

Teaching

for high potential

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS: LEARNING WITH PURPOSE

by Christopher Benavides, 2003 Professional Achievement Certificate Program Graduate

One morning, Ella approached me with a magazine ad featuring Rob Lowe as the spokesperson for National Denim Day for breast cancer and a request. She wanted to discuss this as a class and perhaps do something. As Ella and I talked with the class about cancer, the students asked if the class could wear denim on National Denim Day for a contribution. Because of the new school uniform policy, we needed approval from the principal. When she learned of the school initiative, she agreed but only if we coordinated the event for the entire school.

The next day my students began their project with great enthusiasm. They decided to recycle old jeans

as posters around the school and visited each class to announce the event. Students also appeared on the school morning show and created an informational flyer to send home. As they learned more about the effects of cancer on individuals and their families, the class decided to add an educational component. For this, we targeted our efforts to the fifth grade and planned an event. One student invited the speech pathologist to teach them sign language to "Wind Beneath My Wings." Then the class wanted a guest speaker: a cancer survivor. So, we worked with the American Cancer Society to arrange a guest. In addition, the class agreed we should invite the Mayor whose husband was a breast cancer survivor. The event was a huge success and the class raised over \$3,300 to donate to the Susan B. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. This event continues at school each year with students raising funds and awareness—all thanks to a gifted student's initiative and the work of the entire class.

Gifted students have a passion about the world in which they live and often have a sense of agency and urgency about making the world a better place (Renzulli, Koehler, & Fogarty, 2006). They are impassioned about a range of issues such as cancer, homelessness, animal care, and AIDS. Service learning projects provide gifted students with opportunities to make community connections while learning with purpose through the curriculum.

In school-based service-learning projects, students can apply curricula and classroom learning to areas of interest or concern through hands-on service projects they design and implement. Connecting with the community is more than just volunteering or getting out of the classroom; to be an authentic service learning experience, a real need must be addressed and planned student learning must be linked to the efforts.

A Service Learning Primer

For many students, community service learning motivates, boosts self-esteem, promotes leadership and cooperative skills, and provides opportunities for independent exploration. Although students must have ownership of the "problem" and a central role in developing possible solutions, careful planning is necessary to ensure that all students are actively engaged and learning (Lewis, 1998). There are six essential steps to facilitating a successful service-learning project.

1) The Issue Statement

The issue statement identifies a perceived community need or interest and provides a rationale for student involvement. One effective way to engage students in selecting an issue is to scan the newspaper with an eye for

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Benefits of Service Learning

- Increased retention of academic skills
- Development of leadership, citizenship, and personal responsibility
- Empowerment of students as learners, teachers, achievers, and leaders
- Heightened awareness and increased involvement in the community
- Increased relevancy of education to "the real world"
- Authentic opportunities for career exploration
- Enhancement of creative problem-solving and critical thinking skills



identifying community needs. Volunteer opportunities and human-interest stories often can ignite a project. Gifted students are attuned to these issues and want to learn about them in order to do something about them. As the issue statement takes shape, students will explore a number of key questions: What issues or concerns exist in our community? What is something that needs to be accomplished for our community? Do we need to raise awareness about something? Why is this important?

2) Research

Social scientists know that identifying an issue is just the beginning; the real work comes in collecting data to make informed, practical decisions about how to help. In this manner, service learning encompasses content knowledge across the curriculum. For example, researching the issue of homelessness can lead students to explore topics in science (nutrition, climate, healthcare), social studies (government policies, economics, psychology), and language arts (persuasive writing, reading for a purpose). In the research phase of the project, students are seeking to answer the following: What do I know? What do I want to know? How can I help? Is there a person or organization in the community that is already working on this

issue? Can I visit a place to find out more information or access more resources?

3) Problem Alternatives

As students dig deeper into an issue or topic, they are likely to discover a multi-faceted problem rather than a simple cause and effect relationship. Re-examining the issue with facts in hand gives students a chance to apply new skills. For example, in an initial issue statement, students identified lake pollution as an environmental concern in their community; however, in a discussion comparing their research findings, they discovered that the underlying causes of the problem were agricultural run-off and overpopulation of migratory birds. As they examine their data, students might consider the following: What factors or situations have contributed to the issue or concern? Is there an unexpected cause or hidden problem within the larger issue? How do I present this information to others? How can I inform others about the issue or concern?

