

In this Issue

- 1 ... NAGC Programming Standards
- 4 ... President's Letter
- 6 ... VAG Innovative Idea Grants
- 15 ... VAG Summer Scholarships



Newsletter

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Parents, Educators and Community Leaders Advocating Appropriate Instruction for All Gifted Learners in Virginia

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New NAGC Pre-K–12 Gifted Programming Standards: Changes and Opportunities

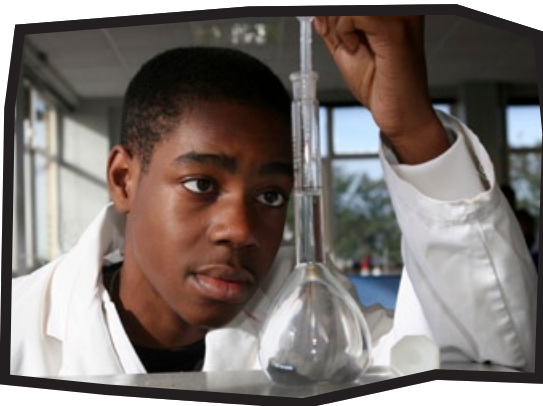
Master teachers in gifted education have always been concerned about their students' performance. They want to know, "What are the best practices in gifted education? How will these practices affect the students that I teach?" The new NAGC P-12 Gifted Programming Standards address these important questions, placing the student with gifts and talents at the heart of each standard. The new standards are different from the 1998 Gifted Program Standards in six important ways, providing concurrent opportunities for all educators who serve and advocate for students with gifts and talents.

1. The standards' focus is on student outcomes.

The change: The previous standards provided guiding principles and standards but did not include student outcomes. This new focus requires teachers and schools to assess the effectiveness and the value of gifted education programming. Educators will need to link what they do to the effect on students. For example, "Educators use differentiated pre- and post-performance-based assessments to measure the progress of students with gifts and talents" (Standard 2 (Assessment), Evidence-Based Practice 2.4.1) so that "Students with gifts and talents demonstrate advanced and complex learning as a result of using multiple, appropriate, and ongoing assessments" (Student Outcome 2.4).

The opportunity: Because educators are able to show the effects of a particular practice on gifted and talented students' performance, they have information that they can use in changing school practices; advocating at the local, state and national levels; and accessing greater resources.

continued on page 2



Standards

continued from page 1



2. The standards emphasize evidence-based practices.

The change: While the previous standards reflected the best indicators of practice at the time, the field has evolved since their creation over ten years ago. The new standards include only those practices that are supported by peer-reviewed research, literature, and/or practice-based studies.

The opportunity: Educators have access to an extensive set of research studies that can provide support for their practices and also can be used in professional development.

3. The standards are carefully aligned to both the NAGC-CEC/TAG teacher preparation standards and the 1998 Pre-K – Grade 12 Gifted Program Standards.

The change: The new standards integrate the two sets of standards within the evidence-based practices and adhere closely to the language of both. For example, the student identification standard in the 1998 Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Program Standards states, “Student assessment data should include...multiple assessment methods” (Student Identification 4.0E) that “measure diverse abilities, talents, strengths...(Student Identification 2). The new standards parallel this language by stating, “Educators select and use multiple assessments that measure diverse abilities, talents and strengths...(Standard 2 (Assessment), Evidence-based Practice 2.2.2). Similarly, both the teacher preparation (Assessment Standard 8, skill 1) and the new standards (Standard 2 (Assessment), Evidence-based Practice 2.3.1) state, “Uses nonbiased and equitable approaches for identifying students with gifts and talents.”

The opportunity: If educators have been using the 1998 standards, it will be easy to shift to the new programming standards since they are closely aligned. Moreover, professional development that was aligned using the previous set of standards can be easily adapted to the new standards.

4. The standards reflect a strong emphasis on diversity.

The change: The new standards recognize that diversity and excellence are essential in realizing the ideals in a democratic society (TAG, 2008). They use a broader definition of diversity that includes cultural, linguistic, intellectual, sexual orientation, and disabilities, and overtly stress the importance of developing skills in this area in 14 of the evidence-based practices and student outcomes. For example, “Students with identified needs represent diverse backgrounds and reflect the total student population of the district” (Standard 2 (Assessment), Student Outcome 2.3).

The opportunity: These standards support educators in finding giftedness, ensuring equitable student outcomes, and in involving all school personnel, families, and communities in educating gifted and talented children who come from diverse backgrounds. They indicate the field’s commitment to serving students who are underrepresented in gifted education programming.

continued on page 3



Standards

continued from page 2

This article originally appeared in the Winter 2011 issue of *Teaching for High Potential*. The column followed on the heels of the newly released NAGC PreK-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards. The efforts of the workgroup that produced the standards was chaired by Dr. Susan Johnsen of Baylor University. The workgroup's multi-year efforts have produced a strong set of student-outcome driven programming standards, providing relevant and timely guidance to schools. For more information regarding the new standards, please visit the NAGC website, www.nagc.org.

