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COMMON KNOWLEDGE™

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CORE KNOWLEDGE® FOUNDATION
VOLUME 17, NUMBER 2, MAY 2004
Thomas J. Kergel, Editor
Mary Kathryn Hassett & Nina Hammiel, Associate Editors

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The Core Knowledge movement is based on deep principles established by the very best scientists. It's a movement that has no partisan ideology or easy slogans, but seeks only to give children the best we can give them, to try to equalize their chances in life--no matter what their family background may be.

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This year in Atlanta you may have noticed some thirty conference attendees from the American Horse School in South Dakota.

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A Conference to Remember

"Wonderful!" "Wow!" "Superior!" "Really Useful!"--these are some of the expressions of positive feedback we received from evaluation forms filled out by the 2,100 people who attended the 13th annual Core Knowledge Conference in Atlanta, Georgia this March.

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Conference: A Photo Journey



View a collage of photos from the 13th Core Knowledge National Conference.

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History Comes Alive for Macon Students

At the Atlanta conference this year, Bonnie Fletcher, eighth-grade teacher at Miller Core Magnet School in Macon, Georgia, shared the story of her students' immersion in history.

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Core Knowledge and Educational Reform

by E. D. Hirsch, Jr.



Don Hirsch gives address at the General Session.

The Core Knowledge movement is based on deep principles established by the very best scientists. It's a movement that has no partisan ideology or easy slogans, but seeks only to give children the best we can give them, to try to equalize their chances in life—no matter what their family background may be. This has always been the true ideal of democratic education, and I believe it is fair to say that this movement in which we are privileged to participate comes as close to fulfilling this democratic ideal as any reform of schooling that has so far been devised in America. I will mention later some facts and figures that illustrate how this potential is being realized.

I would like to make some comments on the great people in the movement. You are selfless people who put the benefit of children above the convenience of grownups. We know this because we know that implementing Core Knowledge takes a great deal of work. The idea that educating children, especially those with disadvantages, is always easy and "natural" is a mistake that is all too easy to fall into. It's a lot easier than teaching Core Knowledge.

Yet, even though it's hard work to master the knowledge in the [Core Knowledge Sequence](#), it's hard work that dedicated teachers engage in, because they realize that it's best for the children. It's also deeply rewarding for teachers.

I don't buy the idea that all we have to do to improve things is to start making schooling competitive through charters and vouchers. These may be worthy experiments, but unless a charter school or voucher school is a good school with a solid and coherent curriculum, no amount of so-called competition will help transform it. The whole notion that competition will transform education seems to assume that we teachers aren't always succeeding because we are lazy, that we need some external prod to goad us into trying hard for our children.

I don't accept this idea. I think most people go into teaching because they are devoted to children, and to the idea of giving children a good chance in life. If schools aren't succeeding in doing this, it's mainly because teachers find themselves in an incoherent system based on well-meant but mistaken anti-content ideas, and on other well-meant but mistaken ideas, many of which get perpetuated in schools of education. Teachers find themselves caught in an incoherent system. The children coming into their classes have had very uncertain and uneven prior preparation. Teachers cannot teach, and students cannot learn, at their full potential under such an incoherent system, even with heroic efforts. The talents of teachers and of their students are wasted by this unevenness of prior preparation in earlier classes.

In a school, we all depend on each other. The Kindergarten teacher depends on the preschool teacher the year before, the first-grade teacher on the Kindergarten teacher, the second-grade teacher on the first-grade teacher. The young child's learning is slow and cumulative, and it is deeply dependent on content knowledge as well as the procedural skills of numeracy and literacy.

Those who are fortunate enough to teach in a fully-implementing Core Knowledge school may be, as they surely are, in the vanguard of educational improvement in America, but they are also in a school that models what every good school in the country should be like. It may be inconvenient for schools to decide on definite core content grade by grade, but it is time to stop pretending that content incoherence really doesn't matter because learning is natural and every classroom deserves an autonomy that is heedless of the long-range needs of children and of the larger community of the school. So we in Core Knowledge are lucky to be in the vanguard, and so are our children.

Let me say a word about the elephant in the middle of the room—the [No Child Left Behind Act](#). Some teachers and administrators in the various states are worried and distracted by NCLB. But this law cannot be a permanent worry for us in the Core Knowledge movement, because whatever its current defects—and they are many, or in the ways the states are carrying it out—and they are many—the bipartisan Democrats and Republicans who sponsored the law wanted to achieve exactly what Core Knowledge does achieve when it is implemented. So, in the midst of a lot of anxiety in many schools about the new situation caused by NCLB, truly-implementing Core Knowledge schools do not have to worry, and I want to say a few words that explain why the educational power inherent in Core Knowledge shows up when our students take the tests mandated by NCLB.

It's important that we all understand this lack of real conflict between Core Knowledge and standardized tests, because if we who are inside the movement don't explain to ourselves why Core Knowledge leads to very significant long-term improvement in standardized test scores, then we can't explain that important point to worried principals and superintendents who may harbor the wrong belief that the way to improve those scores is to drill, drill, drill on test preparation. This anxious response to tests is a deeply destructive idea that misconceives the nature of learning. It even misconceives the nature of the much-maligned standardized tests. Administrators may fear they can't waste time teaching and learning Core Knowledge. They think they have to spend all possible time prepping for the tests.

