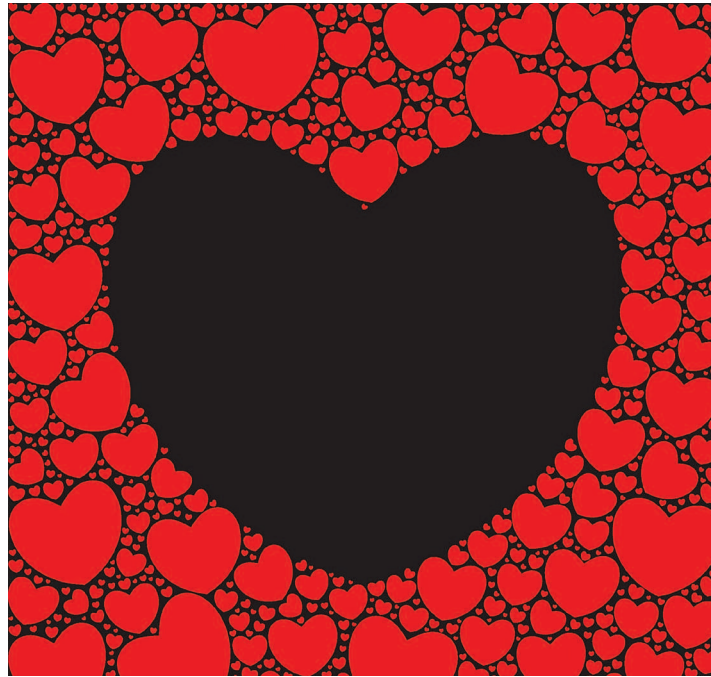


Schoolroom stories: The black hole valentine

Three eight-year-old boys in my classroom created a serial story of comic strip characters. Set in another universe, each character had special super-hero qualities. Some abilities were unique. Other attributes emerged only in conjunction with the skills of associates, or the task at hand.

These characters' adventures focused on helping each other out of problems, and the largest problem was safeguarding and procuring the energy to maintain their super powers. The protagonists of their stories traveled across the universe searching for these vital resources.



When the boys weren't involved with their comic strip characters, they researched black holes, plan-

ets, space travel, jet propulsion, big bang theory, solar energy, radio waves and constellations. Their comic strip acted as a type of ongoing research paper. New information learned showed up as drawings and dialogue in their cosmic comic stories.

The comic strips helped me know what lessons the boys might find interesting. Math? Scientific notation seemed to fit right in with space travel. History? Studying about Charles Schulz of Peanuts fame. Physics? Looking

at simple machines. Music? Elton John's "Rocket Man." Whatever subject I introduced that related to the comic strip was well received.

After a discussion about black holes, one of the boys, Randall, asked me, "Ms. Maren, what do you think is the most powerful force in the universe?"

The tone of Randall's voice let me know he expected me to decide between fusion, fission, solar, gravity or perhaps some other form of energy that the boys hadn't discovered, or anybody else for that matter.

"Well," I said, "you're probably not going to like my answer. You probably won't even think my answer is believable. You'll probably think it is the grossest, yuckiest answer I could tell you. I expect you'll just laugh when I tell you."

"No, no. We promise we won't laugh," the boys promised.

"The most powerful force in the universe? I think the most powerful force in the universe is ... love."

Much to their credit, the boys



Maren Schmidt

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didn't cough, roll their eyes, or shout out "Oh, gross!"

"You probably won't find that written down in any physics book. You won't find a mathematical formula to prove it. And some people might even say I'm wrong and crazy. But I think the ultimate force in the universe is love."

It was lunchtime. The boys left without additional comment. That day here was no more discussion about the most powerful force in the universe.

A couple of weeks went by and Randall asked if he could talk with me. "I've been thinking about what you said about the strongest force in the universe. I've talked to my parents and to my grandparents. But mostly, I've been thinking about it and I have to tell you I think you're right. Love is the most powerful force in the universe. It makes everything possible. The power of love makes a black hole seem weak and tiny."

That was my black hole valentine.

Kids Talk™ is an award-winning column dealing with childhood development issues written by Maren Stark Schmidt, M.Ed. She has more than 30 years experience working with children and holds teaching credentials from the Association Montessori Internationale. Contact her at maren@marenschmidt.com or visit MarenSchmidt.com.

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