Pre-K – Grade 12 Gifted Education Programming Standards ... <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=6524>

The programming standards were developed with input from a variety of stakeholders and integrate principles and concepts from the initial program standards, which were developed in 1998, and the national NAGC-CEC/TAG teacher preparation standards. A visit to standards section of the NAGC website will yield the revised programming standards, accompanying resources, guiding questions, FAQ's, a research base, and glossary of terms, **all** that you need to increase services for high-ability students.

5. The standards emphasize strong relationships between gifted education, general education, and special education.

The change: While the 1998 standards did not address gifted education's relationship to special education, the revised standards stress the importance of partnerships among all educators in addressing the needs of all students. For example, Standard 5 (Programming) states, "Students with gifts and talents demonstrate progress as a result of the shared commitment and coordinated services of gifted education, general education, special education, and related professional services..." (Student Outcome 5.2).

The opportunity: Gifted educators have opportunities, including as part of a Response-to-Intervention team, to collaborate with special and general educators in implementing rigorous differentiated curriculum, recognizing strengths early, scaffolding learning, and using data to make decisions about more intensive services.

6. The revised programming standards are more specific and integrate cognitive science research.

The change: Based on recent research on learning, the revised standards emphasize metacognition, higher-level thinking, and problem solving within the evidence-based practices. For example, Standard 3 (Curriculum Planning & Instruction) encourages educators to use critical and creative thinking strategies and problem solving and inquiry models (Evidence-based Practices 3.4.1–3.4.4).

The opportunity: The evidence-based practices are more specific and provide guidance to educators on the types of practices to implement that may effect student outcomes.

Conclusions ...

Adaptation to any new change takes time and patience, careful planning, and discussion requiring a plan for implementation. In order to implement the new standards, educators will need to examine the ways that they assess student outcomes. These assessments may be in both qualitative and quantitative formats and include products, performances, above-grade level tests, nationally normed tests, and other tests that focus on higher thinking skills. The workgroup is now developing recommendations for educators in this important assessment area.

The development of these standards evolved over time and involved many people. I would like to acknowledge those who developed the 1998 Program Standards and the PreK-12 workgroup members who diligently committed their time and energy to this important project. We hope that these new standards will translate into better programming for all students with gifts and talents.

Reference

The Association for the Gifted (2008). *Diversity and developing gifts and talents: A call to action*. Retrieved from <http://www.cectag.org>



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President's Letter

These are exciting times for gifted education. With the current focus on 21st Century Skills, educators of the gifted have a unique opportunity to engage in dialogue and an exchange of ideas that support critical and creative thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving – all hallmarks of gifted education and now seen as a requirement for all learners. Thinking, reasoning, reflecting, analyzing, discussing, and applying new ideas are essential characteristics of a climate of learning that encourages students to think on a higher level, challenge existing ideas, and entertain new possibilities for the future. The critical and creative thinking skills that are nurtured through problem-solving and problem-posing strategies and practices encourage students to move beyond a focus on getting the right answer for a test and instead encourage them to question the answers, formulate their own ideas, and seek solutions that are not ordinarily considered. In a time when new information and research are challenging experts in each field to be flexible, work collaboratively, and think creatively, educators of gifted learners have an important contribution to make to this dialogue and gifted learners will benefit from their efforts.

The focus on critical and creative thinking also helps us find and nurture gifted potential in students who have historically been underrepresented in gifted programs. When students are accepted, valued, and respected for the contributions that they are able to make through learning experiences that require advanced applications of knowledge, they are challenged and motivated to reach new heights and move beyond existing molds. Equity of opportunity can only become a reality when every student is encouraged to transcend prescribed limitations, raise and exceed their own expectations, and experience an educational environment that challenges them to discover and develop their highest potential.

As we evolve into a diverse global society, gifted educators can help lead the way by sharing practices and strategies that infuse 21st Century skills into learning experiences that will ultimately impact all learners. This will ensure that gifted learners have multiple opportunities to problem-solve, reflect, create, and collaborate as they generate new knowledge, understand complex issues, and conduct an active search for solutions and ideas that will shape our future.