There would be much less concern about these tests if American students did better on them. There would also be less concern if administrators and teachers understood that there is no good way to prep directly for a standardized reading test. Of course, Core Knowledge prepares students for these tests indirectly. But, as I will explain, there can't be a direct, quick, and narrow test-prep method that will lead to significant reading improvement for all students. The improvement from such anxious methods of drill is initial, not permanent—and it's around the edges. Test prep drill leads to quick and dirty improvements that are minor, not to long-range improvement. The way to get truly long-range test results is through modes of schooling that really do improve students' general knowledge and verbal comprehension.

Some of you here may have forgotten that the [Core Knowledge Sequence](#) was originally designed as a long-range reading-improvement program. If you think back to our origins in the 1980s we first marched under the banner of the term "[Cultural Literacy](#)." We made the claim that true literacy required possessing the knowledge that was widely shared in a literate society. We said it was our duty to convey this knowledge to all students, since without it they couldn't be truly literate. We said they couldn't understand writings and classroom lectures addressed to a general audience without this shared knowledge. We originally called this knowledge "Cultural Literacy" in order to show its connection with literacy and thus with reading comprehension.

But at the urgent request of teachers, we dropped the name "Cultural Literacy," because in the 80s and 90s the word "culture" was a red flag, and teachers had enough problems on their hands without being accused of Eurocentrism and other cultural/political misdemeanors. So at teachers' urging, we adopted the name "Core Knowledge," which was quite accurately descriptive and also sounded more neutral. That turned out to be a good move.

But changing the name did not change the fundamental idea that this carefully chosen knowledge was the knowledge students need for reading comprehension and true literacy. Of course, the movement and the name Core Knowledge attracted many people who simply felt that the schools ought to be about education and about teaching solid knowledge. But now, in these days of NCLB, it's probably important for us to remind ourselves that

our choice of which solid knowledge we ought to teach has been determined by a careful analysis of the kinds of knowledge needed to make our students full participants in the spoken and written word.

So what is this special knowledge that has so much efficacy in helping students to understand what is said and written? I wonder how many of you remember how we determined that? I won't digress into all the details, but basically we spent a long time making an inventory of the kinds of knowledge that is taken for granted in school books, in newspapers, magazine articles, newscasts, and so on—in the spoken and written language that is needed for further learning and full participation in society. It was the kind of knowledge that elite insiders get from their homes and their peers, but that outsiders such as some kids from poor homes or some immigrants could only get from school. It's always been a strange blind spot when people have said that Core Knowledge is elitist. Its aim is to teach to the non-elite what the elite already know—and what they use to advance themselves in the world. There could hardly be a more anti-elite or more democratic program in the nation than Core Knowledge.

Let me remind you then why learning Core Knowledge can improve reading comprehension and test scores, probably more than any program going. It's because it is based on a sound conception of reading comprehension, sounder than the widespread, mistaken notion that reading comprehension is some sort of technical skill that can be learned by formal drills or by prepping for a test.

Those of you who teach reading know how much time is spent in these programs on exercises in classifying and in finding the main idea, and so on. These language arts exercises are based on the idea that reading is a strategic skill like driving a car or throwing a basketball into a hoop. Reading does have some elements like that, but there's a big secret about reading that has not received enough prominence in education schools and teacher training. It's a simple fact that reading and writing are based on speaking and listening. In general, you cannot read better than you can listen. If you haven't got the knowledge and vocabulary to understand an utterance when it is spoken, then no amount of practice and formal drills can help you understand that same utterance when it happens to be written down. If we don't develop the oral language and the general knowledge of our students, we can't develop their reading comprehension. Language development and knowledge precede reading improvement, and without language development and knowledge, there will not be much reading improvement—a fact that stares us in the face when we look at the national reading scores.

Core Knowledge could be regarded as a very effective language-development tool. That is because the knowledge it imparts is the knowledge that is taken for granted in serious writing and speaking. So it should not be surprising that Core Knowledge, when it is implemented over time, raises reading scores dramatically. But note those two words—"implemented" and "over time." We need to make sure that we really do follow the carefully devised sequence, and that our students really do gain the knowledge represented by the sequence. That's the "implemented" part. The second part—"over time"—is also important. In one year, the knowledge imparted doesn't give the whole picture, and might not be superior to some other curriculum. It takes two or three years for the cumulative effect of a carefully devised sequence to make itself felt, and it also takes time for vocabulary to grow accordingly.

But given those two provisos, implementation and time, the results of teaching Core Knowledge are striking. Here are a couple of graphs that illustrate the long-range effects of Core Knowledge. They come from a longitudinal study done in the state of Virginia, in which students at a Core Knowledge school were tracked for 7 years and compared with students in a matched non-Core Knowledge school.

Figure 1 shows the Core Knowledge school overtaking the control school in the later grades.

Figure 1. Stanford 9 Reading Scores Grade 4 to Grade 6 Core Knowledge School Compared to Control School.