4) Brainstorm

Once students have an in-depth understanding of the problem, they can begin to think creatively about a solution. Encourage your students to remain open to many and varied responses as they

discuss the following questions: List as many ideas as you can to improve this situation, issue, or problem. What resources do we have? What actions can we take to address this situation, issue, or problem? What can we do to make a difference?

5) Action Plan

The purpose of an action plan is to get all students working together to achieve a common goal. As students develop a course of action, it will become clear that "no one can do everything, but everyone can do something." A division of labor encourages students to identify their strengths and interests and to direct their efforts toward making a difference in their community. As they map out their next steps, students will tackle many questions: What do we want others to do or know about this situation, issue, or problem? What resources do we have? What resources do we need? What solutions will work best for us? What is our timeline? How will we organize our efforts?

6) Evaluation & Reflection

After a project is completed, reflection is necessary to evaluate the service-learning project and extend student learning. Some ways to reflect

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Four Ways to Get Your Students Connected

Direct service learning (person-to-person, face-to-face service)

The benefits are responsibility, empathy, development of interpersonal skills, and problem-solving. Examples include tutoring, conflict resolution programs, performances about violence, or drug prevention, and recording the life stories of senior citizens.

Indirect service learning (working on or advocating for a broad issue often within an organized group)

The benefits are increased cooperation, teamwork, organization, and project-specific skills. Examples include compiling a town's history, volunteering at a local health clinic, restoring a historic structure, and removing exotic plants to preserve public areas.

Research-based service learning (gathering and presenting information on areas of interest and need)

The benefits are an increased ability to conduct meaningful research, make discriminating judgments, and assess, evaluate, and test hypotheses. Examples include writing a guide on community services and translating it into other languages, water testing for local homeowners, and gathering information and creating a brochure for a non-profit agency.

Advocacy service learning (educating others about topics of public interest)

The benefits are increased perseverance, as well as a greater understanding of rules, systems, processes, and the skills needed to work with adults. Examples include hosting a public forum on topics of interest in a local community, public information campaigns, working with an elected official to draft legislation, and training community members in disaster preparation.

Understanding Motivations: Using Literature to See the World from Another Perspective

Joan K. Jacobs, Ph.D., Lincoln (NE) Public Schools

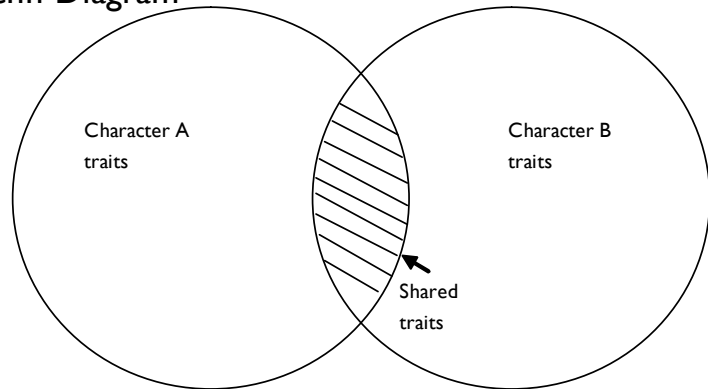
The reading of literature combines the best of several worlds: it's entertaining, it increases our skills and knowledge base, and it provides us with a wealth of insights about how other people may think.

One of the best uses of literature within a classroom is helping students discover that ours is not the only possible—or correct—perspective at a given time. An in-depth discussion regarding characters and their relative abilities to 1) make good decisions and 2) understand the way other people think and process information can yield positive long-term results in elevating classroom management and minimizing interpersonal conflicts. It is much easier to analyze the effectiveness of decision making when we do not have a personal investment in the outcome, but the practice of analyzing characters and their motivations will ultimately become helpful later when students are emotionally involved in issues with others.

To that end, on the next page are suggestions for books that encourage good discussion of motivations and varying perspectives. While the questions that accompany the novels are specific to the books, other strategies may prove effective regardless of the title being used.

The Johari Window, for example, provides students a concrete understanding of the problems created by assuming that we all share the same world view. As an overview, the window is divided into four panes: arena, façade, blind spot, unknown. Each pane

Venn Diagram



includes information about a level of awareness and unawareness of the character and those who interact with the character.

