

It takes a school trip to bring out some of life's greatest questions

Who would win in a fight between Chuck E. Cheese and Ronald McDonald? How about the Wal-Mart Happy Face vs. the Carl's Jr. Star?

These were just a few of the deep philosophical debates I heard while driving up the coast of California with 55 high school students, six teachers, and three parents, loaded into nine vans on our annual trip to Hearst Castle, Santa Cruz and Northern California.

Since we don't allow students to bring headphones, CD players, video games or cell phones, there is plenty of time for meaningful conversation and social interaction while we travel. Mixed up between freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors, the talk was often lively and spirited.

We had the usual debates about who's the best point guard in the NBA Western Conference (Mike Bibby or Steve Nash?) or whether Raul Mondesi might be the cure for the Angels' injury problem. And we had our share of silly questions, such as when our caravan wound its way down San Francisco's serpentine Lombard Street with inches of clearance on each side, and a student asked "Is this a one-way street?"

But there were also serious discussions about life and death, heaven and hell, and whether George Tenet should have resigned as CIA director. A visit to Alcatraz was fodder for several discussions about capital punishment and the prison system. Twelve hundred miles on the road in five days lends itself to a full range of topics. When you travel and eat and camp together, conversation between adults and students flows with an ease not often found in the classrooms.

When the discourse lags, the teacher in me always falls back on some tried-and-true questions certain to bring about a different opinion. I ask, "Why do women live longer than men?" The consensus among the girls is that women take better care of themselves



and handle stress better, while the boys are sure it's because men work harder than women.

We went to an Oakland A's baseball game and saw Bobby Kielty win the game with a walk-off home run in the 12th inning. On the way out of the stadium one of the students mentioned that we got 33 percent more baseball than we originally paid for, since the game went extra innings. (He's the kid who passed the AP calculus test with flying colors as a junior.)

Our foreign exchange student from Hong Kong, Ken Yau, got to see more of California in one week than in the entire rest of the year. We roughed it a couple of nights in tents at San Simeon and Kings Canyon, but we were staying in a hotel in the Bay Area. However, Ken was confused when we stopped to watch a herd of buffalo in Golden Gate Park. He came to me with a wild-eyed look and asked, "Mr. Warneke, are we camping here tonight?"

From the Winchester House in San Jose through Gilroy, the garlic capital of the world, we made our way to the Kings River for a final day of whitewater rafting. Some rookie rafters were hesitant, concerned about the dangers of the roaring rapids, while the senior veterans couldn't wait to grab a paddle and take on the river. After safely reaching camp, we prepared for the ride back to Torrance and the end of the trip. The only debate left was which students would have the privilege of riding in the "Warvan," our ancient Dodge Ram with no air conditioning, no radio, and me, the principal, behind the wheel.

Before we reached the school parking lot we finally had agreement on our original question. If Ronald McDonald brought his friends, the Hamburglar and Grimace, and Chuck E. Cheese brought his crew, it would turn into a gang fight and the police would come and break it up.

You don't hear such stimulating, thoughtful debate such as that in the classroom every day.

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Do you have a story to tell? Submit your column to Lisa Donahue, My Turn, *Daily Breeze*, 5215 Torrance Blvd., Torrance, CA 90503-4077, or e-mail us at lisa.donahue@dailybreeze.com. Please limit to 800 words and include your telephone number. We'll pay \$25 for each column we publish.