

# *Antietam Adopt-A-Cannon Project*

**John Bailey,  
Benjamin Banneker Middle School, Montgomery County**

Eighth graders study the American Civil War in Montgomery County. In addition, 8th graders earn 10 service-learning points through social studies. Two years ago we began a program with Antietam National Battlefield Park in which students raised money through a "Penny Wars" Competition to be used to preserve cannons at the park. Students also visit Antietam, and reflect on the significance of their preservation efforts, as well as the role played by Antietam in the Civil War.

**Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project?** Environmental as well as education needs are met. By raising money, students are helping to preserve for future generations a battlefield park that is under constant attack from human and natural elements. Students are also preserving structures that benefit their own education in addition to others. After taking a field trip to Antietam with other social studies teachers we became aware of the need for outside contributions to maintain the battlefield. The federal government has cut Dept. of Interior funds to national parks in recent years. It became obvious to me that this is something my 8th graders could do, especially since it fits so well into our established curriculum. The money raised is used to repair antique cannons that are on permanent display at the park. Wooden parts, as well as brass finishes deteriorate over time, and are in need of constant repair.

**Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives?** Unit 7 of the 8th grade social studies curriculum in Montgomery County is entitled "The Civil War and Reconstruction." Outcome 3 states, "Explain why Antietam, the Emancipation Proclamation, and Gettysburg may be considered turning points of the war." This project, including field trip, reinforced the importance of Antietam. In addition, the connection with the Emancipation was also explored, as one follows upon the other.

**Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project?** By visiting the park students were able to see how their money is used. Students were also able to reflect on the efforts by the park staff to return the park to the way it was in 1862. Students reflect on the significance of the battle, and how it led to Lincoln's call to free the slaves. Students also write an essay reflecting upon the importance of community service. What it means to preserve the nation's heritage. This may also include other tasks or actions that may be taken of similar nature.

**Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project?** The money was raised through a Penny Wars competition between twelve social studies classes. Students took leadership roles in publicizing the efforts. They encouraged parents and other teachers to contribute to the cause. They helped staff maintain money collection jars. They encouraged one another, because in this competition, the class that raised the most pennies, minus other coins and dollars was declared the winner. For the two weeks in which this competition occurred, they generated a great deal of enthusiasm among their peers.

**Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project?** Antietam National Battlefield Park primarily. They waived entrance fees for the school tours of the battlefield. They were of course the recipients of the funds raised.

**Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project?** Buses and plans for a visit to Antietam were arranged months in advance. The objective was to visit the park during the Civil War unit in April. Collection jars for the "Penny Wars" were collected and labeled in advance. Articles were placed in the school PTA publication, letters were sent home with students, and announcements were made school wide in advance to alert parents and the community. Students were informed of the rules of the competition a week before the actual collection of money began. In the first year, "Penny Wars" occurred before the planned Antietam visit. This year, so

as not to interfere with another school fund raising effort, the money was collected after the trip. A rotation schedule among staff was arranged to help supervise the success of the contest. Finally, permission slips and money collection for the field trip needed to occur a month in advance.

**Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project?** Certainly, students gained a greater understanding of the American Civil War, especially the role played at Antietam and how it led directly to the Emancipation. Student also gained an understanding of how America's treasures and legacy are affected by time. They also learned how they can get involved to preserve America's heritage.