By completing a Johari window on two characters who are engaged in a conflict, for example, it may become quite apparent why the conflict exists, if the conflict is predicated on uneven understandings of the situation. This process also provides students with practice in finding and citing evidence in the text.

A similar strategy involves the use of a Venn Diagram, which demonstrates points of commonality and differences between two characters allowing students to compare and contrast story details with ease. The intersection of the circles indicates areas of commonality between the characters, while the non-overlapped portions contain characteristics pertaining only to a single character.

Johari Window

<p>Arena</p> <p>Information about Character I that is known by both characters</p>	<p>Blind Spot</p> <p>Information that the other character has noticed about Character 1 (especially those things of which Character 1 is unaware)</p>
<p>Façade</p> <p>Information of which Character I is aware but has not disclosed to the other</p>	<p>Unknown</p> <p>Information that both characters do not know about Character I.</p>



NAGC
Standards

The information contained in the article aligns with the following Gifted Program Standards: Socio-Emotional Guidance and Counseling (1 & 4) and Curriculum and Instruction (1, 2, 5). For a complete copy of the Standards, visit www.nagc.org.

Granny Torrelli Makes Soup



*And then she says it: Okay Rosie, what's going on with you?
I say, Nothing's going on with me.
She says, You maybe can fool other people with that smart head of yours, but you can't fool Granny Torrelli.
I like Granny Torrelli, always making good things, always so calm, so patient, always telling me about my smart head.*

For the child who has difficulties dealing with anger or understanding other people's perspectives, this book would be a wise choice. Every problem in Rosie's life eventually becomes a topic for discussion while Granny Torrelli cooks and metes out her wisdom. When Rosie has difficulties—how to handle anger, the differences between generations, the problems encountered by and with her blind friend Bailey—Granny makes soup and shares stories from her childhood in Italy, thus revealing that even as cultures are different, some concerns are timeless and present for all of us.

Sharon Creech succeeds once again in creating a believable world that is equally enjoyable for boys and girls. The book can be read quickly and almost effortlessly, despite the Italian references that appear regularly (zuppa!); it is appropriate for a wide range of ages.

Pictures of Hollis Woods

This picture has a dollop of peanut butter on one edge, a smear of grape jelly on the other, and an X across the whole thing. I cut it out of a magazine for homework when I was six years old. "Look for words that begin with W," my teacher, Mrs. Evans, had said.

She was the one who marked in the X, spoiling my picture. She pointed. "This is a picture of a family, Hollis. A mother, M, a father, F, a brother, B, a sister, S. They're standing in front of their house, H. I don't see one W word here."

I opened my mouth to say: How about W for wish, or W for want, or W for "Wouldn't it be lovely," like the song the music teacher had taught us?

But Mrs. Evans was at the next table by that time, shushing me over her shoulder.

Right from the start, it is clear that Hollis doesn't fit in. Named for the woods where she was abandoned as an infant, 11-year-old Hollis struggles with balancing the inconsistent family life of foster care with her prodigious talent as a visual artist. She has become renowned among child protective services for her unwillingness to stay either in school or with any foster home.

When she meets aging Josie, however, she realizes that finally the situation has reversed, and that Josie, however well meaning a foster parent, really needs Hollis to look after her.

Discussion Questions for *Granny Torrelli*:

- Why does Granny Torrelli make soup whenever Rosie is upset?
- If Rosie has good intentions in learning Braille, why does Bailey become so angry when he finds out? Justify his reaction. Justify her reaction to his reaction. How might she have handled the situation with more sensitivity?
- Consider how many of the senses are involved when Granny Torrelli makes soup. Why might this be important?
- In previous years, Bailey and Rosie have gotten along well. Why do they now have difficulties in their friendship? What has changed? What might they need to do to make sure they remain close?
- Why is food so important in this book? What difference does it make? Couldn't Granny make the same impact in the living room?

Reference

Creech, S. (2005). *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup*. New York: Harper Collins.

Discussion Questions for *Pictures of Hollis Woods*:

- In Chapter 1, why is Hollis so adamant about not wanting anyone to see into her soul?
- Through her years in foster care, what has Hollis learned about dealing with conflicts? How does she typically respond when she encounters a problem?
- Why does Hollis not believe in the Golden Rule? Find evidence that she operates under a different belief system.
- The self-fulfilling prophesy suggests that you will get whatever you expect to get. Is this true of the people who have known Hollis? Find examples from the novel to support your answer.
- To whom does she demonstrate her lack of respect? How does Hollis demonstrate her lack of respect?
- Find a situation in which Hollis responds differently from the way you might. What accounts for her making such different decisions?



