



The Merriam Community News

December 2009 - Volume 18 - Issue 4

Ed Notes

It's the day after Thanksgiving and I'm still thinking about the gifts in my life for which I am grateful. There are many and I'm sure that I don't take stock of them as often as I'd like. One of those gifts is the amazing crew of people who I have the pleasure to work with at Merriam School.



I am consistently and continuously impressed by our staff at Merriam. They care deeply about children. They design creative projects and activities to help kids get excited about school. They have infinite patience. They seem to always be smiling, and have a sense of humor, even on the bad days. They work long and hard on their preparation, often during the weekends and in the evenings. They are terrific collaborators, and model teamwork for the children. They serve on numerous committees, all with the purpose of making Merriam an even better place. They are reflective about their work. They pay attention to the individuals and the larger group in their classrooms. They keep our office and our classrooms and our facilities running in a smooth and energetic way – and they do it with such grace. I could go on and on.... We are all very fortunate to have such a kind and dedicated group of educators, office and support staff, and custodians working with and for the children at Merriam.

“Thank you” are not particularly easy in our culture. Even for children, it's sometimes difficult to look a friend in the eye and say “Thanks.” I'm not sure what the source of our difficulty is – embarrassment perhaps. Or maybe we just get so busy that we forget the difference that a “thank you” or a positive remark can make. Sometimes I wonder if we've come to expect so much from others that we might take their enormous efforts just a little bit for granted. But the gift that we give the person receiving thanks is huge. And it doesn't really require that much effort.

The PTO Teacher Appreciation Lunch is a wonderful way that you've been able to thank our educators. They feel grateful and appreciated – it has a huge impact on them. Celebrations and traditions like this are a terrific way to weave appreciation into our school culture.

I've been thinking that it would be great if we could bring that positivity into our school in a more regular way –through ongoing communication such as email. Maybe a number of you have an experience in your workplace that is similar to the one that we usually have here at school. It's kind of a “No news is good news” mentality. If we don't receive many emails, it must mean that things are going OK. But we expect that the majority of emails that we do receive are about a problem we need to solve (and indeed, those problems are important for us to solve). For some reason we don't usually communicate about the things that are going well.

Wouldn't it be great to shift the culture a little bit? Here's my request/ suggestion. Take a couple of minutes in the next week or two to send a positive note or to make a positive comment to someone who works with your children. I know that many of you already do that, but let's see if we can keep it going. Just as we want the students at Merriam to be noticed, appreciated, and acknowledged on a regular basis, it's nice for the staff to receive the same. It can be the boost that keeps smiles on people's faces, even on the tough days. Perhaps “news can often be good news!”

Thank you for being such a caring, good-spirited, and responsive parent community! I hope that you and your families are well as the winter season approaches!

**Save the Date
for the Merriam Auction:
Saturday, March 6, 2010
See You There!**

ABPCC To Hold Meeting On December 17th

Are the holidays stressing you out?

The Acton Boxborough Parents of Children with Challenges (ABPCC) invites you to our monthly meeting on Thursday, December 17 for an open discussion. Bring any suggestions you have that may help others get through this busy and often stressful holiday season. Join us on Thursday, Dec. 17 at 9:30 a.m. at ABRHS in room 131 East.

We're planning an evening presentation for January or early February to address ways to help our children and teenagers cope with anxiety. Check next month's newsletter for details.

The primary goal of our support group is to connect parents with others confronting similar issues. By sharing concerns, experiences, resources and ideas, we strive to form a community of parents who can provide mutual support and comfort.

For further information on our group, contact us:
Francesca Ricciardi: fmr08@verizon.net or
Ebit Speers: ebandmac@verizon.net

Cultural Enrichment Fall News: What's The Story? Part Two

**Calling All Students! Send In Your Questions
To Storyteller, Odds Bodkins! All Questions
Chosen Will Win a Prize!**

This month, Cultural Enrichment at Merriam was proud to sponsor and welcome professional storyteller, Odds Bodkins, to our school. Our students seemed to enjoy Odds' potpourri of musical stories, fables, and legends. As our school theme this year is "What's The Story?" Odds has kindly agreed to be interviewed by our students so we can find out more about how he uses the oral storytelling tradition to enthrall his listeners.

Therefore, we need questions from our students! Does your child have a question that he or she wishes to ask Odds Bodkin? If so, now is their chance! Questions could range from the personal, such as, "When did you first start telling stories and fables professionally?" or "What did you do before you became a storyteller?" to the



storytelling process itself, for example, "How do you combine the oral storytelling tradition with your written work as a children's book author?" to the practical, "How do you make that dripping water sound with your mouth?" or, finally, to specifics, such as "I hear you performed at The White House. Did you perform in front of the President himself? If so, which President saw your show?" In the December issue of Merriam Monthly, we hope to publish our full "interview" with Odds.

