

Oregon Battle of the Books builds better readers

By LORI A. McNEIL, M.B.A., M.Ed.

Each new school year brings new activities, new programs, new challenges, and new opportunities for learning. Every year, students in third through twelfth grades across the nation have the chance to participate in a program designed to increase literacy skills and a love for reading through goal setting and interactive competitions with peers.

America's Battle of the Books was created to offer learning and comprehension of specific books through social learning, interaction through games, and mutual respect. Volunteer educators and librarians operate this organization, which is membership-based. America's Battle of the Books has been in operation for over 25 years and was patterned after an earlier reading

competition program, which has been used in schools for more than a century.

Four different membership options give communities opportunities to compete and participate in as small or large of a group as needed, and groups can register as a local school, county, region, district, or state. School libraries order the appropriate book list(s) needed and students read the books on the list and keep a journal of important information as they prepare for the competition.

Most "battles" are organized much like sports teams, complete with team colors and a mascot! At the beginning of the daylong competition students are divided into teams and as a team they choose their captain, team colors and



Photo courtesy of OBOB

The 2015 Battle of the Books winners in Oregon's 3-5 division were from St. Paul Parish School in Eugene.

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mascot. Through the day, these teams will play against each other as they answer questions about the books they have read. The winning team at the end of the day is invited to participate in the statewide battle, usually held in April or May.

America's Battle of the Books has grown significantly since the organization first started. According to their website, the program originated in a small rural school district in Belridge, California. As it grew beyond Kern County, it was renamed "America's Battle of the Books." The program now exists in every state in the union and is presently being used on every continent but Antarctica. The organization is working hard to offer the first national competition sometime in the next decade.

In Oregon, Battle of the Books

(OBOB) is sponsored by the Oregon Association of Schools and Libraries. Regional competitions take place all over the state with Region 6 (NE Oregon) held next March at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton. The state competition is held on the Salem campus of Chemeketa Community College.

Volunteers are always needed and welcomed. If you'd like to get involved, visit oboblsta.pbworks.com for more details or contact the group by email at oboblsta@gmail.com.

Baker City resident Lori McNeil has been an educator for the past 18 years, teaching all grade levels. Her recent book, "Charlie's First Day," follows the first day of kindergarten, as Charlie's class begins learning how to read.