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Giff, P. R. (2002). *Pictures of Hollis Woods*. New York: Scholastic.

272 Powerful Words: Investigating The Gettysburg Address

Suzanna E. Henson, Ph.D., Florida Gulf Coast University

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what we did here.

- Abraham Lincoln

Oddly enough, these stirring lines come from one of the best-known speeches in U. S. history, The Gettysburg Address. For just over two minutes in November 1863, Lincoln shared his ideas about the future of a young nation embroiled in a bloody struggle in a concise 272 words. He addressed the audience of approximately 20,000 people at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, the site of one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. The speech offers an intriguing glimpse into the past, present, and future of the country, as well as revealing a great deal about Lincoln's mindset as the war continued to tear the country apart.

Why Now?

According to the National Council for the Social Studies (1994), "Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time." This framework for the investigation of Lincoln's address encourages students to bridge the gap between past events and their personal perspec-

tives and experiences. It is also ideally suited to engage advanced learners who benefit from an opportunity to wrestle with complex and abstract social phenomena in a range of academic disciplines. In fact, Sewell (1999) reminds us that "Social studies is an open-ended, relatively undetermined and multifaceted area of learning. It is just these qualities that reflect contemporary conceptions of gifted education."

The Past in the Present

The Gettysburg Address is intricately connected to the legacy of Lincoln's presidency, and it continues to influence American politics and history over a cen-

tury later. Many students have read about the 16th president, and some have visited historic sites such as the Lincoln Memorial and the Lincoln homestead in Springfield, Illinois; however, few have reflected upon these experiences within a historical or political context or in relation to their own lives. This exercise builds upon that familiarity and helps students to develop interpretive, analytical, and investigative skills.

Reading this speech sparks natural curiosity in students about the specific time, place, and circumstances of the memorial event. Why did Lincoln write The Gettysburg Address? Under what circumstances did he give it? Why has the speech become so popular during the past 140 years? What does it mean? How does The Gettysburg Address connect to events in the world today? As students uncover clues and develop a greater understanding of The Gettysburg Address's historical connections and political expression, they also make connections and develop interpretations that relate to their own lives.

Lincoln's speech provides a wonderful starting point for a series of explorations in various interest areas and academic disciplines. For example, students could investigate how political

Investigative Questions: The Gettysburg Address

Literary Criticism

- What characteristics of the speech contribute to its mood?
- What is Lincoln's message in this address? Is it political? Memorial?
- Why does Lincoln use repetition and is it effective? Why or why not?
- Does the speech sound poetical? Was it written to be said aloud, or to be read by future generations?

Historical Perspective

- Lincoln begins his speech with "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Why does he do this?
- How has this speech become part of Lincoln's legacy as a president?
- How would you feel if you were a soldier hearing The Gettysburg Address in person in November 1863? A Southerner? A child? A mother or father of a soldier? A Congressman?

Biographical Perspectives

- Who was Abraham Lincoln? When and where did he live? How did the events of his life shape his writing?
- What world events influenced Lincoln's life and time as president?
- Using this speech as an example, what can you say about Lincoln as a writer? As a person?

Personal Connections

- What ideas would you like to explore in your own writing?
- How does The Gettysburg Address connect to events in the world today?
- If you could explain the ideas within Lincoln's speech to anyone, who would it be and why?

speeches are constructed as well as how that process has changed over time. They might also be interested in examining the way in which the speech serves two purposes, political and memorial, and investigating whether there are other examples of the same type of speech in history or literature. Other learners may decide to trace the effects of Lincoln's address on the country—or the effects of the Civil War on the President and his speech.

An Investigation in Action

I investigated The Gettysburg Address with a group of 10-12 year olds last summer. Holding up a replica of the speech and a copy of *Lincoln: A Photobiography* by Russell Freedman, I introduced the class to this work of rhetoric and writing, one piece of evidence at a time. We began by reading the speech together because although many students had heard about the address, few had actually read or heard the language of the speech. After rediscovering this beloved classic, we began to explore the meaning and the setting of The Gettysburg Address.

