

"DESTINATION IMAGINATION" Builds Character & Confidence

Since 1982, Destination Imagination (DI) has impacted more than 1.5 million participants. Each year, more than 150,000 students participate in this program, with the support of more than 38,000 volunteers worldwide.

Students who participate in DI become better at creative and critical thinking, teamwork, and idea generation. The full story about DI can be found at www.destinationimagination.org. What the website cannot express is the feeling of satisfaction gained through the volunteer experience.

Last year I had the opportunity to be a co-leader for a team of kindergarten students at Sand Hill Elementary. The kindergarten level is called "The Rising Stars." They do not get judged but they are as much a part of the competition as the older teams and they earn a ribbon of participation.

Our group of 10 kids was tasked with creating and agreeing on a team name and then they had to invent their "story."

You can imagine the amount of effort it takes for a volunteer leader to encourage a crew of spirited kindergartners to work together as a team toward one goal.

The fun and laughs for me were mixed with amazement, wonder, and a bit of agitation. I watched as these little people talked about everything from their favorite pets to what they had for lunch ... everything but what they were supposed to be practicing for their performance. Before went home each day, they would act out their skit. The first couple of times were crazy and I felt humbled in my position of no control. I wondered if these kids had been paying attention? Did they not know that they were going to perform in front of judges, and why weren't they feeling anxious or afraid of failure?

On the day of the performance, just as brave as ever, these young actors got together and quickly shouted out their story as they executed the presentation. They were wonderful, and even added some creative words to the routine. When the team challenge was presented, they worked together with a purely incredible

performance. Thoughts of what they might say next kept all of us adults on our toes.

But as we watched them work together, get mad at each other, and then perfectly finish their challenge with well-earned bows and curtsies, we were proud. They did it, and they were wonderful!

I saw the confidence in their faces and the pink in their cheeks as the judges gave them a favorable report.

Destination Imagination gives young people an opportunity to express themselves outside the structures of school and tests, and teaches them how to "design and manage a project, and gain the skills needed for the 21st century workforce."

It also reminds us of the wholesome visions of every child and how much they need that freedom of expression to be fruitful in their future.

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