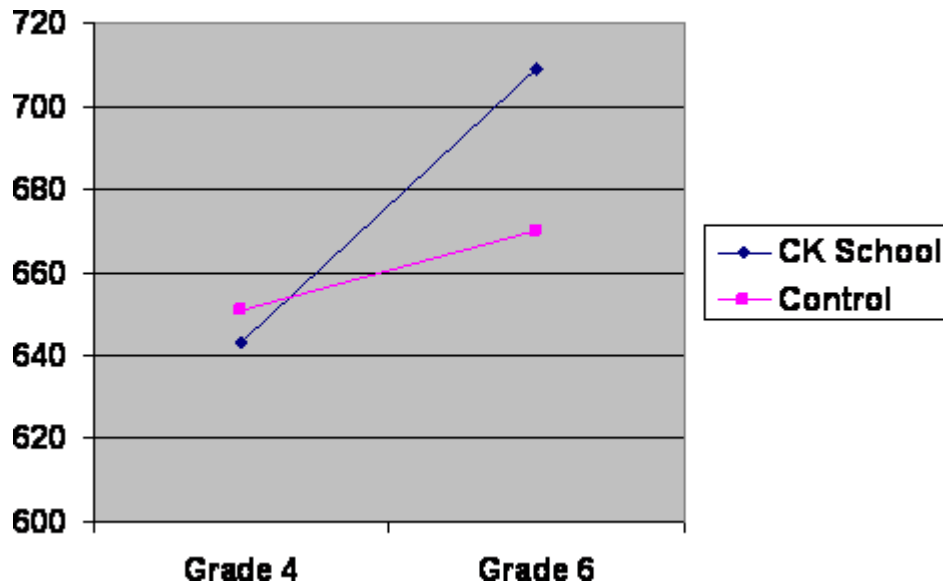
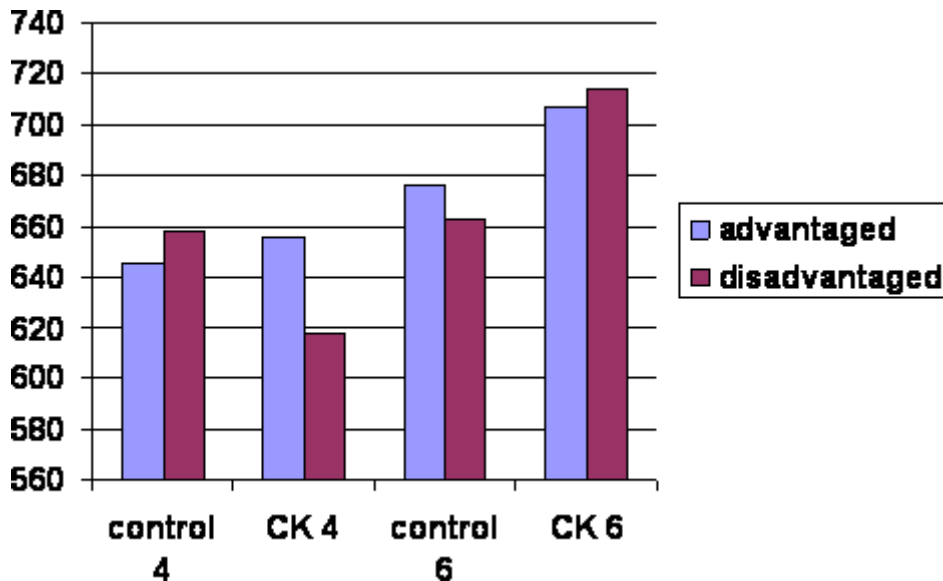


Figure 2 shows that the Core Knowledge school was more successful than the control school at closing the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged (free-lunch) students. For more information on this research, click [here](#).

Figure 2. Test Score Gap, Advantaged vs. Disadvantaged Students, Grade 4, Grade 6, Core Knowledge School Compared to Control.



Stories like the one told in these graphs abound in the Core Knowledge community.

Now I'm aware that under NCLB, many superintendents and school boards are demanding quick fixes. But let's not assume that these administrators will be permanently misguided or irredeemably stupid. They can be brought to see that the rush to quick fixes in reading scores has not worked and cannot work, because that is not

the way growth in language happens. Optimal growth in language occurs when students are exposed to domains of knowledge over long enough stretches to become familiar with them. When we teach with a coherent focus on substantial knowledge rather than on technique, we are providing the very best context for language growth. That means growth, not just in the words connected with a domain of science or history, but also growth in the knowledge of general-purpose words. We need to help people understand that a slow but steady and coherent focus on knowledge yields the most significant growth in language, and consequently, in reading comprehension and test scores, and it does so FASTER, not slower, than a focus on techniques.

Please understand that when I criticize the idea of teaching reading strategies instead of teaching knowledge I am certainly not criticizing teaching strategies for the sounding out of the written word. Knowledge of how to spell and how to sound out words is also substantial knowledge, and fluency in those skills is absolutely essential to literacy. We all know that our students have to learn how to sound out fluently and accurately. No, I am criticizing the practice of spending a lot of time in so-called comprehension skills—on classifying and finding the main idea, and other such misguided formal activities. I call them misguided because it has been determined that doing these exercises has no significant long-term effect on reading comprehension. On the other hand, it has been shown abundantly that relevant background knowledge has an enormous long-term effect on reading comprehension.

Since Core Knowledge is a careful sequence of the cumulative background knowledge that is needed for general literacy in the United States today, it is a kind of secret weapon for raising reading comprehension scores on those hated standardized tests. But we don't want to keep it a secret weapon. We want to impart this knowledge to as many children as possible. We believe in the ideal of democratic education, that the wealth of a child's parents in money or education should not determine a child's chances in life. That was the aim of democratic education from the beginning in every place where modern democracy took root. You in the Core Knowledge movement have a great deal to contribute in the unfinished effort of making that democratic ideal a reality.

