

Four Rivers Currents

January 2010

From the Principal's Desk...

END OF THE AUGHTS – FORWARD INTO THE TENS

These first decades of a new century are just so awkward; it's very difficult to know what to call them. Still it's great to have endings and beginnings – of the year and of the decade.

Parents, faculty, staff, and the Board recently completed midyear surveys on my job performance. While I haven't yet seen the feedback, I want to assure you how seriously I take such feedback. All of our teachers recently reviewed survey information gathered from students on each one of them, a process that is both trying and edifying. Our work matters a great deal to us. We appreciate constructive suggestions and we need to know when we're doing something right. Know that I will try to keep doing what's working and I will strive to improve whatever I can.

When students come back from break, they will have three weeks until the end of first semester. Most of us have felt quite positive about the shift from trimesters to semesters this year. There has been more time to work on skills and develop themes before needing to summarize student learning and assign grades. Those grades will be coming, however, and some students will find that they have not taken full advantage of the multiple opportunities they've had on one standard or another. Remember that you can check out your student's academic performance and more on FOCUS. Instructions about how to use our student information system were with last month's Currents. You can also contact the office and have instructions sent.)

You may not know that we have been working on a number of initiatives this school year. We are always working to plan and improve what we call learning expeditions – these are our larger projects that ideally take students out into the field to explore real world issues and that ask students to create quality work around that issue. This year we have been learning ideas and practices related to Differentiated Instruction, where teaching methods are varied based on how a student learns or how they show their learning, to better meet the needs of each student. We have also been working on making guidelines for student behavior more clear and consistent. Lastly, we have been particularly focused on communications within the school and between school and home. Some of you have let us know where we have not made enough improvement. And yet, we've taken some significant steps forward in several of these areas so far.



The year ends and a new year begins. We look back and try to recognize our accomplishments. We look ahead and realize how much more there is to do. With a new year arriving, we have the chance to refocus on goals we've set and to try to improve what we could not take care of last year. Happy new year to everyone. Goodbye to the aughts or the ohs or the zeroes. Hello tens.

~ Peter Garbus, Principal ~

7th Grade News

Post Cards from the Past by Gabby Santucci, Lily Margola, and Abby Levesque

Have you ever wanted to travel back in time? Well, now you can! In December, the seventh graders completed a project called Post Cards from the Past. We kicked off the project by reading Ray Bradbury's science fiction story "A Sound of Thunder," which is about Time Safari, Inc., a company that allows people to go back in time. In science, each student was assigned a geologic time period to study, such as the Precambrian, Cretaceous, Permian, and Holocene time periods. There were also "extinction experts" who investigated what caused periods of mass extinction on the earth and two "special ops" agents who explored the Precambrian to learn what it was like when the earth first formed.



Emma Burnett and Maia Buchanan smile in the shadows of the Woolly Mammoth.

Throughout December, we have been researching, learning about, and drawing pictures of our time periods in Science class. In English we have been working on writing post cards from our time periods, adding voice and making them as interesting as possible. These post cards are loaded with interesting facts and stories.

We recently visited the Pratt Museum of Natural History at Amherst College, and they told us that they are going to allow us to put our finished, museum-quality post cards on exhibit. We encourage you and a your families to come and check out our work when it goes up in January! Admission is free.



L—Seventh grade students learn about an ancient camel-like creature at the natural history museum. R—Will Borcy practices writing ancient cuneiform on a clay tablet.



A Trip to the Museum

by Tyler Campbell and Noah Padilla

On December 2, the seventh grade went to the Pratt Museum of Natural History at Amherst College. There, they could look at the towering, majestic woolly mammoth bones, find the many, many dinosaur tracks, or open countless drawers to examine the fossils of fish, plants, and small animals inside. The museum had over 200,000 fossils and even had artifacts dating from over 4,000,000,000 years ago. Wow!

Big Numbers by Noah Foster-Marquis

What have we been learning about this month? We have been learning about big numbers in math and how to write them in scientific notation, standard notation, and words. We also learned how to multiply them and round them down and up. Do you know how to write 1.2×10^{178} out in standard notation? Ha! Bet you can't!

Writing with Voice by Emma Burnett

Everyone knows what voice is. It's the thing you use to make yourself known, to express your ideas and opinions. And when you write with voice, you let your personality come into your writing. That's what the seventh grade class has been learning about in English. We wrote creative vignettes about some very colorful rocks with funny personalities. Then, we tried to incorporate voice in our post cards from the past writing.

Now, a question—how's my voice?

