



Getting 'silly' at Odyssey of the Mind

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GRAND RAPIDS -- Months of preparation unwound on one chaotic day of crazy creativity, and for eight minutes, Kelsey Miesen got into the act as an "extremely self-centered teacher with a bad attitude" in an absolutely silly scenario.

"I like not having to be myself today. I look ridiculous," said Kelsey, 14. "It seems like (we practiced for) eternity. In the end, it's fun."

Kelsey and her teammates from Caledonia's Kraft Meadows Middle School took part Saturday in an Odyssey of the Mind regional tournament. Spectators jammed hallways that doubled as staging areas for costumed children and bizarre cardboard props as about 70 teams performed at Forest Hills Central High School.

Participants came from elementary, middle and high schools in Caledonia, Forest Hills and Rockford. Other area Odyssey teams will compete Saturday in regional events at Grandville and Greenville high schools.

The top teams in each category qualified for the state tournament April 14 in Traverse City. The best teams at that showcase then join peers from around the globe May 23-26 for Odyssey of the Mind world finals at Michigan State University.

For most teams, the regional performance was the climax of tons of brainstorming, lots of construction and hours of rehearsals since last fall. A team of fourth- and fifth-graders from Forest Hills were in the hallway hot-gluing props and making last-minute checks before their performance.

"We're making sure everything is functional and fixing stuff from the car ride over here," said Nathaniel Millard, as teammates pointed out a tree trunk made of wine corks and foliage created with crinkled green pop cans.

"We wanted to use cans (on all of our props) but we couldn't drink that much," Grace Pynnonen said.

Props used by a team from Rockford's Roguewood Elementary included pinball machines, squirt guns and a lighted popcorn machine.

"I couldn't stay still before we got on stage," jittery 9-year-old Sarah Kogelschatz said after the performance. "You get tons of teamwork and you get life skills out of it, and you get to do fun things like build stuff."

Students come up with all the solutions, while coaches may provide materials and technical instruction.

"It's fun just to watch it evolve from nothing," said Karla Miesen, coach of the Kraft Meadows squad.

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