Auction Time Is Getting Close!

By the Auction Committee

Auction preparations are in full swing now. Thank you to everyone who turned in the awesome array of items for the live and silent auctions. And thanks to those who put in long hours working with the kids on their class art projects, those who coordinated class baskets, and to the principals, teachers, and staff who have volunteered themselves as live auction items. This is setting up to be a great event.

As you read this, several important auction committee activities are taking place. Committee members and volunteers are entering information into the auction software, writing descriptions of the items, and figuring out how to organize and display them.

Invitations were mailed the last week of March. Please send in your RSVP card as soon as possible. Teachers and staff are invited as our guests, so please think about adding a donation toward the cost of their tickets when you send in your card. If you can’t attend, please consider using the RSVP card to make a donation—we can’t stress enough just how tight next year’s budget is going to be.

Something new at the TOPS auction this year—you can reserve a table for 10 for $100. Take table-hunting anxiety out of the evening and help TOPS at the same time. Each reserved table will have a Table Captain who is responsible for the $100 reservation fee. Everyone sitting at the table needs to indicate their Table Captain on the RSVP card. A limited number of reserved tables are available. Any questions? Call Ellen Markman at 329-1205.

We’ll be continuing this year with the very successful Dessert Dash bidding. Not only did we make as much as we have in the past when the auctioneer handled the negotiations, but it opened up time for other live items and guaranteed that everyone got something delicious. The table with the highest bid chooses first!

Raffle tickets for a great weekend getaway will be sold at several events at the end of March and on Friday afternoons at school in April. It’s a great way to get in on the excitement even if you can’t be there auction night.

Look for former TOPS students who will be helping out with the food service and clean-up. Not only will they be doing a good deed, but they’ll also be earning some of the volunteer service hours they need to graduate from high school.

There is still time to help underwrite this year’s auction expenses. This absolutely means more of the money raised can go directly to the Friends of TOPS budget. Please call Barbara Lui at 325-3204 if your business can make a donation toward the cost of putting on the auction. So far we have raised almost $2000 toward this goal. Donors will be acknowledged in the auction program.

Please call Tammy Luthy at 322-3784 to volunteer to help on auction day. Some of the specific jobs we still need to fill are: sound system set-up (needed day of auction, will train), van and driver for beverage pick-up (day of auction), bartending (wine, beer, and non-alcoholic hosting, night of auction), day of auction set-up (join us for pizza and fun, 2-3 hours), and raffle ticket sales (table and roving sales on night of auction). Please note that any items that need to be delivered on the day of the auction (like those wonderful, bulky class baskets or anything with perishable components) need to be there by 12 noon. Please look for Carol White, and she’ll make sure they are well taken care of.

Thanks again for all the hard work you’ve already put into this event. Let’s team together to make the 2003 auction the best one yet.

Librarian Steve Haines shares a book with a rapt audience
ABOUT THE OUTRAGEOUS PUBLISHING SERVICE

Welcome to the eighth monthly newsletter of the 2002-2003 school year. The newsletter is edited by Teresa Németh, designed by Cindy Suzumura, and mailed to you by Heather Burgess and Nancy Lambert. Don Zemke provides our sports photos.

We need your submissions: calendar additions, classroom news and news from the larger community, faculty notes, committee reports, opinions, profiles, compliments, congratulations, children’s art, photos, and anything else significant to the TOPS community.

Submit your contributions to the newsletter box in the main office or, preferably, by electronic file to Teresa Németh at zongora2@hotmail.com.

Remaining deadlines for 2002-03 are Wednesdays April 16 and May 14. If newsletters are to arrive the first week of the month, there can be no exceptions to these deadlines.

Anyone interested in working on the newsletter should contact Teresa at 325-8320 or the above email address.


delete

FORUM

COMMUNICATION AT TOPS

By Tammy Luthy

“Are we at TOPS as open as we say we are? Can we be better?”

I would venture to answer a resounding yes to both of these questions. Are we perfect? Of course not.

Thank you to Kathy Barker for raising these issues in the March Forum. I believe Kathy has given us a collective tap on the shoulder. Let’s all step back and look at where we are.

We get an awful lot done at TOPS. Hard work and open dialogue make this possible. TOPS is bursting with the energy and commitment of our families, staff, administrators, neighbors, and community volunteers. We are a group of adults some 900 strong. This large TOPS community shares varied skills, passions, and time availability to create a dynamic experience for our children. I never understood the term “organic” until I saw the way TOPS families weave together forming a sum so much larger than our parts.

