

A TEACHER REFLECTS



Before I had my students write their stories in Lesson 4, I had them imagine what it would be like to be a human in a Brobdingnag classroom.

What size would a chair be? a desk? a pen? How large would the writing be? Could you sit on a letter? If a giant pen dropped to the floor, what kind of sound would it make? As students described the things they would see and the experiences they would have in a Brobdingnag classroom, they actively did mathematics. For example, as **Kira** was describing how it would feel to sit on a brobdingnag chair, she measured her own chair and did a quick calculation to find the height of a similar chair in Brobdingnag.

Hector explained to the class that he could hide behind a Brobdingnag crayon box and went to the chalkboard at the front of the classroom and traced out the width of 12 crayon boxes to show that a Brobdingnag crayon box would be much wider than he is. **Myisha** claimed that a giraffe from our world could stand under a Brobdingnag student's desk. She estimated the height of her own desk and used a calculator to compute the height of a similar desk in Brobdingnag.

When my students had a good picture of a Brobdingnag classroom, I had them begin their stories. Since they were having a hard time getting started, I wrote this writing prompt on the board and had them finish the paragraph:

“One day I went to school with Glumdalclitch and stumbled upon what I thought was a log lying on the floor of the classroom. It was about

three inches thick and over six feet long. One end of it had been sharpened to a point like a spear. Only slowly did I realize that...”

Students identified the “log” to be a pencil and continued on with the adventure including other Brobdingnag objects from the classroom:

“Only slowly did I realize that the log was really a pencil that one of the Brobdingnag students had dropped, for in a matter of seconds, a 5-foot-long hand reached down to the floor. It began scrambling around, trying to find the pencil. Suddenly, the hand seized me by the knees! ‘I’ll use this stubby pencil,’ the Brobdingnagian murmured, as it brought me up to the desk. Without even looking at me the student absentmindedly started to doodle on a piece of paper, using my feet as a tip. As the teacher walked by, he turned me around and rapidly used my head as an eraser. ‘Ouch!’ I yelled. Shocked, he dropped me. I can’t believe I actually survived the 28 foot drop from the desk to the floor!”

In her writing, this student adopted two different perspectives: the perspective of a human in Brobdingnag and the perspective of a Brobdingnag student encountering a human for the first time. She saw the Brobdingnag pencil as a log and the Brobdingnag student saw her as a pencil. As a class we tied this lesson into a discussion of cultural awareness and respect of differences.