



# Media-Providence Friends School

## *Dragon Tales*

Winter 2007

*Narratives of the Magic of MPFS*

## The Reading-Writing Connection

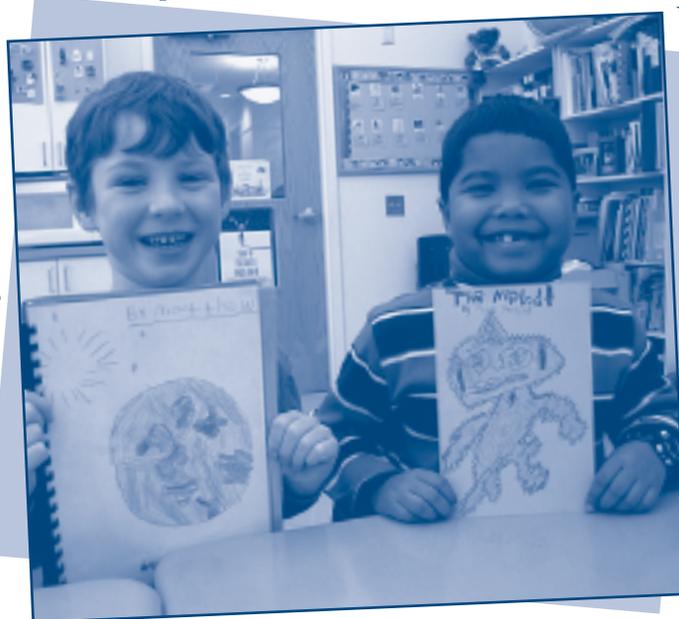
In the world of literacy, reading and writing are inextricably intertwined, mutually supportive, parallel processes. They are critical life skills... underpinning learning in all subjects: in Math children read word problems and must support solutions with written explanations; in Science, they record data and document observations within lab reports; in Social Studies they examine primary source documents to write research reports; in Spanish, students translate English and Spanish texts; in Music they read about composers before listening to their works; in Art, they write descriptions to accompany paintings.

At MPFS, reading and writing instruction take place within Language Arts and Humanities programs. Their aim: to develop literacy, language fluency and communication skills, and along the way, to instill within students a love of reading and writing that grows and lasts for a lifetime.

### Reading

The foundation for reading is laid in preschool when children's brains are wired to recognize the sounds of language. Accordingly, Teachers Merrill, Andrea and Heather integrate pre-reading activities throughout the school day including interactive read-alouds, games that use rhymes

and alliteration, and circle sharing time. Together with letter-sound correspondence lessons ("letter of the week", games of picture and letter identification, etc.), these activities build vocabulary as they develop the phonemic awareness needed to



understand written language. Picture and beginning reader books are also utilized to reinforce pre-reading skills.

Preschool lessons pave the way for explicit reading instruction in Kindergarten and 1st grade when phonics, word analysis and spelling are introduced. Teachers Emily and Liz teach a meta-cognitive approach, helping students to acquire a comprehensive set of strategies to independently monitor

reading comprehension (using "smart" fingers to retain place, taking "picture walks" to obtain context, "chunking" to parse multi-syllabic words, confirming that what has been read made sense, learning rules for adjacent vowels, silent letters, etc.). With the advent of more substantial reading abilities, children begin to build a significant bank of sight words and proudly share their abilities with both older and younger students for the first time – always a huge boost to self-esteem.

Teacher Shirley, Lower School Language Arts Coordinator, can frequently be found in the Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade classrooms working with teachers to develop child-specific reading strategies. She also provides individualized enrichment and remediation for students, ensuring that children have the ability to self-monitor comprehension, evaluate and synthesize text, and relate stories to their own experiences. These skills are critical for success in upper elementary and middle school grades when formalized spelling, vocabulary and grammar instruction are often connected with literature selections.

Because motivation for readers is highly personal, from 3rd through 8th grade, teachers often tailor literature selections

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This Newsletter is a publication of MPFS. If you have moved recently or are planning to move, be sure to give us your new address so that you can continue to receive uninterrupted mailings.

Media-Providence Friends School is a PreK – 8 Quaker day school which provides a rich educational experience where academic challenge is combined with the teaching of values.

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# Quaker Pedagogy: A Primer

What makes a Quaker school different from other independent schools? And what makes Media-Providence Friends School different among Friends schools? Is there a particular method of teaching - a pedagogy - that affirms the Quaker testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality and service? How do we instill these values, which are shared by most religions, within our students more directly?

