

Description of Cross-Curricular, Cross-School Experience

For the first time in its history, Montgomery Academy collaborated with an all-African American class from Valiant Cross, a high-poverty school in Montgomery, Alabama for a cross-curricular, cross-school experience. The Montgomery Academy sixth and seventh grade students read Jo Hackl's novel *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe* for their summer reading assignment. MA Sixth and seventh grade teachers Mrs. Sease and Mrs. Grant created a 2-day interdisciplinary experience for the students including a book themed lunch featuring fried catfish and red velvet cake. The highlight of the experience was author Jo Hackl's visit to MA and a partnership with the Valiant Cross Academy 6th graders. Mrs. Sease and Mrs. Jada Davis at Valiant Cross worked together to partner the MA and Valiant Cross students in this learning experience.

Jo Hackl's novel "takes readers on an adventure with 12-year-old Cricket and her companion, a field cricket named Charlene, through an overgrown ghost town in Electric City, Mississippi, to solve a thirty-year-old clue trail in search of a secret room that may or may not exist, all to try to win back Cricket's run-away mother."

On Smack Dab Day 1, MA teachers took students through a variety of activities in their core classes. Students determined the area and perimeter of Cricket's treehouse in math class. In science, students identified types of plants that Cricket sees in the woods, and they came up with an outdoor survival plan using only the items found in their school backpack. They researched ginkgo trees and drew branches and leaves from that tree. In social studies and history, students researched the art of Walter Anderson (the artist on which the novel's secret room is based). They also researched doogaloo (the type of coin used in the ghost town of Electric City, MS) and created their own doogaloo in history and social studies. In English class, students drafted a short story using instructions and writing tips created by our visiting author Jo Hackl.

On Smack Dab Day 2, MA 6th and 7th grade students and faculty welcomed Valiant Cross Academy 6th grade students and faculty to campus for the morning. MA students and Valiant Cross students began the day together discussing a self-reflection document they completed earlier in their English classes for each other. Receiving help from others is a theme in the novel and the self-reflection document included reflections on the examples of help given and received in the novel as well as in the students' own lives. From there, MA and Valiant Cross students gathered to hear Jo Hackl speak about her life as a writer and the process of writing *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*. Later in the morning, both MA and Valiant Cross students worked with Mrs. Hackl and each other in a Writer's Workshop setting to revise and edit the short stories they wrote earlier in English class using writing prompts provided by Ms. Hackl. The students used a revision bookmark tool that Ms. Hackl developed and worked in groups of students from each school to revise their stories. Additionally, students created watercolor paintings in the style of Walter Anderson similar to the paintings found in the novel's secret room. MA and Valiant Cross students ended the morning together over a relaxing lunch during which they had the chance to get to know each other better, to speak with Mrs. Hackl in a small group setting, and to reflect on their morning of reading, writing, and creating together.

Valiant Cross students departed after lunch, and MA 6th and 7th graders continued their Smack Dab Day 2 adventures. The afternoon's excitement included paper making and a scavenger hunt around the MA campus. In the novel, Cricket's mother makes paper using "things in her paper the way other people stuck things in scrapbooks." (Hackl, *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*, 2) MA students brought to school their own special items for their personal paper-making experience and had a special visit from their beloved MA Lower School art teacher Mrs. Tullos to learn how to make paper. Because Cricket follows clues in the novel to find the artist's secret room, MA Middle School math teacher Mrs. Parvin created a math scavenger hunt for the afternoon. Students followed clues to find a special location on MA's campus.

Smack Dab Days at MA were a special learning experience for MA 6th and 7th graders as well as for Valiant Cross 6th graders. In their mid-term reflections, several MA students listed the cross-school experience as a highlight of their year. Now that the schools have had an opportunity to work together, they are exploring future collaborations.