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Teacher of the Day:

Students take center stage to share their interests and expertise

By Peggy Clifford, third grade teacher at South Grafton Elementary School in Grafton, Massachusetts

In my third grade class at South Grafton Elementary School in South Grafton, Massachusetts, children regularly teach each other about topics of interest to them. The process which I've devised for this, called "Teacher of the Day," encourages students to invest in their learning, to become independent researchers, and to share their knowledge with others.

Three times a week, at the end of Morning Meeting, one child delivers a "Teacher of the Day" presentation. It is an oral and visual presentation which summarizes independent research that the child has done on a topic pertaining to the era of history or place in the world that we are studying in social studies at that time. While the overarching topic for these presentations is directly connected to our social studies curriculum, students are offered many choices within this topic so that they can focus on a subject that interests them.

For example, in the first couple months of school this year, we learned about local (Grafton) and Massachusetts history. This was the broad topic for the first "Teacher of the Day" assignment. I offered a list of suggested topics and we also brainstormed possible topics using the categories of people, places, or things (see the sample chart below). If the children could make a connection in some way to local or Massachusetts history, they could research and teach about any subject that they wanted. For instance, a few of the creative subject choices in this series were cranberries on Cape Cod, the white-tailed deer, and the Great Molasses Flood.

Teacher of the Day #1: Grafton and Massachusetts History

Some Possible Topics

People: Paul Revere, Susan B. Anthony, Norman Rockwell, Clara Barton, Robert Goddard, Bobby Orr, Louisa May Alcott, Dr. Seuss, etc.

Places: Cape Cod, Sturbridge Village, Connecticut River, Martha's Vineyard, Charles River, Appalachian Trail, Mt. Greylock, etc.

Things: Boston Tea Party, American Elm, Red Sox, Bald Eagle, Battle of Lexington and Concord, Boston Marathon, Boston Bruins, etc.

Early in the year, I send a letter home to inform parents of this process, explaining that these presentations will be part of their child's yearly, long-term homework. I tell parents to expect five or six "Teacher of the Day" projects during the year. I also tell parents that for each of these projects their child will be responsible for preparing an oral presentation using note cards (provided by me) and some sort of "visual" (poster, book, picture, object, etc.) to help the child teach his/her classmates. I indicate that it should not be a lengthy lecture but should be factual and reflect the child's research. The detail in the finished product varies quite a bit from child to child, and the length of the presentations range from 15 minutes to over an hour!

Once the topics and presentation dates are chosen, I send a note home informing parents of their child's presentation date. I also alert the librarians at our local library who are very helpful in locating resources on particular topics.

On the day of the child's "Teacher of the Day" presentation the class sits on the floor in front of the presenter. I sit behind the group and take notes. Specifically, I write questions and answers based on the information the child is teaching. The presenter and I will use these questions later in a game of "stump the audience." Here are a few examples of these questions:

- For the presentation on cranberries on Cape Cod—Q: What do the harvesters do with the cranberries right after they pick them? A: They put them into a lake to clean them.
- For the presentation on the white-tailed deer—Q: How is a white-tailed deer like a cow? A: They both have four stomachs and four hooves.
- For the presentation on the Great Molasses Flood—Q: What evidence is there in Boston today that the Great Molasses Flood of 1919 really happened? A: On hot summer days there is still a faint smell of molasses.

At the end of the lecture, the presenter asks the class, "Are there any questions or comments?" At this point, This children in the audience ask questions to clarify what they have heard or make a personal connection to the information by sharing stories of their own experiences or knowledge of the topic. When the questions and comments are finished, the presenter asks, "What have you learned?" This is a very gratifying experience for the presenter because his/her classmates raise their hands and offer back facts that they have learned from the presenter —thus validating the presenter's job as teacher.

In the final phase of the lesson, the presenter and I try to "stump" the audience. The presenter reads the questions I composed during the presentation and the class is challenged to answer the questions. The children love the contest atmosphere of this part. It also motivates the children to focus on the preceding lecture because they hate to be "stumped!"

At some point after their presentation, the students choose three of these questions and answers to use for word processing practice at the computer. They type them, print them, cut them into strips, and put these strips into a bowl. Students then work with partners to practice answering these questions in preparation for our gala culminating game of "Elementary Bowl"—a team quiz game based loosely on the old TV quiz game "College Bowl."

We play "Elementary Bowl" once all the members of the class have had a chance to present. In the game, the class is split into two teams. Each team sits on the floor in a line facing the other team. The first quizmaster is chosen randomly. This quizmaster reaches into the "Elementary Bowl," pulls out a question and reads it. The first student on the opposing team gets a chance to answer it. If he/she doesn't know the answer, the first person from the other team gets a chance. This proceeds back and forth down both of the lines of students until the question is correctly answered.

The team that answers correctly gets a point and the student answering the question becomes the next quizmaster. The former quizmaster takes the seat of the child who answered correctly which means that students often switch teams throughout the game. Students cheer for both teams because they don't know until the end which team they will end up on!

In this fashion the game proceeds until all the questions are answered. The game keeps the children's interest because they are the owners of the questions which come from their own presentations. No one is discouraged if they don't know the answer or answer incorrectly because there is no negative consequence. Only a correct answer scores a point and no one is ever eliminated.

In addition to informal assessments of the knowledge gained from these presentations and activities, I do a formal but simple check-off assessment of the presenter and the audience with questions such as the following:

1. Did the presenter know the subject?
2. Did the presenter write the information on note cards?
3. Did the presenter have a visual component to the presentation?
4. Did the audience ask thoughtful questions?
5. Did the audience express what they had learned?

In my years of doing "Teacher of the Day" I have modified and refined its components. I have enjoyed watching children become "experts" on a range of topics and share what they know, on center stage, with their classmates as their audience. It is a way for students to teach each other while feeling successful and basking in the limelight.