

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1995
VOLUME 18, NUMBER 1



GREGORY GRAMBO

Helping Students
Capture A Moment
In Time

(Building A Time Capsule)

January/February 1995
the Gifted Child Today

pages 10, 12, 13

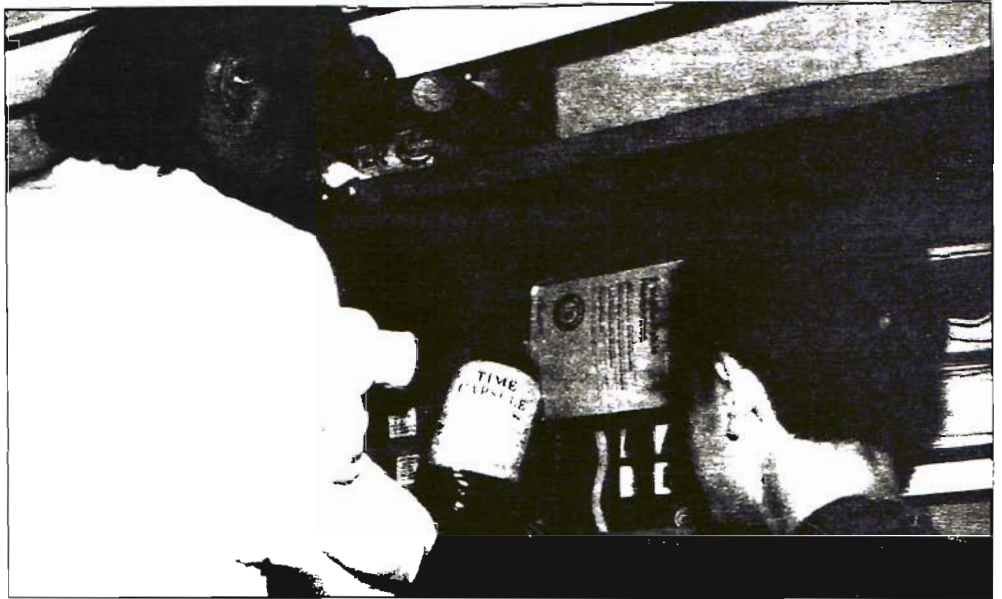
IN THE CLASSROOM

Gregory Grambo, Ph.D.

Helping Students Capture a Moment in Time

Recently, I picked up a history book and leafed through its pages. I asked myself, "What is history?" History consists of events and things that happened in the past, but is it the distant past or the recent past that is considered history? History includes things and events that happened a decade ago, a year ago, an hour ago, and even a second ago. Newspapers print history, and history happens on television and radio. I find myself thinking, "Are these the only types of recorded history we have?"

In my classroom, I have a reproduction of a 1908 Sears catalog. Does this catalog tell history? It shows the types of things people bought and what they cost in that year. The catalog gives an idea of the amount of money people spent on things and the types of things people bought. Yes, this catalog does tell history, just as much as cave paintings tell the history of the hunts of ancient man. Its items, like a newspaper or artifacts, tell the stories of the past. Sometimes we find these items by accident, like the documents from a sunken ship or forgotten things put away in an attic. Some items were buried with the ancient Egyptian kings and were dug up at a later date. These things tell of what life was like long ago. We could also put items away with a specific idea of when we would like them to be found and for what purpose we hid the items.



Sometimes when architects design a building, the last stone to be put into place is a stone with the building's finishing date. It is called the corner stone. Many architects and designers used a hollowed out corner stone where they hid items that were of importance during the year or years that the building was completed. If the building was ever to be torn down or demolished, the items hidden inside the corner stone would be found and would help to tell their story. Whether the items were hidden by accident or on purpose, the items were suspended in time and, therefore, a time capsule was formed. These capsules can be hidden or lost, in attics, basements, in space, or in the sea.