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The Little School That Could

By Mary Kathryn Hassett



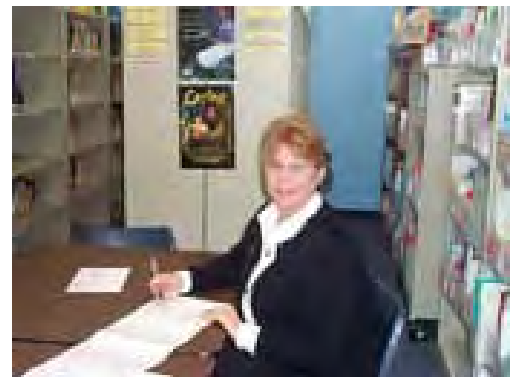
Staff members from the American Horse School at the Core Knowledge National Conference.

This year in Atlanta you may have noticed some thirty conference attendees from the [American Horse School](#) in South Dakota—teachers, paraprofessionals, and even one board member. In their second year of implementing Core Knowledge, this school, chartered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, is pleased to be part of the Core Knowledge network and proud to be the only one of seven schools on the Pine Ridge Reservation to make its annual yearly progress goals for 2003. The story of how the American Horse School came to adopt Core Knowledge is instructive and shows, for one thing, how appropriate it is that Principal Gloria Coats-Kitsopoulos counts among her ancestors the intrepid warrior and accomplished diplomat, Chief Red Cloud.

When Gloria Coats-Kitsopoulos retired as a Lieutenant Colonel from the U.S. Army, she was living in Texas. However, she didn't head for Padre Island or for a golf resort in the Rio Grande Valley. Instead, she headed back to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota where she grew up. She was determined to find some way to relieve the impoverished conditions of life in that place. She focused on helping children by improving schools. Within a year she was Principal of the American Horse School in Allen, South Dakota.

"When I came here," she said, "There was no structured curriculum, and the library had been converted to classroom space. I found this dusty book in the corner of a classroom, *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High Performing, High Poverty Schools*, and was electrified by the description of a school that was using a curriculum called Core Knowledge." After doing some research and convincing a number of skeptics, she secured a grant from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, brought in a Core Knowledge consultant, Jane Brower, and began the long process of implementing the exciting and challenging Core Knowledge curriculum that offered kids the same rich content they might receive at an expensive private school. Ninety-nine percent of her students were eligible for free lunch; however, as with other Core Knowledge students, they began to study Mayan civilization in first grade and elements of geometry in second grade. In third grade they donned togas and celebrated holidays related to their study unit on ancient Rome.

Some people, she said, "continued to scoff, asking why Native Americans needed to know about ancient Rome." However, she added, "they study their own culture too." The school teaches the Lakota language and integrates many other local elements into the Core Knowledge curriculum. The town of



Gloria Coats-Kitsopoulos, Principal of the American Horse School.

Allen is close to many iconic locations in American history, among them the Badlands, the Crazy Horse Monument, and Mt. Rushmore. All of the schools in the area, including hers, are named after famous Lakota Sioux chiefs.

Since adopting the Core Knowledge curriculum, Ms. Coats-Kitsopoulos has observed that her students' attitudes have improved dramatically. They can't wait to show off their accomplishments. "Our teachers can't wait to learn more either," Ms. Coats-Kitsopoulos said, "That's why so many came to Atlanta, even though each teacher had to write five Core Knowledge units to qualify for the trip." Phoebe Tallman, a paraprofessional who helped her teacher write her units, remarked that she appreciated the opportunity to hear other teachers give their presentations in the Saturday sessions. Ms. Tallman has been at the school for eleven years and is working on a degree in Lakota Studies at the Ogallala Lakota College.

Ms. Coats-Kitsopoulos is particularly proud of having reclaimed space for the school library by adding an addition of five new classrooms. She secured a library grant of \$13,000 and let each teacher select 500 books. More remarkably, a retired reading teacher and friend of the Lakotas drove a U-Haul from Virginia to South Dakota with a gift of 5,000 books to stock the new library.

Connie Smith-Hammock, the librarian and newsletter editor, reports a new enthusiasm for reading among the students. This is no doubt reflected in the 30-point gain the school has made in language arts testing. Sharlene May, a member of the school board, confirmed this impression and added, "I see a big difference. Parents now have to sign off on their children's reading, and the little ones insist that their parents listen to them read."

The first three years at the American Horse School are ungraded in order to accommodate the various levels of reading readiness displayed by entering students. Children are enrolled in little communities called Tiospayes in Lakota fashion. The communities are named after animals, such as squirrels, robins, owls, foxes, and coyotes. Next year the school hopes to obtain a grant to implement a preschool program, which will enable all children to be ready to learn at grade level. "We will do whatever it takes," said Ms. Coats-Kitsopoulos, "to identify early reading problems and to solve them. We are happy to have the books to work with and the guidance of the Core Knowledge curriculum." Among the improvements at the American Horse School is the attendance, which now averages 90%. "I'm a little worried," Ms. Coats Kitsopoulos said, "that we may have jumped too high. How can we beat that next year?"

Principal Coats-Kitsopoulos is already looking forward to the conference in Philadelphia, and hopes to encourage some of her teachers to make presentations. She even hopes to raise money to bring her student dance group, Teci Wacipi, to perform at the conference. "This plan," she said, "would serve two purposes. They could share their heritage with hundreds of other schools, and they could see all the historic sites in Philadelphia—and maybe we could even take them to Washington, D.C." Her enthusiasm mounted as she spoke. Ms. Coats-Kitsopoulos may have retired from the army, but her service is not over.



