

# 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

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 worldwide 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 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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odyssey_of_the_Mind).



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

## TEEN SCENE

### Consider This: A Successful...Failure?

By Steven Zhou

Did you get accepted? What place did you win? Have you been awarded a scholarship?

When it comes to life, we all want to succeed. Competition seems to be the gas that fuels our teenage psyches. As I write this, I'm sitting on the floor at a public speaking tournament hoping to qualify for the State Championships. College acceptance letters are being delivered to friends and many are experiencing the joy of being "chosen." A couple of days ago, our Express Yourself Teen Radio on-air team was notified that our program is the most listened to show throughout the entire world on the Voice America Kids Network. In only three months of broadcasting, we are ranked number one.

One might argue that success is the trophy from the tournament, the acceptance from the desired college, or the status of being the top radio program worldwide. However, these trophies and accolades can only last a maximum length of a lifetime. Miramonte senior Lisa Chang shared her valuable viewpoint. "Learn to find enjoyment even when you don't end up on top. Those who are truly happy are those who love what they're doing." Instead of always trying to win, perhaps the loftier goal is to love the experience and make an impact on the world that survives after we're gone.

High school years are comprised of competition, from coveted positions on sport teams to auditions for the starring roles in school plays, but at what cost? A friend of mine wrote a paper describing the negative effects of over-competitiveness, citing examples of students who get professionals to take the SAT for them, or athletes who use illegal substances to gain strength.

When we examine the motives of someone who cheats to get an "A", or a student driven to the point of suicide by the pressure of "not measuring up", there would be little argument that their success equates failure.

Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor and 20th century psychologist, wrote, "Success cannot be pursued, rather, it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself." While not a perfect definition of success, the quotation summarizes the lives of people who made a lasting impact through dedication to service such as Martin Luther King's work with civil rights or Gandhi's devotion to freedom. As teenagers, our true success could be measured with our efforts to make a positive difference.

As I wonder how to help Express Yourself Teen Radio continue to be number one, it dawns on me that the success of the program is based on these questions: Are we providing a voice to teenagers around the globe and are we enjoying this adventure? How we influence and improve must be the reward. Otherwise, in our pursuit of the physical prize, we may just end up successfully failing.

Steven Zhou, a senior at Miramonte High School, is the administrator and co-host of the international teen radio program, Express Yourself!

Teen Scene is YOUR voice. If you have something to say or have writing skills and want to be part of our Teen Scene team, email our Teen Coach, Cynthia Brian, [CynthiaBrian.com](mailto:CynthiaBrian.com).

The opinions expressed in Teen Scene are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly.

Submit stories and story ideas to [storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com)

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