



Staff photo by Dana Kacedon Lane

**A WORD IS BORN** — Kingwood Township School fifth-grader Tess Richardson shows off her winning entry in a competition to devise a name for a common symbol that had gone unnamed for 100 years.

**KINGWOOD TWP.**

# Just what is a discula?

**By John Monteith**

A Kingwood Township School student has come up with a name for a symbol that has been in common usage for 100 years without a name.

It looks like a hook hanging from a stick. Everyone recognizes it, they're introduced to it in elementary school and it follows them throughout their lives. Some have referred to it as a "division house," others as a "division box" or "division bracket." There's something out there called a "division sign," or more formally an "obelus," but that's different, a line with a dot above and a dot below. When using the heretofore unnamed symbol, a person writes the "divisor" number in the hook part, the "dividend" to the right of the hook and under the stick, and the "quotient" on the stick.

"I got tired of calling it a thingy," said KTS math and language arts teacher Susan March.

It should be called a discula, derived from the Latin for "mark" and "division," according to KTS fifth-grader Tess Richardson, who won a contest conducted by Ms. March to finally pin a name on the symbol.

Princeton and Columbia univer-

sities verified for Ms. March that for a century the symbol had indeed gone without a name. The contest was open to students in grades three through eight, and about 10 percent submitted entries. In the final round of the competition, about 300 students voted on seven possible names. "The whole school got into it," said Ms. March.

Students read a novel in conjunction with the contest, about a boy who creates a new word, "frindle," for a pen in order to aggravate his dictionary-obsessed teacher. "It was a good cross-curricular experience," said Ms. March.

KTS students will now promote the use of discula in school and among family and friends in hopes that it will find general acceptance and end up an entry in the dictionary.

Ms. March, a "late career," three-year teacher, joined KTS this year, teaching fifth-grade math and language arts and sixth-grade language arts. She previously worked in journalism, business relations and advertising. She teaches fifth-grade math and language arts and sixth-grade language arts.