

PRESS RELEASE:

Heathlands School based in St Albans, Hertfordshire have been fortunate to compete in the US run 'Battle of the Books', a reading comprehension competition for the past 4 years. Battle of the Books is held at Gallaudet University in Washington DC, the only University in the world to deliver it's curriculum in sign language.

Six Heathlands pupils were lucky enough to get through to the National Finals and have written about their experiences. The press release below is a mixture of all of their recounts, enjoy!

I participated in the Battle of the Books competition that was organised by Gallaudet University, and when returning home, I brought some of the happiest and most enjoyable memories ever I've had.

Last September, I was asked if I wanted to participate in Battle of the Books. I was a bit unsure because I tried last year but didn't make it, however I decided to be brave and join the team. That was my best decision ever.

I wasn't sure until I realised that all my classmates wanted to participate that I confirmed my decision to enter the competition. I mean, why not have a go at it? The team assignment took place and I was in the Buff team with three other peers, just like the Blue team too. We were given three books that we had to read and remember them for the Preliminaries. In the Preliminaries, we played against three teams from different schools in America.

We passed and went through to play offs in December, I was really nervous and I didn't think we would pass.

We pushed our effort into answering the questions - in the first round, there were 12 questions (2 points for each correct answer) where we could discuss the answer. In the second round, each individual must answer the question without the ability to discuss. This increased our anxiety because what if I know the answer but my peer doesn't?! So desperate to give the answer yet I was not allowed to. It was very difficult, but nowhere as difficult as the last round. Three presentation-style questions were given for each of us, and we had to agree which for who. Then, when it was my turn, I had to answer the question in a presentation style in ONLY TWO MINUTES, using the whiteboard to help me remember and explain my points. The judges then will conclude how many points out of 5 should I receive based on my use of evidence and clear explanations.

When it was the last week of school before Christmas Holiday, the teacher announced big news ... we are going to AMERICA!!! Well apparently my reaction wasn't even good enough. But inside, it felt like I'm running around with joy! I didn't expect that I would be able to go to America! I'm the only one to go to America for the first time in my family! America has been my dream since I was 5. I always watched these Americans going on tours and beautiful places in America on YouTube!

However, little did we know that we had to read four new books for the competition, and it was hard work. Very hard. The closer the competition was, the more nervous and anxious we got, but more positive emotions overtook them.

On March 29th, we flew to America from London to Boston to Washington D.C. Before going to Gallaudet, I was really excited and kind of nervous at the same time. But mostly excited as it was my first time visiting the world's only one deaf university.

I was feeling a bit nervous for the matches but mainly excited as we arrived at Gallaudet University. Before the Battle officially started, we all went sightseeing around Washington D.C. This was my first time in America and it was like an adventure, discovering new things that I thought only belonged in American films.

When I arrived in America, my peers decided to tour around Washington DC. We saw the white house, the bell of freedom, the US Capitol, the national museum of the American Indian, Lincoln's waffle shop and we went to a deaf Starbucks where all of the staff were using ASL! We then had dinner at a Deaf-owned restaurant called Mozzarella DC, and the food was so good.

When I saw all of the children in the icebreaker, I was bursting with excitement as I would love to get a new friend from other countries, its will be so cool! Learning with their culture, learning their signing language.

So, as you know, deaf Americans use "ASL" for their sign language. We had to practice back in the UK so we could communicate with them. Also it wasn't that hard to communicate with them in America. But I was kind of confused with "where" and "what" because in America, they sign the opposite of the British's. So for example, I asked a staff member "where is the canteen" but I signed "where" in BSL! And they thought that I said "what is the canteen"... we both were confused! Anyway, but ASL isn't really that hard though.

Then the competition day came the very next day! My team was super nervous because we had 5 matches against some of the best teams, and the matches were hard.

The five round robin matches were interesting . Three teams beat my teams and we beat two teams. It was really hard to beat but I think my team was doing very well and the teamwork was beautiful.

So when I was doing the presentation in the first round, I was very nervous, struggling, thinking too much that the time went up before I could do it. Then I thought to myself, how to improve and manage the timing. So when the second round began, I was ready for presentation. I improved so much! And I even got a better score than in the first round. And I was really glad. The judge also came to me after the match finished! He told me that he was really impressed by my presentation and that I was brave enough to do it!

After five robin matches. I felt good as I know how to present better as I landed on 5 points.

By the end of the day I was exhausted but we had to go on a nighttime tour of Washington DC with all of the teams and I had a good time. We went to the Washington monument, Lincoln Memorial and the World War II memorial.

My best part was going to the Monument because there were powerful winds. It was so funny!

On Sunday, it was the final. But we (Blue Team) sadly didn't get through. We lost by 1 point in the quarter -final! I felt disappointed but I'm really happy the (Buff) other team was having another match.

My team (Buff) went against Maryland School for the deaf in the quarterfinals and we won so we advanced to the semi-final. We were up against the best ranked school in the tournament, Texas school for the deaf. I thought they would beat us but we all tried our best and my team won! We were in the finals, against California school for the Deaf, Fremont. I was really nervous as almost everyone was watching and the match was being live streamed to Facebook so anyone could watch us. We beat the other team and won the championships for the Buff division! I was so ecstatic, I couldn't believe we actually did it, after all of our hard work finally paid off. We were so emotional, so speechless.

**Q: WHAT WAS THE BEST PART OF BOTB?**

If anyone asks me what my best experience was, I'd say that this was. I'm proud to say that Gallaudet University has inspired me to become the best I can be, considering my

accomplishment in winning the championships. The competition encouraged me to push my possibilities, and develop my confidence and communication skills as well as learning how to be responsible with all my possessions without my parents. It is one of the biggest achievements I have done, and it will remain in my memories forever.