Well, that's enough sample question ideas from us, now over to you! Please put your thinking caps on and email your questions in to any one of the Cultural Enrichment Co-chairs at Merriam (our email addresses are at the end of this article). There will be small prizes awarded to those students whose questions get selected for Odds. We will make sure that we represent each grade level through K-6 (assuming we receive questions from students from each of those grades!) and so will pick at least seven questions for Odds to answer.

Finally, several people have asked where they can buy recordings of Odds' stories. Parents can order Odds' full collection from The Odyssey to The Little Proto Trilogy, an original dinosaur musical adventure, or any of his other 15 other audio titles, as mp3 files for iPods at a substantial discount. Currently, Odds is offering a discount of \$99 for downloads of *all* 17 of his recordings. If you wish to take advantage of this special price, please visit: www.oddsbodkin.com/special/. Note CDs and cassettes are also available as well for some select titles. For further information and general ordering details, go to www.oddsbodkin.com/store.

If you have any questions or suggestions concerning Cultural Enrichment at Merriam, or if you wish to join our committee and/or volunteer your services by previewing or recommending local arts shows for our school, please get in contact with one of the current co-chairs below:

- Cath Smith: 978-263-4377 or cath.a.smith66@gmail.com
- Ronit Ben-Shir: 978-263-9872 or rbenshir@jccgb.org
- Lisa Jensen-Fellows: 978-274-2504 or Lisa@myfanwy.com

Merriam Auction: March 6, 2010 "Making a Difference" with a Community Donation

Before you know it, spring will be here and so will the Merriam Auction on March 6th. The success of the Merriam Auction is due in large part to the generosity of the Merriam community. Please consider donating a service, talent, personal creation, or an item to the Merriam Auction. Donations are often received through the generosity of employers and their nonprofit foundations. Your donation, large or small, goes directly to funding our talented classroom assistants. Our dedicated classroom assistants provide outstanding educational support for 18 hours per week and set Merriam apart.

If you have any questions about community donations, please contact Renee Yourk, Community Donations Liaison, at ryourk@verizon.net or 978-264-4252.

To donate now, go to <http://merriam.maestroweb.com/> and click "Donate Item" at the top of the page. Hard copy forms will be distributed in upcoming Friday mail packets.

Welcome to Suzie Kruse

As some of you may already know, Kathy Sullivan, who worked in our office part-time for a little over a year, has departed for an exciting full-time work opportunity. We will miss her, but wish her well in her new endeavor. I'm pleased to announce that Suzie Kruse has started this past Monday, and will be working 19 hours per week. She has joined Allison and Jayanthi as part of the office team. Please come by to say hello to her! Below is a brief bio that she has written. - Ed

Hello! I am thrilled to join the Merriam School community. I recently relocated to the Boston area from Chicago along with my husband, Ron, and our seven-year-old daughter Sophie. How fortunate we are to have found Acton! I hold dual Bachelor's degrees in Education and Mathematics, and have spent most of my professional life in the field of education.

Prior to having Sophie, I wore many hats in

education including homeroom teacher, math specialist, technology specialist, extended day director, and program coordinator/developer for museum education programs. I was fortunate enough to stay home with Sophie during her early childhood and acted as a freelance math item writer for a publishing company during this time. I continue to write enrichment curriculum. Last year I went back to the classroom as a substitute teacher, and closed the year with a long-term middle-school position.

When not playing with Sophie, Ron, or one of our crazy dogs, I enjoy Tang Soo Do Karate (both Ron and I are 2nd degree black belts) as well as a variety of outdoor activities.

Again, I am absolutely delighted to be part of Merriam School and look forward to meeting you. Come by and say hi!

This Month's Healthy Recipe: Gobbledygook

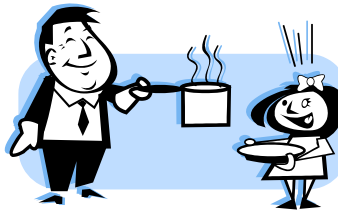
This month's Food Service Recipe from "Healthy Cooking for Kids" is a quick and healthy snack.

Ingredients

4 cups Cheerios or other toasted oat cereal
1 cup chopped shelled peanuts
1 cup raisins or dried pitted prunes or apricots, chopped
¼ cup margarine, melted
1 cup sunflower seeds
1 cup chopped pretzels.

Directions

Mix cereal, nuts and raisins in large bowl. Pour melted margarine over cereal mixture and toss lightly with fork until coated. Sprinkle in seeds and pretzel bits and toss again. Or, place whole mixture into large plastic bag, seal and shake well.



Serve in sandwich bags or small bowls. May be refrigerated in airtight container for up to one week.

Recipe makes six to eight servings.

