



Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

April 2004

Volume 3 No. 5



Common Language, Shared Goals

Improving student writing has been a focus area for our school since we opened our doors almost three years ago. All of our expeditions involve extensive writing of reflections, notes, reports, poetry, and narratives. We want students to be technically skilled writers who are able to spell, punctuate appropriately, organize their thoughts in paragraph form, and use correct syntax. But that's not enough.

We also want our students to write *beautifully* – with a style that is both distinctive and personal. We want them to select precise words, to weave metaphors and similes into their descriptions, and to use powerful language and varied sentence construction.

To that end, we have adopted a school-wide writing exercise called “Describe the Day.” The exercise calls for students to write descriptions of the weather, sky, and outdoor environment two-three times per week. This repeated exercise requires students to dig deep for new and unusual ways to describe the same old thing. It has helped children to move from “Today is cloudy” to “The white and puffy clouds swim across the sky like swans in a lake... her graceful neck and brilliant orange beak pointing to the gods in the heavens.”

We have also adopted the 6+1 Writing Traits model for teaching and assessing student writing. The traits are organization, word choice, voice, conventions, fluency, ideas and presentation. Last month every student in the school wrote an essay (or drew a picture and dictated sentences) about the same topic related to the Early People/Woodland Peoples time period. The staff examined these student work
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Family Association Plans a Busy Spring

The Family Association is planning two family social events for Spring.



On Wednesday, April 28, 6:00-8:00 families will be entertained by Puppeteer Tom Knight. Every family should bring a dessert to pass, cut up for easy serving. The Family Association Social Committee will supply plates and plasticware, napkins, milk, water, and coffee. This event will be held in the Eisenhart Basement.

The end-of-year picnic will be held Sunday, June 13 from 1:30 – 6:00 p.m. at the Maplewood YMCA. Open swimming will be from 3:00-5:00 p.m. Hamburgers, veggie burgers and hot dogs will be supplied.



Please bring a dish to pass.

Come share these enjoyable events with old and new friends. A great time is assured for all!

Indians/Explorers/Settlers Exhibitions

Kindergarten, 1st Grade, and 2nd Grade:

Wednesday, June 16, 2004, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

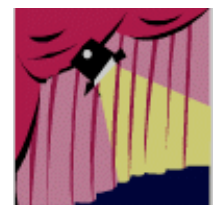
3rd and 5th Grades:

Thursday, June 17, 2004, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

4th Grade:

Monday, June 21, 2004, 5:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Eisenhart Auditorium
Specific Times and Locations
To Be Announced



All students are required to attend.

Family Association Directory

Board of Trustees Representatives

Sara Bruzda (473-9736) Teresa Snell (527-0070),
Maureen McDonald (527-0824)

Officers

Co-Chairs: Tracy Smith (544-0577), Anne Spaulding
(461-5356)

Secretary: Alice Carli (527-9632)

Treasurer: Julie Schnepf (256-0722)

Family Association Committee Chairs

Family Social Activities

John Quitter (787-0332), Annette Ramos (244-1378)

Babysitting & Transportation

Betsy Serapilio-Frank (654-5958)

Staff Appreciation Luncheon

Marcy Berger (271-3549)

Fund-Raising

Mary Lavin & Tom Slothower
(442-1277), Diana & Jim Carter (473-1187)

Legislative Issues

Anne Lichtenstein (244-7373)



Classroom Parent Volunteer Coordinators

Kindergarten

Laura Brewer (241-3034), Blanche Fox (288-9313),

Jennifer SanFilippo (442-5420), Nancy Weinstein

(865-7714), Eileen Wrona (288-3273)

First Grade

Gina Dodd (426-3356), Annette Ramos (244-1378),

Marisa Stike (254-0403), Yvonne Villareale (473-
9318)

Second Grade

Joanne DeMarle (328-5982), Jeanne Eckl (377-8957),

Bill Howard (436-2573), Kamaria Rivera (254-6598),

Betsy Serapilio-Frank & John Frank (654-5958)

