In the world of literature, there are few competitions that compare to the **Battle of the Books**. In North Carolina these competitions are held at the High School, Middle School and even Elementary School level. At the middle and elementary schools, Haywood County Schools has been competing in them for many years. According to the North Carolina School Library Media Association (NCSLMA) who sponsors Battle of the Books, the philosophy behind this competition is to “encourage reading by all students”. Students read a variety of literature representing many different kinds of literary styles and viewpoints by renowned authors. At the elementary level, students read 18 books selected by the NCSLMA. On the day of the competition, each team answers detailed questions relating to each book in a quiz bowl type format.

The **Elementary Battle of the Books** (EBOB) competition in Haywood County was held on March 25th at the Haywood County Conference Center in Hazelwood. This location was chosen because it could accommodate all nine elementary schools that had teams represented on the day of competition. Each team consists of no more than 12 team members who have been reading, reviewing, and practicing since the beginning of the school year in 2014.

After several hours (5 to be exact), Hazelwood Elementary School pulled out ahead to win this year’s competition. It was a tight race, however, with Bethel Elementary and North Canton Elementary close behind. Ella Laursen, 5th grader on the Hazelwood team, said “the competition was very challenging and there was great competition between the schools”. It was obvious that all students had spent a great deal of time and energy to be able to answer the type of questions that are asked. Boone Williamson, a 4th grader on the Hazelwood team, said “the questions were very detailed and required you to think about all 18 books and figure out which one might have this one detail.”

In order to prepare for the competition, students at Hazelwood started reading the books in the summer of 2014. Every year the books are high-quality literature that range from historical fiction such as, *I survived the sinking of the Titanic, 1912 by Lauren Tarshis* and current realistic fiction such as, *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello’s Library* by Chris Grabenstein. There are also several books on the list that focus on North Carolina history like *Taffy of Torpedo Junction* by Nell Wise Wechter. This book is set on the coast of North Carolina during World War II when Japanese submarines combed the coastal waters. *Soft Rain* by Cornelia Cornelissen is about the Trail of Tears and the book *Blue* by Joyce Hostetter was set in North Carolina during World War II and the polio epidemic. Ansley Welch, another 4th grader on the team said, “I liked the book *Blue* because it was sad and I like sad books.” These were both favorites for many students on our EBOB team. Hazelwood 4th grader, Addie Melton, said her favorite book was the *Princess Academy* by Shannon Hale. “I liked this book because it was very adventurous.”

In August at Hazelwood Elementary, EBOB meetings took place every other week in the Library with their coach, Carol Clarke, Librarian at Hazelwood Elementary. Practices were held every week starting in January. Emma Dorgan, a 5th grader on the team said that practices were “an important part to the whole competition. I only missed one practice, but that was because of a doctor’s appointment that I couldn’t miss.” Mrs. Clarke was impressed with their dedication and their commitment to the demands that were needed to be met by each member. “For some of these students, this is their sport. They take this as seriously as a baseball or soccer match and I am amazed every year how our team synergizes and realizes the steps that need to take place to reach their goal of being the best team they can be. What a great group of readers, thinkers, and team players.” Savannah Ziglar, a 5th grader, said “she felt so happy to be a part of the team for Hazelwood and she was determined to do her best.”

The Elementary Battle of the Books list for next year has already come out and many rising 4th and 5th graders are already thinking of becoming part of the team at Hazelwood. Hopefully, many students in Haywood County are thinking about challenging themselves in this endeavor too. “Instilling in our students a love of reading and the idea of becoming a life-long reader is a high priority for me as I’m sure it is for many educators in Haywood County. I’m glad there is a competition like Battle of the Books to add to the excitement of what reading naturally can give to a reader.”