Carol Horn

VAG Newsletter Dates and Deadlines

The VAG Newsletter is published online four times each year. Deadlines for items are November 15, February 15, May 15 and August 15. We invite you to submit your suggestions and/or articles you have written and would like to share with VAG members through this newsletter. Parents and teachers are especially encouraged to submit their children's original creative writing pieces. Email articles or photographs to vagifted@comcast.net or mail to VAG, P. O. Box 26212, Richmond, VA 23260-6212. Black and white or color prints can be used, but will not be returned to you.

Visit our web site – www.vagifted.org



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From the Executive Director



Thanks to all of you who supported VAG and gifted education by attending the 2011 conference in Williamsburg. We were fortunate to have outstanding presenters from across Virginia and beyond. Mark your calendar to attend the 2012 seminar to be held October 21-22, 2012 at the Wyndham Virginia Crossings Hotel & Conference Center in Richmond, Virginia.

Don't forget to visit our website: www.vagifted.org to learn about our continuing awards and scholarships: Nicholas Green Distinguished Student Award, Teacher of the Year, and Summer Scholarships, Parent of the Year, Leader of the Year, and Teacher Grants for Innovative Ideas. Contact your school division coordinator for gifted or visit our web site for application materials. Deadlines vary, so check them out today.

Liz Nelson

Legislative Visits

From February's visit to the General Assembly: Delegate Charles D. Poindexter, (second from right), 9th District, with Kevin Simms, Region VI and VAG Vice President, Diane Naff, Region VI, and Brenda Mash, Region VI.



VAG Membership Application

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ FaxNo. _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____ E-mail _____

Check as appropriate:

____ Parent _____ (Name of school division your child/children attend)

____ Professional _____ (Name of school division where you are employed)

____ 1 Year \$20.00 ____ 2 Years \$35.00 ____ New Member ____ Renewal – Membership No. _____

VAG Innovative Idea Grants

The Virginia Association for the Gifted presents up to 10 “Grants for Innovative Ideas” each in the amount of \$500 to individuals or teams whose proposed projects support the goals of VAG and directly services gifted students. The VAG Scholarship and Awards Committee awards the grants annually. Visit the VAG web site, www.vagifted.org, for application. The deadline for applications is December 1.

Here are reports from four of the 2011 grant recipients – **Donna Meade-Warren**, Fairfax County Public Schools, **Lisa Walker**, Virginia Beach Public Schools, **Jessica Roy**, Orange County Public Schools, and **Jenna Conlee**, Spotsylvania County Public Schools.

Next issue we’ll print reports from two other grant recipients – **Linda Waggaman**, Floyd County Public Schools on her project to have gifted/high ability students create public service announcements (PSAs) that reflect a need in that community, and **Martha Spencer**, Parkway Christian Academy, Roanoke, on her Cooking Science Investigation.

VAG Grant helps a Philosopher’s Club make a SPLASH!

by Denise Meade-Warren, Stratford Landing Elementary School, Fairfax County

I am the Advanced Academics Resource Teacher for Stratford Landing Elementary School in Fairfax County. My role is to collaborate with classroom teachers to provide challenging resources to develop critical thinking skills in students. I also provide direct services for certain students who were found eligible for that Level of Service.

As I began to write this article, the following quotes entered my mind:

- *“Let us examine this question together, my friend, and if you can contradict anything I say, do so, and I will be persuaded.”* – Socrates
- *“Intelligence is not how much you know or how fast you learn, but how you behave when you don’t know the answer.”* – Unknown
- *“Questions are the roots of knowledge that help us to grow.”* – Denise Meade-Warren



My philosophy as an educator has always regarded the empowerment of my students as most important within my classroom system. In my perspective, empowering activities take into consideration student Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983) which can be reflected in student process and products and help students make connections to big ideas/concepts to deepen understanding. I feel it is absolutely necessary to recognize that most students in elementary schools were born in the 21st century, therefore we need to teach them skills that will be applicable to them for when they enter the work force someday. We know that there will be jobs that have not been invented yet. Also, due to daily advancements in technology, the world as we know it is a much smaller place. Our students will need to have the following skills (P21.org):

- Self direction
- Flexibility
- Adaptability
- Cross-cultural awareness
- Critical Thinking
- Problem solving
- Responsibility
- Communication

For the past couple of years, our school has designated a half-hour period at the end of each school day, which is called “SPLASH,” for all staff and students to be engaged in a school-wide program to reinforce and enhance student learning. As a school we are dedicated to providing all students activities to cultivate their critical thinking skills. Within the Advanced Academics Department of Fairfax County Schools there are four Levels of Service at the elementary school level. I wanted to provide a Level I Service for the school to include all learners where they could be active participants and 21st century skills could be cultivated. This Level of Service is for all students to learn to think, reason, and problem solve through nine strategies that challenge students to apply knowledge in different ways. Because I was assigned to the second grade team, I was able to begin this project with all second grade students during “SPLASH” time.



continued on page 7

VAG Grants

continued from page 6

The second grade team and I collaborated about how we would organize the students. We decided to select students randomly from each of the three second grade classrooms, and each group would come to me for one month during “SPLASH” time for the Philosopher’s Club. Parents were all notified and they were very excited about this project.

