
What will you do?

I'm a control freak. I plan everything down to the minute and have detailed itineraries that leave nothing to chance...except when it comes to retreats. Sure, the first few years I had every moment planned out, but after a while, I learned that the serendipity of the moment usually leads to far better outcomes than I could ever plan. I've learned to let go a little more every year and put more of the planning and leading of activities into the kids' hands. In fact, this past year I told my top jazz band, which is primarily upperclassmen who have gone on the retreats before, it was up to them to plan and lead the whole retreat. They incorporated many of our previous activities, but they put new twists on many of them. They led jam sessions and got even the shyest kids to participate and improvise. They created a retreat that appealed to everyone and by the time we left, all first-timers knew they were now part of the Jackson band family.

- Skits, talent shows, rehearsals, games, secret pals, and show-and-tell are just a few of the types of activities we do each year. On our last night, we have a tradition of "senior scrolls." I have a large poster board for each senior. The boards are put out on tables, and after our last activity of the night, everyone goes around to each senior scroll and writes a message to each senior. I hadn't realized how important these were to kids until I had the unfortunate experience of attending a former student's funeral. At the reception, a few of his prized possessions were on display. Right in the center of the table was his senior scroll from the retreat he attended 12 years earlier.
- I often hire a motivational speaker, hypnotist or other entertainer to come in and do a show on our first evening. This year, I tried something new. I saw a TED talk of a man who made a clarinet out of a carrot. I had one of my senior sax players watch the video and learn to do it so he could lead the activity at the retreat. He also had to learn the fingerings for the carrot as they are different than sax fingerings. After the kids got into teams and made their "carrotnets," this student played each one, starting with a major scale, then a jazz tune. When he played each of the carrots with a rhythm section backing him up, it was incredible to hear how well a vegetable can be turned into an instrument. This activity was a big hit!

Every fall I feel incredibly overwhelmed when I think about putting together a retreat while doing everything else required for work and family life. But I never regret taking the time and effort to ensure the students have this weekend to bond because the dividends are so great.

While there are some tasks I can't turn over to students, like filling out district paperwork, reserving the facilities, arranging for buses and other administrative duties necessary for a trip or retreat, I have let the control freak in me step back a little bit more each year so the students can step forward and take ownership. It wasn't easy at first, but I really love how the planning process has become an activity that gets the kids to work together and bond even before the official start of the retreat. I see the benefits of

this process carry over in their ability to work together musically much earlier in the school year than if they didn't go through the planning process.

I encourage you to take the plunge and incorporate a retreat into your long-term plans. If you need additional ideas, resources or anything else to help you do this, send me an e-mail or call me up. I'd be delighted to collaborate with you so you can make it happen for your kids. (Extra bonus: our collaboration for your retreat can fulfill some of the goals for TPEP, so it's two-for-one benefits!)

Lesley Moffat teaches instrumental music at Jackson High School in Mill Creek (Everett School District). A graduate of Indiana University with a master's from City University, she has been teaching for 27 years. In addition to teaching, she enjoys serving as a clinician for festivals.

Excerpt from a story in the Everett Herald, November 2014

Where physics, jazz and carrots meet to make beautiful music

For this year's jazz retreat, Lesley Moffat, Jackson's Director of Bands, designed a kick-off/icebreaker activity that included music, physics and carrots—one of the world's healthiest vegetables.

Based on a TED Talk, and enlisting the services of senior Ben Lee and physics teacher Andrew Sevald, the students learned how to make a very serviceable instrument out of the vegetable and created the *carrotnet*. They were able to hear its very specific and individualistic sound while also understanding the physics of how it all worked.

After Sevald's mini-lecture on the physics, teams worked to craft their instruments. Caught up in the enthusiasm of the moment, Jackson Principal Dave Peters and Sevald teamed up to make their own instrument.

"It sounded pretty good with the exception of the 'thumb hole' note. I wish I hadn't talked Dave into drilling it where we did," lamented Sevald.

Several teams made carrotnets and battled musically among the teams.

"It was Jackson's embrace of both STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) and STEM (Success Through Exceptional Music)," said Sevald.

"The Spaw/Hittle instrument was a clear winner but I could have listened to any of them for hours," said Sevald. "It was an amazing event."

