

Tournament has students thinking on their feet creatively

March 12, 2006

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Shreveport Times

shreveporttimes.com

Looking at a middle school boy covered in what could be tinfoil, and wearing pan lids and tin cooking trays, standing in a hallway at Bossier High School on Saturday morning and it was obvious, the Destination ImagiNation tournament challenge was on.

Inside the school's auditorium, a team from J.S. Clark Magnet Elementary School, in Monroe, sat in the audience and waited for its turn to perform later that day. The school brought four teams, comprised of 24 children between 7 and 12 years old, to compete in the six different challenges that taught skills in problem solving, creativity, improvisation, conflict resolution, time management, planning, teamwork and confidence.

The school was among the approximately 15 from throughout Louisiana taking part, totaling about 150 students and 60 volunteer officials, organizer Ray Turek said.

"It's open to everyone," he said. "If you have enthusiasm and creativity, you'll love to participate."

J.S. Clark Magnet Elementary's team managers, second-grade teachers Brooke Fortson and Nece Martin, said the challenges were genuinely student-centered and helped foster friendships and teach creative thinking. The two have worked as appraisers, or judges, in past tournaments, but their focus is to get students hooked early, so they'll want to compete year after year, Martin said.

For 10-year-old Kiara Kirk, the entire tournament is a varied and fun challenge that really gets students thinking.

"I like On Safari (one of the competitions)," she said. "You get to look up inhabitants and their environment and use improv to do a skit."

Another challenge, called Kidz Rulz, asks teams to present a story where it's possible to bend the rules of motion by creating an illusion, and what might happen as a result. The team creates their own set for the setting, as well as two "side trips" that must be integrated into the overall presentation.

Upstairs in an English and speech classroom, five eighth-graders on the Haughton Improv team prepared to compete in the On Safari challenge. The teams had to use cardboard, string or twine, and newspaper to present their environment and inhabitants, telling a story that involves overcoming a natural disaster and employing one of six "improv techniques."

The two boys and three girls on the team, in the 30 minutes they were allotted, devised a six-minute skit telling the story of saving crawfish on a beach from a gooey, sticky substance that was spilled in a ship accident. They provided all of the sound effects to explain the action.

Afterward, the team said it would compete again next year. Two members, 13-year-old Hannah Burson and 14-year-old Carson Allgood, elaborated on what they enjoyed most about the challenge.

"You get to integrate your knowledge," Allgood said.

"I thought it was really fun," Burson added. "It really adds to the skit to integrate a place's history and culture."