The use of queries, like those above, is a format common amongst Quakers. Nancy Starmer, Head of George

School, says that

"The query is meant to elicit self-examination or group self-examination."

Like Friends in a Quaker community, our students might ask, "How do we help to create a

community of learners where everyone in our class is respected?" or, for middle school, "How might I work to alleviate some of the problems of our society?" or, "Do I take on the work of a student in a serious and thoughtful manner?" These are "heavy" questions, but they are the worthy ones. Just asking questions, instead of giving information, "opens up new synapses and connections in the brain, connections that make the brain more receptive to new and different points of view." (Baucom 2003)

Another format used in Friends schools relates to the way children gain skills, and how we ask groups of children to answer questions. While every child needs concrete academic skills, we try not to make acquiring them a win or lose operation. Whether in Meeting, Humanities, or Group Guidance, we ask students to consider a topic in all its complexity, seek causes in a communal way, and work together toward a solution. This kind of discourse is deliberative rather than argumentative or adversarial, prompting the search for common truths, not differences. We know that using all the talents, ideas, and experiences



of each person in the pursuit of solutions makes for better solutions. Nancy Starmer connects this notion that "we are all teachers of each other" to the Quaker idea of continuous revelation - that truth just keeps on a-

comin', if we are open to new information from science, literature, experiences, each other, and the spirit.

These are just a few examples of ways "Quakerness" is embedded in the "deep muscle" of the school. Upcoming editions of Dragon Tales will examine other means by which Quaker pedagogy informs our students' daily experiences.



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to the interests and needs of each learner. Small classes enable teachers to recognize students' individual likes and dislikes so that they can find the "perfect book". And, unlike in large schools, MPFS teachers can continuously update book selections for currency and relevance, making for more thought-provoking reading.

During these years, students also experience alternative ways to respond to books. Peer-led literature circles are much like book clubs in their dependence upon deep discussion based on particular information. Our students examine specific content in plot and characterization, new vocabulary and inferences, and consider connections to their own lives and to the broader world (other literature they've read, historical knowledge, and current issues). This method also engages the "social beings" our children are becoming. Through these means, they become more vested in the content, and this enhances reading skills in a more subtle fashion.

## Writing

Research indicates that those who read well often write well. In that it leaves behind a physical record for all to see, however, for most students writing feels like a "riskier" venture than reading. To alleviate fears that accompany this risk, MPFS students are taught to first edit for content, because it is the ideas they bring that are most important in any type of writing. Grammar, at these early times, is secondary and is called for later in the editing process as they write for others.

Emergent readers/writers use drawings to convey information. As fine motor skills and phonemic awareness develop, students are encouraged to use inventive spelling (sounding out) to describe the action happening in their pictures. During first grade, when so many skills gel, their compositions begin to have recognizable beginnings, middles and ends and increasingly include traditional spelling for many sight words.

The writings of mid and upper elementary graders become more sophisticated as students use pre-writing organizers such as story maps and character elaborations to organize their thoughts. Students learn research techniques (note-taking, outlines), are expected to write well-organized, well-supported multi-page pieces, use vocabulary effectively and demonstrate grammatical competency.

In middle school, expectations increase significantly as students often receive multiple writing assignments a night from teachers of different subjects. They are exposed to various kinds of writing and by the time of graduation in 8th grade, have tackled assignments asking for expository, narrative, responsive, persuasive, creative and biographical styles, and have learned appropriate acknowledgement of source materials through standard bibliography formats.



MPFS reading and writing programs build the skills necessary to read for meaning - gaining information from text, identifying feelings and motives, making inferences, writing clearly and sequentially, and moving to higher order thinking skills like analyzing and evaluating. The two intertwining programs also reflect the mission of the School: challenging the way students think, helping them to make connections with texts, themselves and the world, and encouraging them to articulate their own unique points of view.

# A Family Legacy

We are grateful to the Camp Family for their recent gift to the Faculty Salary and Enrichment Endowment Fund. Through the bequest wishes of William and Katherine Camp, Teacher David Camp, his brothers, Nelson and Anthony, and wife Teacher Margaret, have directed a generous gift from their parents' estate to the Fund.