People seem to find the right match for their skills. Or at least we keep trying....

TOPS families log over 10,000 volunteer hours each year. Heaven knows how many hours never get written down. Step back to think what that number means. That is an average of over 20 hours per family each year. These hours are logged by adults who are truly committed to the entire TOPS community. There are steadfast hours weekly logged in support of reading circles, chess club, or grading papers. There are special-event hours for school plays, camping trips, or the school auction.

Our Site Council supervises a complex budget and makes vital decisions. My family is thankful for those who are willing to meet, deliberate, and decide on behalf of the community. This job carries deep responsibilities that I believe Site Council members take very seriously.

Our staff and administration are committed to bringing our children the finest education possible. Because we are a cooperative school, each teacher must in effect coordinate duties. Let us remember if we offer a suggestion that may involve a significant time commitment, others may feel pressure to meet the demand. When you have a great idea, are you prepared to jump in?

It is helpful in group dynamics to start from the assumption that all members of the community come from a place of good intentions. This opens minds to the first word. Assuming good intentions shines a new light on every face and breathes fresh air into every conversation.

Along this journey we will, of course, disagree on process, priorities, values, and, ugh, finances. Debate IS a good thing. Disagreement and discussion and varying viewpoints are vital to finding our clearest solutions and building mutual ownership of issues. This does not mean we will always find 100% consensus. There is no community of humans that has ever reached that ideal.

We can, however, respect a decision, should the issue have been truly aired. Bring your best intentions, know your facts, and listen fully to the other sides. If you have questions about a proposed idea, imagine how you would like to be questioned and proceed accordingly. If someone questions your ideas, listen to their concerns. We should each remember that it takes courage to propose changes at any level. We need courage.

Rarely does an issue have winners or losers. I believe we create successful dialogue much of the time. In some cases, we fail. My wise husband has this funny political observation: “Contentious issues often become contentious.” Heated conversations can bring stinging words but we can always hope for bridge-building to follow. Sometimes decisions come from the tyranny (or the wisdom) of the majority. After a conflicted decision, we can reflect on our actions and try to do better the next time around. Eventually the time comes to move on. This is what we would expect of our children. This is what we must expect of ourselves.

I would venture to guess that many families have a story about an unanswered phone call, an idea that went unexplored, or a seeming rebuff by an established group. Step back and ask yourself some questions when assessing such situations. Was this person busy? Did I make myself clear? Do I feel strongly about this issue and will I regroup and once again move with it? Should I lobby other families to join me in this effort? Was this decision made through democratic means even if the end results were not to my liking? Constructive feedback to the person who has sighted you can often resolve any misunderstanding before things get out of control.
I challenge people to really look at the concept of “we” and “they” in a large amorphous volunteer organization such as TOPS. We are in a state of constant flux. We meet and part based on issues and activities. We could be a “we” or “they” several times in one day or even during one visit to the TOPS office. I believe this concept of “other” can consume and restrict our efforts. We are creating this journey collectively. Each person should strive to create a safe and welcoming space when someone joins a conversation or an established group. We could all use an extra hand or a new idea.

Let’s be honest here. Some people behave badly. Some words are uttered without forethought. Some words are misinterpreted by the listener. Some people truly believe they know it all. Some folks do not follow through. This is human behavior. I have, however, never met one person at TOPS who wasn’t trying to make TOPS a better place. I sincerely hope that we are evolved enough to avoid shunning and hating. We should recognize there IS a CONNECTION AT TOPS

By Paul Framson

A year and a half ago I participated in a diversity issues study circle chaired by Garry Owens. I am glad I did. The chance-taking dialogue of those sessions connected me with parents I might not have connected with otherwise. During that study circle I maintained a minority view among participants: that privilege rests upon, and diversity should reflect, circumstances in addition to race. These circumstances include economic class, lifestyle, how able-bodied one is, and the quality of mentorship during one’s youth.

I believe that race drives diversity issues at TOPS, and that my viewpoint remains a minority one among people working on diversity. I am comfortable with this generally, but not always. When not, I speak. I am in dialogue with many TOPS people working on diversity, owing in good measure to chance-taking opportunities like the study circle. These opportunities demonstrate that we do care and think deeply, but usually not in consensus. The demonstration alone is valuable; it’s a resource when quick action is needed on issues for which there is consensus.

