

Mississippi's Gifted Problem Solvers Take on the Future

Approximately 250 expert problem solvers and short story writers participated in the annual Mississippi Future Problem Solving Program (FPSP) Affiliate Bowl, held this year on April 19-20 at the University of Mississippi. Students from across the state participated in one or more of the various components of the Bowl - booklet competition, community problem solving, and scenario writing.

The Affiliate Bowl is the culmination of a year-long program where students are taught to creatively seek, attack, and solve problems or challenges. In the booklet competition component of the program, students worked on three futuristic problems during the 2003-2004 school year ("Smart Clothes", "Rage/Bullying", and "Artificial Intelligence"), which were critiqued by trained evaluators. Based on the third problem, the top ten teams from each of the three grade divisions (4-6, 7-9, 10-12) were invited to participate in the Affiliate Bowl. While teams knew the general topic of this year's Bowl - "Media Impact" - they did not know the specific nature of the problem they were to solve until the Bowl began.

The Scenario Writing component gives students a chance to write a short story based on one of the topics that the booklet teams have worked on during the school year. Winning scenario writers were honored at the annual Affiliate Bowl Scenario Luncheon, at which the first place winners in each age division presented their scenarios.

In Community Problem Solving, or CmPS, students also work in teams, this time

using their problem-solving skills to creatively attack a problem or challenge which they have identified within their school or community.

In each component the students' work is evaluated according to established criteria, and trophies, plaques, medallions, and ribbons are awarded.

State champions in each division of each component will represent Mississippi at the 2004 Future Problem Solving International Conference. This year's Conference will be held at the University of Kentucky on June 3-6.

Founded in 1974 by Dr. E. Paul Torrance, FPSP stimulates critical and creative thinking skills and encourages students to develop a vision for the future. The Program currently charters forty-three affiliate programs throughout the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Korea, involving more than 250,000 students annually.

For more information about Future Problem Solving, contact Mississippi's Affiliate Director, Melissa Grantham, at 601-853-2764 or mpgmsfmsp@juno.com.

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From the Executive Director

I would like to thank Kate Brown for being our representative at the affiliate meeting in Washington, DC in March. After her visits to the Capitol, all our U.S. Congressmen agreed to again support the Javits funding for gifted by signing on as sponsors and/or cosponsors of the bill. I trust you will express your appreciation to your senator and representative for their support at the federal level. We are so fortunate that we have this type of relationship with them. Check the NAGC website to keep updated on what is going on at the national level.

All states are in a dilemma with funding for gifted and concerns regarding the effects of No Child Left Behind on our gifted and more able learners. We will continue to work with the Department of Education regarding our concerns and try to develop a plan to address the gaps for our population of students.

As you know, MAGC launched an intensive legislative agenda this year. In addition to the activities that were reported in the last issue of Concepts, we sent letters to all the affiliate groups, teachers of gifted and advisory board members requesting their assistance with our legislative agenda. I have spoken to many groups around the state encouraging parents to get involved in our efforts and ultimately form a local affiliate group. I would like to personally thank each of you who responded to our call for help relative to gifted funding for 2005. This has been a most unusual session with lots of frustrations for everyone involved. After a long struggle the house and senate were unable to compromise on the education

bill so it was necessary for the bill to go to conference. Three members from each chamber served on the conference committee. Sunday Evening May 9 at midnight, bill 1696 was finalized. This bill for 2005 was \$44 million short of 2004 funding. This shortage of funds impacts all programs including gifted. As I write this article, MDE has not finalized budget allocations and could not give me specifics as to the amount that gifted will be funded but did say it will be less than we currently have in 2004. Gifted funding is not a part of the lump sum allocated to districts through MAEP, thus the amount of money allocated to districts for gifted will have to be used for gifted programs. So we anxiously await the final budget report from MDE. We are aware that adjustments will have to be made relative to gifted teacher units. In some situations districts will be able to make up the difference in funding to keep all their gifted teachers, in other situations they may not have the funds available to do that. Let me assure you that MAGC's goal is for full funding so that all our identified gifted children can be served. With your help, we will continue to work toward that end.