Because of the VAG Grant I received, I was able to purchase books for this project. In addition to the books that were purchased, I used the book, *Wise Guy*, by M. D. Usher. This picture book served as a wonderful way to introduce the students to Socrates – and what a philosopher is. I told the students that Socrates continually asked questions which were “open-ended.” I then encouraged them to develop questions about things which they wondered about. It was quite interesting that so many students were interested in things such as, “Where does the universe end?” and “Why people

were created.” We then placed all questions on a wall in the classroom entitled, “The I Wonder Wall.” This helped the students really examine what “open-ended” questions were. As time went on, students became totally vested in the process of our Philosopher’s Club. I noticed that because they knew the expectations which included respectfully sitting in a circle with name tents that contained the last names of the students – ready to listen to each other. As each child was an active participant, they were delighted to call each other, “Mr. or Miss _____” as we read and discussed books.

In conclusion I am convinced more than ever that student participation in Philosopher’s Clubs really develops 21st century skills. The roots of questioning, collaborating, critical thinking, self-direction, and flexibility have grown in these students thanks to “The Philosopher’s Club”!

References

Touchstones Discussion Project, 522 Chesapeake Avenue,
Annapolis, Maryland 21403, www.touchstones.org,
410-263-2121

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills

Fairfax County Public Schools Advanced Academics Website



VAG Innovative Idea Grants

Green Grows the Community Garden: Planting the Seeds of Discovery

by Lisa A. Walker, M.A., Gifted Resource Teacher, Tallwood High School, Virginia Beach, 2002-03 VBCPS and VAG Region II Gifted Teacher of the Year

Creating connections among disciplines is often a daunting task for high school educators in this era of high-stakes testing. All too often, high school teachers have little or no contact with teachers outside our subject area, and as a result, rarely have time to collaborate.

In the fall of 2010, however, Tallwood High School, Virginia Beach, adopted a new paradigm and established a ninth grade gifted cluster to address this challenge. Ninth grade students identified for gifted services were clustered in Honors English, World History 1, Geometry, and Biology classes, and these teachers were scheduled with common planning time. As the GRT, I was tasked with the job of bringing these four disciplines together in order to assist the teachers to appropriately differentiate curriculum, instruction, and assessment for gifted learners, and to focus on the specific needs of these young people.

Our first task as a team was to design a project that would help us find connections among the four core subjects and allow our students to experience authentic learning. Discovering our common interest in gardening, we began our year-long project with high expectations and a willingness to let our students lead the way.

Thanks to an **Innovative Idea Grant from the VAG – *Green Grows the Community Garden*** – our ninth grade gifted cluster students at Tallwood High School were not only able to make meaningful connections among language arts, social studies, geometry, and biology, but they were also able to make a meaningful connection with the third grade gifted cluster class of our feeder school, Tallwood Elementary. Indeed, the students and teachers discovered that we had planted more than just vegetable seeds in this project based learning experience!

The Essential Question

Students were asked to consider the question: ***How can a community garden benefit the larger community?***

Right from the start, students were given ownership of the project and encouraged to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information and ideas across a wide range of sources in order to plan the garden from the ground up. Using such strategies as Sandra Kaplan's *Depth and Complexity* and Paul's *Reasoning Model*, each teacher designed lessons and activities that asked students to consider how their garden project also affected sustainability, interdependence, and the health literacy of our stakeholders. Throughout the year, connecting the garden project to course content and SOLs was a priority for the cluster teachers. THS World History 1 teacher, Caitlin Stravino's, asked students to look to the Aztecs for some gardening guidance.

continued on page 9



VAG Grants

continued from page 8

“The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.”

– Mark Van Doren

Our Problem: The soil in Virginia Beach is composed mostly of a heavy clay which drains slowly, meaning it stays saturated longer after rain or irrigation. Plant roots would remain wet and possibly rot. The sun comes out and dries the soil, forming a hard, cracked surface.

Aztec Problem: The Aztecs built their capital city, Tenochtitlan, on an island in the middle of Lake Texcoco. The land available for agriculture was limited and too poor in fertility to produce a sustainable yield.

Aztec Solution: A solution to this problem was the invention of chinampas or floating gardens. Chinampas were one of the most successful methods used by the Aztecs to increase farming productivity. Chinampas were made by piling mud on top of reeds. The mud was extremely fertile since they took it from the bottom of the lake.

