



The Merriam Community News

November 2009 - Volume 18 - Issue 3

Ed Notes

“Would you lie to keep a friend out of trouble or would you tell the truth?”



“Would you rather be the tallest person in your class or be average in height?”

“If your best friend threw a party and didn’t invite you, would you confront him/her directly?”

These are just a few of the questions from *The Kids’ Book of Questions*, by Robert Stock (there’s a grown-up version simply called *The Book of Questions*). Stock poses questions that help us to explore ethical situations and deepen our understanding of ourselves. Kids enjoy discussions of these open-ended questions, in large part because they get to hear a rich variety of perspectives in discussions with their classmates or friends. In leading conversations such as these with children, I find that it’s useful to ask kids to take a position on one side or another at first, even if their answer ultimately lies somewhere in the middle. It can be interesting to see what our initial “gut” reactions are when faced with a challenging question.

So in taking a page out of Stock’s book, I thought I’d try out a question of my own, related to children and their learning: “Would you rather that your child strive to continually improve at their academic work, but be somewhat anxious and lacking in self-confidence OR be somewhat indifferent about or even disinterested in improving their academic skills but be generally content and comfortable?”

As is the case with all of Stock’s questions, there’s no “correct” answer here, just food for thought. I’ve been thinking lately how much the language of “improvement” is used in our schools and in our culture. An MCAS test score is entitled “Needs Improvement.” We write a “School Improvement Plan” every year. Companies look for ways to improve their products. “Be all that you can be” is a popular slogan. Self-improvement books are big sellers. We are constantly looking to improve as

SPECIAL NOTICE: Newsletter Distribution To Change

In an effort to conserve resources, starting with the December edition, the monthly Merriam newsletter will be distributed electronically only.

The newsletter will be sent to Merriam families as an attachment from Ed Kaufman and will be posted on the PTO and school websites. Printed copies will be available in the office the first week of the month.

Feedback from our survey last year indicated that most families would continue to read the newsletter if distributed electronically, so we hope this method of communication will still be effective at keeping you informed, along with Friday mail packets and weekly e-mails.

Please contact the PTO board if you have any questions.

adults and we generally ask the same of our children. There’s nothing wrong with that, right?

I’m a little embarrassed to admit what happened after I got home from a busy day at school at about 8 pm a couple of weeks ago. I saw my daughter and the first words out of my mouth were something like, “Have you finished your homework yet? You know that you have a test in Math tomorrow – have you done everything you can to prepare? And what about English, remember that you were going to work on a stronger concluding paragraph?”

After my verbal barrage I apologized to my daughter and told her that I was so glad to see her and that I wanted to hear about her day. In reflecting on that experience I realized that I hadn’t balanced my priorities in the way that I would have preferred. I thought of the two

- continued on page 5

SCRIP is Back!

The Merriam PTO is pleased to once again offer Merriam families the Scrip Shopping Card Program. This is a program where you can purchase gift cards to many of the places where you already shop or eat, at no additional cost to you, and the Merriam PTO earns a percentage of each card. Last year, the PTO earned more than \$1500 to support teaching assistants through the Scrip program.

How does it work? Merchants agree to participate in the scrip program and offer their cards at a discounted rate. Discounts vary, for instance if you buy a \$25 gift card for Roche Bros Merriam will get 3% (\$.75) back; if you buy a \$25 gift card for the 99 Restaurant, Merriam will get 13% (\$3.25) back!

Why should I participate? This program is a great way to help raise money for our school without doing anything additional or different; just shop as you normally would on a regular basis.

- ▶ Do you shop regularly at Roche Bros. or CVS?
- ▶ Do you go to The Gap, TJ Maxx, or Macy's for clothes, or visit Ace Hardware, Home Depot, or Lowe's for supplies for home projects?
- ▶ Do you stop by Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts for coffee in the morning?
- ▶ Do you purchase gift cards for your family, coaches, teachers, or others for birthdays and holidays? Now you can buy the cards and Merriam will benefit as well.

