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REPORT BY **ROBERT L. SMITH**

With Christine Dager, Jane Greenhoe, Debbie Kroll, Tracie Lucksted, Marcy Vanderwel, and Gail Wright.

Every year since 1982, through MRA's initiative and by the governor of Michigan's proclamation, March has been the "Reading Month." In hundreds of schools all over the state, educators collaborate to motivate students to develop good reading habits. This is accomplished through celebrations that involve entire communities and are both highly enjoyable and memorable.

For the past several years, teacher-authors Carol Trojanowski and Margaret Holtschlag (creators of *The Random House Calendar for Kids*) have co-chaired the Celebrate Reading Committee which directs the statewide endeavor. The pair has co-edited a booklet (see *Celebrate Reading 1993* on page 54 for details) which suggests activities and lessons and features messages from Michigan authors. According to the co-chairs,

Important elements to a successful March is Reading Month celebration are visible signs that people are reading, community involvement, whole school participation, positive reinforcement for reading, and public recognition that reading is a top priority in your school.

(1991)

Celebrate Reading 1993 reports what ten districts have done to celebrate the special month. Included in this MRA publication are details about schools where principals sat on roofs, conduct-

ing office business outside to reward students for reading more than they usually do. School boards, parents, radio and television stations, restaurants, food stores, and malls were involved in the events in several locales. Teachers and administrators invented themes such as rain forests, dragons, bears, China, Dr. Seuss and more. The publication offers a wealth of details about reading celebrations.

This article describes a few more March is Reading Month activities that MRA members initiated. We hope that reading about these celebrations and instructional accounts will stimulate your creativity as you plan this year's literacy activities.

The Dragon's Tremendous Tail

Reported by Reading Support Teacher Christine Dager of Ida Elementary/7900 Ida Street/Ida/48140.

In 1994 Ida Elementary School had an exciting March is Reading Month. The reading incentive was a large, green and orange, stuffed paper dragon which hung in our lobby outside the office. Because our dragon was originally tailless, our job as readers was to put a tail on him. Each kindergarten through fourth grade was assigned a specific color, and we built a paper chain dragon tail that trailed down every hallway in our school. Each chain link represented a book or chapter read during the month of March. The tail eventually grew to 5,390 feet (That's more than a mile!), and its colors really brightened the school. Our principal was terrific about measuring and announcing the length every

morning during announcements. He kept challenging the students to read more and extend the tail to longer lengths.

Activities included the following.

- Literature Encounter Day — the staff (principal, teachers, counselor and assistants) chose a book and planned a related activity. Students signed up for the encounter of their choice.
- Book Swap Day — students brought in a used book and swapped for a new used book.
- Community Read-In — the entire community was invited to come to school with good books and pillows and read for the evening.
- Storytelling — this was performed by a local duo.
- Teacher Exchange Day — each class exchanged their teacher with another class for the purpose of reading stories.

Dive into Reading

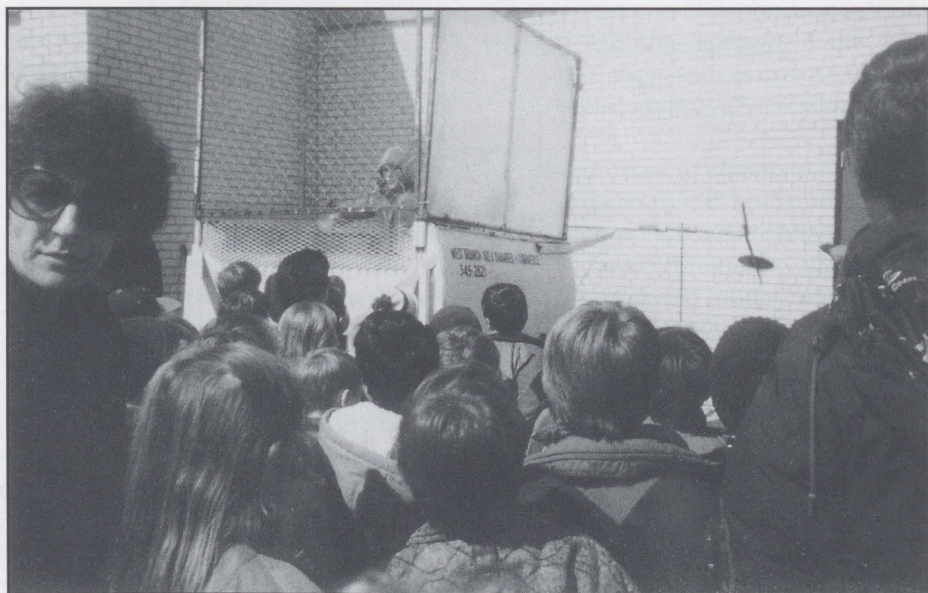
Reported by Chapter 1 Reading Consultant Jane Greenhoe of Pinconning Area Schools/605 W. Fifth Street/Pinconning/48650.

