



Destination ImagiNation® — A trip beyond

Educational process stimulates creativity, decision-making, teamwork

Bill (Pappou) Drew

Here's a challenge: With a group of four or five others, come up with a list of items you would take if you were to be deposited on an iceberg, food and water already available. You have three minutes to prepare a list.

The possibilities are endless. Would your answers be straightforward like warm clothes, an igloo with a heater, a deck of cards and the like? Or would they take the form of being unusually creative?



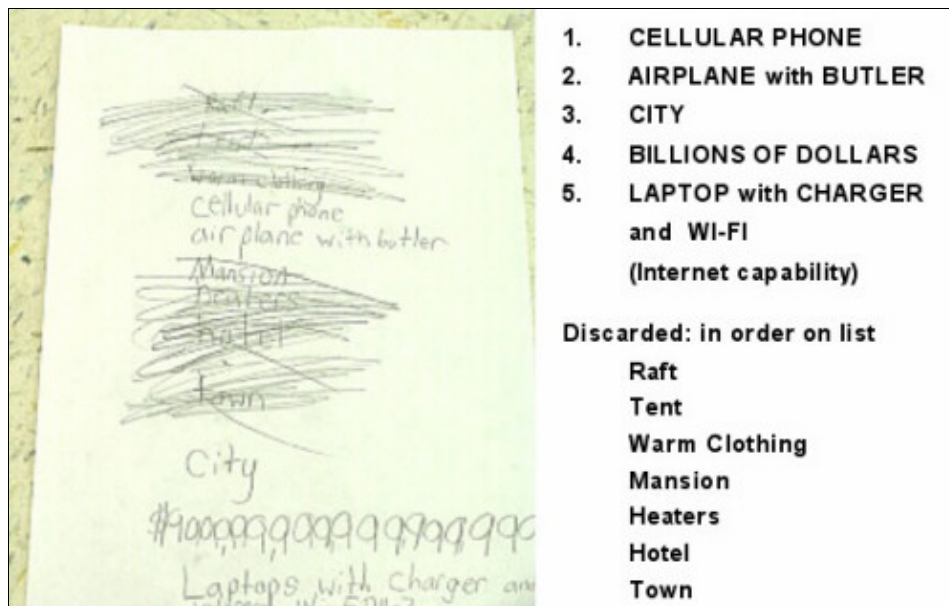
A DI team puts heads together to arrive at a list of five items. (Bill Drew photo)

Destination ImagiNation (DI) is a program used with school-age children to foster improved use of the brain, "thinking, outside of the box," as the saying goes. Jill Schoonmaker, director of the DI program [here](#) in New Hampshire says'

"This is who we are. We are thinkers. We are travelers. Our world is a place of endless possibilities. We are explorers. We are creativity. Together we can solve any challenge. Our destination is our imagination. We are a team!"

What are your answers?

The results of using this challenge as a training tool is seen in the graphic below. Are its answers creative, useful and imaginative? In a competition, appraisers would score their responses.



Their final list (Bill Drew photo)

The list above sounds like items desired by a dictator going into exile. Notice by viewing the list it appears the group poured out things that came to mind and wrote them down. Then, with further consideration and discussion, they arrived at the final five crossing out the remaining suggestions. THIS is DI.

This type of "quick game" is called "Instant Challenge". It is one of two major components of the Destination Imagination (DI) program. The other is a *main challenge*. It's a selected project worked on during the winter months with the team's solution presented at a regional competition in mid-March.



Instant Challenge: With an orange, toothpicks and some small marshmallows, create a cartoon character. (Bill Drew photo)



Instant Challenge: Using a single piece of paper, cut it so there is a continuous ribbon of paper. The winner is the one with the longest length. WINNER: 22 feet. (Bill Drew photo)

WHAT IS DI? It's a "lifestyle," acquired by being involved in the program. It embodies learning that uses school subjects, research and student interests to teach how to manage a project, budget and drive creativity into results. It's the process of facing choices, selecting alternatives, using imagination and creativity, putting to use experience, talents, and skills in negotiation, in striving to achieve goals. It's the ultimate "kids hands on" / "adults hands off" program where the kids learn by doing, and succeeding as a team, while having fun doing it.

At the national level, teams of adults experienced in DI create six main challenges. Each problem has a particular focus yet every challenge has the requirement of a theatrical skit, with a theme that coincides with the team's particular solution to that challenge. Each team has the freedom to pursue any direction as long as the teams meet the requirements of the selected challenge. See this years challenges and more detailed explanations [here](#).



The six categories of DI's MAIN Challenges (Bill Drew graphic, icons (c) Copyright Destination ImagiNation)

In the fall of the year groups of five to seven children form teams. Teams at the junior high, middle school and senior high school level are fewer in number but no less dedicated to the objectives of the DI process. There is no parent or teacher telling them what to do or how to do it. They are required to think for themselves. As one 7th grader put it to a team manager, "We need your signature here. We'll take care of it from there."