Please look over the complete list of participants and if you ordinarily shop or eat at any of the participating businesses, consider buying a gift card and help raise money for our school at the same time. There are more than 100 merchants participating that are in our local area so you're sure to find ones that appeal to you!

How do I buy cards? Simply fill out the order form distributed in Friday mail, and then send it back to school with a check, payable to "Merriam Community PTO". Your cards will be distributed a week after the deadline. We will let you know when your cards are in (you will have a choice of picking up your cards at the office or having them sent home with your child).

If you can't find your order form, additional forms are available on the PTO website.

Scrip is available to order several times during the school year. The deadline for the first Scrip order is

Monday, November 16th, and the cards will be distributed on Friday, November 20th.

Any questions, please contact Cathy Castaneda at cathy_castaneda@hotmail.com.

Fall Cultural Enrichment News At Merriam: What's The Story?

After the exciting performances of *Into the Woods, Jr* and *Footloose* by the Starz-N-Lightz local theater company at our All School Meeting in October, the story at Cultural Enrichment continues with our proud sponsorship of a one hour show entitled, "What's The Story?" on



Thursday November 12th at 10:45 a.m. in our cafeteria by award winning storyteller and children's author, **Odds Bodkin**.

Odds is known for his unique character voice and music-filled story telling style. His performance, which has been specifically designed with our K-6 Merriam audience and school-wide curriculum in mind, will get students actively participating in rich, multiculturally diverse folktales, songs, and fables, such as "Tale of the Name of the Tree," a Bantu story, performed with African stanza and "The Elf of Springtime," a Swedish tale performed on Celtic harp.

Odds has been showcasing his "musical theater" storytelling abilities, both locally and overseas for over 24 years. Named by The New York Times as "a consummate storyteller," Odds has won the Parents' Choice Gold, Silver and Honor Awards for multiple stories, The Dove Family Foundation Award, The Oppenheim Platinum Award for Best Children's Audio, and the Storytelling World Award, amongst others. For further information, check out the website: www.oddsbodkin.com.

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 local arts shows for our school, please get in contact with one of the current co-chairs below:

- ▶ Cath Smith: 978-263-4377; 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 Rocks At The Fall Dance Party

Friday, October 16th was the Fall Dance Party. The cafetorium rocked with great music and even better dance moves! The kids really know how to move it, move it! Thanks to all the students and families who made the night so much fun!

Special thanks to all the students who got on stage with the DJ to help lead the dance party. You are awesome! A very special thank you to Lisa Sajedi, Laura and Gary Wordsworth, Matthew Howe, Lingya Zhou, Jennifer Whitney, Mara Beggs, Jean Zhang, Rhea Koch, Kelley Vialle, Anibel Salguero, Dew Win, Tina Humphreys, Chris Kim, Kim McCormick, and Donna German for all of your help during the event.

Thanks to everyone for bringing your best dance grooves and school spirit. Hope you had a great time!! -- Ann O'Grady, Fall Social Chairperson

Family Fall Clean-Up Is Re-Scheduled for November 8th!

Get Out Your Gardening Gloves! WE NEED HELP!!!! Come have fun raking and cleaning up the grounds with other families at the Parker Damon Building on Sunday, November 8th from 1:00 - 4:00pm. This event replaces the previously scheduled clean-up that was completely rained out.

We need your help! Do your part this year and help us clean up! We're getting lonely out here! Bring your rakes, weeding tools, wheel barrows, friends and neighbors... everyone is welcome! Contact Amanda Lye (978) 635-9879 (PDB Landscaping Committee Merriam co-chair) with any questions.

There are other opportunities to help out! Every Thursday at 10, a group of us meet to work on the gardens. No experience is needed – just enthusiasm and garden gloves!

Thank You to 5th Grade Teachers

On behalf of all the 5th grade parents, we would like to acknowledge our appreciation of your time, planning, and hard work that you all put into the overnight field trip to Merrowvista.

Our children had an amazing time and it truly was a valuable learning and social experience. You also ensured each child's emotional and physical safety. We also recognize that you spent the night away from your own families to be with our kids; for that we are truly grateful. We also would like to thank

all the parent volunteers who also gave up a night with their own families to be with our kids. This overnight field trip created memories for our kids that will last a lifetime. Thank you again!