I got the "All star" medal for doing the presentation very well and overcame my fear and social anxiety.

The best part in Battle of the Books was when we were in dinner, lots of people sat on the table and talking with each other, it really amazing, also in the school buses we were busy to learn how to sign ASL and American people were busy to learn how to sign BSL, we teaching the opposite sign.

I think the best part about Gallaudet University is that everyone is using sign language and it made me feel included. I met quite a lot of new people and I still keep in touch with them through social media.

I personally think that the hardest part about the Battle of the Books is having to answer difficult presentation questions. The fact that you need confidence and knowledge from the book to stand up in front of everyone was a huge challenge but an achievement to my life, especially in the finals.

This experience inspired me to never give up and always become the best I can be.

When we flew back to the UK, I met my parents at a train station, and the atmosphere was very welcoming and emotional. I experienced a severe jet lag reaction as I basically skipped one night - I should have slept on the plane but I didn't!

This experience was so memorable, so I want to thank those who helped make this experience as best as possible! (I really love the SignVideo-sponsored hoodie!) Wait here America - I am coming for you next year!

Many thanks to parental contributions, SignVideo and BlueSpark for their sponsorship to enable Heathlands to attend.

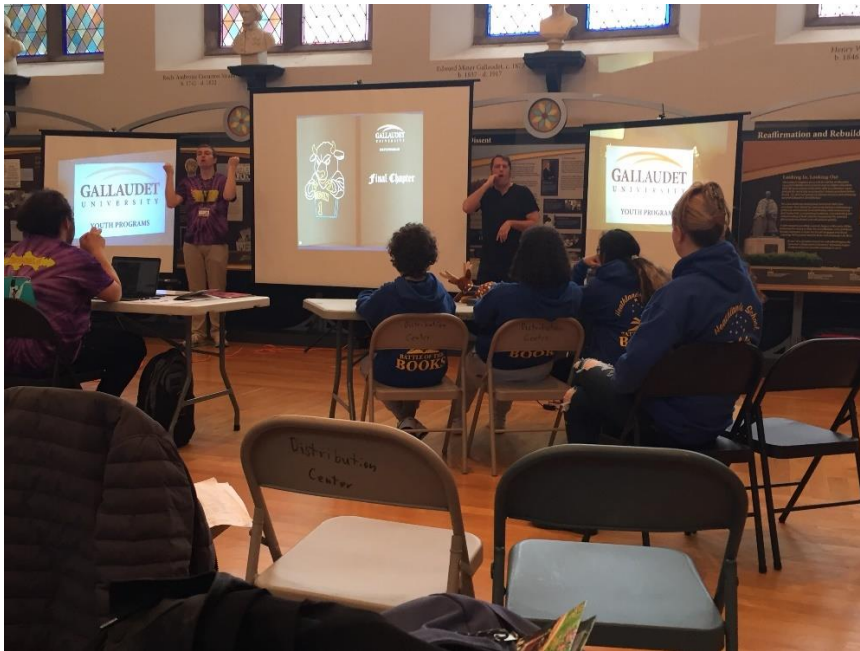
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With Roberta Cordano- President of Gallaudet



Both Heathlands Teams with their chaperones.

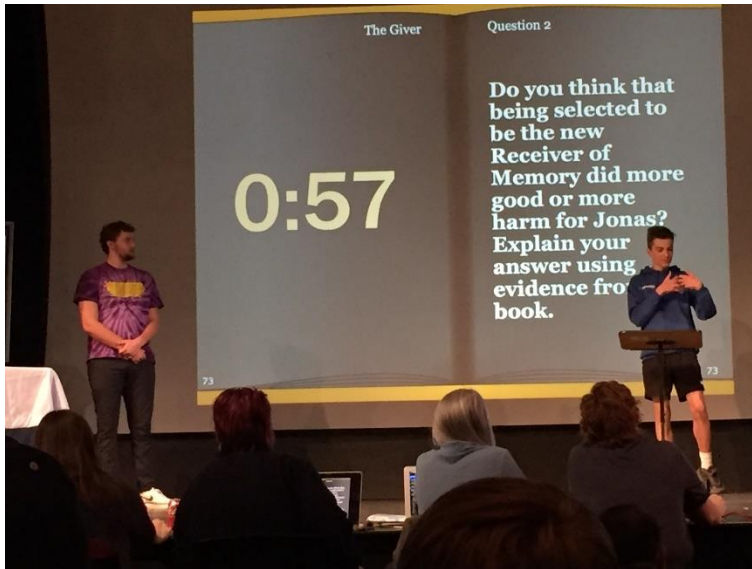




Buff Team



Blue Team revising!



Presentations were given two minutes planning and presenting time.

Books read

	<b>Prelims</b>	<b>Finals</b>
<b>Blue Team</b>	Maya and The Robot - Eve L. Ewing Front Desk – Kelly Yang The Gauntlet - Karuna Riazi	Stand Up, Yumi Chung! -Jessica Kim A Whale of the Wild- Rosanne Parry The Only Black Girls in Town- Brandy Gilbert Dragons in a Bag- Zetta Elliott
<b>Buff Team</b>	American as Paneer Pie - Andrea Davis Pinkney Loretta Little Looks Back: Three Voices Go Tell It - Supriya Kelkar Too Bright To See - Kyle Lukoff	The Giver- Lois Lowry I Know Your Secret- Daphne Benedis-Grab The Last Fallen Star – Graci Kim The Boy at the Back of the Class - Onjali Q. Raúf

[www.heathlands.herts.sch.uk](http://www.heathlands.herts.sch.uk)

<https://gallaudet.edu/youth-programs/>

<https://gallaudet.edu/youth-programs/battle-of-the-books/>

<https://www.instagram.com/starbuckssigningstore/?hl=en>

<https://mozzarella.com/>