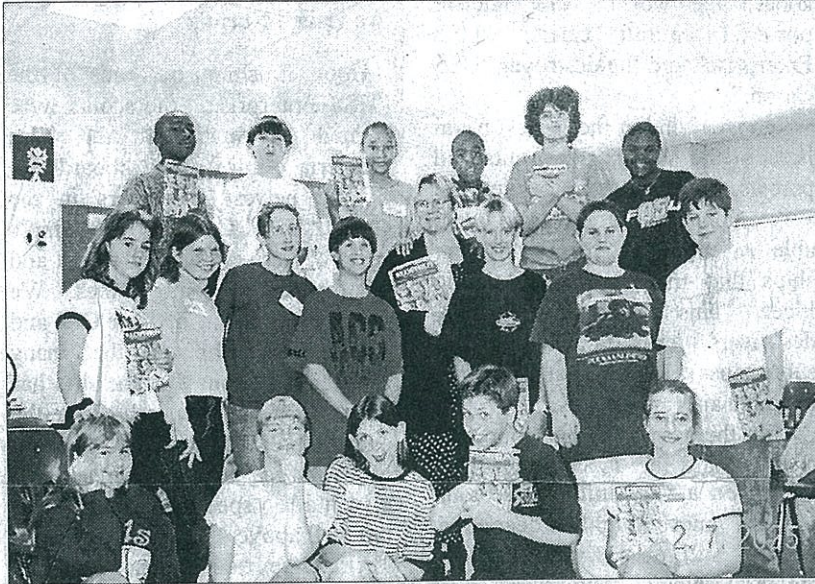


New Touchstone program begins at Arapahoe Charter School



Arapahoe Charter School sixth grade students surrounded Touchpebble's facilitator, Cheryl Huff, after a discussion group session. Touchstone Discussion Project focuses on readings from classic literature and art to create thought, opinion and discussion. After just a few sessions the students were enthusiastic and look forward to the special sessions.

(Photo by Lizzann Taylor, Arapahoe Charter School)

By Lizzann Taylor
Arapahoe Charter School
Sixth grade students at Arapahoe Charter School (ACS) are participating in a new program developed at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, called the

Touchstone Discussion Project. Cheryl Huff, who recently moved to this area from Maryland, has brought this program to ACS.

The Touchstone discussion method encourages students to develop valuable skills of careful listening, independent thinking and

critical reading. Touchpebble, the Touchstone program for elementary students, complements the regular curriculum by drawing selected readings from a wide variety of sources including western classics, classics from other civilizations, folk tales, reproductions of paintings and modern works.

Huff, a Touchstone facilitator, said that the Touchstone Discussion Project is a not-for-profit organization founded at St. John's in 1992. By 1994 it was implemented in the Annapolis school system. It is funded through various grant programs. Huff is not only volunteering her efforts for this introductory class at ACS, but was able to secure the Touchpebble texts from St. John's College as well.

Through the Socratic method of asking questions and leading discussions, students discover and take responsibility for their learning and form their own opinions.

Jennifer Gildard, sixth grade language arts teacher at ACS, said she was amazed at how empowered the students become in a cooperative learning environment after a few sessions. Students are excited about the roundtable discussion format and finding that their ideas and opinions are important.