Let me encourage every teacher of the gifted and every parent of a gifted child or youth to join with us so together we can continue to fight for the rights of this population.

It is my privilege to work with the MAGC Board, the Advisory Board and to serve as a friend to and spokesperson for the 33,000 plus gifted students in our state. We are indeed looking for a brighter day for all areas of education!

Jean C. Prather

From the MAGC President

MAGC Membership a Must

Having endured this season of uncertainty, I am more convinced than ever that a large membership is vital to MAGC's success in ensuring that Mississippi's gifted children have appropriate educational services. In addition, a significant increase in membership would make me feel that I had served you well as MAGC President. We all know of principals who have promised to kiss a pig or shave their heads if their students read a certain number of books. I recently read an article about a minister who preached from the roof of his church because his congregation met an attendance goal. This made me think that perhaps I might promise to sing at the fall conference if our membership included 90% of the teachers of the gifted in the state. However I quickly realized that the prospect of my singing would undoubtedly have a negative effect on both the conference and our membership. Instead, let me try to promote MAGC membership by sharing with you some of the work that our organization has done on behalf of gifted children this year.

Our members have worked tirelessly to promote funding for gifted education for the upcoming school year. As the legislature wrestled with education funding, MAGC continually worked to remind our representatives that gifted classes are essential to appropriately educate our state's brightest children. We began by bringing gifted education to the legislators' attention. Early in the legislative session, a committee chaired by Jane Everly put together gift bags for the legislators. Attached to these bags was a tag with the message, "Gifted Education and Legislators working together for the future of Mississippi." MAGC Executive Director, Jean Prather, led a delegation of parents and gifted children who delivered the gift bags and made personal contact with legislators. (See the last issue of *Concepts* for pictures.) MAGC

Legislative Chairman, Kay Collins has endeavored to keep the membership up to date on legislative developments via email. Gifted advocacy groups throughout the state were also called into action. Many of those parents made telephone calls, wrote letters, and send emails in support of gifted education. Jean Prather made regular visits to the capitol and contacted legislators, SDE staff, and lobbyists almost daily. At Teachers of the Gifted Instructional Forum at MUW Jean challenged the assembly to contact legislators and ask for full funding of gifted education. We also collected signatures that day. These were attached to a letter asking for full funding for gifted education that was sent to the legislature. Two mass mailings were done, one to our membership and one to teachers of the gifted who do not belong to MAGC. These mailings informed the recipients of the legislative situation and included MAGC membership information.

Because of their passion for gifted education, MAGC members have done an amazing job of lobbying for gifted education funding. Our weakness, however, is still in our numbers. As long as there are teachers of the gifted and parents of gifted children who do not belong to this organization we will never have the clout we need. Please do your part to ensure that Mississippi continues to meet the needs of its gifted children. Share this issue of *Concepts* with the parents of your students and with other teachers. Give them a copy of the membership form. Start a gifted advocacy group in your area. (Contact Jean Prather for information on how to do this.)

The events of this spring should dispel any doubts that membership in MAGC is important. In fact MAGC membership is vital important. If our membership increases significantly between now and our fall conference, I promise that I will not sing, but I will be wearing this biggest smile you ever saw!

Mary Webb



The Bookshelf By Dr. Bob Seney

Let me begin by quoting myself from the Winter 2003-4 "BookShelf."

"Here in the *BookShelf*, I usually try to help you keep up with all the Newbery Award and Honor Books. In the past few years, I think that the selections for the awards have been especially appropriate for gifted readers (Remember Judith Halsted's characteristics of books for gifted readers?) In this issue, I am going to stick my neck out and make a prediction for the 2004 Newbery Award. This is especially tricky since for the past couple of years my nominees have not been showing up on the list! But this year I think that I have selected a winner, at the very least a Newbery Honor Book."