Example: last fall. Were it not for FACES, TOPS would now be half on the way to becoming a K-8 analog of the neighborhood schools that serve Montlake, Madison Park, and Laurelhurst. Nothing less than moral outrage could have motivated a defense of TOPS that was not only fierce, but successful in giving us pause to consider TOPS’ role in changes facing Seattle. I am comfortable with the role that race played in the moral outrage; I added my own minority voice of outrage. Diversity among our voices permitted us to constructively shape each other’s outrage. Prior connection through opportunities like the study circle helped FACES to be quick on its feet.

I am grateful to Kathy Barker for observing in the last newsletter that there are parents who were disenfranchised by the “moral righteousness” of FACES. Part of my reaction is above. The rest follows. I could have chosen to isolate myself from FACES or other coalitions at TOPS. But TOPS is the village that helps me raise children. Why would I choose anything other than connection with it? Connection is what these coalitions offer – built of dialogue, struggle, and accomplishment. These coalitions invite participation, but all participants must be willing to take chances through candid dialogue. To the disconnected I propose: re-connect yourselves.
**SITE COUNCIL REPORT**

**MARCH 12, 2003**

By Ellen Markman

**PRINCIPAL’S REPORT/BUILDING LEADERSHIP TEAM**

Bruce Denton reported that the Building Leadership Team discussed the TOPS transformation plan at their most recent meeting. The BLT is starting the process of “owning” the transformation plan, which encompasses closing the achievement gap, supporting the study circles, and working toward aligning the curriculum in writing and math. Next year they are looking at using “differentiated instruction” which meets the needs of students where they are, rather than expecting all children to be in the same place.

The BLT is currently working on the budget for the coming school year, 2003-2004. It was due March 14. Mr. Denton reported that last year’s budgeting process was uncomfortable in its approach, and in response they started this year’s process looking at the essentials, rather than starting with what needed to be cut. Consequently, he feels TOPS is in good shape going into next year, despite the budget crisis. They responded to what is important to the staff and have funded all the current teachers for elementary and middle school, two P.E. teachers, special education, ESL and the ESL assistant, the resource room, 2 office assistants, office secretary, principal, vice principal, librarian, full-time counselor, half-time family support worker, .4 (2 day) nurse, custodian, and half-day instrumental music.

Not funded were the volunteer coordinator, college tech support, P.E. supplies, extra library time (before and after school), extracurricular (after school) sports for elementary, library materials, supplies for art, science and math. It was noted that in light of the budget crisis, TOPS has done pretty well, and Mr. Denton said the two new special education classes are bringing in more money per student, and there are some savings with voluntary reduction by special education, family support worker, and office staff. The costs of maintaining a larger ESL staff due to BOC are also reduced.

Mr. Denton was asked about class sizes for next year. He said that TOPS has asked enrollment services to maintain the same class sizes we have this year. It is not anticipated that TOPS class sizes will increase.

**TRACI TATE, ASB PRESIDENT**

Traci reported that the middle school has designed and will be selling hooded sweatshirts (hoodies) to the TOPS community. The sweatshirts are white or gray, with baby blue lettering. They will say TOPS on the front, in a “tag” designed by TOPS students, area code (206) on the sleeve, and the TOPS falcon on the back. They are only $25 and will be for sale in the go-home.

**BUDGET REPORT**

Peter Dewey, Site Council treasurer, reported that the No-Bake sale is in the final stages, and has made about $43,000. It is a little less than budgeted, and it was noted that if there are still some procrastinators out there, the no-bake team will still take your money.

**EASTLACE COMMUNITY REPORT**

There was an Eastlake community meeting held at TOPS on February 26 to discuss the new park under the columns of the freeway close to the University Bridge, and the assignment issue. There was a good turnout, especially among parents of young children interested to know about the current state of the school assignment debate and what the future will hold for the neighborhood.

In late April/May there will be an Eastlake community fair, which the TOPS community is welcome to attend.

A group of Site Council members and Eastlake community members has met for the fourth time to work toward a common understanding about the assignment issue and the relationship between the school and the community. Margie Butcher, Keith Cohon, Paul Framson, and Dave Sarju are on the Site Council team. They are indentifying what is important to the TOPS group and formulating common goals. The two groups are moving towards crafting solutions and will present their work to the larger Site Council community, hopefully at the next Site Council meeting.

