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A Sport of the Mind

Submitted by Gerard van Steyn



Happy Valley Elementary team members Bella Gladden, Elena Mountin, Bradley Sides, Madeline Smith, Tyler Smith, Hayden van Steyn and Jacob van Steyn. Photo Gerard van Steyn

seven children each competed in the San Francisco Bay Region Odyssey Tournament.

One local team from Happy Valley Elementary developed a creative solution to their chosen problem in which scientists realistically travel across the ocean, are sucked into a mechanical moving vortex, enter a two-dimensional computer world as flat people, collect samples of computer worms, escape and return to evaluate and report on their findings and all while running into funny, mischievous sea creatures. To construct and execute their ideas, they independently worked with a dozen different power tools and self-wrote and refined their script, costumes and acting.

The third-grade Rheem team (including members Emma Bennett, Jane Burcham, Olivia Hillhouse, Connor Johnson, Quincy Morgridge, Jamie Murray, and Michael Pien with coaches Jennifer Johnson and Lenore Morgridge) took first place in their division. Their problem emphasized math by constructing a structure that could support as much weight as possible. The team constructed a 12-gram balsa wood structure that supported an amazing 235 lbs before it was crushed. The team also wrote and performed "The Lost Treasure" about pirates seeking gold, complete with a device which multiplied the treasure they found.

The following 12 Lamorinda teams won at the regional tournament and will be competing at the state Odyssey tournament on March 31:

- = Glorietta Elementary School
- Happy Valley Elementary School
- Lafayette Rotary (high school team)
- Moraga Rotary (elementary team A)
- Moraga Rotary (elementary team B)
- Moraga Rotary Club (high school team A)
- Orinda Intermediate School (blue team)
- Orinda Masonic (high school team)
- Sleepy Hollow Elementary School (green team)
- Stanley Middle School (team A)
- Stanley Middle School (team B)
- Wagner Ranch Elementary School

Odyssey of the Mind helps kids develop critical life skills that they may not otherwise gain through traditional classroom work or youth sports. To learn more, check out http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odyssey_of_the_Mind.

As most adults know, success in work / life is most often about being able to work effectively in a team environment, think creatively, develop unique solutions and then execute the plan - experiences that kids don't get enough of through traditional academics and after school activities. Because of the need for more opportunities to develop creative thinking, problem-solving skills, and the ability to work in inventive teams, Odyssey of the Mind (OoTM) has become a successful, growing world-wide program that fosters these life-skills in children and young adults.

OoTM team members apply their creativity to solve problems that range from building mechanical devices to performing their own interpretations of literary classics. The foundation of OoTM is that every idea and solution must come entirely from the kids, with no coach or parental suggestion or input. Teams then bring their solutions to competitions on the local, state, and world level. Thousands of teams from throughout the U.S. and from about 25 other countries participate in Odyssey of the Mind.

Over the last four-plus months many local OoTM teams have been working hard to independently imagine, create, build, develop and perform their ideas, and to work collaboratively as teams, and have fun. On Saturday, Feb. 25, a record number of over 200 Bay Area teams of up to



From left: Lenore Morgridge, Emma Bennett, Quincy Morgridge, Michael Pien, Connor Johnson, Jane Burcham, Olivia Hillhouse, Jamie Murray and Jennifer Johnson. Photo provided

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[back](#)

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