David and Margaret Camp have been associated with Media-Providence Friends School for nearly four decades. David has taught wood shop, fifth grade, middle school and Quakerism here and also served as a Trustee, while Margaret has assisted a half a dozen Heads of School and provided a warm welcome to all in the front office since 1979. Their children Nathaniel ('89) and Geoffrey ('90) are MPFS alumni whose grandparents visited the school for special events, concerts, and plays. Bill and Kay Camp shared the school's commitment to peace, justice, human rights and education and it was this connection that led David and Margaret, in consultation with David's brothers, to distribute a portion of their estate to MPFS.



"We are touched by this kind gesture from the Camp Family. A strong endowment is crucial to the long-term health of Media-Providence Friends School, particularly in the area of support for faculty, as teachers remain at the core of the School's quality," said Phyllis Mincer, Director of Development.

The Camp Family graciously agreed to allow us to announce this gift to our community with the thought that it might encourage others to support the long-term viability of elementary Quaker education through bequest giving. "David's work and involvement with MPFS since 1970, and now as our 8th grade teacher of Quakerism and comparative religions, reflects the importance of having experienced teachers on our staff.

They inspire intellectual inquiry in students, and introduce them to important values of simplicity, peace, integrity, and equality," explained Lynn Oberfield. "We are thankful to the entire Camp Family for their support."

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## EITC Educational Improvement Tax Credit

Pennsylvania's Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program provides businesses tax credits for making contributions to institutions like MPFS to fund need-based scholarships. Several area corporations collectively contributed \$35,000 toward MPFS' financial aid fund in 2006 by way of this innovative program.

The MCS Group provides business, outsourcing and document management services to corporate and legal markets across the nation. Harry Shreckengast, MCS Vice President and MPFS parent, brought the program to his company's attention. "As Clerk of MPFS' Board, I

understand the school's challenge to procure sufficient financial aid funds. Investing 10 minutes of my time to speak to my CFO about EITC 5 years ago has made a real difference to MPFS' scholarship fund."

Bob and Kitty DeMento, current school parents, described their reasons for participating in the EITC program as follows: "Part of what makes MPFS such a remarkable institution is its commitment to economic diversity in its student body. We were happy to help open doors for children who wouldn't otherwise be able to attend this wonderful school."

Roffman Miller Associates is a wealth management firm headquartered in Philadelphia. Said Peter Miller, Managing Director, "Our company was pleased to work through EITC to support need-based scholarships for worthy young people in our community. These children are our future."

EITC contributions underwrote 10% of financial aid grants during the 2006-07 school year, offsetting expenses that normally would come from the school's operating budget. More important, these gifts have helped to transform lives. Thank you, EITC donors!

# Alumni News

## Calling Alumni Artists — Help Inspire Student Artists!

Each spring, MPFS students celebrate the visual arts with an exhibition of their year-long work in Art. As we plan for this event, it occurred to us that our students would enjoy learning about, and from, alums involved in the fine arts. If this describes you, kindly email [jpeterston@fox.mpfs.org](mailto:jpeterston@fox.mpfs.org), with details about what you do. Digital photographs of works would also be interesting to share with students! Who knows, if we have a tremendous response, perhaps we will organize a small alumni exhibition here at school!

## 70's

**ANDREW FULTON** emailed us to report that he is living in Royal Palm Beach, Florida with his wife and daughter. He has been a civil trial lawyer there for 17 years.

An alum of both MFS and PFS, **CHUCK WILKIN** is living in Glenmoore with his wife and 4 children.



**CLARENCE PEARSALL** (pictured left) stopped in and fondly recounted memories of school plays, the playground tree house and maypole, and his teachers. These days he is a professional firefighter and CPR/Emergency Management instructor and lives in Newark, Delaware.

## 80's

**KYLE GOLDSCHMIDT** is teaching AIDS orphans in Zambia while on leave from his job as a mechanical engineer.

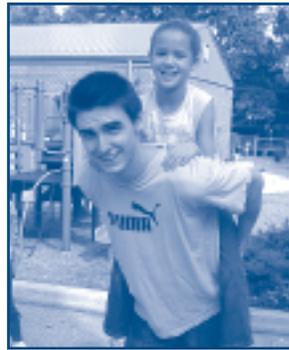
**PETER LEBUHN** '84, is working at a drug rehabilitation center, helping former prisoners turn over a new leaf.

**SUZIE SHAPIRO** wears many hats as the director of a Manhattan preschool, a doctoral candidate in Education Administration at NYU, wife and mother of a two year old!