Our Solution: The students were asked to study the Aztec’s use of chinampas. Their solution was to build raised garden beds above ground level. The beds were enclosed by rectangular wooden frames. Students were then asked to consider the following:

- What local materials would make a good soil for planting?
- Where can we find these materials?
- There is some evidence that the chemicals used in pressure treated wood can leach into the soil it comes in contact with. What could we do to prevent this from happening?
- The wooden frames need to be moved to our desired location. How can we get this done?

These questions guided our conversation and decision making throughout the process of building the garden beds, but most importantly, students were able to connect the content of the course to their own lives, a key goal of the grant.

Creating Connections

As the year progressed, students began to examine the nature of community gardening through a series of interdisciplinary lessons, but more importantly, they were able to see how they could use the skills from each of their core academic classes to assist them in developing their own garden on the grounds of Tallwood High School. Cluster students not only decided on the type of crops they grew, but also the methods to be used and the means for marketing the project to the community and home school.

continued on page 10



VAG Grants

continued from page 9

Throughout the year our students:

- Communicated with community experts and expressed their findings in expressive writing projects such as letters and brochures.
- Studied the theory of agriculture and its impact on both ancient and modern societies.
- Used geometry and math computer technology to design and construct raised beds.
- Researched, graphed, and plotted the outcomes of plants using the scientific method.
- Designed and wrote UBD lessons and activities for gifted third grade students based on their understanding of hands-on, engaging lessons and best practice.
- Planned and created a brochure and activities that led third grade students through a journey of engaging observation, prediction, and data analysis.
- Produced a bumper crop of healthy vegetables
- Shared their discoveries as mentors to local elementary school children.

Discoveries, New and Unexpected

As a culminating activity our students decided that they wanted to share the **Community Garden** experience and their abundant crop of squash, five varieties of lettuce, red and white radishes, and green onions with our elementary feeder school's gifted students during a visit to the THS Community Garden. THS Gifted Cluster students were so excited about the real-life connections they were able to make with their core classes that they decided to have a lesson planning competition and voted on the four best lessons to use with our young visitors. Watching our ninth grade students researching third grade SOLS, discussing depth and complexity, problem solving skills, learning styles, hands on activities, best practice, and student engagement was a joy. Our students knew and understood exactly what was needed to create the fun and challenging lessons plans. In fact, the brochure they designed for the day guided the third graders through a journey of engaging observation, prediction and data analysis from pre-assessment to post test.

On a beautiful sunny morning in June, Tallwood Elementary GRT, Caitlin Kaminski, arrived with 25 third-grade gifted students who were given a "Big Buddy" to help lead them through the day's activities: Fun with Feet, Bartering for Brownies, Graphs in the Garden, and Tasty Testing. As we all sat down to a lunch of fresh salad vegetables with lots of Ranch dressing, I was so proud of what our students and teachers had accomplished and so thankful to the VAG for the funds that allowed us to buy the seeds, soil, and equipment needed to grow the garden. As our visitors got ready to leave, one little boy raised his hand and said, "*Can you be our Big Buddies forever?*". I bet you can guess the answer to that question. This year we will most definitely be planting more seeds.

Many thanks to Dr. Nancy B. Farrel, THS Principal for common planning time, THS Gifted Cluster Teachers, Caitlin Stravino, Franklin Tamayo, Tom Muckle, Greg Doughty, and TES GRT, Caitlin Kaminski.



VAG Innovative Idea Grants

Eco Scholars Birdhouse Project

by Jessica Roy, Gifted Resource Teacher, Orange County Public Schools

A \$400 Innovative Idea Grant focused a whole community on the Chesapeake Bay watershed and helped make it possible for 24 middle school students to be part of the Eco Scholars program and participate in a three day field experience at the Chesapeake Bay Education Center on Smith Island.

The adventure started last summer on Smith Island where the abundance of birds captured the imagination of the 2010 Eco Scholars. Snowy Egrets, Great Blue Herons, American Bitterns, Pelicans and all manner of song birds could be seen from just about any vantage point on the island. The birds were incredibly beautiful. They inspired many students in that group to learn more about the birds and their habitat.

Knowing that the livelihood of those beautiful birds was directly impacted by what happens right in our backyard gave the students an idea. We could help protect the Bay by helping birds in the Virginia Piedmont. And that's how the blue bird house project got started: a couple of kids noticed a few beautiful birds and made the connection to their own lives in Central Virginia.