8th Grade News

Eighth Grade English – Telling Our Stories

This month, the eighth graders have been living dual lives. Yes, they have been their normal chatty and energetic eighth grade selves, filling the upstairs hallway with their typical waggish antics and unidentifiable sounds effects. However, they have also been spending their days exploring an uncharted island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, getting to know an unruly pack of puerile adolescent boys who have nothing but a conch shell to maintain any semblance of a civilization. You guessed it – we have been knee-deep in *Lord of the Flies*, and we are just a chapter away from getting off of this island...for now.

To take a break from the savagery, students spent some time writing narratives about a memorable moment in their lives using “Show, Don’t Tell” writing. Instead of just telling a story, which we all do every day, students were encouraged to show a story, by describing what the moment looked like, smelled like, sounded like, felt like, and tasted like. They were encouraged to use metaphors and similes to make their writing come alive, which it did! I became a lucky fly on the wall as I spent an evening reading their stories. I thought you might like to be a fly on the wall, too! Enjoy some tidbits...

“Several floodlights, attached to the old wooden building, illuminate the space out back. They also exaggerate and darken the shadows of ominously unmoving cars, and scraggly, bare trees that stand alone, steadfast in the cold.”

“When I heard that news it felt like the weight of the world was being lifted off of my shoulders.”

“It was as boring as watching paint dry.”

“The rope is made of thick twisted twine, the loosened strands stick out, which makes holding the rope almost painful.”

“The sun was beating down on my back, producing sweat that the glistening pool in front of me could not cure.”

“As we walked along the short dirt path, I began to feel that familiar ecstatic feeling in my thin six-year-old body.”

“I push off the sandy bottom, then bob back up to the rippling surface. My dress flows around me underwater just like my hair.”

“I feel my boat gliding across the water like icing across a cake.”

“I scrape my cleats against the dirt as the intensity rises.”

“I am left alone in the cold. I look upwards and see the small snowflakes floating towards me. Above me, the leafless trees sway.”

“This is a story of Sunil Leue succeeding at a very challenging task: The First Responder test.”

“Then she tosses and the set of purple golf balls swings out of control. Being my usual self, I pay no attention.”

“It was spinning so fast that all I could see were blurs, like a smudged painting.”

“My nickname was Big Country.”

SPANISH

The 8th grade Spanish class recently crafted pen pal letters for each of the 7th grade students taking Spanish. They described what life is like as an 8th grader from their day-to-day activities to what they do on the weekends. Students also put together surveys to poll students from different divisions on their preferences in sports.

DIV II NEWS

MATH

Ninth grade math students are finishing up their study of probability this month by creating games. Students are working either independently or in pairs to create a game that incorporates probability and will require the players to develop strategies. These games will be finished by winter break and when school reconvenes, the 9th grade will visit the 7th grade and spend some time together playing the games.

In January, 9th grade math will look at some data analysis, incorporating scatter plots with lines of best fit.

Tenth grade math students are becoming immersed in all things geometric. Currently they are learning many properties of triangles including isosceles, equilateral, and right triangles. They have learned to construct medians, altitudes, perpendicular bisectors and angle bisectors using simple math tools. Underlying all these triangle properties is the practice of algebra as they use geometric properties to write and solve algebraic equations.

After winter break students will explore right triangle trigonometry, which has many real-world applications.

SCIENCE

Ninth grade Environmental Science students have been working in the laboratory designing experiments that model the greenhouse effect. They have been busy designing and re-designing their experiments to collect accurate data. They have been working with Excel to create line, bar, and pie graphs of their data.

Tenth grade Biology students are finishing up their study of the brain and nervous system. Each student completed research examining one question they had about the human nervous system. They are now moving into cell replication and the cell cycle. In class we have talked about cancer and how this disease occurs. After break the students will be conducting a lab in which they culture bacteria and expose it to mutagenic substances such as tobacco.



Right: 9th graders work on experiments modeling the greenhouse effect



SPANISH II

Students have been learning lots of new vocabulary and ways to express themselves in the past tense. They have reflected on what they used to do when they were younger, especially during family get-togethers. Most recently, students have investigated the role of the piñata in Mexican celebrations. Then they made and broke their own piñatas to mark the end of 2009 with a "bang." (photo left)

DIV III NEWS

ENGLISH

Response to Modernization, Literature

Dystopian novels, novels of utopias gone wrong, stimulate our thinking in a unique and frightening way. After reading *Oryx and Crake* and *1984*, students in this class were full of questions about the future of genetic engineering and information control in our world today. They've found themselves arguing different perspectives on "progress" and whether we're going too far. So really, what IS the ideal relationship between technology and community? After several months of reading and discussing this issue, students are each creating a final product combining an essay and a creative piece that answers this question. During the writing process, they've engaged in discussions (and at times, heated debates) about how technology is helping or hindering our relationships and our society, an issue that is nothing if not topical.