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A Conference to Remember

By Mary Kathryn Hassett

"Wonderful!" "Wow!" "Superior!" "Really useful!" — these are some of the expressions of positive feedback we received from evaluation forms filled out by the 2,100 people who attended the 13th annual Core Knowledge Conference in Atlanta, Georgia in March 2004. The conference was a huge success. We received numerous positive comments, including ideas about what people would like to see at future conferences. Some wanted "more science and math presentations"; more sessions "like the one Liping Ma presented"; others wanted more sessions "like those that were put on during the Saturday part of the program."

Of course, as with any conference of this magnitude, not all comments were always completely glowing. Some remarks reflected the typical type of problems that occur at these large conferences. For example, some attendees commented that "some of the session rooms were too crowded"; that "a presenter cancelled without notice"; or that "vendors were not open long enough."

We appreciate these constructive criticisms as well as the positive remarks. All feedback will be helpful as we plan for next year's conference, and we intend to address all of these issues so that we can continue to improve our conferences each year. We hope that next year's conference will be better than ever. As in previous years, we will post on our website the complete program for our upcoming conference sometime around January.

Thursday sessions were devoted, as usual, to the basics of implementing, sustaining, and funding Core Knowledge, with a new emphasis on aligning state standards and developing leadership models. One of the seven Core Knowledge preschool sessions on Thursday took teachers through an entire year, from start-up on day one to graduation day. Another Thursday session unveiled preschool's new assessment tool, the [CK-PAT](#). Some of the K-8 sessions on Thursday were devoted to explaining new resources, including the new *Day-by-Day Planner*. Other new resources, such as the soon to-be-published [Teacher Handbooks](#) and the already-available supplements, the [Art Resources](#) and [Text Resources](#), are explained in the new catalog.

During the general session, Barbara Garvin-Kester, Core Knowledge Foundation President, and Cyndi Wells, Director of Core Knowledge Professional Development, took turns honoring 13 new official schools and 12 schools that were designated as the first official visitation sites. Dr. Garvin-Kester announced her intention of making these schools, and all the schools in the Core Knowledge network, partners in the legacy that she hopes to create by "bringing Core Knowledge to center stage in reforming



The lobby and registration area of the Marriott Marquis Hotel at the Core Knowledge National Conference.

American education." Thursday's session ended with perhaps the most inspiring talk to date by our founder, E. D. Hirsch, Jr. He reminded us that education is a long-term endeavor, and not a process subject to quick fixes and patchwork standards. To view the text of his address, click [here](#).



Keynote Speaker, Jack Prelutsky

All of the conference-goers were very enthusiastic about the new luncheon offering, which this year featured a keynote address by the witty and talented Jack Prelutsky. His entertaining poems, songs, and stories delighted the attendees and reiterated the conference theme, "The Power of Words." The Mary Lin Elementary choir surprised the audience with a musical rendition of one of Mr. Prelutsky's poems, arranged by Choir Director Phyllis Johnson-Porter. The choir received a standing ovation for their performance of "Oh Shenandoah" and "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel," which was accompanied by

students on trumpet and drums. Several audience members thought they spotted a future thespian or potential presidential candidate in the student orator who introduced the songs and explained their origins and relevance to the Core Knowledge curriculum. These presentations, along with the outstanding performance delivered at the previous day's general session by the choir from Morningside Elementary, made us realize that the bar has been set very high for next year's entertainment.

Prelutsky's leading the entire audience in a stirring rendition of "Rat for Lunch" may go down as one of the most memorable moments in conference annals. Jack Prelutsky's enormous popularity was evident by the long lines of autograph seekers that stretched throughout the exhibit hall on Friday. Teachers loved hearing from a living author who is already required reading in the [Core Knowledge Sequence](#). We suspect that kindergartners and first graders will be reciting a great number of poems by Jack Prelutsky in the years to come.

Friday's sessions helped teachers refresh their knowledge of various fields as they heard from and interacted with experts. These sessions featured several favorites from previous conferences: Dennis Dennenberg, Jim Weiss, Frank Wang, Liping Ma, Rodney Bowling, Alex Filippenko, and many others who, as always, filled their rooms to capacity. Vicki Cobb, award-winning children's science author, and James G. Basker, historian, were among the new presenters at this year's conference. Dr. Basker's session entitled "Amazing Grace: Slavery in Poetry" was said by one attendee to open up new ways of thinking about how to use poems in the Core Knowledge units on slavery. His other session on "Why Documents Matter" also got rave reviews.

In fact, so many sessions received rave reviews that we will mention only a few to give you the flavor of what was covered this year. As always, the inspiring storytelling techniques of Jim Weiss no doubt turned many preschool and kindergarten teachers into virtual Sheherazades. Those who regretted that two sessions on the Holocaust were scheduled at the same time will be glad to know that both were touted by attendees as among the best they attended—"moving, informative, and useful" were the words used to describe them. One teacher said that Bruce Rodgers' enthusiasm in his presentation on "The Eighth Grade Supreme Court" was absolutely infectious. Another conference-goer couldn't find enough superlatives to describe the session on Aztec dance. One attendee expressed regret that more people didn't know in advance that Dr. Geoffrey Haydon's session on the history of jazz was "not to be missed." Some spent their Saturday night listening to him play jazz piano in an Atlanta club. The Atlanta setting made possible other splendid offerings, such as the session presented by the High Museum on the "Visual Arts and Learning," and the session presented by the Atlanta History Museum called "History

House Calls: A Museum Travel Trunk Program." The Georgia location also made possible another treat, Kim Siegelson's very well-received program, "Soul Food: Black History Through Good Books."