Lost & Found Committee News

Volunteers Needed! The Lost and Found Committee is still looking for a few people that can give just a little bit of time to help find the owners of lost and found items. There is total flexibility regarding the amount of time you take, the time of day, and even what day you will help. Even just once or twice is very helpful. For more information, please contact Yvonne at yvonnebenelli@aol.com. Thank you.

December Lost & Found Fair: The next Parker Damon Building Lost & Found Fair of this school year will be held the week before Winter break. All items in the Lost & Found Area with legible names on them (preferably first and last names) will be brought to the school office and a note sent to the student. Items without identifying names will be displayed in the hallway outside the multi-purpose room at the bottom of the main staircase. Any items not claimed by the end of the fair will be laundered and donated to charity.

Please remind your children to check the Lost & Found Fair for items that they may have lost. Families are also welcome to check the fair anytime the building is open. When school is in session, please remember to sign in the school office before going to the fair.

2009 Auction News: Bid Online for Summer Camps in January. Just like eBay, Only Better!

No need to wait until the auction date of March 6 to bid on summer camps. After you learn all about camp offerings at the Merriam Summer Options Camp Fair on January 19, you can bid online for many of them including:

Back By Popular Demand:

Star Camps
Concord Academy Summer Camp
Marcus Lewis Day Camp
Camp Farwell for Girls
and many others

New This Year:

Camp Merrowvista

Wizards and Warriors Day Camp
Camp Birch Hill

Support the auction and get a jump-start on your summer planning. Online bidding will take place from January 22nd to January 27th. More details on this exciting way to bid for summer camps are coming soon.

Reminders from the Health Office for a Healthy Winter



The CDC recommends reminding children to:

COVER THEIR NOSE AND MOUTH with a tissue when they

cough or sneeze, and have them throw the tissue away after they use it.

WASH THEIR HANDS OFTEN WITH SOAP AND WATER, especially after they cough or sneeze, use the bathroom, and before handling food. If water is not near, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.

NOT TOUCH THEIR EYES, NOSE, OR MOUTH. Germs often spread this way.

Your child should stay home from school if he or she has a fever, vomits, or has diarrhea within the past 12 hours, appears lethargic, or has a persistent cough. If your child is sick and goes to school, you put others at risk for getting sick too. Before returning to school after an illness, your child should be fever-free for 24 hours and have enough stamina to manage a full day of school activities, including P.E. and recess. If your child is taking an antibiotic, he or she should remain at home for the first 24 hours. Please be sure to notify the health office if your child tests positive for strep infection.

All medications should be brought to the health office by a parent. Do not send in medication in your child's backpack.

Check your child for lice once a week, and contact the health office if you find lice or nits. The most effective control is careful, repeated inspection of the child's hair and scalp by parents.

Students need to get plenty of sleep and physical activity, drink water, and eat good food to help them stay healthy in the winter and all year.



Mark Your Calendars For The Scholastic Book Fair

The Scholastic Book Fair will take place this year from February 5 - 12 in the Merriam lobby. This is a great chance to purchase books for yourself or your class and support classroom assistants. More to come!

Healthy Recipe: Gingersnap-Banana Frozen Yogurt

This month's recipe comes from eatingwell.com.

Stir chopped gingersnaps, sliced bananas, and toasted pecans into softened vanilla frozen yogurt for a quick, crowd-pleasing dessert.

Ingredients

2 cups vanilla frozen yogurt, softened
6 gingersnap cookies, chopped
2 bananas, sliced
¼ cup chopped toasted pecans

Preparation

Layer equal portions of frozen yogurt, chopped gingersnaps, bananas, and pecans into four small dessert cups or glasses. Freeze until the yogurt is firm, at least 10 minutes.

Makes four servings.

Help Wanted: Office Volunteer

We are in need of an additional volunteer for the Merriam School front office. The commitment is for a few hours in the morning every other Tuesday starting in January 2010.

The front office volunteers coordinate the attendance of all students to ensure safe arrival, prepare reports for changes to student's dismissal routines, and prepare lunch counts for the cafeteria staff.

If you are interested in volunteering or would like more information on the opportunity, please contact Dianna McNeish at 978-263-1825 or mcneish4@verizon.net.

Help Make Another Memorable Merriam Movie

Merriam parent Christo Tsiaras will create an unforgettable movie for the auction. He needs 300 photos to make this special keepsake. Classrooms, all-school meetings, or after-school activities make great pictures. No home pictures please.

Please send Christo school-related still-photos or short videos (either taken by parents/guardians or teachers.) Shots can be digital (over 300kb in file size) or can be scanned and returned to you. Please send to christo@dreamalleypictures.com.

The Merriam Community News

Editor: Joe Campo ▪ Production: Sue Follett

The next Community News will be published on Friday, January 8.

Email articles by December 23 to Joe at jb_campo@yahoo.com.