Great Books

At last we are passing into Modernism, the last literary period we're studying in our journey through the Great Books. Students are reading and discussing elements of Modernism in either *The Great Gatsby* or William Faulkner's *Light in August*. After holiday break, we wrap up the course with our overarching question: What is the relevance of the Great Books in education? We're hoping for survey feedback from various students and teachers across the country about this very question, and the Great Books students will be answering it themselves in the form of a position paper. These position papers will be used to prepare for a symposium on this topic at the end of the semester.

SOCIAL STUDIES

History of Community

Students completed formal site assessments of areas for redesign in the Greenfield community this month. They began work on drafting different types of plans to create concrete representations of their visions, using drawing in plan, concept art, digital modeling, or 3-d mock-ups. They also returned to the practice of using scholarly databases through the Boston Public Library website that they learned to use earlier in the year to research specific components of their designs. One group that is looking at the future use of the Greenfield Public Schools administrative building on Davis St. returned to that site to meet with the superintendent, tour the 1902 building, and photograph blueprints. The class is preparing for a public exposition in January.

Education Policy

Earlier this month students interviewed our principal, Mr. Garbus, as well as Marc Kenen, executive director of the MA Charter Public School Association, to learn about current authentic questions in education policy. The goal of these interviews and the preliminary research students conducted was to develop ideas for final projects in which students will create policy papers on educational topics which are directed at an audience defined by the students. The idea is to improve education in our local or broader community through students' thoughtful research and consideration of educational issues.



An early depiction the 1902 school building at 141 Davis Street, which currently houses the Greenfield Public Schools administrative offices.

ADVANCED SPANISH

The class is enjoying reading a 16th century Spanish drama-El Burlador de Sevilla, while also working on an original play of their own—El Lazarillo de Turners (Falls). In addition to the group work on their final project, students are also leading mini-lessons and discussions on a variety of topics including poetry, movies, music, and dance.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NURSE'S NOTES

The H1N1 clinic was completed without incident; thanks everyone for your support!

Mother Nature reminds us that winter has arrived Here are a few suggestions to aid students in surviving:

- Eat a good breakfast EVERY morning; include protein
- Layer clothing; a sweatshirt under a jacket allows for different climates
- Wear a hat if outdoors; much heat is lost through our scalp
- Wear gloves and use lotion to prevent dry, chaffed hands
- Never leave home without "chap stick"

PLEASE, PLEASE do not remove coats when hot and perspiring when outdoors. Jackets may be opened for 2-3 minutes to "cool down"; then re-close.

As always, maintain hydration with adequate water consumption.

YEARBOOKS

To Order a Yearbook fill out an order form in the office.

Cost: \$30.00 until Jan. 31, \$35 thereafter

YEARBOOK ADS

Prices: Range from \$20.00 for a business card size to \$100 for a full page. More information in the school office. **Deadline for ads is Friday, January 22.**

WINTER WEATHER and LATE ARRIVALS

Four Rivers values a prompt arrival to school, but sometimes winter weather and traffic conditions make it difficult to get here on time. In situations in which the weather or traffic are responsible for your child arriving late, students will have an EXCUSED TARDINESS. Students arriving late should check in at the front office. Whenever possible, please call the school to let us know you are running late.

THE DRAMA CLUB will be presenting ***Murder for Rent***, a play by Giovanna and Charles Knox Robinson, on February 26th and 27th at 8:00 pm at the Shea Theater. Tickets are \$7 in advance and \$9 at the door and will be available starting January 4th at the school office.

FUNDRAISING FOR A SPANISH TRIP TO NICARAGUA

In anticipation of a cross-cultural trip to Nicaragua in April with a focus on language learning and community service in two different communities abroad, a group of students and families will begin fund-raising similar to the efforts that went into a successful Spanish Trip to Mexico in 2008. We want to let you know about a few upcoming fund-raising events in January, February and March.

Can and Bottle Drive ~ Please drop off your recyclables in cardboard boxes provided in the high school and middle school.

Pancake Breakfast ~ On Saturday, January 30th, Four Rivers will host a Pancake Breakfast at Applebee's Restaurant on Rte 2 in Greenfield from 8:00-10:00 am. We will sell tickets at school for \$7 in advance.

Scrap Metal Drive ~ Stay tuned for news of the scrap metal drive in March! There will be opportunity to donate certain types of scrap metal to the school. Proceeds from sale of the metal go to lowering the cost of the trip for students.