**FUND DEVELOPMENT**

Jennifer Shaw reported that the Fund Development Committee has selected the Art Project proposed on behalf of the Art Committee as this year’s Fund an Item at the April 26th auction. The funds raised will go towards supplies, supplementing the art teacher’s salary, display boards, and permanent hanging space in the hallways. It will benefit both the elementary and middle school art programs.

**DRAMA COMMITTEE**

Linda Korbus reported that the middle school play made more money than usual. The elementary school play is currently under development with David Crandell writing and Julie Jamieson directing. A choreographer is also on board. Auditions will start at the beginning of April. The play will run May 30th and 31st.

**COALITION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Fourth-grade teacher Mary Chao gave a presentation at the February CSJ meeting. Mr. J will speak at the April meeting, and Carla Fetterley in May. The Attack the Achievement Gap II presentation with Ed Taylor will be on Thursday, March 20 from 7-9 p.m. Dave Sarju emphasized that the entire TOPS community is welcome.
A MESSAGE FROM THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

Greetings! By the time you receive this, Mrs. Scott will be back at TOPS. We have sure missed her and are glad she has returned. We were fortunate to have the support of Mrs. Beverly Walker, Mr. Harry Nelson, and Mr. Chris Drape. March brought a lot of testing and now the ITBS is behind us. Fourth- and seventh-graders will be completing the WASL soon.

In March our elementary students enjoyed an extended day of TOPICS. Thank you to all the staff and parents who made this happen. There are still a few TOPICS sessions left; it’s not too late to contact Tracy Seefeld or your child’s teacher so you can sign up to lead one. Our middle school students enjoyed themselves at Skate King and our sixth-graders braved the elements at sixth-grade camp.

Thank you to the Coalition for Social Justice for doing such a fantastic job planning and organizing our Attack the Gap II event with Dr. Ed Taylor. The evening included insights from Dr. Taylor, as well as breakout discussion groups.

Our Building Leadership Team also deserves kudos for its hard work on our transformation plan review and budgeting process. We were able to spend a good amount of time reviewing our transformation plan and the progress we have (or haven’t) made. For next year, our priorities are continuing our studies on the impact of race in education, collaboratively reviewing student work, learning about differentiated instruction (meeting the needs of all learners), and continuing to align our math and writing curricula.

Seattle Public Schools uses a “weighted student formula” to provide money to schools. Basically, each student brings money to the school. Students with greater needs drive more funds. Each school is given a budget and the responsibility to meet the needs of its students. On a related note, there has been talk of class-size changes at TOPS. Our plan is to maintain the class sizes we have this year. A few of the key changes or highlights of our budget are that we were able to maintain a full-time librarian and full-time counselor. We will have slightly less help in the office, our family support worker will be here half-time, and our instrumental music teacher will be here one half-day per week. We believe that Site Council will be able to meet our unmet needs.

Speaking of money, our auction is approaching soon. If you haven’t made plans to attend, I hope you do so. You will certainly enjoy the evening, even if you’re not prepared to go home with some big-ticket items. Please join the TOPS community for this fantastic event!

Cheers!

Bruce

OUTREACH TO THE EASTLAKE/ROANOKE PARK NEIGHBORHOODS

By Paul Framson

After the school board vote last fall, FACES members and others redirected the energy of the school assignment struggle into outreach. One form, with accomplishment already, has been outreach to other schools in the Central and South Clusters. The other form has been outreach from TOPS to its neighborhood. This process began in February with the airing of emotions from the TOPS and neighborhood groups. A foundation of trust developed. The process then became a forum for exposing the motives and goals of the two groups, and for exploring the contrasts then revealed. Soon the process will evolve to exploring solutions to the schooling challenges of the neighborhood.

I have participated in outreach to the neighborhood. My own premises, goals, and motive, none of which reflect consensus, now follow.

PREMISES: Demographic changes at the center of town will continue to impact TOPS and the Central Cluster. The fall struggle was a defense of TOPS against several parties with a variety of agendas: people from Eastlake, Roanoke Park, Capitol Hill, and Montlake who felt entitled to TOPS, or even simply to its physical facility; school board members for whom dismantling TOPS would be an acceptable implication of a sweeping, poorly informed vision; lastly, neighborhood people who were uninformed by the TOPS mission, but who upon learning of that mission own it to some extent, while still legitimately feeling deprived of a neighborhood schooling opportunity. Our dialogue is primarily with people in the last category, and potentially through them with people in the other categories.