- Ronit Ben-Shir and Lisa Sajedi

PTO Basketball Fundraiser

IT'S GAME TIME! Get ready for some fun and excitement as the Merriam School staff take on the PTO in a game of basketball! On Friday, December 4, 6:00pm - 8:00pm, come on out to the RJ Grey gymnasium to cheer on your favorite players in this fun, non-competitive fundraiser. There will be snacks, souvenirs, and plenty of laughs... especially during halftime!

INTERESTED IN HELPING? We need you! Are you good with music? We need someone to set up some great game-time music on your iPod or laptop. Good with advertising? You could help by contacting local media outlets. Familiar with running a basketball scoreboard and/or game clock? There's a job for you! Are you good at getting donations from businesses? There are only a couple of requests. Interested in working at the ticket booth or concession stand on game night? Let me know! -- Danielle Fredericks (978) 496-7336 or daniellefredericks@yahoo.com

Gamewright Game Night

Merriam will be holding its first Gamewright Game Night on Friday, November 20, in the cafetorium from 6:30 until 8:30.

Families will have the opportunity to play a full selection of Gamewright's fun and educational tabletop games, from bestsellers like *Slamwich* and *Rat-a-Tat Cat* to its newest titles, including *Ring-O Flamingo™* and *Can You See What I See? Finders Keepers* game. In addition, we will be selling Gamewright games during the event, and 50 percent of the profits will go back to support Merriam's classroom assistants.



HELP OUT! Volunteers are needed for this fun family event. We're looking for help setting up and cleaning up along with during the event to help sell games, etc. Contact Diane Johnson at dianeljohnson@verizon.net for more information or to volunteer your time.

Report from The Acton Public School Committee

At its October meeting, the School Committee accepted generous donations from five elementary schools, totaling \$566,078. The donations will be used to fund teaching assistants, purchase equipment, and support other school needs essential to delivering the quality educational programs that our children deserve. The School Committee is grateful for the dedication and efforts of our students, parents, and staff and the leadership of the PTOs and principals in their fundraising activities. The School Committee also recognizes the generosity of individuals, local community organizations, and businesses as many of the fundraising events could not be successful without their contributions.

As of October 1, more than 2,500 students are enrolled in our elementary schools. The overall district-wide class size has grown from 23.1 of last year to 23.6 this year. The actual class sizes vary across grades and they are above school committee guidelines in 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 6th grades. Both budgetary and space constraints contributed to the current class size situations.

We are paying close attention to the state's economic news and waiting to see what emergency measures the Governor will announce for this fiscal year. In anticipation of possible cuts in our local aid, the School Committee endorsed a \$125,000 cost-saving plan prepared by superintendent Dr. Steve Mills as our initial response to the crisis. The reductions include eliminating one Central Office position (shared with the regional school district), cutting materials and supplies budgets by 5%, reducing overtime hours, moving the Lamplighter publication to electronic form, and savings in insurance categories. Additional cuts may be required before the end of the school year.

The School Committee is starting the budget process for FY11, which begins July 2010. We are currently planning for a 10-20% reduction in Chapter 70 state aid. The committee and the administration will be looking at all areas of the budget to see where we can reduce costs. This will require many difficult decisions as we try to meet the needs of our students with lowered revenues. The committee is also entering into scheduled collective bargaining with our unions to negotiate new three-year contracts. We will keep you updated over the coming months and urge all of you to come to our meetings and lend your voice to this process.



**Save the Date
for the Merriam
Auction:

Saturday,
March 6, 2010

See You There!**

Our next meeting will be held on November 19th at McCarthy-Towne School. The meeting is also to be televised on local cable stations. All members of the Acton Public School Committee can be reached by sending an email to apsc@acton-ma.gov. We welcome and value your feedback.

