is a gold formal gown that she is contemplating using as her own prom dress.

“I’ve seen all of Jenny’s clothes and they are incredible. All of them look like they came right off the rack at a store,” said junior Mady Bowman.

Creating a piece includes finding the perfect pattern and fabric, and taking the time to plan the “perfect look.”

“Sometimes I’ll start something with a limited plan and use trial and error,” said Aylward, “but it mostly ends up being an error.”

As for the future, Aylward plans to apply to pre-college summer courses at the New Hampshire Institution of Art as well as Fashion Illustration classes at the Rhode Island School of Design and Lyme Academy of Art.
In need of a third person for their boat in the cardboard boat race, senior Stephanie Ollhoff and junior Rebecca Menghi invited Stephanie’s mother, Christine, to row bow seat on their cardboard boat, *Pilot*.

“It all started when I saw Mr. Tucker building [boats] for teachers in the school who brought their kids to row with them,” said Stephanie. “They were pretty small. *Pilot* was relatively big and Mr. Tucker said we needed a third person.”

In last minute desperation for another participant, Stephanie had the idea to bring her mother, Christine Ollhoff, who teaches 3rd grade at Niantic Center School.

“If teachers could bring their kids, why couldn’t I bring my mom?” said Stephanie. “I asked her and she wasn’t sure at first, saying she would have to check with her principal at NCS, Melissa DeLoreto. It turned out that Ms. DeLoreto was totally for it, and said she should bring her class with her on a field trip.” In order to keep the spirit of school, the field trip had to be educational. The day before the race, Stephanie went to her mother’s class and talked to the kids about the boat race and all that went into it.

“She came in for about 40 minutes and talked to them about the process of building the boat,” said Ms. Ollhoff. “She asked them if they knew what engineering was, then talked about how things were put together and problem solving. The kids were thrilled and so were the parents.”

On race day, Ms. Ollhoff and her class were a tad late, which gave Stephanie an “anxiety attack.” Coming into the race, they had all the normal worst-case scenarios in their minds.

“When we stepped in, we almost tipped the boat,” said Stephanie. “By the time we got it settled, Mr. Tucker called go and we were caught off guard.”

Despite this, the Menghi-Ollhoff-Ollhoff team came in second in their heat and managed to keep afloat for the entire length of the pool. But that was not even the most exciting part.

“The kids were directly at the end of our lane, so they could stand up and cheer,” said Ms. Ollhoff. “It was nerve-racking in the water, but the race made for an exciting environment and we all had a fun time.”
Danny Munch Goes Above and Beyond

Junior Danny Munch has earned 180 hours of community service so far this year.

By ELHS Student Cara Bradley

Being a member of the Leo Club, the president of the local 4-H club, and volunteering at the Mystic Aquarium has earned East Lyme High School junior, Danny Munch, 180 hours of community service so far this year.

As a member of the Leo Club, Munch commits many hours to various events that the club plans from pasta suppers to car washes. He first got involved with the Leo Club in fifth grade and has been an active member since. Through the Leo Club’s fundraisers, he supports local charities and soup kitchens.

Most of Munch’s volunteer hours come from an active volunteer position he has at the Mystic Aquarium. He helps teach guests about the aquarium animals and assists the workers with everyday animal care tasks. Munch loves animals and even wants to pursue a future in animal care. “I raise exotic breeds of chickens, pigeons, and pheasants for state and regional shows and keep multiple freshwater and saltwater fish tanks with exotic species of fish and aquatic invertebrates,” said Munch.

When he is not dedicating his time to helping others, Munch is training to become a Connecticut state falconer. “Most people have never heard of falconry but it is the act of training birds of prey to work with their owners to capture their food,” said Munch.

“Falconry requires many licenses, lots of studying for state mandated tests, and a lot of interest in birds.” Currently Munch is in line to become the 11th falconer in Connecticut.

Munch also works with the New London county 4-H club and has been the president of the local club for the past three years. He has worked with the UConn extension center to teach children and adults about agriculture, raising different species of farm animals, and training kids how to show species of animals in state and county competitions.

“Danny has a rare talent, he can relate to animals and kids to bring out the best in all,” said Munch’s 4-H leader Nancy Kalal. “Danny is a hard worker and a smart worker. He can look ahead on a project to see what needs to be done, and then accomplish it, without fanfare.”

“It is hard to juggle honors and AP courses while staying involved with the community, but Danny does it very well,” said junior, Robert Alden, a good friend of Munch’s and fellow member of the Leo Club. “And that is what makes him such a unique person, he displays the personality of a studious person in school but at the same time has spare time to help the community in a fun way.”
East Lyme High School’s No Excuse for Abuse Club is trying to raise awareness about domestic violence and the harm it can cause a person.

No Excuse for Abuse was involved this holiday season with helping Safe Futures in New London, formerly known as the Women’s Shelter. This year the money that was raised during the week of the Extravaganza was donated there.

Physical Education teacher Jennifer Carney-Brush contacted the club before the Extravaganza and wanted their help with donations. Meghan McParland, graduate of ELHS and founder of the No Excuse for Abuse Club, had made donations to Safe Futures as well.

