

## **Communications Class Puts Knowledge to Work**

Why is there thunder and lightning? Why do turtles have shells? To explain nature's mysteries, Abingdon fourth-graders invent legends and dramatize them through stop-action claymation movies in their Modern Communications class. The rise of Alexander the Great and other social studies topics are fodder for fifth-graders' historical fiction films.



Modern Communications is one of three special classes at Abingdon designed to help K-5 students connect academic subjects with real-world applications. Children make concepts come to life through drama, dance, movement, art, film, and video. They also get to use the lab's 15 laptops and eight digital video cameras.

How exactly do nine- and ten-year-olds make movies? Kerry Abbott, who created the class and has been teaching at Abingdon for seven years, says children first brainstorm, then research their story. Using special story-boarding software, they map it into 12 scenes.

Then kids get to mold and twist bits of colorful clay into characters – from snakes and snails to Julius Caesar. They create sets with cardboard, crayons and found objects. By moving the clay characters slightly and filming them a few seconds at a time, they create a visual story. Later they record voices, edit

in iMovie, and finally add titles and credits.

## **What does it mean to be Word Smart?**

Last year third-graders showed their school-mates various ways people can be smart in a series of special features. These video shorts air during the

morning announcements on the Cardinal News Network (CNN), the school's closed-circuit TV station.

According to the Multiple Intelligences theory that underlies Abingdon's special programming, children explain that people can be number smart, art smart, body smart, people smart, music smart, self smart, nature smart, or word smart. "Everyone is smart, just in different ways," a third-grader says, she explains to the camera.

The "in-depth reports" also feature future careers. Children show their peers that a number-smart person might choose to be an accountant, banker, engineer, astronaut, or scientist.

Even kindergarteners and first-graders get to take Communications with Kerry Abbott. They might write poetry about famous works of art, or write literature-based plays. Last year, kindergarteners got increasingly creative with the classic Three Little Pigs and created storybooks such as the Three Little Javelinas, the Three Little Hawaiian Pigs and the Magic Shark, the Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig.



## **Advice for Kids, By Kids**

"I'm bored," a little girl complains while sitting in the gym waiting for the school day to start. "Why don't you check out a book at the library?," another suggests. In "Morning Opportunities", one of the public service announcements (PSAs) that second-graders create in Communications class for the rest of the school, children explain how to return and check out library books, and how to get a pass to the music room to practice their violin, recorder, or band instrument.

PSAs are shown to the entire school via CNN, and second-graders get to write the scripts, act, and produce. Students treat topics ranging from healthy choices in the cafeteria to how to play nicely on the playground.

Friends of Abingdon Neighborhood School (FANS) is a community support group for Abingdon Elementary School in Fairlington. To sign up for their monthly e-newsletter, visit <[www.friendsofabingdon.org](http://www.friendsofabingdon.org)>.

*Contributed by Amy Suardi.*