Well, do I have egg on my face? My nomination, which you might remember was Gary Paulsen's *The Glass Café* (2003, Wendy Lamb Books) with the wonderful subtitle: *OR, The STRIPPER and the STATE: How My Mother Started a War With the System That Made Us Kind of RICH and a Little Bit FAMOUS*, didn't even make the Honor Book List! I just don't know. I guess I will just have to stop trying to second guess the Newbery Committee. This doesn't mean that I am happy that Paulsen was overlooked once more, I'm not, but I will accept the "judges" pronouncement and just grumble a little. Actually, accepting this year's Newbery list is not so hard at all!

With my grudge, I was all set to NOT enjoy this year's Newbery Award Book, *The Tale of Despereaux: Being the story of a mouse, a princess, some soup, and a spool of thread* (2003, Candlewick Press) by Kate DiCamillo, but I readily admit I was quickly hooked by this delightful book.

"The world is dark, and light is precious. Come closer, dear reader. You must trust me. I am telling you a story." (Preface) So begins the tale of Despereaux --

a very unlikely hero, but that is the bases of his creation. The son of one of DiCamillo's (remember, "Because of Winn-Dixie" (2000, Candlewick Press) DiCamillo's first novel and a 2001 Newbery Honor Book?) best friends asked her to write a story for him. "It's about an unlikely hero," he said, 'one with exceptionally large ears.' "What happens to him?" I asked. "I don't know," he said. "That why I want you to write the story, so we can find out." (Book jacket) Readers, I promise you that you will keep reading until you find out as well.

Despereaux Tilling is different from birth. He was the only mouse in his litter that was born alive. He was very small; he had very large ears; and he was born with his eyes open, unheard of! As you might expect, he acted differently from the other mice. His older brother, Furlough, tried to teach him mouse ways but to no avail. Despereaux was not interested in "scrabbling" across the floor. He wanted to take it easy and see what was around him and he was especially caught up by the light shining through the stained glass windows. Light turns out to be a very important element in this story. Through several adventures, Despereaux finally meets the Princess Pea.

In his wonderings about the castle, one day he heard a honey-sweet sound, which eventually, he finds out is music. The King was playing his guitar for the Princess. Despereaux was enamored both by the music and the beautiful Princess. He did the unthinkable in the mouse world. He actually talked to the Princess and allowed her to pet him. This was too much for the Mouse Clan and he was called before the High Council who sentenced him to the dungeon to be eaten by the rats. "Reader, you must know that an interesting fate (sometimes involving rats, sometimes not) awaits almost everyone, mouse or man, who does not conform." (Page 25)

So begins the adventure, an adventure that involves four very different characters, Despereaux, the Princess Pea, Chiaroscuro,

the rat villain, and the simple minded maid, Miggery Sow. It is up to our hero to save the Princess from the clutches of Roscuro who has misled Miggery. With many a twist-and-a-turn, the tale spins itself out and the reader is carried along almost breathlessly. This book is a delight! I actually don't resent that it replaced my favorite.

Stylistically, there are several really clever techniques. One of them is suggested above. At the end of nearly every chapter, DiCamillo reminds us of her role as story teller and speaks directly to us. At one point, she declares "Reader, it is your duty." (Page 127) and continues with our instructions. DiCamillo certainly keeps us in the story. This technique is very similar to what we find in the delightful Lemony Snickett books. In fact, I was often reminded of that series and of Avi's Poppy series, which is another of my great favorites. At any rate, the Newbery Medal is well earned. I am not sure when I have enjoyed a Medal book so much. You certainly are in for a really fun reading experience. By the way this book would make a perfect read aloud book for any age group.

