



■ Pascal, Sara, and Einstein, "Eureka!"

Chamber Theatre's 'Eureka!' gets students to count on math

By IRIS FANGER
FOR THE PATRIOT LEDGER

Sara's mom has a problem. Her daughter has yet to crack a book for a math test because she's too busy multi-tasking among her cell phone, her iPod, and the latest delivery from Netflix. When mom finally gets Sara down at her desk, she falls asleep over her math book.

The feisty, bopping Sara and her mom are two of the characters in "Eureka!," play designed to hook students into the excitement of discovery through mathematics.

Albert Einstein, Blaise Pascal, Lady Ada Lovelace and Pythagoras are just some of the mathematicians who travel through time to change Sara's mind about the relevance of her studies.

Boston-based Chamber Theatre Productions presented two performances for students at Marshfield's Furnace Brook Middle School earlier this month. In the spring, "Eureka!" will visit Hanover, Norton, Kingston, Quincy, Plymouth, Mansfield and Canton. Chamber Theatre is owned and run by Spring Sirkin, who lives in Quincy.

Furnace Brook Middle School math teacher Jean Kelley worked as a consultant on the script to playwright Shaun Wainwright-Branigan. Julie Berteletti, born and educated in Canton, also served as an adviser.

Chamber Theatre performed in Marshfield to thank Kelley for her help.

Kelley who said, "I love math" and recalls doing word problems for fun as a child, changed careers from working as a lawyer to teaching in 2001.

"There's more to life than a salary," she said. "There's something about being able to work with children and make a difference."

Kelley hopes that the play will "give a spark" to the 104 math students she sees weekly in her classes.

"Nothing compares to live theater because the



■ Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelace, "Eureka!"

audience is participating," she says. "The play's title means 'I have found it,' in Greek.

Math supervisor Diane Moore joined Kelley at one of the Marshfield performances.

"The kids were really enthusiastic," Moore said. "The play took some of the math concepts studied in middle school, like order of operations, prime numbers, probability, Pascal's triangle, and the golden ratio, and described them in an engaging way."

One scene about Pascal's theory of probability turned him into a card shark and had him challenge a courtier in a high-stakes game, to the amusement of the student audience.

In "Eureka!," Einstein appears complete with his trademark gray, flying hair, to serve as master of ceremonies and welcome the other characters bedecked in colorful period costumes. Draped in a flowing, white toga, Pythagoras arrives accompanied by a clap of thunder.

Einstein is portrayed as a sympathetic teacher, passionate about his discoveries and the importance of math to understanding the universe.

Pascal is a foppish snob until he talks about his theories, while the well-born 19th century British scientist Lady Ada Lovelace struts her superiority to the men, and brags about her research on the first computer program, written before anyone had invented computers.

"I like the fact that the actors pulled in the history," Moore said. "It made it come alive."

She reinforced the theatrical experience by giving the students an assignment to color in the patterns that appear in Pascal's triangle.

Chandler Grabowski and Danny Dalton were two of the students at the show.

"The play helped me remember a lot of the stuff we've gone over," Chandler said. "I've only seen a few plays. This one was by far the best I've seen."

Danny added, "I liked the way the characters jumped out of the window seat and closet. Math and science are my favorite subjects. They go together."

The math concepts discussed in the play were projected in formulas on a screen over the stage.

Kelley said she hopes to periodically hear the students shout "eureka!" in her classroom or even the word, "wow."

"I want my students to become surgeons, to cure diseases, to write plays, to use their wonderful brains," she said.

Her ambitions for them echo Einstein's final words to Sara, "Stay curious. Stay focused. Stay learning."

Not bad advice for the rest of us.



■ Ada Lovelace, Pascal, Einstein, and Pythagoras with Sara "Eureka!"