

concepts to younger students in very engaging ways.

Developing a similar outreach model, Paula introduced her 28 Forensics students to our plan with the “Mentoring Project” handout. (get [HERE](#)) Student buy-in was no problem – final exams are never popular so any alternative is welcome. In addition, students were visibly excited at the idea of playing the role of teacher and sharing their knowledge with younger children.

Since Forensics is only a nine-week elective, the students began their projects almost as soon as the course started. After the project sheets were distributed and discussed, groups of three were self-selected, a time line was established, and topics chosen and approved. Two blocks of preparation time during class helped groups get started. A couple of weeks into the project, students handed in their short topic papers for Paula’s feedback and then prepared their lessons for the seventh graders. They were reminded that presentations needed to be not only engaging but also age-appropriate. Considering some of the grisly images Forensics calls to mind, this was a very important consideration.

Selected topics included wound analysis on a victimized Barbie, microscopic examination of hairs and fibers, Denzel Washington’s hamster and tire tread impressions (get sheet [HERE](#)), height determination through long bone measurements and graphing, arson, and blood spatter. Some of the labs were found and adapted from the many forensics internet sites while others, such as the tire impressions activity, were original productions. One on lip prints, which turned out to be very popular, was a particularly successful rewrite from geocities.

Stress-free practice sessions were given to peers during week 7 and 8 just prior to the middle school outreach sessions. The students were very positive about these ungraded dry runs and offered many positive and useful suggestions for improvement. Many students modified their presentations based on this whole class sharing.

Each of the final presentations consisted of three parts – a short talk, a lab/activity, and an opportunity for seventh graders to view various related artifacts and ask questions. Sometimes these questions veered off topic to discuss general concerns about high school. Rather than viewing this as negative, both the teachers and students saw this as a chance for the middle school students to talk with older students in a safe and



comfortable setting. Both age groups seemed to enjoy this.

The rubric the Forensics students received in their “Mentoring Project” handout was used to determine final grades. Paula took care of the short paper and pre-presentation components while Linda provided feedback on the actual presentation. Seventh graders were evaluated solely on class participation. Because of thorough preparation of lesson plans and public speaking rehearsal, all Forensic groups received a well-deserved A.

Reflecting on the entire process, from preparation to execution, surprisingly few difficulties were encountered. While 4 out of the 5 of seventh grade groups were very engaged and attentive, the period 8 class presented some “end of day” challenges. Paula was able to observe this group and was very impressed by how the three presenters interacted with the students and fielded questions. While not really significant, time management was an issue for some groups. In most cases, students used the 50 minutes available to them very wisely but one group was too short while another was disappointed when they couldn’t finish their blood spatter activity. This was not surprising because high school students are accustomed to 85-minute blocks, not 50-minute periods. Even Linda had to make major changes to her teaching when she switched levels.

Time constraints mandated that the nine groups present over just two consecutive days. Afterwards, Paula debriefed the students in a two-fold process – a class discussion focused on group experiences and also individual reflective essays. The success of the project is clearly expressed through the words of the forensics students.

“I feel that the mentoring project for forensics was a great idea since one of the best ways to learn something is by teaching it to somebody else. It was also a great idea how the mentoring project counting as our final, made life a lot easier. It was a pleasant experience, but not all easy. The background data for my project of hair and fibers was so broad that it was hard to summarize it all. Everything else was fun and easy. The students were pleasant and the teachers were kind, helpful, and patient.” --a participating student