

Free Inside

Guide

to the Back Mountain

Dallas Middle School

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Middle School students find meaning in poetry

By KASIA McDONOUGH
Post Staff

DALLAS - In a complicated world that revolves around who likes who, and what so-and-so is wearing, middle school students are discovering poetry is simply wonderful.

Seventh and eighth grade students at the Dallas Middle School are participating in a Poets in Residence program. The innovative 10-day course, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Council of the Arts, provides young people an opportunity to develop their own writing skills while learning lessons that will last a lifetime. "I am trying to make the kids aware that language and experience can connect," said John McGuigan, poet in residence.

McGuigan is a retired teacher and the author of a collection of poems entitled *A Wonderment of Seasons*. "John is perfect for this program because he is so enthusiastic about poetry," said Elaine Williams, DMS teacher. "The kids have responded tremendously to his style."

The poetry workshop is designed to help students develop their powers of observation. McGuigan uses unusual, often implausible questions to inspire them to think creatively. One exercise asks the teenagers to consider life as a nickel "What would concern you?" asks the gray-haired poetry guru.

McGuigan stresses to the students the importance of writing about familiar material. "It is the ordinary everyday stuff that is beautiful," he said. The students in the fifth period core group agree that it is helpful to write about what you know. Christy Williams read proudly from a poem paying tribute to her older sister. "My sister is the sprinkles on top of ice cream," she said.

The students also use a memory exercise to help them recall important events of the past which may provide exciting material for a poem today. Bobby Murphy found this tip especially helpful when writing his poem "Leaving," which tells of his family's move from Florida when he was in kindergarten. "From the air the city looked like a Lego village," said Murphy.

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Home run hero
Teamates hoisted Jason Demnicki after he smacked a home run to give the Astros a 6-5 win over the Yankees. The Back Mountain Baseball Major League teams met Saturday afternoon in Dallas. Demnicki's heroics came with two outs in the bottom of the sixth inning, when he had two strikes. See complete Back Mountain Baseball results, more photos on sports page.

POST PHOTO/RON BARTIZEK

Teachers rank high in years, pay, but not in education

By KASIA McDONOUGH
Post Staff

BACK MOUNTAIN - Area teachers are among the most experienced and highest paid in the state.

Based on statistics provided by the Pennsylvania School Board Association (PSBA), the average teacher's salary for the academic year 1997-1998 in the Dallas School District was \$47,654. That figure ranked 171st out of the 604 school district statewide.

A profile of Lake-Lehman teachers, based on salaries from the 1996-1997 school year, rates their salaries as the 162nd highest in the state. Lehman teachers were paid an average salary of \$48,014 for that academic year.

Salary schedules for the upcoming scholastic term indicate those rankings may be higher in the future. The Lake-Lehman contract includes an entry level pay rate of \$29,587 for a first year teacher with only a bachelor's degree. A teacher with 17 years of experience, or more, and a master's degree plus 54 additional credits will earn \$59,722 in the school year 1999-2000. In Dallas, a new teacher with a bachelor's degree is paid \$26,341 while a teacher with at least 15 years of service and a master's degree plus 36 credits is paid \$59,765.

A preliminary matrix of salaries in Dallas reveals that 73 of the 153 teachers employed by the district have qualifications which put them at the top of the pay scale, while in Lake-Lehman, 41 of the 140 teachers qualify for the highest rate of pay according to a list of faculty salaries for the 1998-1999 school year. The disproportionate number of educators at the high end of each scale contributes to the high ranking among school districts around the state.

Teachers in the Dallas School District have a higher average total years of service than their Lake-Lehman counterparts. Dallas faculty members have an average of 19.5 years of teaching experience which places them 64th in the state. Lake-Lehman teachers ranked 154th with 18.4 years of service.

The PSBA profile indicates that area

See TEACHERS, pg 8

Fine - and big - feathered friends take up residence at park

By ALENE CASE
Post Correspondent

TRUCKSVILLE - The great blue heron is the largest native breeding bird in Pennsylvania. For at least the past three years, there has been a small nesting site within the Frances Slocum State Park, and this spring there are several active nests in two somewhat separate areas there.

Although herons are wading birds that are generally seen in or near water, they nest high in trees. These rookeries (or heronries for the strict ornithologists in our midst) are often found far from feeding areas - perhaps 20 to 50 miles from the nearest pond or river. The parent birds realize that protection for the eggs and baby birds is of greater importance than the ease of food gathering. Nests are bunched together, also for protection - few predators are willing to risk contact with the long bills of several adult birds.

Some people call the great blue heron the "blue crane." It has also been known variously as the Indian pullet (people used to eat the young ones like we do chicken now), blue cranky, poor Joe, or



A great blue heron perched warily on a tree at Frances Slocum State Park. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

Long John. Since herons and cranes and egrets are all related, these common names have often caused confusion. The scientific name of the great blue heron is *ardea herodias*, which literally translates as "the heron's heron." When one sees the graceful lines of the bird in flight or the quiet efficiency of the bird catching a meal, what more needs to be said?

The largest great blue heron rookery in Pennsylvania consists of more than 200 nests in Mercer County. The Brucker Great Blue Heron Sanctuary has been established there in order to protect the birds and to educate the public. Apparently these measures were needed in order to prevent disturbance of the nests by misguided fishermen. Yes, great blue herons eat fish (along with snakes, frogs, grasshoppers, and many other kinds of small animals). However, they usually eat the less desirable minnows and sunfish - not the fingerlings of trout and other fish caught for sport. As far back as the 17th century, wise people knew that there was better fishing downstream of a great blue.

Of course, the great blue heron is smart

See HERONS, pg 8

Stalking the elusive heron, and learning about animal intelligence

Great blue herons are large weird looking-birds that spend their lives in or near water, right? Wrong. Come on, every time you've seen one it was always in a swamp. It hides in the reeds and rushes and when you least expect it, flies off. Right. Well, most of the time.

The rest of the story you can read in Alene Case's informative article about great blue herons. And here's my story to back it up. Alene and I had been hunting the great blue heron since last year. In



CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

the fall, after the leaves had fallen from the trees, she took me to a field overlooking a large forest grove in Frances Slocum State Park and said, "Look up there in the treetops and you can see their nests." Incredibly, I could see them easily, because the nests were huge. At least five three- or four-foot-wide nests swayed in the tallest treetops, magnificent remnants of blue heron family life in the spring. Now who would have thought it? Big blue swamp birds nesting in the trees.

Well of course no one would believe this, so I

needed some photographic documentation to support the whole business. My problem was twofold: the herons had already left for their migration south, which was a fact that never occurred to me; and another one that should have, my lens was dismally small in range to get a good closeup anyway. I vowed to return in the spring before the leaves came out again to photograph this wonder, and Alene agreed to write a "blue heron" article.

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