As always, the Saturday sessions, which were devoted to teachers presenting their juried units, were much acclaimed as "everybody's favorite," "classroom friendly," and "very useful." It is apparent that the success of the conference owes much to the hard-working and skillful teachers who agree to present every year.

Cyndi Wells, the Foundation's Director of Professional Development and coordinator of the presentations, remarked, "the presenters have no idea how much they are valued by the Foundation and by their colleagues." Some teachers could not resist praising Lisa Levesque's introduction to Aesop, "City Mouse, Country Mouse," with the adjective they sometimes inveigh against when used by students-"awesome!" Her other preschool session, "Every-Body is Special!" tied with Aesop in the superlative sweepstakes. Some have called for more sessions devoted to TAG students. Jennifer England's "I'm Done, Now What Can I Do?" was praised for providing some practical ways for challenging gifted students.

Several attendees commented that the session on "World War II in the Pacific and the End of the War" was rich with useable material. Several others were mightily impressed with all the work that went into many sessions. The attendees also praised the numerous prizes and fun handouts that were provided in many of the sessions, including the presentation "Town Tales and Timelines: An Integrated Study and Simulation Unit of India, China and Japan." Several sessions devoted to Civil Rights topics were most likely inspired by the conference being set in the birthplace of Martin Luther King. Finally, Katherine Gingetty's excellent session, "Character Education: Teaching Virtue from Ancient Heroes" convinced some respondents that classical virtues can translate across the centuries and into today's classrooms.

We hope that many of our favorite presenters will return next year. Additionally, we plan to have many new and exciting presentations at next year's conference as well.

Finally, we want to mention another conference feature that is always overbooked-the school visits. We want to thank the four schools that participated this year: Morningside Elementary School, Capitol View Elementary School, Mary Lin Elementary School, and Inman Middle School. Gerald Terrell, Vice President of the Core Knowledge Foundation, spent much of the day at Capitol View preparing a new implementation video. He received many positive comments from visiting conferees. "They were impressed," he said, "with the outstanding leadership at the school and with their use of many, many Core Knowledge resources." The conference closed with President Barbara Garvin-Kester playing her favorite role-Santa Claus. She presided over the popular drawing for vendor-supplied gifts. This year the gift certificate of free registration for next year's conference was won by Lynne Marie Valencia of Denver, Colorado.

Karen Baggiano, our Core Knowledge Conference Director, is still reviewing the evaluation forms. So far, she thinks the prize for the person who traveled the greatest distance goes to the preschool teacher who came from the Philippines to attend both the Conference and the preceding Preschool Institutes. She came in hopes of gathering information to implement Core Knowledge in a number of schools in Asia, starting in the Philippines. Karen also reports that, "'Go West, Young Man' might be the relevant advice to listen to in 2006." Texas exceeded even Georgia in supplying the greatest number of conferees, with Colorado and Arizona also staking big claims. Next year, however, we may bring the west back east. [Gloria Coats-Kitsoupoulos, Principal of the American Horse School](#), had the greatest number of staff

members from a single school. Thirty members are planning to return.

We look forward to seeing you next year at the 2005 Core Knowledge Conference in Philadelphia!

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Conference: A Photo Journey

By Nina Hammiel



The lobby registration area
Wednesday, March 3rd.



E.D. Hirsch, Jr. addressing the
General Session.



Don Hirsch and staff from
Crossroads Academy in Florida.



Attendees viewing the vendor
displays.



Attendees enjoying the
pre-conference Preschool
Institutes.



Cyndi Wells and Gerald Terrell
are conducting a Leadership
Institute.



Members of the Morningside
Elementary School Choir
performing at the General
Session.



Members of the Mary Lin
Elementary School Choir
entertaining at the keynote
luncheon.



Jack Prelutsky, troubadour poet,
wows us at the keynote
luncheon.



The Cat in the Hat takes on Core Knowledge.



Core Knowledge Preschool flourishes in the Arkansas Delta.



Bruce Rodgers traveled back to the 1700s.



Don Hirsch and staff from Franklin K-8 school in Oregon.



Don Hirsch and staff from the PEAK school in Arizona.



Volunteers and members of the Core Knowledge Staff stuffing tote bags.

General Contact Information:

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[Send us email](#)



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COMMON KNOWLEDGE™

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CORE KNOWLEDGE® FOUNDATION
VOLUME 17, NUMBER 2, MAY 2004

History Comes Alive for Macon Students

By Mary Kathryn Hassett

At the Atlanta conference this year, Bonnie Fletcher, eighth-grade teacher at Miller Core Magnet School in Macon, Georgia, shared the story of her students' immersion in history. Last November, 43 of her students, accompanied by two teachers and two parents, boarded the Amtrak train for a three-day pilgrimage to Virginia's history sites.

After an all-night journey, they landed in Petersburg, Virginia, now cinematically as well as historically famous as the battle ground depicted in the much touted film, *Cold Mountain*.

At the recently opened Pamplin Park, the students got to recreate the life of a Civil War soldier, following an oral account of his exploits on a CD player and examining diaries and military records. They even had a taste of the hard tack that was part of a soldier's rations. At the end of the day they reenacted the Battle of Petersburg. "I think the outdoor role playing at Pamplin Park was the favorite part of the trip for most students," declared Ms. Fletcher, "and I really recommend this Park as a hands-on experience for middle schoolers."