Central Elementary School took the

theme "Dive into Reading." If the approximately 500 students in the building would read 3,500 books during the month, then the principal, Mr. Tim Flint, would go into the dunk tank. If they reached 4,000, a mystery guest would make an appearance. The tally was kept in front of the office on a large tank— with water rising as books were read.

Judy Barabek, a second grade teacher, designed activities around our theme. A kick-off assembly with a skit by the teachers started the celebration. The Coast Guard taught water safety to the children. Demos by a diving school and hover craft were other parts of the assembly. Puppeteers and visitation by an area librarian were also part of the activities.

The result of all these kick-off activities was a month of vigorous reading. So, on an extremely windy day in April, Mr. Flint got into his wet suit and took his temporary place on Bobo the Clown's seat (see photo). Our mystery guest proved to be the school secretary, Mrs. Chris Kanyo, in camouflage. Watching the students, it was easy to see that they really enjoyed themselves!



Shiloh — *Phyllis Reynolds Naylor*

- ▼ The main character in this book loves animals and will do almost anything to save a dog.
- ▼ The title of this book is the name of a dog who has been mistreated.
- ▼ The problem in this book is that a young boy finds a dog who has been mistreated and does things that he really shouldn't do to protect the dog.
- ▼ Marty makes a deal with Judd Travers and works hard to keep the dog he wants so badly.
- ▼ This story takes place in the hills of Friendly, West Virginia.
- ▼ Marty is up in the hills when he sees a beagle slinking along with his head down.
- ▼ Marty's dad calls Judd Travers to return the dog.
- ▼ A quote from this book, "And you've got to get it through your head that it's his dog, not yours, and put your mind to other things."
- ▼ Marty makes a deal to work two weeks for Judd Travers so he can have the dog.

Imogene's Antlers — *by David Small*

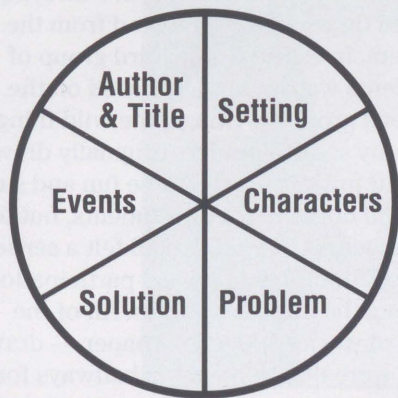
- ▼ The main character in this is a little girl with something very strange on her head.
- ▼ The title of this book is the name of a little girl and the things that are on her head.
- ▼ The problem in this story occurs when a little girl wakes up in the morning and finds she has grown something very strange on her head.
- ▼ The problem is solved when the little girl wakes up the next morning without the strange things on her head.
- ▼ This story takes place in the home of a little girl who has grown some strange things on her head.
- ▼ Because a little girl has grown some very strange things on her head she finds it very difficult to do normal things like get dressed and go through doors.
- ▼ The little girl's mother is so upset that whenever she looks at her little girl she faints.
- ▼ One of the things this little girl does during the day is use the strange things on her head as a bird feeder.

Literary Pursuit

*Reported by Reading Specialist
Marcy Vanderwel of Glerum Elementary/342 W. Lakewood/Holland/49424.*

At Glerum Elementary in the West Ottawa School District in Holland one of our successes was a game called "Literary Pursuit" which was patterned after the game *Trivial Pursuit*. Each classroom had a game board and a "pizza-board" with spaces for six different colored wedges which represented different literary categories. The categories were main characters, author/title, problem, solution, setting and story events.

A large game board was also dis-



played near the library with pizza-boards representing each class so students would know how other classes were progressing in filling up their pies. We had a box containing Literary Pursuit cards (see example) with questions about particular books in the six categories. These books were arranged according to grade levels, but teachers were encouraged to use cards filed below students' grade level in order to give the students many opportunities to be successful answering questions about books. The teachers played the game in their classrooms whenever they had a few spare minutes. We asked them to play the game at least three times a week. When students filled their pie, which represented being able to answer a question in each of the categories, the class was given a small treat and were encouraged to begin another pie. The students loved playing the game.

Our committee worked on developing the questions for the Literary Pursuit cards. That was a time-consuming task; even so, we will continue to develop more cards so that students can play the game for longer periods of time with a greater variety of books.

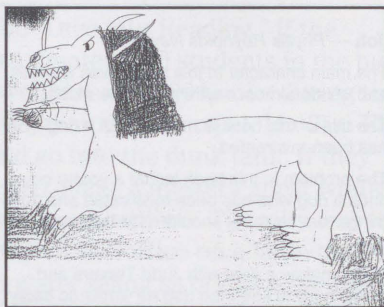
Where the Wild Things Are Drawn and Described

Reported by second grade teacher
Tracie Lucksted of Brown Elementary/
Garden Lane/St. Joseph/49085.

