

## Gail Franklin - Latin and Seventh Grade History

Gail Franklin is a logophile, someone who loves words and language. Make that languages. She also loves history, so it's not surprising that she teaches middle school Latin and seventh grade American history, or that during her 18 years at Topeka Collegiate she has, at various times, also taught language arts and Russian.

When asked, "Why take Latin?" Mrs. Franklin is persuasive. "It's helpful if a student plans to study a modern Romance language," she explains, "because Latin is the parent language of them all." It is a good English vocabulary builder, too, since more than 50



percent of English words come from Latin. Then there's the excitement of listening to voices from long ago. "Latin is not spoken as a native language by anyone, so the ancient world can communicate with the modern world only through text. We must approach it through reading. We analyze grammar and word structure. The analytical approach is a good tool for any student in any discipline. It's good mental exercise."

It's fun, too. Latin students relish taking a break from grammar to re-read Greek myths and learn the Roman counterparts to Greek gods and goddesses. "A couple of my seventh graders could team teach the class," says Mrs. Franklin, "I have to be on my toes!" Students even celebrate Saturnalia. That's the ancient Roman Winter Solstice festival held in honor of Saturn, the father of the gods.

Ancient history isn't Gail Franklin's only passion. She also enjoys teaching the history of the American Revolution, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. She particularly likes discussing ideas and the philosophy of government with middle school students. "Middle school can be an awkward time for students," she says, "but their intellects are blossoming. They're developing more sophisticated ideas and a more sophisticated sense of humor. Some students are very aware of current events, and it's interesting for them to tie the ideas of the revolutionary period to today's issues."

Mrs. Franklin helps seventh graders with their History Day projects, and observes that those who find a topic they really like dive in and enjoy the research. For those who don't, it's a bit more of a chore. But the hard work pays off and "Every once in a while I'll get a note or an e-mail from a student thanking me," says Mrs. Franklin, "and that's always rewarding." Particularly when this Latin teacher who speaks Russian hears from students who thank her for turning them on to language, or tell her they've decided to study Latin or linguistics in college, or take up Russian, because of her.

Gail Franklin knows what it's like to be inspired by a teacher. For her, it was Sister Elena, the Catholic nun who taught her Latin and American History in high school. "Sr. Elena could just tell a good story," Mrs. Franklin laughs. "She made history and Latin into a big story, with big drama." Is it any wonder that her former student now teaches Latin and American History?