Third Grade

Faye Henri (244-1831), Sue Lederer (473-3929),

Anne Lichtenstein (244-7373), Susan Proe (224-
0536), Anne Spaulding (461-5356)

Fourth Grade

Alicia Ainsworth (262-5482), Robyn Dean (461-
1438), Cheryl Marshall (671-2961),

Debbie Ortenzi (533-2428), Maggie Torres

(454-2659), Teddi Urriola (671-2961)

Fifth Grade

Paul Jonasse (461-1137), Mary Lavin (442-1277),

Karen Schneider (288-4726)

Upcoming Dates To Remember



- Apr. 28: Family Association School Event
6-8 p.m. Eisenhart Basement
- May 10: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- May 19: Family Association Meeting
6:30 p.m. 4th Grade Classroom
- May 28: Professional Development Day
No School for Students
- May 31: Memorial Day – School is Closed
- June 5 or 12: Playground Installation
Details TBA
- June 10: Parent Conferences
11:30 a.m. Dismissal for Students
- June 13: Family Association Picnic
1:30-6:00 p.m. Maplewood YMCA
- June 14: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- June 16: Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd Grade
Exhibitions, 6–8 p.m.
Students Required to Attend
- June 17: 3rd, 5th Grade Exhibitions, 6–8 p.m.
Students Required to Attend
- June 19: Christine Lavin
Playground Benefit Concert
7:30 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
- June 21: 4th Grade Exhibitions
5–8 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
Students Required to Attend
- June 23: Passage Ceremony 1:00 p.m.
Tickets Required

Tickets On Sale Now!

Christine Lavin

Playground Benefit Concert

Saturday, June 19, 2004

[note date change]

7:30 p.m.

Tickets available at
RMSC main desk



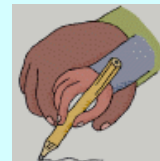
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samples and identified areas of strength and areas in need of improvement. Based on our findings, we have set a school-wide goal to help students improve the organization of their writing during the remaining months of the school year. This entails teaching students how to write compelling introductions and conclusions, structure writing pieces with a clear flow and sensible chronology, and including details with topic sentences.

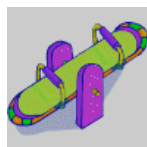
As with so many aspects of our school, the consistency of this approach to writing across grade

levels strengthens our teaching and assessment. Teachers develop a common language, set collective goals, and share strategies. They discuss results, celebrate successes, and find new ways to address needs. We note student progress by examining student writing each Wednesday during our professional development time.

We'll continue to address all the writing traits in our instruction next year, aiming for steady improvement in student writing at each grade level.



How about that playground?



Is it ever coming? We have just one hurdle left – final approval at the Preservation Board meeting in early May. Then the RMSC facilities crew will prepare the site. We're aiming for an installation date of June 5 or June 12. Save the date! We'll need lots of parent assistance to actually get the equipment in the ground. The playground company will send a supervisor, but the school must provide the human power. All adult help will be welcome. More information will follow to inform you of the arrangements. We're hoping our students can enjoy the last few weeks of school with a daily romp on our new playground!

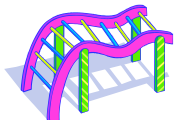
Save the Date!

What: Playground Installation

When: June 5 or 12

Adult Help Needed!

More details to follow



School receives Walton grant

GCCS was awarded a Charter School Expansion grant by the Walton Foundation. The purpose of the grant is to facilitate our expansion to sixth grade next year. Grant funds will pay for additional library books for student research, furniture for the classroom and new break-out spaces, professional development for new teachers, and a laptop computer lab for our sixth graders.

We are grateful to the New York Charter Schools Association, which was asked to recommend five New York charter schools for Walton funding. These funds will create a world class learning environment for our sixth graders.

Many thanks also to the Walton Foundation for its generosity and support.

2004-2005 Calendar Coming Soon

The staff has considered several alternatives, and has determined the calendar for the next school year.

