



## **Brenda Thayer**

Brenda Thayer graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater in 1984 with a Bachelor of Science in Education. She later earned her Masters of Science in Education from the University of Wisconsin Whitewater. Brenda began her teaching career in Fort Atkinson at the J. F. Luther Middle School where she taught sixth grade social studies, language arts, science, and math. She currently teaches sixth grade social studies and language arts at the Fort Atkinson Middle School.

When asked about his personal educational philosophy, Brenda stated, "My philosophy of teaching is that I as the teacher must inspire the love of learning through a safe environment where my students know I care and respect them. My classroom has to be a secure place to think, share, and develop theories without the fear of being teased." Students know that her door is always open if they need help on homework, or if they need to talk to someone. She further states, "To be a successful teacher I must always be willing to learn from well-seasoned teachers, the young exuberant ones, parents, and students.

Brenda states she works to raise the achievement for all students beginning on the first day of school when she establishes an educational, yet fun tone for her class. Respect of each other is a priority. Brenda incorporates a variety of teaching strategies and activities to address the varied learning styles of her students. For example, the units may include reading, writing, videos, plays, games, projects, guest speakers, fieldtrips, and Smart Board activities. She also works closely with the language arts teachers to create interdisciplinary units. If students are required to complete a project, it is completed in class, with materials she provides, so no student is left at a disadvantage. When planning her units, she takes into consideration not only what she needs to accomplish, but also what her students need in order to be successful.

Brenda has developed some innovative projects and programs over the years which include an Earth Day Project with the assistance of the Department of Natural Resources warden; a medieval festival complete with a banquet, re-enactors and a catapult; and an overnight trip to

McKenzie Environmental Center. She states that these could not have occurred without the help and cooperation of her colleagues.

Brenda has also been involved in community service. She has been a volunteer with 4-H where she has been a leader or co-leader for the Hebron helping Hands 4-H Club for seven years. She has also taught Sunday School at the Hebron Methodist Church for quite a few years.

In terms of unrealized goals she plans to conquer, the first is to learn Spanish fluently enough to communicate with Latino students and parents who have a limited English vocabulary. She has taken beginning Spanish at MATC, a Survival Spanish for Teachers Workshop, and a three credit graduate class on beginning Spanish for teachers. She also hopes to develop a colonial day experience similar to the one she developed for the medieval unit. It would include different aspects of colonial life such as being taught a lesson with a modified horn book, learning crafts, games, colonial food, and if possible, finding a re-enactment group to do presentations.

When asked what the most positive aspect she sees in education today Brenda states it is the accountability of teachers to teach the curriculum. She also believes that movement toward standardized grading helps the teacher focus on what needs to be taught.

A colleague, Jerry Searing states, "To say Mrs. Thayer is the ultimate professional is really not enough. She has gone above and beyond to show expertise in her profession. She has coached our Math Counts team after school, led the Social Studies Department in curriculum realignment, taken Spanish classes to better teach our ESL population, and extended her learning in the areas of technology used in the classroom. The needs of the child are at the top of her list."

From another colleague, Jane Dan De Hey states, "It is Brenda that I run to when I need help with lessons that I am creating or a problem student. If I need a quick analysis of a situation or idea, she is the one to whom I go. Her advice is always on target. She has successfully pulled teachers together to make the social studies curriculum consistent across the 6<sup>th</sup> grade level and flow in a natural sequence from 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Brenda dives deeply into the content she teaches. She learns the material inside out, and then always finds ways to make it fun and interesting. One

such activity is a Native American unit. Working along with the Hoard Historical Museum staff, Brenda has put the students in touch with the past and helped them make connections to the present.

It is with great pleasure that we recommend Brenda Thayer for the Herb Kohl Teacher Fellowship Award.

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