

People in the News

Roman Small Change Makes Big Impression at Elementary School Level

PITTSBURGH—Mia Gilardi, an eight-year-old student at St. Louise de Marillac School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has the distinction of being the youngest student to clean and attribute a Roman coin in the Ancient Coins for Education (ACE) program, and Zee Ann Poerio is her proud teacher.

Teacher Zee Ann learned about the ACE program last year when she decided to introduce simple Latin lessons at the elementary level. ACE is a non-profit organization that provides 4th century AD Roman coins to classrooms for cleaning and attribution. Zee Ann hoped to help students expand their vocabulary and verbal skills while enriching their understanding of ancient Roman culture and its foundation for western civilization. By incorporating the study of ancient coins with the study of Rome and its customs, mythology, art, and lan-

guage, Zee Ann started building a little Roman empire in the third grade, and young Mia became one of her "star" students.

By allowing students to hold these little pieces of the past in their own hands, ACE has helped to bring ancient history to life for thousands of students (almost 90 schools so far this year), including Mia and her friends in the third grade. When teacher Zee Ann introduced the ancient coin project to her class, she took out one of the identified coins she received as a model from ACE, a coin of the Emperor Constantine I the Great, 307-337AD.



Zee Ann Poerio (left) and Mia Gilardi, hold the certificate Mia received from ACE, which Mia was given for successfully cleaning and attributing her ancient coin given to her by the ACE program.

Students were astonished to be able to look at and touch a coin nearly 1700 years old since they had only ever seen Roman coins in a museum before. Imagine the excitement when their teacher told each of the 64 students from two third grade classes that he or she would be taking home their own ancient coin to uncover a piece of the past. She explained some of the history behind the coins and then described how to prepare their coins safely for attribution. On what seemed like "Pay Day" for the students, Zee Ann distributed the coins in small, sealed envelopes. The excitement mounted as each student opened their envelope and took a first look at his or her ancient coin.

One student said, "You can already see a face on my coin."

"I can see someone's legs on mine," said another.

"You never know what you will find," Zee Ann told them. "Just take your time, be patient, and stop brushing as soon as you see an image on your coin."

After a few weeks, Mia Gilardi brought her coin back to class. She had

soaked it in olive oil, then gently removed the dirt from the surface. She also brought in a printout from the Internet with a picture of a coin that she believed was hers. After Zee Ann checked with ACE numismatists Mark Lehman and Scott Uhrick using a digital photograph and an Internet discussion group set up for the project, she was able to confirm the identity of Mia's coin as a bronze of Valentinian I struck in 365 AD. Mia was thrilled when presented with a certificate from ACE recognizing her accomplishment as their "youngest ever attributer" — in the third grade! Mia was also featured in a local newspaper article, and her parents are, of course, immensely proud of her, as is her school.

ACE and its generous benefactors also provide opportunities for teachers to challenge their creativity and share ideas by submitting activities to the "Teacher Supplied Resources" section of the ACE website. Zee Ann Poerio won a Postumus silver antoninianus donated by Harlan J. Berk for a lesson plan she wrote. Her study of ancient coins has helped Zee Ann share her goal of introducing Latin at the elemen-

tary level with other teachers. Last year, she organized a workshop, "Rome Built Day By Day," sponsored by the Pennsylvania Classical Association, Dickinson College Department of Classics, and the National Committee for Latin and Greek. ACE donated support materials and coins that were given as prizes.

This year, the Roman empire that teacher Zee Ann started in the third grade is expanding as she is organizing a small Ancient Coin Museum to share the collection on Open House and National Coin Week with parents and visitors to the school. Appreciative of those willing to donate coins and pass on their numismatic knowledge with her students, she looks forward to sharing this experience with Roman culture beyond the walls of her classroom.

Zee Ann quotes Cicero, who asked, "What greater gift can we offer the republic than to teach and to instruct our youth?"

