

# V L U S W E E K L Y

Stories by and About the Vassal Lane Upper School's Scholars

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**In this issue of the *V L U S Weekly*:**

Updates!

Editorials!

Stem Night!



Image from <http://www.scooperbowl.org>

## Community Service Update

By Kirk Morris

I would like to thank you all for making Spirit Week and our School Dance both huge successes. I also would like to thank everyone who has contributed to our fund raising efforts. We set a goal of \$500.00, to support The Jimmy Fund's efforts to fight childhood cancer. We have reached our goal, and as a result will receive 75 tickets to the Scooper Bowl, and we will be going on June 3. The Scooper Bowl is an all you can eat Ice Cream event- more info at [www.scooperbowl.org](http://www.scooperbowl.org). I will be drafting up permission slips soon. We have reserved 2 busses and will leave around 10:30 and return close to the end of the day. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

## **Families and Students Engage in “Higher Order Thinking” at VLUS STEM Night**

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By Matt Dunkel, VLUS Math Coach

On April 17<sup>th</sup>, Vassal Lane Upper School hosted our annual STEM Night. (“STEM” stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.) Our goals were to celebrate the science and math programs at VLUS and to engage families and students together in the types of “higher order thinking” that students undertake in VLUS classrooms every day.

Turnout was high: over 150 students and family members attended! Mixed groups of 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students and families worked together in classrooms, where teachers led interactive math and science activities. We even got to meet some 5<sup>th</sup> grade students and families from our feeder schools, who attended STEM Night to get a taste of middle school math and science!

In math classrooms, participants used patterns and geometry to find the maximum number of slices that they could make from a pie. And in science classrooms, participants designed methods to grow a prize-winning giant pumpkin! Afterward, participants discussed their strategies and reflected on the types of higher-order thinking that they had used. They also talked with visiting STEM professionals to explore connections between these activities and the day-to-day work of real-life STEM-related jobs.

Feedback from the evening was overwhelmingly positive. In their Exit Tickets, families and students wrote that they enjoyed the opportunity to use different problem solving strategies and engage in higher order thinking. As one parent said, “A highlight was seeing students realize that they were doing thinking at the top of Bloom’s Taxonomy!”

Participants also enjoyed the evening’s focus on collaboration and group work. As one student put it, “a highlight was getting to do math with my mom.” Families and students also enjoyed the mixed-grade groupings; as one student wrote, “I enjoyed working with people who I’m not used to doing math with.”

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Some family members said that STEM Night was directly connected to their own work in STEM-related fields. For example, one parent wrote that “this task was very similar to my own experience as an engineer. We need to constantly create, analyze, and evaluate our designs and methods and apply them to specific problems.”

Other family members said the evening was a dramatic departure from their past experiences with math and science. One parent summed it up nicely by saying that our activities were “much more interesting than when I was in school!” Another parent elaborated: “I can’t recall doing problems that were so open-ended, that allowed you to solve them in multiple ways.” As a third parent put it, STEM Night was “much more collaborative and creative” than her own experiences in school – “focused on the process and not the product. Also, fun and not scary!”

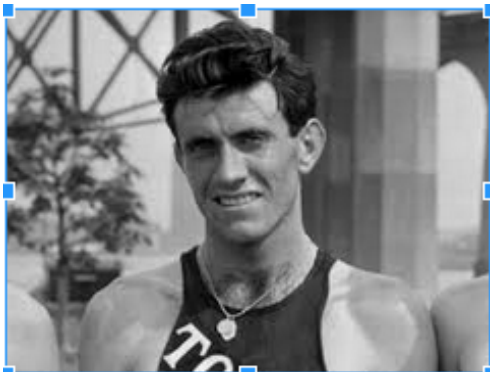
VLUS teachers greatly enjoyed the opportunity to “think about thinking” together with families and students, and we’re already looking forward to next year’s event. Many thanks to everyone who came out!