COLLEGE AND CAREER COUNSELING

JANUARY DATES -Take Note:

Tuesday, Jan 5	Registration Deadline for Feb. 6 ACT (<i>late registration Jan.15</i>)
Tuesday, Jan 12	College Information Night for Junior Families 7:00—9:00 pm
Saturday, Jan. 23	SAT —if you are registered to take the SAT today, remember to arrive by 7:45 am. Bring acceptable photo I.D. and your SAT Admission Ticket, and two #2 pencils with erasers. <i>(If you do not have a photo ID, see Ms. Taylor as soon as possible).</i>

SENIORS: Keep track of college application deadlines. Notify Ms. Taylor of any additions or deletions on your college list.

JUNIORS: See Ms. Taylor or Ms. Durkee to set up a college advising appointment with Mr. Itterly or email him directly. He will be making appointments on Tuesdays after school.

SCHOLARSHIP INFORMATION:

Seniors, be sure to check out the Scholarship Resource Files in the Gardner Room of the Farm house. We are working on getting a list online, but in the meantime you should check out the opportunities on file. Ask Ms. Taylor for a quick orientation.

COLLEGE INFORMATION NIGHT

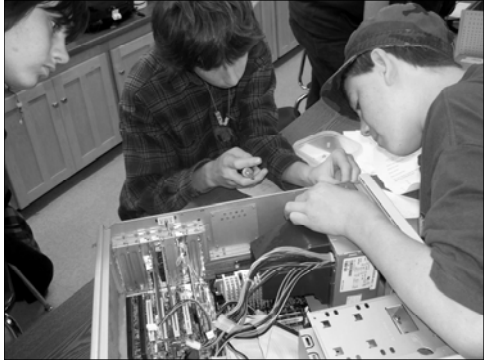
For Juniors and Their Families

Tuesday, January 12, 2010

7:00-9:00 pm - Common Room

This workshop is designed to introduce families of Juniors to the College Search and Application process, and the school's plan for juniors for the next few months.

Sophomore families are welcome to attend, but the primary focus is college search, testing plans and preparation, and how the staff will support each student. There will be a brief overview of the PSAT, what the scores mean and are used for, and the use of College Quick Start and My Road features, which are free through the College Board for the remainder of the students' High School Careers.



Mr. Lederer's technology students at work

ADMISSIONS

INFORMATION SESSIONS

Saturday, Jan. 9, 10:00-11:30 am

Wednesday, Jan. 13, 7:00-8:30 pm

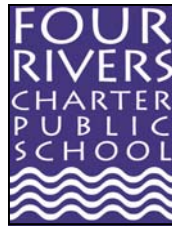
Saturday, Jan. 30, 10:00-11:30 am

Wednesday, February 10, 7:00-8:30 pm

SIBLINGS of Four Rivers Students who wish to attend the school next year must submit an application by the deadline, February 25!

The school's best advertising is ***Word of Mouth***, so we urge you to let your friends and neighbors know we are accepting applications until the deadline of February 25, 2010 for FALL ENROLLMENT.

Four River Charter Public School is dedicated to educating young people for lives of learning and service. The school offers a rigorous academic program aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and an emphasis on character development for moral and social responsibility. Three central themes – nature, technology and community – pervade the teaching and learning at the school. Four Rivers works closely with parents and seeks both to serve and learn from the many resources of Franklin County.



Four Rivers Charter Public School
248 Colrain Rd., Greenfield, MA 01301

SPANISH I (Div II)

In Spanish class, we are doing a small translation project for the farms *Seeds of Solidarity* and *Nuestras Raíces*. Through this project we will use the AR verbs we know in the present tense along with vocabulary related to farms and foods to translate information about how to grow local food and encourage sustainable growing. Our goal is to translate small pieces of the website into Spanish so that Spanish speakers all over the world can understand what the farms are doing and maybe help make the world a greener place by teaching the importance of sustainable gardens. This project is great because it has a good message and brings people of many languages together.

Written by Oliver Lowe, Sam Sol and Dan Siano

SPANISH III (DIV III)

Below is a poem written by Karen Walton in the 11th grade. It came from the poetry project we have been working on in our Spanish 3 class. Students have written poems that correspond to the different

ODA A CUATRO RIOS

by Karen Walton

Aquí es Cuatros Ríos.

Todo es tranquilo,

Verde rodea la escuela-

Los árboles y las plantas en un jardín.

Pero dentro de la escuela,

Hay fuego.

Todos los estudiantes,

Están en todos los lugares.

Confusión y fuego.

Amigos farfullan fuerte

¿Dónde está mi clase?

La escuela desparta

ODA A UNAS FLORES AMARILLAS

by Pablo Neruda

Contra el azul moviendo sus azules,

el mar, y contra el cielo,

unas flores amarillas.

Octubre llega.

Y aunque sea

tan importante el mar desarrollando

su mito, su misión, su levadura,

estalla

sobre la arena oro

de una sola

planta amarilla

y se amarran

tus ojos