GOALS: At the least, to create understanding; at the most to craft a proposal for improving access to neighborhood schooling for Eastlake, to be considered by TOPS if it involves TOPS.

MOTIVE: The TOPS mission is more effectively served when we are helping to craft solutions from the ground up, than when we are defending ourselves against proposals that neglect our mission. The more successfully we craft, the less likely we are drawn into defense.

You can reach Dave Sarju, Margie Butcher, Keith Cohon, or me if you desire more information about outreach to the neighborhood.
NO FIXED TEMPLATE: ELEMENTARY ART AT TOPS

By Dan Hurley

Walk through any hallway at TOPS and you can’t escape the ever-presence of student art. Pastel painted aquariums, realistic self-portraits, abstract drawings “inspired by Miro,” mixed media collages, historical dioramas, and black-and-white geometric figures all share the canvas that is our school. Still it’s easy to overlook the significance of this artwork. After all, art is what our kids do, how they express themselves. What some may not know, however, is that TOPS is fortunate to have a remarkable art program, with two dedicated art teachers, and a history of integrating that art curriculum into the larger values of the school.

Cynthia Livak has taught art to TOPS students since 1999. An engaging woman with short brown hair and an easy smile, Cynthia is a mixture of cool energy and mindfulness—the TOPS Elementary Artist in Residence. Along with Luzita Roll, the middle school art teacher, she directs the school’s art program. Cynthia teaches grades 1-4, as well as the BOC and DHH students. For one hour a week per class, she teaches the fundamentals of art and instructs them in its creation. “I offer no fixed template,” Cynthia claims. Of course she incorporates classical instruction such as color theory and art history into her lessons, but often “hands on, get dirty” is the rule.

Recently she worked with Carla Fetterley’s second-grade class as the students created self-portraits with paint on paper. Her primary objective was to have the students learn to “mix skin tones and fill the page,” but admits the benefit extends beyond this. “The exercise teaches self-knowledge, works as a drawing lesson, and is a favorite for parents as they assemble their family art collection,” she says.

Carla is enthusiastic about Cynthia’s work and is passionate about the value of art in the classroom. “Besides being fun, art with Cynthia is critical to students’ emotional development,” she claims. “Art activities allow children to create without stringent guidelines, and completing their projects gives a great sense of accomplishment.”

Other recent projects include egg tempera paintings inspired by a class trip to the Jacob Lawrence exhibition at the Seattle Art Museum, rainforest puppets, and Festival of Lights luminaria—candle covers in the Mexican tradition. Cynthia likes to experiment with various media, challenging the students with watercolors, mixed media sculpture, puppets, wire figures, wire with newspaper, paper, paint, pencil, and crayon. Although working with a limited budget, she knows she can count on Luzita Roll to share resources and lend support.

Cynthia’s approach to teaching art is rarely independent of other work going on in the classroom. In fact, her support of individual teacher curriculum has won her many admirers. First-grade teacher Margie Butcher tells this story:

“I bumped into Cynthia in the hallway. I asked her what she had planned for art, and she said she was still trying to decide. I mentioned that we were studying insects in science. So in three days she put together the idea for the kids to make insect puppets. The insects could be real or imaginary, but the children had to make them accurate, using what they know about what all insects have in common. The kids loved it, and now we are doing an insect puppet show!”

In the fall of 2002 an art committee of parents and teachers was formed to help sustain the art program at TOPS. This committee offers hands-on support. Some recent efforts include volunteering assistance with Cynthia in the classroom, investigating ways to display children’s art in the public arena, and looking for ways to financially support the art program through grants and donation.