## Louie Zamperini

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Feature Article written by Tyler Da Silva for Ms. Anna Marsh’s 6th grade English Language Arts class

Louie Zamperini was a famous runner and World War II survivor. When Louie was born they knew right away he was a fast child. Even when he was young he loved to run. At a young age he was mischievous because he would always run and hide from his mom. His parents were Italian immigrants. He also had a brother named Pete.



Eventually Louie became a runner and made it to the Olympics. In the Olympics, he was trailing behind a lot of people. He made a last minute dash and almost got first place. When the Olympics were over, Louie ran around Berlin stealing beer. Since he wanted a souvenir, he saw the Nazi flag that was protected by 2 guards. He ran by

Image from <http://gretawire.foxnewsinsider.com/tag/>

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them, and jumped to get the flag. One of the guards saw him and started shooting. In the end, Louie got the flag. There was no serious injury.

## WWII

When Louie joined the war he would always run every day. Louie and his crew named their



Image from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutsuhiro\\_Watanabe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutsuhiro_Watanabe)

bomber *Superman*. When Louie and his crew were on a mission, on their way back, the landing gear broke. When they were landing they couldn't slow down so they almost went plunging in the ocean. On a different mission to bomb one of Japan's air strips, 3 of these engines died, and they were sent plunging into the ocean. There were 11 people on the bomber that crashed, and only 3 survived.

Those three people were Louie, Mac, and Phil. They were at sea for 3 months. During those 3 months, Mac died, so only Louie and Phil survived and got captured by the Japanese. Louie, "The Bird," was moved to 3 Pow camps. Louie and everybody else barely got fed anything, so numerous people would steal sugar cane. Louie got tortured almost every day for a long time. The



Image from <http://www.pinterest.com>

Japanese would beat their prisoners so hard that their wind pipes would be fractured. They would also force prisoners to stand for hours, and they burned prisoners' family photos.

## Conclusion

Louie Zamperini got rescued, but he got rescued when the war ended. I think that his story is inspiring because it makes people believe that they can do anything even if it's impossible. Louie Zamperini died July 2, 2014.

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## **Do You Want to Live in a Country Where the Government Decides Who Lives and Dies?**

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Editorial written by Fiona O' Laughlin for Ms. Kolleen Burbank's 8th grade English Language Arts class

More than 4% of Death Row inmates are declared innocent- after execution. That amounts to hundreds of executed innocents in the past three years alone! The death penalty is a ridiculous and outdated concept and can only lead to disaster.

Greg Wilhoit was one of many sentenced to the death penalty. After 8 years in solitary confinement he was exonerated on DNA evidence, but he had "lost 8 years of his life, the opportunity to raise his two daughters, his livelihood, and his physical and mental health"(8).

Greg was lucky to be exonerated before being killed. However, not everyone escapes execution. For Clayton Lockett, dying took a painful, terrifying 43 minutes. First, the untrained prison personnel put Mr. Lockett's IV in incorrectly. Then, the drugs in it reacted differently than they had expected. Mr. Lockett convulsed and tried to speak, but couldn't because he was strapped down. When his attorney realized the execution was failing, they tried desperately to call off the execution, but it was too late. Mr. Lockett eventually died after suffering through a painful heart attack. (4)

Some people say that executing offenders is cheaper than keeping them in life without parole, so we may as well just kill all criminals. Another great way to save federal money would be to shut down hospitals.

In reality, executions cost the country millions more each year than life in prison. Since the death penalty was ruled unconstitutional, states have to circumvent cruel and unusual punishment laws if they want to kill someone, and the result is a very expensive lethal injection. According to some studies released by the state, "California has spent \$4 billion on executions in the past 30 years, but has only executed 13 people".