The Innovative Ideas grant provided funds to actually build blue bird houses! That meant working with the high school Future Farmers of America – all at once a classroom full of skilled carpenters was involved in learning about the impact our lives have on the Chesapeake Bay – 20 more folks are focused on the Chesapeake Bay. While the FFA students are building blue bird houses, the Eco Scholars are creating brochures to share information about blue birds and the importance of protecting the watershed for the health of both the blue birds and the Chesapeake Bay.

Once the blue bird houses were completed and the brochures printed, the 2011 Eco Scholars joined the 2010 Eco Scholars in offering the bird houses to community members for a donation to the Eco Scholars program. Now approximately 40 students are sharing information about the Chesapeake Bay with their neighbors. Another 100 folks are now hearing

about the environmental issues surrounding the Bay. Many of those individuals made donations to the program in exchange for a blue bird house for sums of anywhere between a much appreciated \$10 to a most generous \$100 donation.

The Eco Scholar's program is completely supported by student fees which are supplemented by grants and fundraising. All together, the project brought in enough money to cover the transportation cost, a three-hour bus ride and 90-minute ferry trip, to and from the island. Since one of the primary goals is to make this program accessible to at-risk populations, covering that cost has a major impact on the ability to offer the program at a reasonable and affordable rate. Even more than that the project made it possible for upwards of 70 students to be involved in real world application of science and language arts and public speaking and desk top publishing and so much more!

Orange County students present one of their blue bird houses to the Smith Island staff.



VAG Innovative Idea Grants

“Flip” into Literacy: A Digital Book Club for K-1 Gifted Readers

by Jenna Conlee, Gifted Resource Teacher, Harrison Road Elementary School, Spotsylvania County Schools



Violet and Daniel perform an audio book review of Junie B. Jones, Boss of Lunch, by Barbara Park. Photo was captured with a flip camera.

The school year was winding down and summer was on the horizon. The Harrison Road Elementary Digital Book Club participants celebrated by watching their video book review “movies” while they snacked on popcorn and juice. As we were getting settled, a couple of them tried to climb into my lap! No, these weren’t my third, fourth or fifth graders that I typically serve as gifted resource teacher in my building. These little ones were kindergartners and first graders who were thrilled to see themselves and their work on the big screen (aka my SmartBoard)! As we watched each video book review, the young book reviewers were rapt with attention and applauded at the conclusion of each clip. It was obvious that these young students were extremely proud of their work and achievement. They were especially pleased to get a DVD copy of their book review to take home to share with their families, too. It was the finale to a several months of hard work.

This celebration concluded a semester’s worth of reading and literacy activities geared toward gifted readers in the primary grades, a new program for my school, which was made possible through an Innovative Idea Grant from the Virginia Association for the Gifted. With funding from the VAG, I was able to purchase several MP3 players, a flip camera and tripod, additional headphones and splitters (to double up the number of students per player), audio book files, hard copies of the books, and assorted covers, containers, and supplies. These were the materials I needed to build the Digital Book Club and implement the project. This new program for young readers is innovative in its combination of technologies to promote literacy and excitement about reading for K-1 high ability readers. I utilized the flip video camera to record students as they reviewed a book they had recently listened to with an MP3 player. Hard copies of books were also provided to reinforce reading fluency and literacy skills. Students listened as they read. Once they finished a book, my young book reviewers wrote up book reviews in a “four-square” format to

craft their on-camera reviews. I based my book review template on Judith and Evan Jay Gould’s *Four Square Writing Method: A Unique Approach to Teaching Basic Writing Skills for Grades 1-3*. I included squares for book information (title, author name, illustrator), character background (tell about Junie B. Jones), summary information, and a “why I like/recommend this book” square. (See page 14 for a sample.) We did some basic planning and pre-writing as a group and then the young students took over from there. For many of them, this was the most writing they had done for a single product. After filming the student reviews, I uploaded these book reviews on the very same MP3 players that held the audio version of the book. Next year, new student participants can view these sample peer book reviews as example products. *continued on page 13*

VAG Grants

continued from page 12



*First graders listen to and read along with **Mummies in the Morning**, by Mary Pope Osborne.*

*Students take an Accelerated Reader test on the computer after reading the **Junie B., First Grader, Boss of Lunch**, by Barbara Park.*



As part of my ongoing flexible grouping for K-1 students this year, teachers referred their highest readers to take part in this Digital Book Club grant activity. Teachers used PALs data to select their participants. Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening is used in my county to assess our primary students' reading skills. After the teacher referrals came back, I had four kindergartners and 11 first-graders for my Digital Book Club program. We met from February through May 2011. Both groups, kindergarten and first grade, read the book, *Junie B. Jones, Boss of Lunch*, by Barbara Park. My first graders also read *Mummies in the Morning*, by Mary Pope Osborne, and completed lesson activities, book reviews, and Accelerated Reader tests. These primary students also used the MP3 players back in their classrooms following our unit to read and listen to additional book titles. I provided first grade teachers with a classroom kit that allowed them to use the MP3 players with all of their students. The Digital Book Club kids helped to train their classroom peers how to use the MP3 players and familiarized them (and their teachers) with specific features of the MP3 player – locating audio book files, playing files and bookmarking, playing video files, etc. I received a lot of positive feedback about using these players with student reading groups and one teacher even worked with me to upload all of the first grade reading series audio files on the players to use as Response to Intervention (RTI) with a few of her students. There are so many possible applications with this audio-video equipment!