- Xuan Kong, Chair (xkong@mail.ab.mec.edu)

News from the Nurse's Office: BMI Notification to Families

As you may know, the Acton Public and Acton Boxborough Regional School nurses have been conducting annual hearing, vision, height, and weight screenings for students in grades K-6, 7, and 10 for many years. This year, because of a new State mandate (105CMR200.500) passed in April 2009, the school nurses will use these heights and weights to calculate Body Mass Index (BMI) for students in grades 1, 4, 7, and 10. The BMI is a "weight for height for age" index. BMI can be a useful tool in the early identification of possible health risk factors among developing youth.

BMI does not tell the whole story about your child's health status, and BMI does not distinguish between fat and muscle. For example, if a child is very athletic and has a lot of muscle, his or her BMI may be high even though he or she is not overweight. That is why we will encourage you to share the results with your child's health care provider. Your child's doctor or nurse is in the best position to evaluate his or her overall health and will be able to explain to you the results of the BMI screening.

Notification letters of BMI results and resources will be sent in a confidential manner to all parents/guardians of students in grades 1, 4, 7, and 10 who participate in the height and weight screening. Parents and guardians may waive their child's BMI screening by submitting a written request to the school nurse. Students' privacy will be respected at all times during the process of measuring height and weight, calculating BMI, and notifying parents/guardians of results.

Cashless Fundraiser Update

Register Tapes for Education 2009-2010

Do you shop at DONELAN'S? You can help Merriam Elementary school earn credit for FREE equipment by placing your Donelan's register receipts in our school's collection box. The receipts must be from September 1, 2009 through March 31, 2010.

Last year we collected over 100,000 in cash value points. Our goal this year is to collect over 110,000 in cash value points. To date we have collected **7,029** in cash value points!

Please help us reach our goal by shopping at Donelan's. Save your receipts dated September 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010 and send them to school with your child. A collection box is located in the Merriam office.

Box Tops for Education: Please keep clipping your "Box top\$ for Education", for each box top we receive we earn 10 cents for the Merriam PTO!!! We've collected 890 box tops to date! Clip the tops and send them to school with your child. A collection box is located in the Merriam office.

Lost and Found Committee News

Volunteers Needed: The Lost and Found



Committee is looking for a few people who can give 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 what day you will help. Even just once or twice is very helpful. For more info, please contact Yvonne at yvonnebenelli@aol.com. Thanks!

November Lost & Found Fair: The next Parker Damon Building Lost & Found Fair will be held from Wednesday, November 18 through Tuesday, November 24. All Lost & Found items with legible names on them 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. Reminder - When school is in session, please sign in at the school office before going to the fair.

Acton Turkey Trot Planned For November 27

A-B Community Ed is proud to announce that we are partnering with members of the A-B community and local businesses to sponsor a 5K Turkey Trot/Fun Run on Friday, November 27.



All proceeds will go to support the Acton Food Pantry. The number of families that the Food Pantry supports has increased 50% since last year, so they really need our support!

Check out our website, comed.ab.mec.edu, for complete details on the event. Folks can register at Community Ed either by mailing/faxing/dropping off a registration form. They can also register online via MKTix (mktix.com/abce).

If running isn't your thing, we are looking for volunteers to help the morning of the race and would love to hear from you! Please contact us at: actonturkeytrot@yahoo.com.

Message from Ed – from Page 1

messages that I really wanted my daughter to hear loud and clear (in order of priority): "I love you just the way you are" (I hope for her to first and foremost feel good about herself) and "It's a wonderful thing to learn and stretch and grow and challenge ourselves – to improve" (I also hope for her to feel curious about the world around her and to take risks in her learning). I suppose that's how I would ultimately answer the question I raised.

A child's self-esteem can be a precarious thing in the elementary years. Sometimes, while we are so intent on giving our children the message that self-improvement is a great thing, we mistakenly convey to them that they are "not good enough." Years of receiving that message can take its toll. As parents and educators we owe it to our kids to consistently remind them that we treasure them for who they are, not who we want them to be.

The Merriam Community News

Editor: Joe Campo • Production: Sue Follett

The next Community News will be published on Friday, December 4.

Email articles by November 27 to Joe at jb_campo@yahoo.com.