Student Time Capsules

Why not make a time capsule with your class and leave a piece of history for the future to discover? Your students will need to discuss with others

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what things they want to tell the future. What things would they need to tell their story? Do the students want to tell of their accomplishments? Would they want to tell about wars? Could it be that they want to tell of a great sports hero? Maybe it is a new type of soda or medicine that made a difference to the way people live? Any of these ideas would be great for a time capsule. You see, the children could tell the future anything that they feel is important. Remember, however, that any item you want to hide must be preserved in such a way so that when found, it will be able to tell a story.

The ancient Egyptians mummified bodies so that even facial hair could still be seen. The Egyptians took care when placing items in a tomb. Items were put in a tomb not because the Egyptians wanted us to find them, but because they believed in life after death and they felt that the kings would need these things when they walked the Earth again. These items were preserved so that they tell us of the wealth of a king and the life he had.

How then do you preserve the items you wish to put in your time capsule? Many papers have acid in them. As time passes the acid causes the paper to yellow, become brittle, and eventually fall apart. Newspaper will fall apart over time, too. You can, however, preserve a newspaper for your time capsule by copying it onto acid free paper which will not yellow and become brittle.

Water will destroy anything in your time capsule. Therefore, you must keep water out of your capsule or put all of your items into plastic bags.

You could recycle old plastic soda bottles into waterproof, soilproof time capsules. Pull off the standing cup from the bottom of the bottle, then cut off the top of the bottle two inches below the neck. Plug the holes in the standing cap



with silicone sealer. This will prevent water from seeping in through the holes. Your bottle is now ready to become a time capsule. Items you wish

to include must, of course, fit inside your time capsule. A set of encyclopedias would not be a good choice for a soda bottle time capsule but may be a

good choice for a capsule made from an old trunk or foot locker. Items picked could be based on a theme such as a birthday, season, certain age, or school year. A schoolwide time capsule could include the school's yearbook, tickets from the prom, a copy of the school's newspaper, and copies of old tests. Student writings, compositions, and poems could be included. A birthday time capsule could include a list of guests, pieces of gift wrapping, and birthday cards. When picking items for a capsule, think of their impact on the future. Computer disks and VCR tape may not stay magnetized for a long time. This is something to consider if you wish to include magnetic items such as these.

Learning from the Capsule

What will people of the future learn when they open the time capsule? If they do not learn or discover anything, then what was the purpose of your capsule? It should have a purpose. Discuss the purpose of a time capsule with your students. Let the children tell the future something and allow the children to pick the items for the capsule.

You are now ready to put the capsule together. Make a list of all the items you wish to include and label each one. What may be an obvious item to you may not be that obvious to the people of the future. Many changes could take place in the design of items you use every day. All items must be wrapped in plastic. If you choose to include computer disks or VCR tapes, keep them in their dust covers and wrap them in plastic. The wrapped items should be placed inside the clear portion of the soda bottle capsule. A label is needed to show who buried the capsule, when, and why. It should also state when you want the capsule to be opened and what

to do if someone finds it before it is supposed to be opened. Place this label inside the capsule so it is easily seen through the plastic bottle. Plug all holes in the container with silicone sealer and smear sealer on the outside of the bottle near the open end. Apply sealer all the way around the bottle and seal the top of the bottle with the standing cap.

The time capsule is now ready to be buried or hidden. However, have you ever put something somewhere and completely forgotten where it was put? If you eventually want the capsule to be opened, then you must tell someone where it is. You can give directions to your time capsule, make a map, or put a marker where you buried it. How can you pass along this set of directions or map so someone in the future can use them? A marker similar to a headstone marker can show a capsule's burial site. One such capsule was buried at the 1938 World's Fair in New York City. Maps could be put in the corner stone of a building or in a family or school scrapbook which could then be passed on and added to from one year to the next.

This type of project involves your students in choosing an idea which they wish to convey to the future. They also need to pick and prepare artifacts for future generations to find. The children have to decide on how to pick items and why these items are important to the future. Making decisions on when the capsule is buried and reopened will be carefully planned by the students. The children will have to then prepare the items for hibernation and figure out how to tell others where the time capsule is. Have your students take an active part in history. Tell the future a story. ☺

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