**JOE WILLIAMS** '87, works with the Philadelphia DA's office to acquire and assign homes for HUD, FEMA and Philadelphia City Services. He is married and has a 3 year-old whom he hopes will attend MPFS in the future.

## 90's

After graduating from Temple's School of Film and Media Arts, **NICK ROMOLINI** '97 put his skills to the test, assisting a BBC film crew to shoot local Philadelphia footage for an upcoming documentary.



**CHRIS NEILSON** '05 stopped by recently to join in on the fun

**KATRINA ROGACHEVSKY** '99, enjoyed a spring semester abroad in Prague during her junior year at Princeton where she studied Holocaust philosophy, the constitutional system of the post-independence Czech Republic, and the European Union from an Eastern European perspective. She is now working on her senior thesis examining the impact Washington v. Davis (a landmark Supreme Court Equal Protection case of the '70's) has had on anti-discrimination case law.

Having briefly considered following in former Math teacher, Thom's footsteps, **JEANINE SWEZEY** '98 has settled on Nursing, and expects to complete her degree at Salisbury University in Maryland this spring.

**KYLE SWEZEY** '95, graduated with a business degree from Widener in 2003 where he was a 4-year starter on the lacrosse team. He has since decided to switch gears, literally, and pursued schooling in automotive mechanics with an aim of rebuilding classic cars (his first job: restoring his dad's '72 Corvette!).

**ANDREW SMITH** '97 is taking on-line courses at Drexel University while managing a Radio Shack in Exton.

## 00's

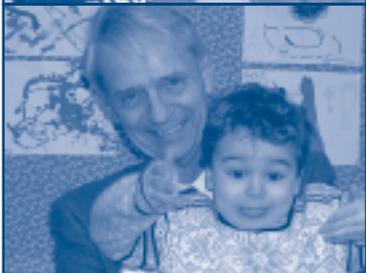
**ANIQUE CLEMENTS** '03, now a senior at Wilmington Friends School, stopped in after volunteering at a Media domestic abuse agency. She recently returned from an exchange trip to Spain and wanted to convey a big "thank you" to T. Jeannie for the Spanish skills she imparted!

Our current cohort of eighth graders sent care packages to the MPFS class of 2002, now freshmen at Cornell, Guilford, University of Pittsburgh, Penn State, Westminster Choir College, Franklin & Marshall, University of Stirling (Scotland), University of Rochester and Delaware Valley College. Packages were also sent to two alums who have remained local. We've been advised to wait until next year to send a package to **AARON ROGACHEVSKY** (pictured right) who is spending a year traveling throughout Central and South America with World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farming before heading to Bard College next fall!



# Annual Fund

Because tuition does not cover all of MPFS operating expenses, we need the generous financial support of the entire MPFS community -- trustees, parents, alumni, parents of alumni, teachers, friends and Friends -- to help bridge this gap. Please invest in the strong academic programs, values-infused curriculum and outstanding faculty that make MPFS so special. Your personally significant contribution today will make a difference. Please contact the Development Office with any questions.



Event photos: Grandparents Day, Holiday celebrations, Winter Concerts/PreK Sing

# Habla En Español Por Favor

Experts concur that children who are introduced to a second language at an early age are more likely to develop proficiency in that language. This is because, unlike adults, children and early adolescents use the "deep motor region" of the brain when acquiring language... the area that controls the things we do without thinking, by "second nature". This is not to say, however, that learning a second language is effortless. Experts also acknowledge that motivation is a critical component in second language acquisition. For this reason, MPFS' language program capitalizes upon the aforementioned window of receptivity and incorporates contexts that reflect students' real life interests and experiences.

To engage students, instruction may take the form of a game, story, song or celebration, and includes plenty of visuals and hands-on activities. Learning is also scaffolded by connecting concepts: just memorizing that "verde" means "green" does not breed comprehension. But when students say the word out loud, write it, paint it, sing a song about it ("It's not easy being verde!"), think about "arbol" (tree) being "verde" and link it up with "verdant", their chances of remembering it improve. Retention is also a function of participation. MPFS' intimate classes give students more opportunities to participate in class. Combined with continual exposure to vocabulary via instruction in Spanish, frequent reinforcement further boosts comprehension.

