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### Inman GEMS

In the past semester, I have learned a great deal from working with the Inman GEMS Girl Scout troop. Each week the girls' smiling faces greet us as we enter in to help them learn math and science. I often feel that I learn more from them than I could ever help teach them.

The girls are always excited for the "Georgia Tech girls" to come. I believe this is so because many of the girls desire an older friend or mentor. Their excitement for the activities seems to increase when they notice our excitement for the activities. It also seems that they are most enthusiastic about activities when we present it to them. In my experience in working with the GEMS and with middle school students at various camps and retreats in the past two summers, I have found that middle school students are like sponges, and they quickly absorb behavioral details in their surroundings and communities and the effects of constructive leadership in their lives. They motivate me to show my responsibilities and eagerness to learn, so that they might share in the desire to learn and to become an effective leader.

The science in the club is interesting and fun for the girls and the leaders alike. The activities span middle school to college-level science, math, engineering, and business curriculum, yet the students seem to approach them with an excitement for learning rather than the expected disgust for studying often found at their age. At the meetings, we have incorporated some very interesting experiments and activities into community and leadership building activities for middle school girls. Some of the activities require a great deal of research and planning. We have done experiments with package engineering, pod-casting, robots and

computer programming, desktop publishing, Rube Goldberg machines, the make-up and composition of make-up, and a great deal of career applications.

From the start of the year, we have documented our meetings to YouTube with pictures and video from digital cameras and sound recordings in GarageBand, a Mac sound-editing program. The girls have learned how to use and incorporate several Mac programs together including iPhoto, PhotoBooth, GarageBand, iTunes, and iMovie. The girls expressed a desire to learn more about photo, sound, and video editing. I also learned a lot more about these programs, and was able to utilize these new skills for projects in both my Political Science class and my Spanish class. I have found a new hobby in editing and now have a new skill that can be a valuable presentation and marketing tool in the business world.

I think that my favorite unit has been our most recent unit on make-up. In the first week of this experiment, each table tested different brands and colors of lipstick for oils. They went through the scientific process and noted different characteristics of the specimen before and after they heated and melted them in a coffee filter. The girls noted that the make-up they recognized as lesser quality generally had more of its color running and it seemed to have more oil appear when melted. In observing the experiment I now feel that I can make a more educated purchase in the future when I buy lipstick. In the second week of the experiment, the girls were exposed to the various ingredients in different lip balms, and then they were able to make their own. Some of the girls made some very interesting concoctions, but others made some very appealing lip balms. In the final week of this unit, a woman who designs make-up brushes came and spoke about how to properly buy and wear make-up. She also explained how the brushes were made. The girls seemed interested in how the new information that they learned could be applied to an actual career.

An important aspect of GEMS is its relationship with the Girl Scout program. While some of the girls are not very interested in Girl Scouting, others are very enthusiastic about the idea. I have noticed that the girls enjoy the activities most when there is a balance. At the beginning of the year, we noticed conflict among the girls. One of the Girl Scout books suggested a role-playing skit where the girls acted out how to solve true conflicts among their peers, and the girls seemed to enjoy the activity and they learned a lot about each other's feelings. In addition, the leadership skills that the Girl Scouts endorse are very important and valuable to learn at their age. Some of the girls are very eager about working towards patches, and we have nearly completed three patches this semester, and have a few more in the works. We are now trying to brainstorm ways to give the interested girls more opportunities to earn patches while keeping the interest of the other girls.

I have personally learned a great deal about myself, especially in terms of time management and my communication skills. I think that one of the most valuable skills I learned in the leadership of the GEMS was the importance of keeping up with emails. Before starting this project, I rarely used email as a form of communication because writing out effective emails always seemed to frustrate me, but now I feel that I have improved in replying to and sending emails in a prompt, effective manner. I have found the importance of time management in this semester as well. The meetings each week cannot be put on hold if I have a test or a project, and these time management skills will help me now in college, and when I have children someday and want to be working and volunteering with their activities.

When I look forward to the Spring semester, I am excited about what lies ahead. We will start selling cookies on January 1 and we will also be starting a unit on Crime Scene Investigations, testing hair follicles and learning about other techniques used in detecting

criminals. We have also started to form “patrols” that will promote more leadership and planning among the girls, beginning with our CSI unit. The cookie sales will be a stressful process, but I think that the girls will get excited about learning marketing skills and earning money for the troop that they can help decide how to spend.

At GEMS, the learning does not stop with the girls learning math and science in a fun, comfortable environment. Not only did I learn a great deal of interesting new math, science, and engineering concepts with the girls, but I learned about myself, where I have weaknesses and strengths, how I can improve myself, and how to balance the stresses of school with giving back to the community.