

I am enthusiastically nominating Jeanne Skinner for the Patricia Behring Award in the junior division. She is exceptional in her ability to reach all of her students and make learning history 'fun', 'unforgettable', 'best ever', and 'awesome'. In a world full of technology and distraction where boredom is dreaded and avoided at all costs by middle school kids, Mrs. Skinner gathers up their attention, sustains it in a most meaningful way, and 'plants history right in our heads'. The students are inspired by history. When it is time for their National History Day projects, that inspiration is translated in the most remarkable and creative ways.

Jeanne Skinner has her students' attention from the moment the bell rings. A current student said, "We come in and sit down and are quiet because we do not want to waste a single moment". Another current student told me that she has classmates that get in trouble or don't do their work in other classes, but in Mrs. Skinner's class they do because she makes the effort to reach all kids and involves them in learning history. Several parents I talked with made the observation that Jeanne Skinner 'involves', 'draws out' and, 'engages', ALL of her students. One parent wrote, "Being a brilliant history teacher is a wonderful thing – but being a brilliant history teacher who can fully engage students and fire their will to learn is something quite extraordinary."

The word 'fun' is the word I heard most often when students talked about being in Jeanne Skinner's class. 'Fun' was followed closely by 'exciting' and 'entertaining'! For example, when learning about the 18th Amendment, she turns the entire classroom into a Speakeasy and teaches the students the Charleston. And every student participates! When teaching Manifest Destiny, she got down on one

knee in front of one boy and sang a song she'd learned as a child, 'You Are My Destiny'. One student said, "When we were talking about politics she pretended to be running for office and stopped at each person's desk as if it was their house and tried to get them to vote for her". During another lesson she brought in a gas mask from World War I and showed students how to wear it and how and why it worked.

Mrs. Skinner is a wonderful storyteller. Many students gave examples of stories she'd told from her own life when teaching. For example, she told the story of accidentally happening upon a Ku Klux Klan meeting. Also, a former student, now in high school wrote, "Once she told us about traveling to Germany as a young woman and almost getting shot by German guards at the Berlin Wall. I will never forget that story."

Several students noted the impression Mrs. Skinner's teaching of immigration policies had. A current student: "One memory of mine is when she was teaching about immigrants. She chose a 'chance' card from a box and stood right next to me. I was super nervous when she asked me to stand, and then she nudged me and was rude to me. I didn't understand what was happening until she explained that immigrants were driven away by this type of behavior. Although I was nervous, I have never forgotten about the reasons immigrants left their country". And, along the same lines, a current student: "When she was teaching us about immigration, she asked different students to portray immigrants and go through a test that we would have gone through on Ellis Island. We each had health ailments and had to answer confusing questions to show how hard it was for immigrants to understand the immigration process. It was a fun way to involve us

and help us understand the challenges immigrants face.”

Parents of students, like myself, also treasure the exceptional, extraordinary ways that Mrs. Skinner shares her talents with our children. “... We have been privy to many conversations about Mrs. Skinner’s classroom. Both of our boys devour the information Mrs. Skinner shares and it is often the topic of family dinners....” And another parent, “As a parent, I would say that through observation, I’ve noticed that Mrs. Skinner relates to ALL kids regardless of their background”. And another, “Ms. Skinner is, without question, one of the most innovative teachers our son...has had in his 9 years in LCS. Ms. Skinner has the uncanny ability to be so engaging that a group of teenage boys would relinquish their free period to take a semester of Russian studies with her. I have heard backseat conversation of Ms. Skinner’s descriptions of Stalin’s rule, of Russia’s part in WWII, and even a ‘dosvedanya’ among peers”.

As one mom said, “Her most valuable classroom products are not written down in a worksheet...”. The ways in which Jeanne has inspired, and continues to inspire, a love of history in her students are so numerous. The National History Day project is required of all 7th grade students at Linkhorne Middle School. The enthusiasm and creativity and love of history inspired by Mrs. Skinner are evident in each project, whether or not they are chosen to compete at our regional National History Day event. My son remembers how history became the favorite subject of many of her students because of the ‘fun and exciting way she teaches.’. “I will never forget the time I spent learning from her and I will never stop wishing that I could be her student again.”

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn”
Benjamin Franklin

Just as the interactive way that Jeanne Skinner teaches makes history come alive, participation in the National History Day project allows the students to immerse themselves in every aspect of learning their chosen topic. Many of them dread the project at the beginning of the year, but a few weeks in her classroom makes enthusiastic historians and learners of them all. Just as in other aspects of class, when it comes time for starting the project, Mrs. Skinner spends time telling stories about the experiences of previous students and showing them examples of the different projects.

Though I would say the best measure of her success is how much each and every student appreciates her teaching and her help with history, her students have a long record of much success at the regional and state level with NHD. In 2013 one of her students took his individual exhibit on the development of electricity to the National competition. Last year eight students competed at the state competition and seven of the eight placed in the top three. A historical paper on whether prisoners had the right to vote placed first and a group exhibit on Miranda rights placed second. Both went on to the national competition. Last year, the eighth graders participated in NHD again, because the theme was civic. Mrs. Skinner supported the students just as much as she had when she was their history teacher. On her own time, she read and edited scripts, gave advice, and critiqued projects. And on her own time, she always attends the state competition, running from room to room-dispensing support and encouragement.

I asked Mrs. Skinner to talk about some of her favorite NHD projects over the

18 years that she's been involved. One of the many wonderful units that she teaches each year is on the Holocaust. This unit culminates with a field trip to the Holocaust museum most years. One year one of her students found out his grandfather was Jewish and had been living in Germany leading up to World War II. He began asking his family members questions and ended up creating an incredible documentary on how his grandfather managed to escape to Shanghai, where he lived in a Jewish ghetto during the war. He made the documentary as a tribute to his grandfather.

Her favorite performance was on Isaac Stern, the classical violinist. The student portrayed Stern at Carnegie Hall and reminisced about his life and the history of Carnegie Hall as well. The performance also included the student playing a short piece on the violin. One year two girls created Mrs. Skinner's favorite NHD exhibit. The exhibit was a pigeon coup and the project was on the history of carrier pigeons.

It is impossible to emphasize enough the tremendous impact this teacher has had and continues to have on her students. In just the week and a half that I have had to compile this application, all that she does and all that she means to others has overwhelmed me. She spent years teaching one school custodian to read and another, from Croatia, to speak, read and write English. She took on a student needing special services in her history class once she learned that he liked history. He became interested in Russian and she tutored him after school and told him of her travels to Russia. He is now studying and living in Russia, where he met his wife! Mrs. Skinner's generosity and the authentic connections she makes with her students are a wonderful example and inspiration to us all.