



The Second Grade class at Andover Elementar Middle School wrote, produced and performed a Halloween play in October.

## Taking Class Time to Create a Play— Students Create Original Performance for Halloween

Gretchen Hildebrand, AE/MS

Second graders at AEMS spent the month of October brainstorming, writing, learning, practicing and designing the scenery for their annual Halloween play. What merit could this have when it ‘steals’ an hour a day from the regular curriculum? The students and I have the answers to that question.



### Week One:

By deciding as a group what the characters and setting should be, the students’ individual voices are heard through their own ideas and they each exercise their right to vote... and vote ... and vote!

“I liked getting to vote for what characters I thought should be included in the play. It was hard to decide but also fun to get to vote a lot.”

- When it is time to write the play, the students have to determine the CONFLICT or problem within the story - because every good story has a problem to solve
- figure out what the action is going to be throughout the story line –it is going to be acted on stage so there has to be plenty of ACTION
- approve of the dialogue each step of the way to ensure that their own ideas are included

- LISTEN CAREFULLY to make sure every part of the story makes sense, so the audience can follow

After the play is written and given the grade 2 seal of approval, it is time to decide who plays which part. For this, students find out how many speaking lines each character has and then volunteer for any part they feel comfortable with. Some students want a lot of speaking parts and are confident with their ability to learn the lines. Others are unsure about a big exposed part on stage in front of a lot of people (the whole school plus parents). This decision-making requires a degree of realism and maturity not often asked of the students. The final decisions, based on who volunteered for what parts and the students’ levels of confidence, are made by the teachers.

### Week Two:

Everyone gets his/her part and the REAL WORK begins. The students learn the POWER OF PRACTICE. Every day they practice reading the play and learning their lines. Every night they practice reading the play with someone at home and learning their lines.

“After about three days I could say my part and I knew what the person before me said and what the person after me was going to say. I couldn’t believe I learned it so fast!”

“It was exciting to be able to read the whole play. It was long and at first I didn’t know all of the words.”

### Week Three:

The play practice moves from the classroom to the stage several times during the week. The students no longer use their scripts. They begin figuring out

how to move on stage, how to speak to another character on stage while still facing the audience. Most importantly, they learn how to use loud, clear, slow voices and speak with expression and poise. This year the students decide to have music at the start and end of the play. More voting happens and the songs are chosen. The ideas for all parts scenery begin to take shape. Teachers and students work together to create it. Parents chip in cardboard and other odds and ends.

“Ms. Minnehan made an awesome living room for the Evil Witch, especially the book shelf. She is really funny.”

“We got to paint everything. I got to drill the wood with Mr. Hubbard.”

“Mr. Silverstein let us use the indoor soccer goal for the dungeon.”

### Week Four:

The scenery gets finished. The students now practice with all props in place. It makes it so much easier to know where to stand, move and speak. Costumes come to school. Parents and students create some of the most AMAZING COSTUMES and are encouraged to do so with minimal cost. It is exciting to see all the creative ideas come together.

There is the dress rehearsal with a

small practice audience, then the hour arrives and the play is performed.

As I sit in the audience and watch I am always amazed. These are seven and eight year olds. They have accomplished so much as a team. They are powerful. They are creative. They are



joyous. They have confidence. They have that for life.

“I loved doing the play. I want to do it again. I loved it so much. I will never, NEVER forget it.”

The child who wrote those last words took them from my heart. Seeing what kids can do when given the opportunity is at least worth a few hours of classroom instruction and seatwork. Don’t you think?

With thanks and gratitude to all at school and in Andover’s homes who make it possible to create lifelong memories.





Pat Frost  
Andover, NH  
Phone: 603.455.8870  
frostbuilding@comcast.net



Diane Fowler

10 Lawrence St.    735-5114    Fax 735-6141