As part of the historic investigation, students explored photographs of Gettysburg taken at the time Lincoln gave his speech; the photos tell a story of devastation, and also foretell the future of the media and photography. Examining pictures of the battlefield taken in July 1863, students better understood the need and importance of the memorial service that took place just a few months after the battle. By analyzing a replica of Lincoln's address, students saw the composition process; different drafts downloaded from the Library of Congress yielded new insights about word choices and revisions. Through their inves-

tigation of artifacts, students developed a better understanding of the historical context and conflict behind the speech.

As the class recorded and discussed their observations about each piece of evidence, I employed guided questions to further student understanding about The Gettysburg Address. The questions elaborated on the previous page in conjunction with inquiry-based instruction allowed a free exchange of ideas and encouraged a philosophical discussion in this elementary classroom.

Investigating the social sciences and humanities with gifted students helps them to develop broad conceptual understandings while also forging meaningful connections between the past, present, and future. Given the opportunity to focus on one small snapshot of historical perspective, The Gettysburg Address, students can examine their own perspectives and reflect on the life experiences of others while also developing research and higher level thinking skills. Finally, their investigation of The Gettysburg Address affords students a new appreciation of rhetoric, history, and its role in their own lives.

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The information contained in the article aligns with the following Gifted Program Standards: Curriculum and Instruction (1, 2, 5). For a complete copy of the Standards, visit www.nagc.org.

Service Learning, continued from p. 1

include journaling, discussions, and artwork. Throughout the project but especially at the end, students should be recognized for their efforts and have the opportunity to celebrate success. Student reflections may focus on the following: How did we make a difference? What worked well during the project? How could we have improved our efforts? What did you learn from participating in this project?

As you consider how best to integrate service learning into your curriculum for the first time, help your students think globally and act locally. Begin with a small issue or concern at school or in your local community. Once students learn the process of service learning, other projects and independent learning will ensue with you acting as a coach rather than the group leader.

Why Now?

Aesop stated, "No act however small, is ever wasted." This motto is especially applicable to teaching gifted students. As a teacher of gifted students, I whole-heartedly support and advocate service learning in the classroom because I have seen the benefits to my students and my community first-hand. Early experiences with service learning create opportunities for academic skills integration and plant seeds that feed caring, active citizens in the years ahead.

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Javits Works

A Challenge in Measurement: Searching for the Yeti

Tutita M. Casa, Ph.D. & M. Katherine Gavin, Ph.D., University of Connecticut

What do mathematicians and gifted third graders have in common? Both are engaged and stimulated by problems that require mathematical reasoning. The activity described below, appropriate for students in grades 3-5, has been adapted from *What's the ME in Measurement All About?* (Gavin, Chapin, Dailey, & Sheffield, 2006), a unit from the Project M3: Mentoring Mathematical Minds series, which provides challenging curriculum for elementary students with high math potential. The activity addresses one of the five content standards identified by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2000): measurement. With teacher guidance, this activity will enable students to work toward an increased understanding of the attribute of length, the realization of the importance of standardization of units, a familiarity with customary and metric systems, and comprehension of how tools, techniques, and measurement units affect the precision of measurements.

Give Them An Inch . . .

The lesson begins with a story about the Yeti, named by the Sherpa who live in the Himalayas. Students may also be familiar with the western interpretation of the legend as the Abominable Snowman.

The Yeti is a mysterious, human-like creature that has lived in the Himalayan Mountains for many years, and there have been several sightings by mountain climbers since the late 1800s. Unfortunately, no one has yet to photograph the Yeti. However, some mountain climbers have found what they think are the Yeti's very large footprints, others claim to have actually seen it, and even some allege to have been rescued by it! The Sherpas, who live in

the Himalayas, contend that the Yeti is an actual creature. There are countless instances that make many people believe the Yeti exists, and to this very day believe the story is more than a myth.

They'll Go A Mile . . .

Now that they're hooked, explain to students that they will become part of a Himalayan expedition team charged with searching for any evidence about the Yeti's existence. Provide the following challenge:

After several days of trekking through the snow-covered mountains, you make an exciting discovery—footprints. They look like human footprints, but are much too large, so it must be the Yeti's tracks! Since no pictures of the Yeti exist, your team decides to use the footprints to create a life-size representation of the Yeti. How exciting! You decide you need to measure the footprints. Unfortunately, all of your measurement tools were lost in a ferocious snowstorm. You have no choice but to use your unsharpened pencil as a measurement tool. You determine the length of a footprint is exactly two pencil lengths. Your team heads back to base camp with this information to create an outline of the Yeti.

