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THE GREAT DEBATE

When second through eighth graders at Heritage Oak Private Education returned to school after winter break, they began preparing for the next stage of their exciting Touchpoints journey. Touchpoints are projects involving videoconference sessions and wikis, shared by students and teachers from the Meritas Family of schools. They allow students to exchange different international perspectives to create a global understanding around “Big Ideas” that require problem solving and critical thinking skills. According to the Touchpoints calendar, February was the month for The Great Debate in which students from various Meritas schools debated against each other, via video conference, using a modified Lincoln-Douglas debate format. This meant that January was the time to get the ball rolling!

Students prepared for the big event by writing persuasive speeches and planning rebuttals to points they predicted their opponents would make. Second graders debated on the extent of a child’s power to live in harmony with the Earth, third graders debated on whether deforestation can be reversed by planting trees in sparsely populated areas, fourth graders debated on whether rationing can solve the problem of water deficits and a depleting water supply, fifth graders debated on whether global poverty can be solved by giving every person around the world 1000 USD, sixth graders debated on whether an effective way to raise educational levels is to increase and lengthen schools days, seventh graders debated on whether world health organizations should prioritize malaria for eradication even if it means largely ignoring other infectious diseases, and eighth graders debated on whether global drug decriminalization would lead to greater drug use and addiction.

After their debates, students got onto their wikis and posted their opening speeches. They also commented on who they thought “won” their debate, why they thought so, what the best points were that were made by each side, and what they, as students, learned from The Great Debate experience.

As the month of February drew to an end, these students walked away with rich learning in the areas of critical thinking and communication. More specifically, students learned how to present an argument, how to use evidence and logic to support a position, how to write persuasive prose, how to do research in the library and on the Internet, how to speak to the point and on topic, how to argue respectfully, and how to work collaboratively in examining and building a case. Students also gained the benefit of learning how to defend positions they may not hold, an important skill as it helps children understand and respect those who disagree with them, and all along, they got to have fun in creating bonds with other students in the Meritas family of schools!

Heritage Oak is a traditional school appealing to parents who are seeking a proven curriculum and a safe, nurturing environment. Community awareness, academic achievement, and family values are part of its program that focuses on the development of the whole child.

The U.S. Department of Education bestowed its highest honor upon Heritage Oak when it awarded the school the 1998-1999 “Blue Ribbon” award. The “Blue Ribbon”, our

Nations most prestigious education award, distinguishes Heritage Oak for its excellence in leadership, teaching, curriculum, student achievement, parent involvement, and community support.