

MfA SD Newsletter Spring 2014

Trang Vu #BrilliantCreativeWinner

MfA SD Master Teaching Fellow Trang Vu was the first place winner of the 2013 Rosenthal Prize for Innovation in Math Teaching, sponsored by the National Museum of Mathematics. The award recognizes exceptional, hands-on math instruction by a teacher who uses innovative teaching methods appropriate to the upper elementary or middle school classroom. Vu received a \$25,000 cash prize for her lesson plan, "Mathematics in Fashion Design - Circle Skirts."

"Trang is a highly motivated and creative mathematics teacher, whose intellect is matched only by her dedication to helping students understand mathematics," said Barbara Edwards, MfA SD executive director. "She is a hard worker and fantastic role model for our new teachers. We're thrilled she won this prestigious award."

Vu teaches math at La Jolla High School. Her circle skirt lesson was designed for seventh grade math students and so she was unable to teach and videotape her entry with her own high school students. Vu collaborated with MfA SD Fellow Brett Patrick, a teacher at Bethune K-8 School, who invited her to implement her innovative lesson with his seventh grade pre-algebra classes.

"The main goal of my lesson is to organize and unify those resources to inspire students to apply the Common Core Mathematics Practice Standards and create the intellectual necessity for learning specific math content knowledge by designing a circle skirt," Vu said.

To solve the fashion design problem, students used their knowledge of area and circumference of a circle. They used an annulus – in mathematics, a flat ring-shaped object - and sections of an annulus, to make the circle skirt or to create other everyday circular items such as tree skirts, skirted tablecloths and lampshades.

Cindy Lawrence, co-executive director of the National Museum of Mathematics, said that before viewing the videotape of Vu's classroom, some of the judges were concerned the boys would not be interested in participating in the lesson, since fashion design is often considered a more female pursuit. "Actually, they liked the fact that the boys in the video were very engaged and enthusiastic about the topic, at least as much as the girls were, if not more," she noted.

Read more about the [Rosenthal Prize for Innovation in Math Teaching](#).

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