The next day the group toured Jamestown Settlement as well as Jamestown Island, where they got to see an important archeological dig in progress. The next stop, Yorktown, was Ms. Fletcher's favorite, offering, she said, "so many teachable moments, especially with the outdoor walk-able timeline." Saturday night brought another highlight when the students participated in the Ghost Tour of Williamsburg. The trip made vivid many of the units the students had covered in the Core Knowledge curriculum: early settlements, Native Americans, the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the struggle for civil rights. "I feel they will be going on to high school with an enlivened sense of American history," remarked Ms. Fletcher.

Ms. Fletcher's preparation for the trip was very much a family affair. She held three pow-wows for students, their parents, and their siblings where various learning stations were set up and students were asked to define their learning goals for the trip. The rest of the family was encouraged to participate vicariously, and the parents especially were asked to model what students should bring to a learning situation. "Parents," Ms. Fletcher said, "were thrilled to be asked to do something other than their usual role-raising funds." Of course, they did that too, helping kids organize their sale of Krispy Kreme donuts coupons to raise the \$500 per student fee required for the trip.

Ms. Fletcher choose to teach at Miller Magnet because she wanted to be at an urban school that used the Core Knowledge curriculum and she also wanted to benefit from the direction of Principal Gloria McSwain. Ms. Fletcher was awarded a grant provided by the U.S. Park Service and the U.S. Department of Education that enabled her to receive summer training at the College of William and Mary in order to prepare herself and her students for the trip. The grant program, a continuing one, is meant to connect national historic sites to the teaching of history.

Teachers interested in finding out more about the grant, the trip, or the tour agencies used by Ms. Fletcher can contact her by [email](#).



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Contests For Kids

Teachers know that competition and the prospect of winning a prize can be great motivators for children. Even though only a few can win top prizes, the spirit of competition may inspire many others to work hard and do their best. With that in mind, we offer a listing of some competitions that may be suitable for children in Core Knowledge schools. If you know of other worthwhile competitions, please submit them via email to [Nina Hammiel](mailto:Nina.Hammiel).

Contest: Campaign Cam Contest

Details:

This contest, sponsored by the TV channel C-SPAN, invites students to identify an issue connected with the 2004 elections and produce a short video that creatively explores and persuasively presents a point of view on that issue.

Who Can Compete: Students in grades 6-12

Prizes: Grand prize of \$5,000, other cash prizes.

For more details, click [here](#).

Contest: Giggle Poetry Contests

Details:

[Giggle Poetry](#) runs several ongoing funny poetry competitions, including a contest that involves writing new and improved versions of the famous poem that begins, "Roses are Red."

Who Can Compete: For most contests, students in grades 1-12

Prizes: Winning poems are displayed on website and may be published in a book. If the poem is selected for a book, student will receive a small payment.

For more details, click [here](#).

Contest: Scripps National Spelling Bee

Details:

What stands between your students and the national spelling championship? Only a few not-so-little words like antediluvian, apartheid, cologne, logorrhea, septuagenarian, and whippoorwill! At the national spelling bee local spelling champs compete for a national title. Students who have seen the excellent documentary film, *Spellbound*, might be especially motivated to enter.

Who Can Compete: Students under the age of 16, who have not completed 8th grade

Prizes: \$12,000 and 15 minutes of fame.

For more details, click [here](#)

Contest:	National Geographic Bee
Details:	Designed to encourage the teaching and study of geography; a series of oral and written tests leads to the crowning of a national champion.
Who Can Compete:	Students in grades 4-8
Prizes:	\$25,000 college scholarship.

For more details, click [here](#).

Contest:	Craftsman/NSTA Young Inventors Awards Program
Details:	Students work independently to develop their own tools or inventions.
Who Can Compete:	Students in grades 2-8
Prizes:	Two winners receive \$10,000 savings bonds.

For more details, click [here](#).

Contest:	National History Day Competitions
Details:	A series of competitions that involve creating a paper, exhibit, performance, or documentary on a historical topic, either as an individual or as a group. Each year's competition is based on an annual theme.
Who Can Compete:	Students in grades 6-8; some states make arrangements for students in grades 4-5 to participate at the state level.
Prizes:	Winners receive medals and other awards.

For more details, click [here](#).

Contest:	DAR American History Essay Competition
Details:	The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) sponsor this essay competition. Each year a new topic is chosen.
Who Can Compete:	Students in grades 5-8
Prizes:	National winners receive medals, certificates, and a monetary award.

For more details, click [here](#).



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KNOWLEDGE
VOLUME 17,
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Professional Development: Think Ahead about K-8 Professional Development Opportunities

The Little School That Could

Core Knowledge and Educational Reform

A Conference to Remember

Conference: A Photo Journey

History Comes Alive for Macon Students

Information for Schools: Contests for Your Students

Professional Development: Think Ahead about K-8 Professional Development Opportunities

Preschool: Summer Preschool Institutes

Links We Recommend: Vendors

Bookstore: New Products Available on Our Website Now

Having Trouble Receiving Our Newsletter?

The daffodils are in bloom, and summertime is just around the corner! It's time to start thinking ahead about summer/fall Core Knowledge professional development! The Foundation offers a wide variety of professional development opportunities that will energize and enrich your school's implementation of Core Knowledge. Whether you are a Core Knowledge novice or a seasoned veteran, we've got something for you.