Contact Carla Fetterley or Cynthia Livak for additional information about the Art Committee.
WHAT THE ARTISTS SAY

A simple way to judge the success of the art program is to listen to passion it inspires in the students:

“Art is very amazing…. If Cynthia ever stops art, I would go wacko!”
~Clara, Grade 2

“Art with paint is creative and interesting. It inspires me to draw stuff with other kids around the world too.” ~Leslie, Grade 2

“Art at TOPS is sometimes hung on the wall. I really enjoy seeing the art that other people make.” ~Anna, Grade 2

“Art is SO fun every time we have it. I am sad when we stop.” ~Maya, Grade 4

“Art is always fun and exciting.” ~Cleo, Grade 4

“I like the art teacher. Art is really fun.” ~Isaiah, Grade 4

“I like art so much that when it’s time to stop, I don’t want to stop.”
~Madeline, Grade 4

SUPPORT THE ARTS AT TOPS

Funding for the elementary art program—art teacher salary and materials—comes entirely from the Site Council. In recent years Cynthia has augmented her salary (and extended her time at TOPS by six weeks) with a King County Arts in Education grant. Unfortunately, unable to secure a grant this year, she must complete her teaching by the end of April.

Although the money collected through the TOPS No-Bake Sale has once again exceeded expectations, there is some concern that the district-wide budget crunch could increase demands on limited Site Council funds. Reducing funds for the elementary art program (funds that have stayed the same over time) would be disastrous. We must not let that happen!
TOPS Vision In The Sixth Grade

By Chris Drape

The pyramids, maps, and Egyptian artifacts that transformed Marianne Trangen’s room into a museum last week now line the walls in the library. When you walk into Lana Fuller’s room, you are greeted by a grand variety of flora and fauna—the bearded dragon guarding the door, newly planted flowers sprouting on the windowsills. Marianne Trangen and Lana Fuller are the TOPS sixth-grade team. They have been together working their magic with sixth-graders here for the last three years: Marianne in language arts and social studies, Lana in math and science.

Today, Lana’s students were energetically engaged in imagining a world without circles prior to exploring (and measuring) all the circles they could find in the room.

Marianne’s students were engaged in a lively discussion of variant definitions and synonyms of their weekly vocabulary words. These rooms come to life with the explorations Lana and Marianne undertake with their students, and the TOPS vision is woven into all that they do. From Math-Around-The-World night, to the Greek festival, science camp, and projects like the Egyptian museum, Marianne and Lana immerse their students in content and themes that connect to the vision, opening their students’ understanding to the complex world around them, and their role in it (they are growing the flowers mentioned above, for example, for the endangered butterflies at the Woodland Park Zoo).

They started the year with a very intentional focus on bullying and respect. The issue was not something just preached to the students; rather, the students deeply examined the issues from their own perspectives and the perspectives of others. The investigation began with viewing a 20/20 special, followed by students exploring their own perceptions around bullying. They read the book The Outsiders, then all took a trip to see the play. A visit by the King County Sexual Assault group, speaking to the issue of harassment and bullying, rounded out the investigation.

Such a start, with a deep exploration of such a critical issue, laid the foundation for keeping the issue of treatment to others central. This thread weaves through the whole year, and gives Lana and Marianne the context to help students continually examine their relationships with others.

Fundamentally, the focus sets the stage for their middle school experience, engaging students in the ongoing process of getting along well together. As Marianne explained, “In sixth grade we try to reinforce the importance of positive social behavior—one of the most important parts of getting them ready to move up.” Marianne and Lana take this work seriously, and are committed to it beyond just the “academic” time. Each day between classes you will find Lana and Marianne out in the halls, in the mix with their students. They are giving students a visible and pleasant reminder of how we work to treat each other well.

This is the TOPS vision in action.

Back Where They Belong

By Michelle Pennylegion

Back on September 11, 2001, the day the Twin Towers came down, Margie Butcher’s first-grade class had just started the annual ritual of learning about new and old classmates, how they would work together over the school year, and, most nerve-racking of all, how well they would like this very new teacher. In what we have come to recognize as quintessential Margie, this brand-new teacher managed to transform a horrific event into an opportunity for learning and community action. The jittery first-graders launched into a project that would bring them closer to one another and facilitate their exploration and discovery of how, together, they could respond to such an overwhelming event in a positive and helpful way.

Margie’s class spent the first weeks of school creating and sending a care package to first-grade students of PS 234 in New York City. The students of PS 234 attend the school closest to the World Trade Center site, and were forced to relocate to another school after September 11. The care package included a video with each child’s heartfelt wishes and thoughts about the event, as well as two books with watercolor paintings depicting themes of peace. Our children sent the package off not knowing whether it would reach the New York children or whether they would receive any response at all.

