

October 8, 2014 – Staunton City Schools Tip Sheet

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Shelburne Middle School: Building Relationships through Restorative Practices

During the 2013-14 school year, Staunton City Schools' staff had many conversations about promoting a positive school climate throughout the division. Through conversations with Dr. Jelisa Wolfe, Executive Director of Student Services, attendance at conferences and research, administration and staff kept revisiting the idea of Restorative Practices.

According to the International Institute of Restorative Practices, the “fundamental premise of restorative practices is that people are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes when those in authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them.” “We felt like much of the restorative literature echoed our thinking about the importance of educating children beyond the academic curriculum, and that the philosophy behind restorative practices blended well with our philosophy in middle school,” said Principal Robert Craft.

This August, after 3 days of training, teachers began implementing some of what they learned during the school's Success block. One of the first practices they used was “circles.” “Circles provide a safe and respectful means for students to share ideas, concerns, compliments and solutions to problems that they encounter in their school day,” Craft added. Further, he notes, “When students understand how their actions affect others they are less likely to repeat the behavior. It's a simple concept, but it takes time and consistency—which is why we decided to make this one of our priorities for the current school year.” With the end of the first nine weeks approaching, there are already signs that this process of allowing students to problem solve with each other is creating a more positive and productive culture within the school. Brandy Johnson, a 7th grade language arts teacher at Shelburne said this when asked to sum up the process. “Circles are going *really* well. Even shy and quiet students are willing to share a little, the more outgoing students patiently wait for their time to speak, and our success has built a real sense of family and trust in these few short weeks.”



Shelburne students participate in “circle” exercises.

Jamestown Comes to McSwain

What do Werewocomoco and Jamestown have in common? If you said that both are important archaeological dig sites in Virginia, McSwain's fourth graders would agree and share with you more about what they are learning in class. As part of the Virginia Studies class, students are learning about how the cultures of the Native Americans and the English settlers clashed and how they learned to cooperate.

Students are reading a selection of historical fiction, *Blood on the River*, by Elisa Carbone. In the story, a boy named Samuel travels from England to the New World as part of an expedition. His first encounters with the native peoples in the Caribbean and in the New World teach Samuel about different perspectives and about the value of culture. Survival in the new colony tests Samuel as he evaluates these life lessons and learns to make good choices using his heart and his head.

In September, fourth grade students at McSwain enjoyed the experience of Jamestown in their own classrooms. A representative from the Jamestown Outreach Program visited each classroom and shared the Cultures at Jamestown program with the students. Students tried on armor from an English colonist, held tools made by Indians and Africans, and even had the opportunity to wear clothing from the first permanent English settlement colonists. The students were amazed at the similarities among these three cultures.

The students are looking forward to their field trip to Jamestown in October, when they will tour the Jamestown settlement and the Powhatan village, visit the three ships, and travel through the museum.



The Jamestown representative discusses the culture of the Powhatan people.