

Living Out Our School's Mission

By Our Fourth and Fifth Grade Teachers

As George Walton Academy teachers, it is our mission to provide challenging instruction, engaging experiences, and global perspectives. This school year, we have been given the opportunity to receive coaching from an outside, premier organization to broaden our instructional strategies and encourage our students to reimagine learning. Through this partnership, we aim to globalize our teaching practices and create student-centered projects. Each grade began their project by developing a driving question. Students took this driving question and prior content knowledge and began to take responsibility for their learning by planning ahead and visualizing their individual and group projects.

Fourth-grade students are working on a heritage project, asking the question “Why do people explore” and delving into oral histories, family trees, and cultural traditions from around the world. Students have been eagerly engaged and actively learning through discussions, leading them to find connections between themselves and their classmates they might not have otherwise. When a student makes a connection between their experiences and our curriculum, it feels as though our purpose for the project has been achieved. It truly is a light-bulb moment. You can find more information about our Heritage Project on our [grade-level blog](#). The fourth-grade “Heritage Food Festival” will be held on Wednesday, December 19th from 1:30-2:30 in the lower school library and all are invited.

Meanwhile, fifth grade is focusing on the Civil War by asking the question “How might we understand differing perspectives from the Civil War era?” Students have written letters from the point of view of various people involved in the war, including soldiers, family left at home, nurses, and presidents. Additionally, they have researched fashion, food, weapons, the Underground Railroad, freedom quilts and battlefields to better understand the different perspectives. By choosing their own projects, students have been actively engaged and eager to get to work each day, and have ultimately developed into enthusiastic learners! Fifth-grade students will publicly display these projects and develop their public speaking and presentation skills in the Lower School Media Center on December 21st.

As educators, these projects have not only helped redefine our student's learning experience, but have also given us the opportunity to collaboratively plan and design the projects we want our students to complete. In many ways, our experience has mirrored the experience of our students as we develop the confidence to approach our content from a new angle. Through this initiative, we benefit from a year-long professional development program that is not only thoughtful, but one that is helping us to more meaningfully live out the school's mission in our classrooms. We could not be prouder of our students and hope to you will come see their hard work!