To measure improvement in skills for the Digital Book Club readers, I selected books that coordinated with my school's Accelerated Reader test library. In addition to writing book reviews, my students demonstrated comprehension of book content through the AR tests. All of them scored very well on these computer tests and they were thrilled to use school computers to take the AR tests. For many of them, it was their first time using this software. To truly assess student growth and depth of understanding, the book review assignment was the culminating activity of the grant project. It served as an indicator whether the project was successful. The book review criteria were shared with students that participated in the digital book club and I assessed the reviews via a rubric. This activity lent itself perfectly to differentiation by reading ability. Books were chosen to fall in the "instructional" level of our young gifted readers. Many participants independently read additional books in the series as well.

Our very young high ability readers deserve attention and academic rigor. This grant project was a very welcome opportunity to address the unique needs of primary gifted readers and allowed these young students access to technology that enhanced their learning. It was amazing to see their excitement about reading and writing. My school community was supportive and eager to take part in the program and make use of the new equipment. I look forward to building on the momentum of the Digital Book Club program and continuing the project this school year!



Equipment and supplies purchased with Innovative Idea Grant funding from the Virginia Association for the Gifted.

Book Information: *Title, Author Name, Illustrator*

Tell about Junie B. Jones

Junie B., First Grader, Boss of Lunch



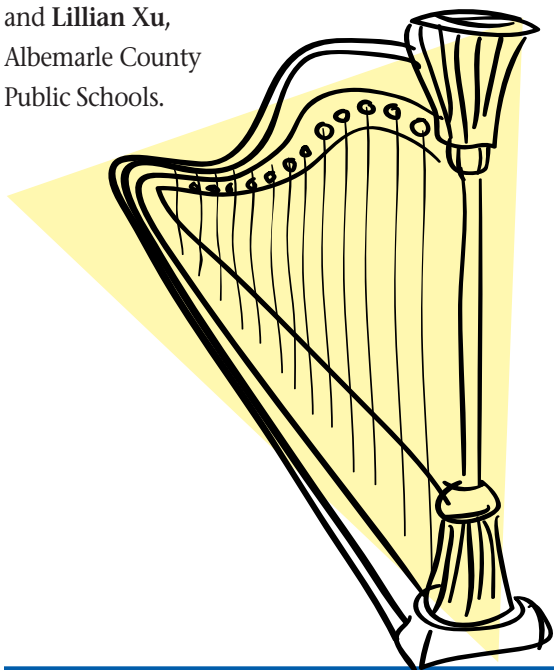
Brief Summary

Why I Like/Recommend This Book

VAG Summer Scholarships

The Virginia Association for the Gifted offers summer scholarships designed for those gifted and talented students who wish to attend academic or artistic programs during the summer months. The scholarships are in amounts ranging from \$100-\$500 and are available for students, K-12. Visit the VAG web site, www.vagifted.org for an application. Application deadline for this summer's programs is March 1, 2012.

Here are reports from three of the 2011 scholarship recipients – **Juliana Gruver**, Arlington Public Schools, **Jack Lohmann**, Henrico County Public Schools and **Lillian Xu**, Albemarle County Public Schools.



Juliana Gruver – Richmond Summer Harp Institute

The Virginia Association for the Gifted scholarship allowed me to participate in the Richmond Summer Harp Institute at The Academy of Music in Richmond, August 1-5, 2011. It was an amazing experience both musically and personally.

My mom and I drove to Richmond on Sunday, July 31, and I met the four girls (ages 12-16) I would be rooming with for the week. We also met one of the faculty and the mom of one of the girls. We inflated our air mattresses, made our beds, got to know each other a little, figured out the bathroom logistics (6 people, one bathroom = logistics needed!) and watched a movie to unwind before the start of camp the next morning.

