

## PRESS RELEASE:

As Doctor Seuss said, 'the more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go' and this is certainly true for six Deaf students at Heathlands School who are flying off to Washington DC in the United States next week to take part in a reading competition!

Heathlands school is a specialist school for deaf children aged 3-16 based in St Albans, Hertfordshire. The school is rated Outstanding by Ofsted and attracts deaf learners across the length and breadth of the country with those who live too far to travel daily, boarding throughout the week within 'Heath House', its residential provision.

A few years ago, in 2019, one of the Heathlands teachers, Dr Patrick Rosenberg, who is an American, involved our students in an American schools reading competition known as 'Battle of the Books'. Around 34 American schools for the Deaf take part in Battle of the Books each year which is run and hosted by Gallaudet University based in Washington DC. Gallaudet is well known across the world for being the only University, in the world, to deliver its curriculum bilingually in sign language and English.

In 'Battle of the Books' teams of 3 to 4 students are grouped into similar reading levels and take part online in a reading comprehension quiz against other deaf schools. Although all students use sign language, Heathlands students use British Sign Language (BSL) in comparison to American Sign Language (ASL) used by the US based schools. However, a BSL to ASL translator is on hand and Heathlands students can introduce themselves in ASL and both sets of pupils quickly pick up each other's sign language!

To reach the national finals, the teams had to read three books each, answer questions and give presentations to make it through the preliminary round and then the play-off rounds. These play-off rounds were done virtually through Zoom and two teams from Heathlands were successful to proceed to the finals, which take place in person, at Gallaudet University. Thanks to generous sponsorship from SignVideo and BlueSpark, the teams are supported with funding to fly out and participate on US home soil. This takes place over a weekend, and the teams will also enjoy tours of the US capital as well as American life on an university campus!

The Heathlands Battle of the Books co-ordinator Pauline Jordan said, 'taking part in a competition like this is such an amazing opportunity for the students. Not only do they improve and consolidate their reading skills, they also get to meet other young deaf people like themselves from America and learn about their life and culture, making many new friends'.

Co-Headteacher Lesley Reeves Costi commented, 'as sign language is the students first language, reading is a core pathway to developing English and at Heathlands, a passion for reading and books is developed from a young age.'

You can follow the progress of Heathlands pupils who are the only non-American school taking part via the Battle of the Books website and FaceBook page. The finals of this competition begin on Friday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023! Good luck to Heathlands!



*Heathlands Battle of the Books teams wearing their SignVideo sponsored hoodies.*

For any further information regarding this press release please contact the Co-Headteacher via Heathlands School [www.heathlands.herts.sch.uk](http://www.heathlands.herts.sch.uk) or Battle of the Books via their webpage: <https://gallaudet.edu/youth-programs/battle-of-the-books/>