The first day of school will be Wednesday, September 1st for 1st through 6th Graders. Kindergarten screening will be held September 1-3 and Kindergarteners will attend a half day of school on September 7. The first full day of Kindergarten will be Wednesday, September 8. The last day of school will be Friday, June 24.

Calendars will be sent home in May.

GCCS Students Travel to Historic National Sites



“It’s not like we just sit around and read history out of books,” commented a fourth grader as he gave a tour of the school to visitors. Indeed not! This spring, our 4th and 5th Grade students are traveling to the sites of some of the most significant events in the history of our country.

Fourth Graders have just returned from Philadelphia, PA. They visited Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell, the National Constitution Center, the Franklin Science Institute, and many other sites.

Fifth Graders leave next week for Boston, MA. A few of the places they will tour are the site of the Boston Tea Party, Faneuil Hall, Lexington, and Old South Meeting Hall.

Fieldwork of this magnitude requires extensive preparation and an intensity of purpose. Students take copious notes, draw detailed sketches, and write periodic reflections in their field notebooks. All the information they gather is used to further their expeditions when they return to school. Further research takes on deeper meaning for students when they can connect what they read to the contexts in which noteworthy people lived and momentous events took place.

Many thanks to the chaperones who so generously give of their time and energy to facilitate student learning and keep our children safe on overnight field studies. Your dedication and sacrifice is the key to successful fieldwork.

Fourth Grade Student Reflections on the Philadelphia Experience

“Everywhere I have gone to since I arrived in Philly, everything has had a meaning. But the thing that had most of the impact was the Constitution Center. The second I walked in, everything around me became so clear, after being so foggy. I realized the struggles that colonists had. I had read it in books so many times but didn’t realize what I was seeing until now. Suddenly, I was full of emotions and, reality. All at once I felt sad, scared, and so many other things that I never had felt before. They hit me like a freight train, a sudden impact. Now I have such more of a respect when people say, ‘The revolution was a hard time, for all people.’”

•••••

“I thought it was amazing when we took the tour of Independence Hall, we were in the same place as Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, John Adams, and John Hancock! The Liberty

Bell was cool because I kept on thinking, this is the real bell!”

•••••

“I am having so much fun. I have found Joseph Hewes’ grave, and I am him for the play.”

•••••



“When we first got here everything was so new and special. Some things were similar to Rochester. But it had an edge to it where it was a little different. I notice this is a historical place... I think that this will be a lifelong remembrance. I suggest other kids to have the same opportunity.”

•••••

“The show at the National Constitution Center was so big, my mind came to the unavoidable conclusion that I have rights and made me proud to be an American!”

•••••

“I think that staying on track was a bit of a challenge in the National Constitution Center. I think to withstand it, I should work on focusing on the topic, my notes, the agenda, and what to do next.”

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“So far the trip has been great. There have been some challenges for me, but I have worked through them. One of my challenges is staying with my group, really focusing, and taking notes.”

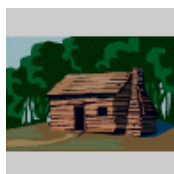
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“I wish that I could have the honor of living in this beautiful chunk-o-history.”

Our Indians/Explorers/Settlers Expeditions

Kindergarten & First Grade – Settling Rochester

Kindergarteners and 1st Graders will work together to examine why people settled in Rochester and what they used to meet their needs. All students will take part in a series of immersion activities and field studies designed to give them an overview of settler life. They will then become part of crews that will focus on one of the following specific areas of in-depth investigation: agriculture/food, homespun, shelter, and geography/travel.



Each crew will design a portion of the final project – a powerpoint presentation. The powerpoint presentation will be burned onto cd's and will be donated to the Stone Tolan House to be given to visiting school groups.

Third Grade – Before the Bridges



Third Graders will reflect back upon their “Bridges of Rochester” expedition last year, then speculate about what Rochester was like “Before the Bridges.” They will identify reasons people moved to the Genesee Valley two centuries ago, and the impact their arrival had on the Seneca people who made this valley their home. Students will investigate the seven settlements that emerged on the banks of the Genesee, and will learn about the people and resources that led to the development of a city in this place.

