

Mock Arrest Provides for Engaging, Real-life Lesson

Mr. Bertrand's Forensic Science classes at Whitesboro High School on September 13 started off just like they would any other day - - with students filing into the classroom, taking their seats, opening their notebooks and waiting for the lecture to begin.

Normal that is, until the police showed up!

School Resource Officer Steve Armstrong, of the Oneida County Sheriff's Office, and Frank Allen and Jeff Montana, school security officers, interrupted each of Mr. Bertrand's four Forensic Science classes to interrogate Mr. Bertrand, a prime "suspect" in a car theft and battery case. The interrogation eventually led to Mr. Bertrand's arrest.

However, if you are becoming alarmed, don't be. The interrogation and arrest were staged to provide an engaging, real-life lesson.

On the second day of school, Mr. Bertrand allowed every student in each of his four classes to ask one question about his whereabouts on the night of Thursday, September 7, with hopes that, collectively, his classes would develop the correct answer. When they did not, Mr. Bertrand decided to invite the officers into his classes the following week to conduct a mock interrogation and arrest.

Just like it happens in real-life, Officer Armstrong asked Mr. Bertrand question after question, as Officer Allen closely looked on and Officer Montana stood guard at the door. Mr. Bertrand was even uncooperative at times, and when he was finally arrested on car theft and battery charges, he briefly resisted - - something police officers often face when in the line of duty.

Before students knew the interrogation and arrest were staged, they sat at their desks both silent and stunned.

"I wanted to utilize our community and officers as a teaching resource in an authentic atmosphere," said Mr. Bertrand. "I also wanted to stress the importance of asking the right questions to get the right answers. If you don't ask the right questions, criminals can go free."

Since Mr. Bertrand's students didn't accurately guess his whereabouts on the night of Thursday, September 7, he thought the mock interrogation and arrest would highlight the importance of asking the right questions, firsthand. He says the scenario was about as realistic as it could be, without it actually being real.

"My students were able to witness an investigation unfold right in front of their eyes," explained Mr. Bertrand. "They also saw how the number of charges can grow as an investigation proceeds, which leads into our next unit - - what are many of the criminal charges and what do they mean?"

According to Mr. Bertrand, his Forensic Science class is designed to give students exposure to the investigation process using the many sciences behind forensics. There's a great focus on finding information, critical thinking, analysis and informed opinions based on science. Students apply these skills to investigate a murder mystery through a series of labs, slowly building evidence to solve a crime.

"Forensic Science relies on the continual reinforcement of the scientific method and use of consistent procedures to make sure evidence found can be evidence used," said Mr. Bertrand. "The mock interrogation and arrest is just the first of many more important lessons to come."