The Academy of Music is home to the American Youth Harp Ensemble, a group that tours internationally and had performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and Lincoln Center in New York. Ms. Lynnelle Ediger-Kordzaia directed the camp. She was incredible – her passion and enthusiasm for the harp were infectious. Every day we spend time on music theory, conducting, and ensemble. I really enjoyed music theory – much was review but I learned a lot from scale games. The class of ten would be divided into two groups, and one group would be scales, such as C (0 sharps), G (1 sharp), D (2 sharps), A (3 sharps), and E (5 sharps). One person from the non-scale team would have a ball and throw it to one of the scales. The scale would then toss them back the ball and say a number of sharps. It really helped me remember the number of sharps and flats in the scales as the game got faster and the scales switched places. We also learned how to tune our harps and how to replace a string – every harpist needs to be comfortable with harp maintenance. The conducting was a challenge for me, ... Although I sometimes enjoy being the center of attention, this seemed a bit much to me.

Ensemble was incredibly challenging. About a month before camp began, they sent 12 songs to review before camp – some as harp 1 and some as harp 2. Playing the harp 2 part is especially challenging when you don't know the melody. On top of those dozen songs, they handed out additional songs to learn during the week. My favorite times in ensemble were when Ms. Ediger-Kordzaia directed. She really connected with us, infecting us with her excitement and love of the music. ...

On the final day of camp we gave a performance. The countless hours in ensemble paid off – I felt very comfortable with my parts and eagerly played each piece. I was also eager for the Sarabande – one of the new pieces from the week – as I had volunteered to conduct the group for that piece! There were five pieces in the concert that students were conducting, and I got to do one of them! In the concert, Ms. Ediger-Kordzaia announced the Sarabande, explaining that it is a dance typically done for a king and queen with an emphasis on the second beat and a good ensemble makes it easy to dance to; then she announced that I would be conducting and she told about my reticence to conducting during the week and then my confidence grew. Nervously I went to the front, made the gestures to have the harpists prepare to play, counted the 3 – 2 time, and started the piece. ...

I am grateful for the Virginia Association for the Gifted scholarship that allowed me to attend this camp. Focusing on the harp for a week with others who also love the instrument helped me to grow musically and personally. My skills have improved considerably. I made several new friends and learned the intricacies of living in tight quarters with five others. I was also able to take risks and try something I was not comfortable with, and ultimately conquering my fears by conducting a piece in the end-of-camp performance. I thank to the VAG for allowing me this wonderful opportunity.

VAG Scholarships

continued from page 15



Jack Lohmann, Henrico County, attended Orchestra Intensive.

Jack Lohmann – Orchestra Intensive

I would like to thank you again for giving me the opportunity to attend Orchestra Intensive (within Orchestra Project) this summer, through the VAG grant program. I have written a short piece about my experience.

This summer, I received a grant from the VAG that allowed me to participate in Orchestra Intensive, a joint initiative between VCU and the Richmond Symphony. This week long experience allowed me to explore my passion for music through rigorous study with numerous professionals. Each day included hours of full orchestra rehearsal in order to master a variety of classic symphonic repertoire, as well as hours of rehearsal in smaller chamber groups on other musical masterpieces. In between rehearsals we participated in workshops, receiving guidance on everything from scales and

arpeggios to applying for college. In every situation, I was able to work with professionals of the Richmond Symphony and VCU, whether in a group or individually. Our work culminated in two fabulous concerts at VCU. It was a truly inspiring experience. Orchestra Intensive left me filled with knowledge and skills, but, more importantly, with a renewed passion and zeal to pursue music, and of the opportunities that lie ahead.



Lillian Xu – CTY Online Honors Biology Course

My summer experience with the CTY Online Honors Biology Course has opened my eyes to new ideas and abundant, aspiring knowledge. I had never even imagined learning as much as I did during this course. The Honors Biology course was individually paced and had rigorous content. It wasn't one of those courses where you could just slack off – it was your decision to succeed. There were various units in this course ranging from "Genetics" and "Energy & Chemistry of Life" to "Diversity of Life" and "Ecology." Each unit had a study guide (usually about 20 pages) to fill out that coordinated with a very informative manual video. The videos were the most exciting part of my course because they were individually paced – with "Pause" "Next" & "Previous" buttons. The videos were simple to understand despite the complex content. Additionally, this course had quizzes (about 40 questions each) that you would take after you completed the study guide and other assignments indicated on your guided syllabus. In this CTY Online Honors Biology course, there were five interactive labs. The interactive labs were just as if you were doing school labs. They came with a lab report, a warm-up quiz, and a test after you finished the lab to check that you understood it.

I have enjoyed this biology course so much and understood many intricate biological concepts that I know will help eternally flame my burning passion for science. It has been an astounding experience. I am so grateful that VAG has given me the opportunity to participate in this wondrous course that has definitely strengthened my love and interest in biology.

Lillian Xu, Albemarle County, took a CTY Online Honors Biology Course.

