

Press Release



Battle Ground Public Schools

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Young historians shine at state; study of 1855 treaty earns them trip to nationals



Left photo: Jessi Shelton, left, and Mercedes McLeod. **Right photo:** Pleasant Valley Middle School 2011 History Day team, from left, front row: Mercedes McLeod, teacher Rene Soohoo, Abby Ogle, Mitchell Robertson; Standing: Jessi Shelton, Alyssa Adams, Nicholas Benko, Ken Wilson.

A study of whaling history off the Washington coast and the birth, life and death of the 1855 treaty with the Makah Indians has won a pair of Battle Ground district students a first place in state competition. It also means a trip to a national competition June 12-16 at the University of Maryland in College Park.

Jessi Shelton and Mercedes McLeod of Pleasant Valley Middle School won the Group Documentary division for middle and junior high students at Washington History Day in Bellevue on May 7.

The eighth-grade girls are students of history teacher Rene Soohoo. Several of Soohoo's students over the past 18 years at Pleasant Valley and Amboy have won high honors at the Washington History Day competition, sponsored by the Washington State Historical Society.

Other Pleasant Valley students at this year's state event included **Mitchell**

Robertson, Nicholas Benko and Ken Wilson, all seventh graders. They finished sixth in the “Group Exhibit” division. They three also won the “National Archives and Records Administration Award” for their research and use of documents. The boys’ subject was the debate – or lack of debate – about whether the United States should drop atomic bombs on Japan to end World War II.

Eighth grader **Alyssa Adams** was fourth in the Individual Performance category for her presentation on the pact that ended WW I. Her performance was, “The Treaty of Versailles: Doomed from the Start, Guaranteed to Start Another War.”

Pleasant Valley seventh grader **Abby Ogle** finished third in a preliminary round. She chose the same topic but in the individual documentary division. Hers was titled “The Treaty of Versailles: The Failure of Debate and Diplomacy.”

For their documentary video that that captured first place in its division, Jessie and Mercedes converted months of study, recorded interviews and copies of historic photos and documents into a 10-minute narrated video titled, “The Treaty of Neah Bay 1855: Created by Diplomacy, Destroyed by Debate.”

The 1855 treaty was one of many across the Northwest orchestrated in 1855 by I. I. Stevens, the first Washington territorial governor and the superintendent of Indian affairs. The Treaty of Neah Bay made the Makah the only tribe in the country with whaling rights guaranteed by treaty with the United States.

According to the girls, “The Makah today have voluntarily suspended whaling because the federal government will not defend their treaty rights, and the Makah do not have the resources to fight in court.

“The survival of the Treaty of Neah Bay 1855 depends on the survival of the whale. . . . The Makah are aware of the irony that if they pursue their treaty rights of (hunting) an endangered/threatened species, they endanger their treaty.”

More information: www.washingtonhistory.org/historyday/; Rene Soohoo, 885-5500

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