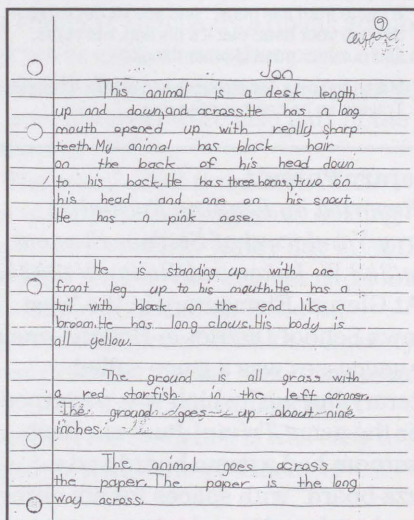
So many beginning readers need to rely on illustrations to help them understand the context of print. It is this perception that led me to initiate a project with my second graders, Mrs. Sue Stobbelaar's fourth graders, and Mrs. Ginny Bergethon's fifth graders to celebrate March is Reading Month. Each of us had an objective for our kids during this project. Mine was for my second graders to begin to take notice of detail and pattern when looking at illustrations. This would help them understand and enjoy context. Mrs. Stobbelaar's objective was to get her children to write objectively and descriptively, using detail and clarification. Mrs. Bergethon's objective for her fourth graders was to use their reading skills to formulate drawings based on the accuracy and detail found in the writings. This also required them to carefully read for the context in the writing.

I read Sendak's story to my second graders two times, back to back. I wanted them to really listen to the words, then to really see the illustrations. They saw many things the second time that they had missed the first. The children picked out and discussed details with one another, then had a chance to choose a favorite monster, and draw it on 11" x 24" paper as close to the book's drawing as possible. After much erasing and reorganization, the students finished their monsters in about four days.

Sue Stobbelaar's fifth graders then took these drawings not knowing (or if they knew, they never let the secret out) that these were the monsters from Sendak's story. They each wrote a detailed description of a monster using as many adjectives, adverbs, and other descriptive words as they could. The fifth

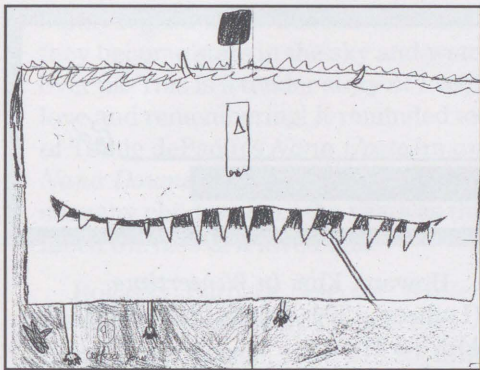


graders were told to use terms like *animal* or *creature* rather than *monster* so as not to put preconceived ideas in the reader's mind.



After being revised a few times, these papers then traveled to Jenny Bergethon's fourth grade class — *without the drawings*. The fourth graders had to read and re-read these papers before starting their own interpretive drawing based on what they had read from the papers. In essence, this third group of students was recreating, based on the second group's writings, the wild things that my second graders originally drew.

Our project proved to be fun and successful not only for the students, but for the teachers as well. We all felt a sense of collaboration and equal participation among the different grades. All of the sets of work (drawing — paper — drawing) were displayed in the hallways for



the entire school to enjoy until the the end of reading month. The sample shown here was one of our favorites.

Married with the Kids

Reported by Reading Consultant/Teacher Gail Wright and Principal Debbie Kroll of Lincoln School/2720 17th Street/Menominee/49858.

For March is Reading Month, our principal told the students that if they would read 5,000 books, she would get married at school! They read almost 10,000. So on April 1 she did have a wedding in the gym with the staff as her attendants and all the students present.

According to Principal Debbie Reines

Kroll, the origin of the idea is unknown, but "students wanted to be a part of what was going on in my life." Their theme was "Reading Makes You Real." The official exchange of vows occurred the week before. After the repeat of the vows, home-made confetti flew, wedding cake was served to each student, and the bride and groom visited each classroom.

Conclusion

It may well be that your principal's spouse is not in favor of a wedding at school, so you may need to switch into your creative gear to fire up your students this March. Planning a March is Reading Month celebration requires not only creativity but also collaboration. Consult *Celebrate Reading 1993* for many tips on arranging your celebration, involving administrators at all levels, keeping records, and setting up publicity. We hope we have shown that when March is Reading Month works, it can be the highlight of the entire school year.

This piece profitted from review by the teachers' writing club of Holt High Professional Development School.

