



"We were entertained and educated by nationally acclaimed historian Peter Bonner" during a recent class presentation, Northgate Teacher Jim Rew said. A number of artifacts were shown to the students, including cups, buckles, guns, and bombs.

## American Studies class provides hands-on approach to history, literature

As a boy growing up around Washington D.C., Jim Rew had plenty of "hands-on" learning especially about the Civil War.

"My mom was always taking my brothers and sister to museums and battlefields like Bull Run, Fredericksburg, Antietam and Gettysburg," said the Northgate history teacher.

"There was something about standing on the battlefield and touching relics that made it so real."

Keeping it real and relevant is what Rew and American Literature teacher Lynn Vance do by combining the two classes into the interdisciplinary class, American Studies.

"Combining the two classes allows me to teach the literature of the era, while Mr. Rew gives the historical perspective, making both classes more relevant," said Vance.

Rew and Vance also know that not all students are alike — that they learn in different ways.

Thursday, Feb. 25 was one of those days where reading, Power Points and graphic organizers gave way to the tactical "hands-on" approach when Peter Bonner and his truckload of Civil War artifacts were invited to Northgate High School.

Peter Bonner of Historical and Hysterical

Tours has consulted and appeared in several movies including *Glory* with Morgan Freeman and Denzel Washington and *Andersonville*, the Coweta County-filmed movie about the most gruesome POW camp of the Civil War.

Bonner, who arrived in period costume, combined historical stories and anecdotes with upbeat humor as he spoke about the soldiers, the slaves, and the women of the war.

He welcomed the Northgate students to eight tables of artifacts such as slave chains as he talked about the slave auctions.

The students were encouraged to touch the rifles, canteens, bayonets, coats, and boots of the soldiers as Bonner told of their stories.

"It was so cool," said Junior Josie Walker. "One thing I hate about museums is that everything is behind glass. Here you can touch it. That makes it come alive."

Bonner's stories addressed the hardships of this era, but focused on the inspiration and human spirit that carried people through.

Junior Michael Seaton was equipped with a typical soldier's backpack, canteen, and rifle.

"It weighed about half my weight," said

Seaton. "I couldn't imagine what a soldier had to carry for ten or twenty miles a day, but now I can!"

Holly O'Neal was shocked to hear the stories of battlefield amputations.

"He told us that the expression 'to bite the bullet' originated there and he had actual bullets where you could see teeth marks!" she said.

On the lighter side, Bonner threw a ball around to students as he told of the game the soldiers played in camp called "rounders" which had hurlers, strikers, and runners. This was the game that eventually became baseball.

"Very few students become hooked on learning from just reading or lectures," said Rew. "Mrs. Vance and I love to sprinkle the class with skits, music, games, and hands-on learning."

"Bringing Bonner's program to Northgate is interactive and differentiated learning at its best. I especially love to see the student that has never liked history pick up an artifact like a slave bracelet or a cannon ball and ask question after question."

"Once history becomes fun, students want to learn more and more," said Rew.



Northgate History teacher Jim Rew dressed in Union blue and Peter Bonner in Confederate gray for a recent Civil War-themed presentation at Northgate High School.



Ashley Beal, Peter Bonner, and Taylor Chastain showed Civil War buckles, bullets, and bombs at classes at Northgate High School recently.