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Not only is the death penalty a financial disaster, it doesn't even follow our highest law - the Constitution. Companies that made the lethal injections have stopped making them, forcing states to create their own "cocktails" of death. Each state experiments with mixing random drugs together, hoping to strike a quick working, non-painful combination. Instead, many people are effectively tortured. (4) Because of this, a federal judge ruled that the California Death Penalty is unconstitutional as cruel and unusual punishment. He said that the sentence has "quietly transformed into one no rational jury or legislature could ever impose: life in prison with the remote possibility of death". This sounds ridiculous when you hear it so plainly, but most of the US doesn't realize what is going on under their own noses.

Do you want to live in a country where the government decides who lives and dies? The death penalty is inhumane, not to mention illegal, and it's time to end this abomination before things get even worse.

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## Legalizing Gay Marriage

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Editorial written by Vigdis Gísladóttir for Ms. Kolleen Burbank's 8th grade English Language Arts class

Imagine if you had been with the person you loved for many years but couldn't marry them because you have the same body parts and use the same bathroom.

Should all countries legalize gay marriage? The answer is of course yes for so many reasons that people have practically ignored. By not legalizing gay marriage, we are teaching children that not all people are equal and if you are gay you won't be as happy as others who are straight. Do we really want to set that example? We need to start making our society one where discrimination doesn't exist. You can't keep denying other people happiness just because of their sexuality.

A 2013 Gallup Poll says that 35 states in the U.S. have legalized gay marriage, and about 55% of Americans believe that the other 15 states should do so, too. The amount of people that support legalizing gay marriage in America has skyrocketed in the past years. A 2013 Washington post poll proves that over 80% of young voting people today support legal gay marriage. It's completely

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ridiculous that there are still 15 states where gay marriage is illegal, when it is absolutely clear that the majority of Americans completely support same sex marriage(1).

No matter what you say against gay marriage, it will almost always trace down to religion or family values. Those two arguments aren't really valid since the first amendment clearly says that "congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion". A lot of married straight couples don't have any children, and it becomes much easier for couples to adopt children when they are married.

People often argue that a child should have the right to a father and mother. This is a fair argument. However, many researches prove that gay people are just as good parents as heterosexuals. Gays and lesbians rarely become parents accidentally, compared with an almost 50 percent accidental pregnancy rate among heterosexuals, that translates to more commitment and more involvement(4).

A study published in Pediatrics on June 7, 2010 found that children of lesbian mothers were rated higher than children of heterosexual parents in social and academic competence and had fewer social problems. A July 2010 study found that children of gay fathers were "as well-adjusted as those adopted by heterosexual parents." Washington Post columnist Ezra Klein argues, "We should be begging gay couples to adopt children. We should see this as a great boon that gay marriage could bring to kids who need nothing more than two loving parents."

Marriage by itself doesn't guarantee good family relationships, but because family leave, tax, and many other benefits are available only to married couples, children suffer if their gay parents are not permitted to marry (9). Assume that you adopted a child but could not get an absence from work because you are not married. You simply cannot put one person's happiness over another's.

Interracial marriage was illegal in many US states until a 1967 Supreme Court decision to legalize it. From the year 2011, support for gay marriage has increased by 5% (1). This proves that support for gay marriage is increasing dramatically over a very short period time.

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Many people think of marriage as a union between a man and a woman. It is time for the definition of marriage to evolve again so we can live in a society where discrimination does not exist, human rights are respected, and two adults can marry regardless of their sexual orientation.

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## **The VLUS Weekly is Back!**

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Have you heard the news? The *VLUS Weekly* is back, and we are currently seeking contributions from Vassal Lane students and teachers. Check us out at [http://vassallane.cpsd.us/school\\_news/school\\_newspaper/](http://vassallane.cpsd.us/school_news/school_newspaper/), and be sure to share your stories by and about Vassal Lane students with Kathleen Moore and Nora Clooney via Google Docs. Please also feel free to send your story ideas to Kathleen and Nora at [kamoore@cpsd.us](mailto:kamoore@cpsd.us) and [nclooney@cpsd.us](mailto:nclooney@cpsd.us).