



Art by Adam Crozier

## Student develops dynamic Disney research

### Switzer focuses on women's roles from a new perspective

By Olivia Lighty

Instead of searching relevant websites for online sources, senior **Chris Switzer** watches Disney movies as his research homework.

Switzer loves Disney films so much, he even based his AP Research project on Snow White, Mulan and three other movie princesses.

He settled on studying female characters, figuring he would be more open minded to charting their differences. If he studied males, he'd be more likely to interject a personal bias, he says.

It dawned on him as he watched *Finding Nemo*, that supportive mother characters are missing from many Disney movies. This lead him to study the female roles that have the most impact and fame: princesses, he says.

Switzer is one of the first eight seniors to enroll in the year long AP Capstone program, which is composed of AP Seminar and AP Research. AP Capstone is a two-year course designed to increase higher level thinking skills among students.

Students in the first year AP Seminar class research the validity of primary sources for evidence in argumentative

papers or debates. In the next year, AP Research focuses on teaching original research skills to students, which includes creating data to prove a thesis statement. Speech and English teacher **Stefanie Davis** teaches this class.

Students create their data using three methods: quantitative, qualitative and rhetorical analysis. Quantitative data involves measuring numerical data. Qualitative data involves collecting data from people, most commonly interviews. Rhetorical analysis involves looking at a specific perspective.

The goal of AP Research is to create a research study that answers an original research question. Switzer's question?

"Does Disney represent women's roles accurately through history represented from the five films: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Mulan* and *The Princess and the Frog*?"

Switzer's goal is to document how popular movies reflect historical progress.

"I feel like we all just say: 'They struggled,' and that's it. We don't see the full dramatic change of it," he says.

Switzer is using rhetorical criticism to decipher whether Disney has accurately portrayed the princesses in the historic period their movies were created and released.

In each movie, he analyzes:

- the princess's ambitions
- her actions before and after an event
- time spent in the home versus outside of it
- the setting

Switzer is watching each movie four times, writing down his observations. He's also studying women's history during the era each movie was released. He then will compare this data with other movies in other time periods to create a timeline evolution of women's roles.

For example, Switzer is already finished with his research on 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.' Switzer says the movie is about 1 hour, 27 minutes and for almost a full hour, Snow White remains inside the house.

"What she mostly did in the house was cleaning," he says. "As soon as she walked in the door, no matter what house it was, she started cleaning."

**"I feel like we all just say: 'They struggled,' and that's it. We don't see the full dramatic change of it."**

**—Chris Switzer**

Switzer's research found that in 1938 when Snow White was released, most women were charged with house-keeping. Only about 25 percent worked outside the home, according to an article in "U.S. History in Context."

This project includes a four-to-five-thousand-word research paper which will make up 75 percent of a student's AP testing score. Each Capstone student must also deliver a 10-minute presentation before a panel of adults, who then have about 10 minutes afterward

to ask questions. The speaking portion represents the other 25 percent of the grade.

After high school Switzer plans to earn his bachelor's degree in athletic training with a minor in sports medicine. He says he's better prepared for college after taking Capstone.

"It helped me find accurate research in order for me to have something valid. It showed me key elements I need to do in order to succeed in a research class."