During the first few meetings a particular challenge from the group of five is selected. Then the members immerse themselves in reading through and understanding what the challenge is all about and what requirements are necessary to obtain a high score in the competition.

The responsibilities of the team managers and other adults is to provide a proper environment and maintain harmony, asking questions as time goes along to keep the team focused. They are NOT to suggest solutions and alternative ways to accomplish specific tasks, merely to assist them. It's a balancing act. Research and trial and error are the backbones of "working a project." Take for instance painting a backdrop. How can it be done? Where can they go for assistance? OK, the art teacher is suggested, so they contact that person and perhaps are shown various ways of quickly creating a background scene or painting a prop. Example: Sponge ends dipped in paint create leaves for trees.



A back-drop in progress. (Bill Drew photo)



A joint effort (Bill Drew photo)



Touching up details (BD)

With the beginning of March, there are only two weeks left till the competition. Instead of a few hours a week being put into the project, it's panic time.

There is not enough time to bring about all the imaginations, desires, intentions, tweaking and hopes of what has been seen to be required to have a perfect performance. As always, choices need to be made.

The skit is put together with the props, backdrops and costumes, and complete run-throughs are now the order of the day. Final touches are being added or removed.

The Regional DI competition this year is Saturday, March 15th at Sanborn Regional High School, Kingston, N.H. Other regional tournaments are held throughout the state. For more information click [here](#). It is open to the public, and all are invited.

The big day arrives. It's the culmination of all the effort that has gone into being involved with the program. The name of the game has been teamwork. Fortunately for New Hampshire there is unquestionably the most experienced

group of adults administering the program; Jill Schoonmaker and her Board of Directors, administrators, teachers of training sessions, school coordinators, appraisers, team managers and their assistants, volunteers and finally the assistance and sacrifices of parents. The moment has arrived.

The movement into the tournament is a daunting one. All the props, backdrops, items that have been created and built, need to be brought into the building. With over a hundred teams participating at one location, it is bedlam.

First there is a parade, and each team is announced and enters the gym. They all take an oath of commitment and honesty. Afterwards day-long presentations begin. Each challenge meets in a particular location, and there is a schedule available as to the order of presentation.



Regional Tournament, March, 2007 (Photo, courtesy of Wayne Kurtzman, NH-DI.org)

The audience for each is made up of family, friends and other spectators. No tickets are required. Appraisers sit in front of the stage area and rate the various specific requirements of the challenge. The performance process takes about 20 minutes. Before and afterwards the team is free to observe other team performances both in their challenge and others. A base of operations for each team is usually located at a table in the cafeteria.

The performance day begins around 9:00 and ends late in the afternoon. If you read up on some of the challenges, upon seeing these performances you will appreciate the uniqueness and the large number of solutions to a standard set of requirements. Schedules are available at the entrance door, and it's come and go as you please.



A group of 2nd graders do their interpretation of the Rising Star Challenge (Bill Drew photo)

With the Rising Stars challenge for 1st and 2nd graders, after completion of a team's performance, each member receives a medal. As with all appraisers, individually decorated hats are a requirement. At the end of the day a prize is given to the winner of the headdress competition.



A wonderful performance rates an awarding of medals. (Bill Drew photo)



Another group of 2nd graders receives awards. Notice the headdress of the appraisers (Bill Drew photo)

All day long for competing teams, those involved with the five challenges, the show goes on. Some involve large and elaborate sets, others very compact.



A group of middle-schoolers make their presentation (Bill Drew photo)

At the end of the day the teams congregate in the gym. A big party is held with all sorts of activities. Finally competitive teams awards are issued. Each team is a winner. They have experienced DI. The winners in each of the challenge categories move on to the state tournament, which this year is being held in Plaistow, N.H., at Timberlane Regional High School on March 29. There you will see more astounding solutions. Winners in the latter tournament are eligible to attend the Global Finals on Memorial Day weekend in Knoxville, Tenn. For more information go [here](#).



Overall view at the Global Finals, Knoxville in 2007 (Photo, courtesy of GlobalFinals.org)

There are numerous complementary programs available to hone the skills acquired in "doing DI." A comprehensive list is available [here](#).

Once a team has finished its presentation, each team member in unison signals the appraisers that the performance is over by expressively shouting "TIME!" The challenge skit for the team in the photo below involved a non-verbal requirement. They have been practicing their own ending.



*Enthusiam and body language in signaling TIME. The performance is over.
(Bill Drew photo)*



Note: The author has been involved in all aspects of the DI program for the past 15 years.

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