“We made the sign ‘Make a Difference’ for Safe Futures and are really pleased that this year’s profits went there,” said president of the club, senior Molly Bennett.

Officers of the club include seniors Hannah Stiles (Vice President), Emily Leen (Secretary), and Kevin Kwon (Treasurer). They meet every other Tuesday to discuss upcoming events they might want to participate in.

In early November, Physics teacher Daniel Nazzaro and senior Randall Clark, who have training in martial arts and self-defense, came in to do a demonstration. The club was shown some basic moves about how to protect themselves if someone came up to harm them.

About 40 people attended. “It was pretty impressive and very educational,” said Bennett.

The Scoop on No Excuse
ELHS’ No Excuse for Abuse Club focuses on the awareness of domestic violence
By ELHS Student Emma Dufresne

The third East Lyme High School Empty Bowls Project raised over $3,400 for Care & Share this past March. Over 275 guests attended, and more than 400 handcrafted bowls were sold. Many guests also contributed non-perishable items to Care & Share’s food pantry.

Thank you to the students, volunteers and the many members of the community responsible for making the 2014 Empty Bowls Project a success.

Contributions were kindly donated from many local businesses, including Chabaso Bakery, Smith’s Acres, Flanders Fish Market, Tri-Town Foods, and the East Lyme High School Technology Education Department Viking Print Shop. The Empty Bowls Project was made possible by generous grants from Stop & Shop, and the Dime Bank Foundation, Inc.

The Empty Bowls Project is a nationwide venture of the Imagination/Render Group, a non-profit organization that promotes the use of the arts and education to enact positive and lasting social change. The project is called “Empty Bowls” because the bowl is a reminder that someone’s bowl is always empty, and giving to a local hunger fighting organization can help end food insecurity in a community.

Submitted by East Lyme High School Art Educator, Eloise Gada
Math is in the air at Lillie B. Haynes Elementary School. Understanding the importance of achieving fluency and automaticity with addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division facts, the third grade teaching team has developed a motivating month long event, Math Mania Month, to encourage students to master their math facts.

Third graders in Mrs. Ballestrini, Mrs. Arnold, Ms. Kuja, and Mr. Faulkner's class are empowered to master their facts using different strategies and techniques including iPads, websites, flashcards, and student created games. Students can then choose to sign up for their assessment to measure mastery at our “Math Mania University”, a specially partitioned area in the classroom. As students move towards mastery, they are encouraged to reflect on areas of focus in order to guide their future practice.

Once the students master each type of math fact, they are congratulated with an opportunity to have their pictures taken in costume to be displayed on the Math Mania wall as they achieve the mathematical titles of Addition Magician, Subtraction Superstar, Multiplication MVP, and Division Detective.

The third graders have met these challenges with enthusiasm and confidence. In fact, the third grade plans to extend this math event until students reach the goals they have set. We look forward to continuing to grow and develop this event for years to come.

Submitted by Jenn Ballestrini and Melissa Chiappone, LBH Gr. 3 Teachers
In the dim corner of a Niantic Center School classroom, a fourth-grade girl and boy argue. Incessantly. But their teacher doesn’t mind, in fact she encourages it. Why? They’re debating points of view and which character in the fairy tale, *Hansel and Gretel*, deserves to be thought of as misunderstood.

“I think it’s the mom,” says the boy quietly, with a grin to an observer. “She left them out in the woods. She didn’t even let them back into the house. She was worried about food.” And while his reserved partner agrees, she argues that the witch “really is the worst out of the witch and mom.”

Across the room, two boys persevere in their struggle to rewrite a portion of *Little Red Riding Hood* from the point of view of the wolf. They determine that Red Riding Hood wasn’t too smart to be talking to a stranger in the woods (and a wolf, no less) but labor over how to persuade their readers that the wolf has been misunderstood.

Two other partners nearby come up with far-fetched explanations for the wolf in *Hansel and Gretel* and begin producing a public service announcement by the wolf’s lawyer, with the Tellagami app on the iPad. They cackle with glee as they edit and read the persuasive paragraph that they’ve written.

Another pairing nearby produces a Tellagami piece about the “old lady” in *Rapunzel*.

The debates, challenges, and iPad productions were included in a set of lessons and a performance task integrating fairy tales, points of view, persuasive writing, academic vocabulary, and a focus on discourse. Throughout the school, Niantic Center teachers continue to focus this year on their quality of instruction and lessons and units that increase the rigor in their classrooms, as they find new ways to incorporate the Common Core State Standards.

“Basically, academic rigor is helping kids learn to think for themselves,” says author Robyn Jackson (ASCD, *How to Support Struggling Students*, 2013). Rigor has four essential components: students know how to create their own meaning out of what they learn, they organize information so they create mental models, they integrate individual skills into whole sets of processes, and they apply what they've learned to new or novel situations.

As always, at Niantic Center, this means setting high expectations and helping students achieve them. Author Barbara Blackburn explains, this is “creating an environment in which each student is expected to learn at high levels, each student is supported so he or she can learn at high levels, and each student demonstrates learning at high levels. … Rigor is for every student you teach (Mason, NAESP, 2013).”