Likewise, instruction is developmentally appropriate: preschoolers learn to count in Spanish as they develop basic number sense in English; first graders simultaneously

learn distinct Spanish and English phonemes; fourth graders tackle increasingly challenging vocabulary in Spanish and English; middle school students begin to master conversational Spanish relevant to adolescent interests: "What movies do you like?", "What is your IM screen name?", "I like to ski, skateboard and sing."

A core element throughout the 11-year program is culture. Students learn about the diverse traditions and histories of Spanish and Latin American peoples, explore the geography of Central and South America, emulate the techniques of Hispanic artists, and try Hispanic foods. The program culminates in a cultural exchange in eighth grade when students travel to San Juan, Puerto Rico for a week to visit its unique ecosystems, attend the Robinson School where classes are taught in Spanish, and experience life in a different culture at a much deeper level by living with a host family. Encountering in situ different traditions, foods, music, art, religious perspectives, economic, domestic structures, and recreational pursuits encourages deeper sensitivity to alternative ways of thinking. At the same time, the exchange calls students to care for each other as they navigate this new culture and language, thereby building community amongst themselves.

Since 2001, T. Angeles has been the able creator and implementor of the Spanish curriculum for PreK-3 through second grade. Students visit her cheerful classroom for two half-hour sessions per week (this year, the PreK-4 classes have had the good fortune to have additional Spanish enrichment as she assists in their classrooms for several hours each day). Angeles,

who received her B.S. at the Universidad de las Américas and her Masters in Education at the University of Alabama, has over 12 years of teaching experience here in the States and in her native Mexico, where she is recognized as an expert in bilingual early childhood education among the 17 American Schools in Mexico. Her enthusiasm is infectious, making Spanish fun for our youngest students.

Beginning in third grade, students delve deeper into Spanish with T. Jeannie, participating in two 45-minute periods per



week before ultimately transitioning to daily classes in sixth grade. Naturally bilingual, having learnt English and Spanish simultaneously while residing in Venezuela and Canada in her youth, she joined our faculty 15 years ago to establish the Spanish program and initiate the exchange program. (Of course, there have been other roles - Tinkerbell in this year's Halloween skit for example - that her teaching credentials belie: she holds a Masters in Education and has attended the Governor's School of Excellence on Modern Language.) Grateful alumni frequently remark upon how well prepared they were for high school Spanish and how their learning with T. Jeannie inspired collegiate pursuits and travels.

So, when next on campus, consider greeting students with an "Hola" instead of "Hello" - just be prepared to answer when they reply "Hola! Cómo está usted?"



# Meet Teacher Emily - Kindergarten Teacher



Teacher Emily Richardson, an MPFS alum, could be said to lead a "double life": during the school year she is our consummate, yet indisputably groovy, Kindergarten teacher. In the summer months, her

alter ego – an internationally recognized and collected fabric artist – comes to the fore. The unique, intricately hand-stitched art quilts she creates by layering silk fabric (that she paints herself) have been compared to collages and paintings, and marry her love of art with her ability in sewing. Examples of her works can be seen at [www.grossmc-leaf.com/artistpages/richardsonpage.htm](http://www.grossmc-leaf.com/artistpages/richardsonpage.htm).

She notes, "There are definitely parallels with teaching Kindergarten and how I work as an artist. As a teacher, I need to get to know my students, figure out what works for them,

where they are and what they need, so it is an evolving, creative process. That's the way I am with my art: if a quilt isn't working, I have to change my approach: try a different color or shape of fabric, use a different type of thread. I have to make it be the best it can be, and that's how I approach teaching."

A graduate of the University of Cincinnati, T. Emily lives with her very round cat, Mungo, near the art museum in Philadelphia in a Victorian row home that she and her husband Rick restored. She loves to be outdoors and enjoys walking and biking in the city and Fairmount Park, and camping and canoeing in the Adirondacks with Rick. In her "free" time, she teaches art quilt workshops around the U.S., in Germany and Japan, and is learning Japanese.

Having taught in public schools prior to returning to MPFS, Emily says she appreciates the way MPFS faculty, administration and students perform as a community. "The

climate of respect and valuing of every individual that exists here is truly amazing. It permits the best to happen, like the cream rising to the top."

Whether her "palette" is comprised of children, paint or fabric, Teacher Emily is an artiste extraordinaire!

## *IMPORTANT DATES*

Spring Fling Auction

*March 2*

Friendly Games Night

*April 20*

Alumni Reception for Graduating

Classes of 1920-1998

*May 11*

*DragonTales*



## Media-Providence Friends School

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