Core Knowledge Coordinator and Leadership Opportunities

Core Knowledge Coordinator and Leadership Institutes are being offered in Charlottesville, Virginia on July 15-16, September 23-24, and October 28-29. These invaluable workshops are designed to help school leaders implement Core Knowledge successfully by refining their classroom observation techniques and by enhancing their ability to support teachers. Completing a workshop in our Leadership Institute is a requirement for all schools that are working towards Official Core Knowledge Visitation status. Spaces fill up fast, so register soon! Click [here](#) for more information.

Core Knowledge Professional Development

Offering campus-specific professional development is one way we hope to honor our commitment to help schools implement Core Knowledge as successfully and economically as possible. The Foundation has a roster of knowledgeable and dedicated consultants who are eager to help ease the transition for new Core Knowledge schools and to refine the implementation of existing Core Knowledge Schools. On-site workshops held at a school's campus can provide the most specific and concentrated support to each school. Participation in Core Knowledge professional development is also a requirement for schools working towards Official Core Knowledge Visitation status.

As you can imagine, demand for Core Knowledge professional development is highest in the summer, so don't wait to schedule your dates! Also, keep in mind that Spring Follow-up Visits are essential to chart your progress. For information regarding workshop options and fees, click [here](#). To schedule a workshop contact Holly Smith, Teacher Development Coordinator, at 800-238-3233 ext. 223 or by [email](#).

Thomas J. Kergel,
Editor

Mary Kathryn Hassett &
Nina Hammiel,



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Preschool:

Summer Preschool Institutes

Consistently a popular professional development option, the Core Knowledge Preschool Institutes are coming in July 2004 to Charlottesville, VA. This year's featured training modules will be "Getting Started in Core Knowledge Preschool" on July 12-13, followed by "Assessment and Planning to Address Children's Learning Needs" on July 14-15. A new addition to the Preschool training repertoire is the "Preschool Leadership Training for Administrators" on July 16th. Click [here](#) for more details.

The Institutes give teachers a rich and empowering week of solid, professional development and collegial interaction with other preschool teachers and administrators who are brimming with energy and ideas. Preschool teachers frequently exclaim, "I can't wait to get back to class and get started!"

The "Getting Started" training module is the fundamental and most critical training module for any preschool wanting to integrate the [Core Knowledge Preschool Sequence](#) into its classroom. Participants will learn the ABCs of the *Core Knowledge Preschool Sequence* and how to supplement the teaching day with our content-rich, knowledge-based program. "Getting Started" is a prerequisite to all other training modules and a requirement for any preschool wanting to achieve [Official Preschool and Visitation Site status](#). Topics of instruction include:

- **Taking a New Look at Developmentally Appropriate Practice & Readiness to Learn**
- **Introduction to the [Core Knowledge Preschool Sequence](#)**
- **Getting Started**
 - Reviewing Core Knowledge preschool books & materials
 - Developing yearlong, month-by-month planning guides
- **Ready, Set, Go!**
 - Integrating Core Knowledge into the Classroom Physical Environment, the Daily Schedule, and Centers
 - Organizational Basics (attendance chart, pictorial schedule, circle time, plan-do-review)

In light of the recent focus on assessment, no preschool should be without the "Assessment & Planning to Address Children's Learning Needs" training module. It equips teachers with assessment techniques to evaluate the goals and objectives of the *Preschool Sequence*, including direct observation, portfolio collection, and activity probes. We show you how to use the **NEW** [Core Knowledge Preschool Assessment Tool \(CK-PAT\)](#) software to monitor individual performance and how to use assessment data in instructional planning. Areas of instruction include:

- **Principles of Assessment**
 - Purpose, role, and characteristics of assessment
- **Direct Observation**

- Using anecdotal records, focus questions, checklists, participation charts, and webs with the *Preschool Sequence*
- **Activity Probes**
- **Portfolio Collection**
- **Introduction to the *CK-PAT***
- **Step-by-Step Teaching**
 - -General principles for scaffolding instruction
 - Developing sequenced activities for the *Preschool Sequence* goals at each child's level.

"The Preschool Assessment Tool has given me an excellent way to assess, monitor, and plan my day so that it is the most effective and beneficial to the children in my classroom."

- Deborah Hensley, Preschool Institute attendee.

Participants stay in the lovely [Cavalier Inn](#), owned by the University of Virginia and adjacent to its grounds. Within walking distance, one can find a range of eateries suitable for any budget. The Inn provides free shuttle service to and from the Charlottesville airport. Ask for the Summer Institute's rate of \$75 per night, which includes a deluxe continental breakfast.

Area attractions include the University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello and the historic downtown walking mall. Click here www.charlottesville tourism.org for more tourist destinations in Charlottesville and Albemarle County.

You can be part of this invaluable training opportunity by clicking [here](#) to download a registration form and more details.

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[American Federation of Teachers](#)

[A+ Images, Inc.](#)

[Apples, Angels, and More](#)

[Art Print Resources](#)

[Artsense, Inc.](#)

[The Baltimore Curriculum Project, Inc.](#)

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Knowledge Tree

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Learning Wonders

Mike Venezia Books and Videos

M S Creations

Oxford University Press

Peachtree Publishers

Pearson Learning

Poetry Alive!

Professional Concepts, Inc.

Quantum Learning/Super Camp

Saxon Publishers

Schoolwide, Inc.

Scholastic

Shurley Instructional Materials

Singaporemath.com

Singlish

Sopris West Educational Services

Touchstone Applied Science Associates, Inc.

Wordsmart Corp.