Jackson maintains, “Rigor requires rigor—if we want to develop rigorous learning and thinking for our kids, then we have to be more rigorous in our teaching. It depends on the way we do professional development and how we train teachers, but rigor can become more natural in the classroom (ASCD, 2013).”

In NCS classrooms, teachers are finding creative, engaging ways to introduce rigor:

- After swapping for Read Across America Day, a kindergarten and fourth grade teacher teamed up to introduce point of view with persuasive writing to their classrooms, using *The Day the Crayons Quit* and *I Want My Hat Back* as mentor texts. After the readings, kindergarten students wrote letters to the other Letter People asking them to move over, so
there would be room on the shelf for Mr. X. Their letters must have worked, because the next day, Mr. X was on the shelf and had written a letter to the kindergartners thanking them for their help!

- In another kindergarten classroom, students teamed up bi-weekly to read with first grade book buddies. They listened to books about friendships, veterans, and robots (by NCS’s Read Across America Day author Dana Meachen Rau). Last month, they read about a lucky leprechaun. Afterward, they collaboratively wrote pieces about what they are lucky to have in their lives.

- One first grade classroom teamed up with a ELHS science teacher to plan a program for the first graders that included a field trip to the high school planetarium. The children engaged in hands-on activities that complimented the science curriculum unit: “Our Sun.” Utilizing iPads, models and the Smart Board, to project onto the dome, the children took an interactive quiz and conducted simulations to learn more about this special star, our earth, and the seasons.

- To connect the curriculum with the world, second grade teachers used Google Earth on the iPads to provide students with a virtual tour of the route immigrants could have taken, upon entering the United States via Ellis Island. After “crossing” the Atlantic Ocean in a one to two week voyage, children “traveled” to Ellis Island and past the Statue of Liberty for medical and legal inspections.

- To connect the curriculum with the world, second grade students also used Google Earth throughout the inquiry-based unit to integrate lessons on geography about continents and countries with virtual tours of ancestral lands.

Some completed a research project and poster of an ancestral country, while other students culminated the unit with an art and writing project about each student's family tree.

- Third grade students increased their exposure to reading and problem solving rigor by preparing and performing in a reader’s theater project. Selected stories were divided into parts or characters. After parts were assigned, students practiced fluency. Lessons were presented in proper enunciation, expression, and body language. Community members lent their expertise in order to perfect the theatrical aspects. A live audience performance capped off the experience.

- In fourth grade, eight large, two-story, clear soda containers line the rooms, with two ecosystems within each container. At the bottom sits a self-sustaining aquarium with fish, snails, and sea plants built by students. In the top, the terrarium holds a variety of plants, pill bugs, and jumping crickets. With hands-on activities, the children investigate, observe, and develop in-depth understandings of ecosystems, living and non-living organisms, and pollution. The project integrates science, math, and technology with reading and writing.

Submitted by
Kimberly Hill, NCS Grade 4 Teacher
On Friday, March 28th, 2014 Mrs. Woitovich, ELMS Media Specialist, and Mrs. Johnson, ELMS Social Studies teacher, accompanied thirty 8th Grade students from ELMS to a Civil War Dream Conference at Connecticut Central State University. These students read *Midnight Rising: John Brown and the Raid that Sparked the Civil War* written by Pulitzer Prize winning author, Tony Horwitz, and participated in a book club that met weekly prior to the conference. While at the conference, students had an opportunity to meet Tony Horwitz and ask questions about the book. ELMS students submitted several questions to the author for consideration and Jon Gignac, Claire Mason, and Anna Fennell’s questions were selected to be asked in a forum of over 400 students representing 11 schools. Additionally, students participated in a CCSU campus tour, book signing, and observed a debate on slavery between Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and Alexander Stephens.

This exceptional opportunity was free to our students and allowed them to delve deeper into the history of the American Civil War by examining John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry in the year 1859. Our students were asked to think critically about John Brown and the full implications of his raid. “Midnight Rising” provided the students with a full account of the history of John Brown, a Connecticut native, and the effects of the Harper’s Ferry raid on our pre-civil war country. Horowitz’s text is rich with primary sources, including illustrations and text from speeches and letters. Additionally, many comparisons were drawn to modern terrorism and warfare and the involvement of the United States. This is sure to be an experience that our students will always treasure!

Submitted by East Lyme Middle School Teachers
Richelle Johnson & Carla Woitovich
This year Flanders School has been working hard to ensure that we maintain a strong sense of community and keep school magical for the children. One of the things we have done is to organize surprise activities that the whole school can enjoy together. We call these random acts of fun “Expect the Unexpected”.

In March, our school wide activity was a leprechaun hunt. About 30 leprechauns were placed in the hallways throughout Flanders and Central Office. All children were challenged to see how many they could find in a 15 minute search! The activity was differentiated for each grade level by changing how much information they were given and the method of recording their findings. On St. Patrick’s Day, the hallways were bustling with boisterous students who were busily collaborating to search.

What unexpected activity happened in April? A school wide Bingo game over the loud speaker!

Submitted by
Patrice Romeo, Flanders Reading Recovery Teacher