Since that time, the students of PS 234 have returned to their original school, and recently our now second-graders have received a response! On an afternoon in February, thanks to the generosity and flexibility of Carla and Mr. J (who let some of their own students go and took others into their classrooms), Margie was able to bring her old class back together to watch a video that was both heartwrenching and heartwarming. In a special production of the public television show Reading Rainbow, narrator LeVar Burton explored the tragedy of September 11.

Continued on page 11
MARY CHAO VISITS THE COALITION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

By Teresa Nemeth

At the February Coalition for Social Justice meeting (my first), fourth-grade teacher Mary Chao shared, in her very engaging and humorous style, some ways she guides students in bringing subject matter off the page and into a very immediate context. It became apparent, to me at least, that activities designed to help students deepen their understanding and appreciation for other cultures and viewpoints can enliven the process of acquiring basic skills in reading, writing, and social studies. And beyond accumulating facts, students take steps toward developing a real sensitivity to what some people experienced decades ago, and what others are experiencing now. The following is an adapted excerpt of Mary’s presentation.

I start off the year with Sadako and a Thousand Cranes, by Eleanor Coerr. Sadako is a young Japanese girl who is exposed to the atom bomb. Ten years later, her exposure to the radiation develops into leukemia. We discuss the ravages of war—how hopes, wishes, and dreams are vaporized for every person. We discuss internment camps (did you know some Japanese-Americans stayed in the horse stalls at the Puyallup fairgrounds?) and just how one should pack to go to an internment camp. Some assignments involve the parents in discussing their hopes and wishes for their children.

It is important to incorporate family values, so that children can learn their parents’ points of view and then listen to diverse points of view from other children and families. This then leads to an awareness that often lights up their little faces in discussion. And then it is time to take social action with sensitivity.

We read I Have a Dream: The Story of Martin Luther King, by Margaret Davidson. We explore the definitions of “segregation,” “discrimination,” “stereotype,” and “racism.” Many children have a difficult time understanding what stereotypes are. Abby, my student intern, made posters with pictures on them. The pictures were of men and women with varying skin colors and clothing styles. The students wrote out their reactions to each of the pictures. It was very revealing to all of us that many of our children’s judgments were right in line with some common stereotypes.

The Martin Luther King Jr. unit covers various areas of discrimination. Families chart their way through the following areas, broken down step by step for discussion: voting and women, voting and minorities, housing, sexual orientation, employment, homelessness, hunger, people with disabilities, the elderly, religion, HIV/AIDS, and male/female roles.

Learning about the Underground Railroad and Harriet Tubman presents interesting opportunities. I created a game in which the children all have to cheer each other to get to Canada. There are no winners—you just have to get there.

Many times I am very lucky to bump into a book that meets all of my needs. Eye of the Changer, by Muriel Ringstad, is one of those special books. Muriel Ringstad contributed to the education portions of the Native American displays at the Burke Museum. The Eye of the Changer is a composite picture of a Salish boy who lived before the introduction of the horse to our area. He is blind and must find a trade. His father has determined that he will be a canoe maker. Wahnu becomes not only a canoe maker, but also a young man on a spirit quest. The children learn about the culture of the tribes—about their close relationship to nature, legends, and each other. As part of learning about Native American family life, family members choose names that must show each others’ strengths. (We encourage something like “Running Deer” rather than, for example, “Running Amok.”)

Joe Drummond and I schedule trips to the Burke Museum/MOHI (Museum of History and Industry) and take the pertinent tours. Often, the docents are amazed that our students know so much about the very depths of the Native American culture in our area. There have been times I’ve paid for a “Home Box,” so that we can show artifacts in the classroom.

Our own students can serve as wonderful resources and gain confidence in the process. During our unit on expository speaking, a Vietnamese student explained the preparation of a Vietnamese dessert. It was particularly gratifying to me to see how very comfortable this student suddenly became, speaking in front of the class in a second language, because she was sharing something she really knew to a class of interested learners.

The Coalition for Social Justice looks forward to more presentations by our outstanding teachers, and invites other parents to come listen and then join in the discussions afterward. Mary Chao’s presentation spawned a particularly interesting exchange, on the CSJ listserv, about assimilation and the idea of a kind of “third space” for people attempting to bridge the gap between two cultures. (Would one of you thoughtful people consider expanding your ideas into an article?) The next meeting is Thursday, April 3, from 6 – 7:30, in the TOPS library.
DOUBLE DUTCH

By Sarah Hoban and Carrie McConnell, Grade 5

Double Dutch is an awesome sport. Every Tuesday after school some of the elementary students join Don in the gym for a Double Dutch practice till 4:20. Practices usually include kids jumping, turning ropes, doing gymnastics, and making up routines for the annual records day event.

