

Putting Fictional Characters in the Hot Seat

by Jennifer Estabrook

Dramatic classroom exercise fun way to understand characters.

Imagine this: eighth grade students clamoring and pleading to sit in the front of the classroom to be questioned, probed, and cross-examined by their peers. It has become a favorite activity in this English classroom, a dramatic activity affectionately referred to as the "Hot Seat." Although there are many options for responding to a text dramatically, in the "Hot Seat" each student takes the role of a character in

character drives stories because stories are primarily about what people most desire. Second, the study of character requires a close reading of a text, which helps develop the capacity to draw inferences and conclusions from small details. Middle school students need extensive practice interpreting the nuances of a narrative text. Finally, the dramatic interpretation of a character offers the opportunity to develop higher level thinking skills. When students

that helps us understand someone's character is a simple one: what do you most want? From this question, students can then begin to think about why that character wants this and what he or she is willing to do to get it. Other revealing questions include: How did you feel? What did you mean? Why did you say that? Why did you do that?

Students who have been chosen to sit in the hot seats must base their responses on evidence embedded in

"That was fun!"

a story and responds to questions from that character's point of view. The goal is for students to come away with a deeper understanding of the characters, their relationships to one another, their motives, beliefs, and feelings.

There are several rationales for integrating the "Hot Seat" and other dramatic activities in the middle school classroom. First, developmentally, students at this age are interested in the lives of the characters in a story and how they respond to triumphs and tragedies. This makes the study and performance of character an engaging aspect of the literature curriculum. It also helps them to understand how

present a dramatic interpretation of a character, they are demonstrating the ability to synthesize information.

The power and success of this activity lies in the questions themselves. After being assigned a chapter or short story, students are required to come to class with thoughtful, interpretive questions to present to the "characters." They have been taught to think beyond the more salient aspects of character such as physical description and delve into complex aspects of character, which truly make them human: motivation, personality, beliefs, inconsistencies and relationships with others.

One of the most revealing questions

the text. Skilled readers understand the author's purpose and can do this easily, but many middle school students need help making inferences, especially with difficult texts. During this activity we return to the text frequently to help all students understand what the author is implying and how we know that.

Now imagine this: eighth grade students scrambling and rushing to leave to get to the next class, but in the midst of the chaos a barely audible remark is heard. "That was fun." Not all days are like this, but once in a while it all comes together: students are engaged, the discussion is thoughtful, and the day's objectives are met.

Family Math and Science Night at Fairmount School

P. Butler

How many sides are on a dodecahedron? What exactly is "gak," and how do you make it? How can families have fun with math and science every day? These questions and many more were answered at Fairmount School this past November as the staff hosted the second annual Math and Science Family Night.

Around 175 people attended the two-hour event at Fairmount School, organized with the theme "Traveling the World of Math and Science." Participants received a passport upon arrival, directing them to select three of 10 math / science activities sponsored by classroom

teachers and staff. The short, hands-on activities allowed families to see the fun, easy and exciting ways that math and science can be brought into their homes on a daily basis. Activities ranged from rockets to math bingo, from the science of paper airplanes to a chemical combination known as "gak."

Families also enjoyed snacks with a math theme as well, as they were asked to figure out how many cups of punch could be poured from a five gallon dispenser and the number of apples in a five pound bag. Overall, the evening was a fun way to promote a home-school connection and to showcase the exciting world of math and science.

**"Tell me and I forget.
Show me and I remember.
Involve me and I understand."**

Chinese proverb

J.F.D. Science Teacher Receives National Award

Paula Leavitt, James F. Doughty grade 6 teacher, has been named a recipient of the Education Achievement Award by the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, an organization focused on improving the scientific literacy of America's youth.

Mrs. Leavitt was one of 6 teachers from America's public schools to be honored. One educator from Alberta, Canada also was recognized. The 7 recipients will be recognized in a ceremony to be held this spring in Washington, D.C.

Mrs. Leavitt, who has been teaching in Bangor since 1984, has been active in a variety of science initiatives for students, including the Solar Car Design Build and Race Program and the Challenger Space Center. Additionally, Mrs. Leavitt has presented on a variety of science inquiry and activity topics at various professional development workshops.

Software from page 1

teachers. Tracking student achievement is certainly not a new concept to the Bangor School Department; however, this locally-designed software program is extremely important because it allows teachers and administrators to monitor students' progress as they work to earn the required points necessary to receive a high school diploma (See insert: "Two-Part System for High School Graduation").

There is a state-wide need to track achievement of the MLR, and recently Messalonskee High School in Oakland and Skowhegan Area High School entered into partnership agreements with the Bangor School Department for use and continued development of the MLR achievement database. Having seen demonstrations of the software on several different occasions, both school systems pursued their request to use the program. While several school districts have expressed interest in purchasing the software, it was determined that these two systems are a great match with Bangor, both in terms of how they have designed their local assessment systems, as well as their ability to implement and support Bangor's MLR database.

We look forward to this partnership with Messalonskee and Skowhegan. If Bangor's database can be as successful in other locations as it has been in Bangor, it will be hard to say how many more school systems might be interested in purchasing this amazing piece of software.