Well, after carrying on about this delightful book, I find that I have used up my

space (again!) and we still haven't talked about the Honor Books. I promise a review of the Honor Books in the next "BookShelf," but at least I can list them for you and encourage you to purchase them. This year only two Newbery Honor Books were named. This certainly shouldn't suggest that there weren't that many good books out there. In fact, it probably means that there were so many good books nominated that the committee just couldn't agree. This has been the case in the past. The two Honor Books named were Kevin Henkes' *Olive's Ocean* (2003, Greenwillow Books) and a non-fiction book, *An American Plague: the True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1792* by Jim Murphy (2003, Clarion Books). I was very pleased with both of them. In fact "Plague" really caught my attention and I actually put off reading it! Well, if you haven't read them, then I have helped you start your summer reading list and, of course, if you are looking for books for our younger students be sure and check out the Caldecott Books. Until next time, Happy Reading!

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Day of Sharing for Teacher's of the Gifted

November 12, 2004 Hattiesburg Family Y, Hattiesburg, MS
Keynote Speaker: Dr. Julia Roberts,
Director, Center for Gifted Studies, Western Kentucky University

Parenting Gifted Children Conference

November 13, 2004 USM – Joseph Greene Hall, Hattiesburg, MS
Keynote Speaker: Dr. Julia Roberts
Director, Center for Gifted Studies, Western Kentucky University
Topic: Advocating to Help Your Gifted Child Thrive

25th Anniversary Gala Celebration of the Frances A. Karnes Center for Gifted Studies

December 2, 2004 Lake Terrace Convention Center, Hattiesburg, MS
Keynote Speaker: Mr. Jason Dorsey Topic: How Gifted Education Changed My Life



Voyage to a Double Planet

By Patrick L. Barry and Dr. Tony Phillips

Download a "nine planets" screensaver for your computer with spectacular photos of our solar system, and you'll notice that one planet is conspicuously missing: Pluto. Icy and mysterious, Pluto is the only planet never visited and photographed by NASA space probes.

In fact, the clearest image we have of Pluto is a tiny, pixelated blob of light and dark patches taken by the Hubble Space Telescope in 1994. It's tantalizing but not much more. Earth-based telescopes have succeeded, however, in discovering one amazing fact: Pluto is not a lone world, but a double-planet system. Its companion, measuring about half the size of Pluto itself, is named Charon.

Work is underway to launch a robotic probe to visit and photograph Pluto and Charon. The project, called New Horizons, will map both worlds. Sensors will chart surface minerals and ices, and catalog the gases that make up Pluto's wispy atmosphere.

"It's the second epoch in the exploration of the planets," says Alan Stern, the principal investigator for New Horizons at the Southwest Research Institute in Colorado. "We're going to the very edge of the solar system."

The probe is scheduled to launch in January 2006. Its journey will be a long one. Pluto is more than 30 times further away from the Sun than Earth is! Even with a speed boost from a flyby of Jupiter, the probe won't arrive at Pluto until July 2015. Afterward, the

probe will venture on to explore the Kuiper Belt, a distant "halo" of small, frozen objects surrounding the solar system, from which comets originate.

Aside from sheer curiosity about these distant worlds, scientists are motivated by questions about the formation of the solar system. Orbiting in the deep freeze far from the sun, Pluto and Charon have undergone less change than the inner planets during the solar system's 4.5 billion year history. These two worlds will provide a glimpse into the past.

Pluto could also shed light on the origin of our own Moon. Earth, with its single, large moon, is unusual. The Pluto-Charon system is the only other pair like it in the solar system. In fact, some astronomers consider Earth and the Moon to be a double planet, too. So knowing more about Pluto and Charon could give clues about how the Earth-Moon system formed.

And, of course, the spectacular, up-close photos of Pluto and Charon are going to look great as a screensaver!

This article was provided by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, under a contract with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

An image to accompany this article can be found on the internet at http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/news_images/NewHorizons.jpg

Caption:

Artist's idea of the New Horizons spacecraft flying by Pluto and its moon, Charon.

(Credit: Dan Durda)

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