

## GROVER CLEVELAND MIDDLE SCHOOL

# Seventh graders recreate Constitutional Convention

**CALDWELL** — A few well-known visitors came to Caldwell on Thursday, Nov. 21 when seventh graders at Grover Cleveland Middle School recreated the infamous Constitutional Convention of 1787.

The brainstorm of seventh-grade social studies teachers Maura Lincoln and Paul Kotlewski, the event is a two-day re-enactment of the famous convention that replaced the then-current Articles of Confederation with the Constitution.

To simulate the historic event, students wear the clothing, speak the language and fight the battles fought by the founding fathers more than 220 years ago. Dressed in knickers, white wigs, three-cornered hats and peg legs, the students take on the role of key historical figures, such as Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, Edmund Randolph and more, both looking and playing the part.

"When we wrote the curriculum, we wanted a hands-on, inquiry-based program that would engage the students," said Kotlewski. "We wanted to make this important part of our history both interesting and fun to learn."

To make the event as realistic as possible, the students sit in state formation, recite the now-famous quotes of these historic men and present the arguments and plans that would change this country forever. No detail is overlooked, including the carrying in of eighty-one year old Benjamin Franklin by his fellow delegates.

"Although the program does



**Above:** Seventh grader Amelye Burki as Edmund Randolph discusses the Virginia Plan with her fellow delegate James Madison, portrayed by seventh grader Spencer Solomon. **Left:** The annual recreation of the Constitutional Convention is the work of social studies teachers Maura Lincoln and Paul Kotlewski. From left, teachers Melissa Tauro, Kotlewski and Lincoln help the 10th annual re-enactment run smoothly, teaching the students Robert's Rules and emphasizing the issues that arose during the writing of the Constitution.

see if the students can recite the quotes and wear the clothes of our founding fathers, it does so much more," said Lincoln. "The students are introduced to and develop an understanding with empathy for how our founding fathers developed an incredible written plan of government."

Designed to familiarize the students with the U.S. Constitution that is studied throughout the school year, the event explores the creation of the three branches of government, the early influences of John Locke and Baron de Montesquieu and

how the Patriots came together to form a nation.

As an added bonus, the students begin to learn the skills of public speaking, debate and compromise.

"Although many of the students are shy at first, they quickly come alive, taking on the role of the individual they represent," said Lincoln. "The exercise gives the students a voice and shows them that people can be heard. Our ultimate goal is to help and provide guidance for developing a group of truly 'civic'-minded citizens.

The skills that they begin to develop with this exercise are skills that will last them a lifetime."

To complement the event, the students travel to the country's birthplace, Philadelphia, visiting the Constitution Center and its life-size bronze statues. "Visiting the actual room in which these men met and seeing some of the furniture, including George Washington's Rising Sun chair; add a final note of reality to the lesson," said Lincoln. "By living the history, we make it real."