Discuss with students how they can use the provided facts to create an outline of the real-sized Yeti. Eventually, they should reason that they could compare the length of their feet to the Yeti's. Most students' feet will be approximately one pencil length. Next, ask, "How can we use the fact that the Yeti's foot is twice the size of your foot to create an outline of the human-like Yeti?" A reasonable conclusion would be to double the

size of the lengths of each of their own body parts to estimate those of the Yeti.

Divide students into pairs and provide them with a calculator, unsharpened pencil, centimeter ruler, tape measure marked in inches, some string, scissors, and butcher paper. Each pair should be assigned one of the following body parts: the head (chin to top of head), torso (top of leg to chin), left arm, right arm, left hand, right hand, left leg, right leg, left foot, and right foot. They will then use their own measurements to determine the Yeti's size and draw this on the butcher paper. Students then will assemble the body parts to build a life-sized model of the Yeti.



The Yeti

To begin, pairs will need to decide who to measure in their team and what measurement tools they will use. Additionally, they need to consider what measurements to make (such as the lengths and widths of various aspects of each body part) and whether they will round their measurements if they choose to use the ruler or tape

In deciding whom to measure, some pairs may select the tallest student, reasoning that the Yeti is tall. Others may choose the student with the foot closest to a pencil length, thinking that the proportions of their body part will be closer to the Yeti's true measurements. A few teams might even average the measurements of all students in their group. Pairs also will vary in the measuring tools they will select. Some will reason that the ruler and tape measure are more precise, while others might think that the string may be more accurate when measuring the perimeter, for instance.

Once the class has assembled

their Yeti, have students study its proportions. As they discuss whether or not it looks like a large human, guide them to compare different features, such as the lengths of the right arm to the left, the length of the torso to each leg, and how far down the hands reach with respect to each leg. Encourage students to justify their ideas and offer their reasoning for others to process and judge. You can use the following questions to guide students to further their mathematical understanding about proportional reasoning and the need for standardized measures if they do not offer these insights on their own.

- How do you think measuring different people influenced the final model of the Yeti?
- How do you think using different measurement tools affected the size of your body part?
- How might rounding have changed each pair's measurements?
- What could we do to construct a more accurate model of the Yeti? Why?

Measuring Mathematical Reasoning

The previous discussion prepares students to demonstrate what they have learned about the importance of proportional reasoning, standard units of measure, and precision of measurement in a writing reflection. Responses to the question, "How would you adjust the measurement-taking process to recreate a more accurate represen-

tation of the Yeti?" should include the following ideas:

- Doubling the measurements of either one person or several people that are close to the same size increases accuracy.
- Using one tool, such as the ruler, also would result in body parts that are more proportional.
- Students also should address the precision of measurements. Although the differences would be slight, using different rounding strategies for each body part will result in less precise measures. Therefore, they should use a consistent rule to recreate the Yeti more accurately.
- The tool they decided to use also impacts the precision of the measures. The centimeter ruler and standard tape measure are more accurate when measuring length than the string or the pencil.
- They also would get a more accurate representation if they measured more dimensions. For example, to recreate the left arm, students could measure the length of their arm and simply double it. However, they would get a better representation if they also measured the width in several places, such as at the bicep, elbow, and wrist.
- Some students might even mention that the centimeter ruler would be slightly more precise than the tape measure since centimeters are smaller units compared to inches, and there would be less need to round when measuring small distances on the hands and feet, for instance.

Closing Thoughts

Measuring skills are necessary for students to acquire. Embedding these skills within a

problem-solving context encourages gifted students to go beyond learning individual skills and to think deeply about complex math ideas. Recreating the Yeti inspires students to consider proportionality, precision in measuring, and standardization of units in a way that is not only engaging, but requires students to reason at higher levels.

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The "Javits Works" column is designed to showcase success stories and research-based best practices from the only federal program that supports gifted education, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program. Please visit www.projectm3.org for more information about Project M3 and www.kendallhunt.com for more information about this unit and other Project M3 units and materials.



There will be several opportunities to hear about projects funded by the Javits Act at NAGC's 53rd Annual Convention in Charlotte, NC, November 1-5, 2006. Visit www.nagc.org for more information.



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
Gifted Children
1707 L STREET, NW, SUITE 550
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
www.nagc.org