Students will pair with 5th Graders for their final exhibition. They will present history from the local point of view by performing vignettes of the events that led to the establishment of Rochester. Fifth Graders will provide a contrast by sharing vignettes from the national scene during the same time period.

Second Grade – Milling About

The arrival of settlers from New England and their cultivation of the fertile soils of the Genesee River Valley led to the rise of small milling communities along local waterways. Who were the people who lived in these communities? How did they find their way here and how did they work together to keep the mills going? Our second graders will first discover how people navigate and why the early milling settlements were established where they were. We will then look into the mechanical workings of the mill, exploring simple machines and energy. We will consider how together, these elements created a system that fueled the growth of the communities in our area. Finally, students will learn what life was like 200 years ago by using historical accounts, personal journals, and correspondence from the era. Students will understand the historical significance of Rochester's first industry and how it set the stage for Rochester's meteoric growth in the 19th century.

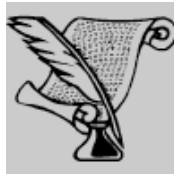
Three major projects will accompany the expedition. Working in collaboration with the Rochester Orienteering Club, the students will map, design, and train others to orient a course on the RMSC campus. Using David Macaulay's book, *Mill*, as an anchor text, students will create technical drawings of a mill component and explain its function within the system as a whole. We are hoping to work with mechanical engineering students to serve as mentors during this phase of our work.

Inspired by the historical fiction of the anchor text, our students will adopt an historic persona and keep a “fortnight's journal” of the work, daily routines, and special events of life in an 1820's milling community. Field studies to historic homes and sites will provide background information, as will primary source documents from the RMSC collection and Rochester Public Library.



Fourth Grade – 1776

The Fourth Grade will be studying the formation of America's democracy through an adaptation of the musical play "1776." The script will serve as the anchor text that leads to an in-depth investigation of the significant people, events, and documents of this time period. Each child will take on the persona of a character from that time and see history through their eyes.



A four-day field study to Philadelphia will provide historical context and rich resources for students to use in their research. Students will have an opportunity to see the site of the signing of the Declaration of Independence – the subject of "1776." They will take notes, photographs, and sketches about the characters and settings of the play.

The class will also be investigating the parallel events and possible influences the native culture contributed to our modern America.

Fifth Grade – How'd We Get Here?

While researching exploration, colonization of North America, and the American Revolution, the fifth graders will inquire: Why do people explore? How do the exchange of goods and ideas impact a culture? How does diversity enrich a culture?

The first two thirds of the expedition will lay the foundation for a three-day field study to Boston. This field study will help students answer their guiding questions. The class will focus on the impact of historic Boston as a port and hot bed of political change. Throughout this field study, students will make observations, sketch, take notes, and experience a portion of our country's rich history.

The 5th Grade class is full of talented individuals who love to perform and entertain. Students have expressed an interest in sharing what they discover by presenting their newfound knowledge in the form of short vignettes. The 5th Grade will present the history of the time period from a national perspective, while the 3rd Grade presents the same time period from the local perspective. We're looking forward to seeing the results of this cross-grade collaboration at our June exhibition.



Revisiting 1776: A World Perspective

Exploring World Cultures through Music, Dance & Visual Arts

What were cultures around the world like in the year 1776? In our expedition work, we will examine world exploration, geography, and cultural influences. The arts will provide a forum for answering the questions: How was the settlement of New York shaped by world perspectives? What lasting ideas do we have from early cultures and civilizations? How do the arts communicate what was valued in cultures around the world in 1776?

We will identify and research countries in the continents of Africa, Europe, Asia, North America, and South America with connections to the exploration and settlement of New York. Our students will document their learning in video and print media. Community Circle will provide a forum for our students to share their ideas on world identity, diversity, and community through the arts.

In addition, the arts will be deeply involved in each classroom expedition. Our arts teachers will facilitate set design, costume-making, choreography, singing, and acting. Each expedition will be strengthened by connections to art, music, and movement.

