

MAKING WAVES AT DCS



Mill Creek Students Weave Dexter History into Spooky Stories

What makes spooky stories “scary,” and so popular among readers of all ages? Students in Chris Hoelscher’s 7th grade English classes recently explored this question in a unit combining the elements of spooky literature and oral storytelling with local Dexter history. After reading stories such as “The Monkey’s Paw” by W.W. Jacobs and participating in literature circles to discuss theme, plot, settings and characters, students wrote their own chilling stories set in and around historically significant Dexter locations and/or landmarks. Classes are also creating a digital map of the story settings, including the accompanying student tales, to serve as a “haunted trail” for community members to follow.

As part of their project research, Hoelscher’s students took a walking field trip to the Dexter Area Historical Society in early October. Society volunteers were on hand to walk students through the museum, discuss facets of Dexter history, and answer any questions about the town. As one group wandered through the museum looking at historical artifacts for inspiration, another sat around a table perusing a book entitled, “Old Dexter Village,” compiled in 1974 for the Dexter Sesquicentennial (150th) Celebration and filled with pictures of historic Dexter buildings, churches and schools.



“This is a great way to get kids writing at the start of the year,” Hoelscher says. “Students are always excited for a field trip, and come back to the building eager to share what they saw with their friends.” Hoelscher started this popular unit in 2019, but the pandemic caused the field trip to be shelved for the past two years. “This project brings Dexter history to life,” he says, and his students were definitely interested in the stories behind the artifacts and photographs displayed in the museum. Their assignment is not only to include historical Dexter landmarks and artifacts, but to also research the time period of their story in order to include authentic and period-appropriate details.

As the students explored the museum and talked with local historians, the wheels of inspiration were turning. They asked questions about where certain buildings were located in town and what Dexter businesses used to exist but are no longer around. Students discussed potential story setting ideas such as the cider mill, Judge Dexter's first home, the train station, and various churches around town. Some story ideas centered around artifacts seen in the museum displays – a veteran's uniform, antique weapons, and dolls.

Creativity flowed onto the page as students brought their tales of the macabre to life.

Below are a few snippets from their chilling tales:

Written by Kayden R-M:

While walking on the trail the two children came up to an old rundown house that looked like it's been there for decades. On the house there was a mailbox with Copeland written on it.

Rose asks Joseph if he knows whose house this is. Joseph replies while still staring at the house intensely, "it's the old Copeland house, the house our grandpa went to jail after entering."

"How?" asks Rose.

Before Joseph replies, thunder erupts from the sky with heavy rain after. So, Joseph and Rose both immediately agree with the look on their faces they are going to go in. So, they both went up to the front door. Joseph with a shaking hand went up to knock but before he did, a loud hissing rose out of the house and the door flew open.

Rose screamed and Joseph closed his eyes and prepared to be hit by something. Thinking that his time might be up. But yet nothing hit him. Joseph opens his eyes just in time to see a black cat run past him.

Written by Anonymous:

In the 1930's, a mill was burned down. They say they know it was an accident. They say they don't know how it started. The citizens of Dexter acted like it never happened, and they built a fire station on top. But what they forgot was there were people inside that mill. And they couldn't be saved.

Written by Elena M:

The doll seemed to burn holes in her hand as she walked home. It felt weird to have it. Almost as if the doll was alive and she was with its spirit, in the presence of something larger than she could ever imagine. The feeling grew the longer she was with the doll. It was



thrilling, making her want to do something crazy, something maniacal. She could almost hear it starting to talk to her, whispering in her ear. Maybe she was going insane.

Written by Anonymous:

Later that night the mill was visited by two young girls who said they were traveling through. They said that they were running from the Salem witch trials. George was confused by this for the Salem witch trials had been long ago, when they saw George closing up the cider mill they approached him with a deal they stated why they were there and said this:

“Hello friendly miller,” they said in unison, a falsely comforting tone surrounded George.

“We have a deal for you,” said one still in a falsely comforting tone. This time they were closer to George without even taking a step.

“If you let us inhabit your mill, we will give you good business and this poison apple,” said the first one.

“If you let us stay the night in your mill.” said the second one to clarify what the first had said but trying to bring back that falsely comforting tone.

George accepted for the sight of these two girls staring into his eyes was terrifying, they carried the smell of blood, and they were panting so loud as though they were very very tired, and they kept swaying in unison, each sway they would get a step closer, that’s when George could really smell them the smell of death flooded George’s nose. For he thought if they caused any damage, he would have enough money to solve the problem. Until he saw them just flow into the house and possess the house the shutters and doors moved in the shape of a face and as George turned away, he heard the house sigh as if the two girls now live in the wooden planks of the cider mill.