At records day there is a Double Dutch tournament that lets kids that do Double Dutch show off their talents in a special routine. Double Dutch is a lot of fun—it’s a great way to get exercise strengthening all of your muscles. We all hope you have enjoyed reading about this great sport and might think about joining the team.
2002-2003 TOPS CALENDAR

APRIL
1 (T) ...............Middle school parent forum, Focus on Girls, 7-8:30 p.m.
3 (Th) ...............Coalition for Social Justice meeting, 6-7:30 p.m.
4 (F) ...............End of third quarter
7-11 (M-F) ........Spring Break
14 (M) .............Race and Education Study Circle, 6:15-8:15 p.m.
16 (W) .............Site Council meeting 4:45-7 p.m.
21 (M) .............Race and Education Study Circle, 6:15-8:15 p.m.
26 (Sa) .............TOPS 2003 Auction
28 (M) .............Race and Education Study Circle, 6:15-8:15 p.m.

MAY
1 (Th) ...............Coalition for Social Justice meeting, 5-7 p.m.
6 (T) ...............Middle school parent forum, Parents and Kids, 7-8:30 p.m.
7 (W) ...............2-hour early dismissal
14 (W) .............Site Council meeting 4:45-7 p.m.
21 (W) .............The Shakespeare Stealer at SCT, grades 2-6
26 (M) .............Memorial Day. No school
30 (F) .............Art Walk and elementary school play
31 (Sa) .............Elementary school play

JUNE
10 (T) .............Middle school parent forum, 8th Grade Transition, 7-8:30 p.m.
11 (W) .............Site Council meeting 5-7 p.m.
18 (W) .............Last student day, 1-hour early dismissal

Site Council Report continued from page 4
and encouraged to attend this event as a means to refresh and recommit ourselves to the school community and increase the dialogue about where we are going.

SPECIAL AUCTION ITEM SELECTION SUBCOMMITTEE
This subcommittee has been looking into a selection process for the auction Fund an Item. It is likely the proposal for recommending a January/February deadline to turn in ideas for the Fund an Item for the 2004 and beyond auction will be accepted. It is felt there needs to be a standardized and widely announced process for the selection of the Fund an Item to include the entire community.

This year’s selection process had several good ideas to choose from. Two that were highlighted at this meeting but not chosen were a proposal to expand the kindergarten play area and funding for the first- and second-grade reading block. There was a concern that the kindergarten play area expansion would be a bigger project than could be funded by this process, and the necessary permitting and construction costs would be better suited to a capital campaign and/or neighborhood matching grant. The reading block was thought to have too narrow a grade band focus to gather broad support at the auction. It was thought the RFP process would be a better channel to raise funds for this program.

Sheri Toussaint noted that the Fund an Item should be a tangible thing rather than a program that needs ongoing funding from year to year. The music program that was funded this year will not have the money it raised from last year’s auction, but it is believed it will be up to the RFP process and procuring grants to support next year’s music program.

Back Where They Belong continued from page 8
and the many ways in which different types of people came together to support and help each other. Although it was a difficult time, the children of PS 234 said they were helped through it by the incredible outpouring of love from around the world. The centerpiece of the program was the creation of PS 234’s very own music video entitled “We’re Back Where We Belong,” written as a gift of thanks for all the messages of hope.

By coming back together to watch this powerful video, Margie’s students learned that their caring work can make a difference even when the horrible things happen in the world. To see the video or hear PS 234’s inspiring song, contact Margie Butcher or go to: http://pbskids.org/readingrainbow/heroes_and_hope/anthem.htm.
Elementary Play Casting Call:
The Moon Robe
To Be Performed May 30 and 31

By Julie Jamieson

TOPS is fortunate to have David Crandall (author of Johnny the King and The Merchant of Cheat Street) back at the helm to create a new work just for us. From what I was able to eke out of David, this play is about a young woman who falls to earth from the moon. Her magical robe gets stolen and havoc ensues. There will be lots of dances—the biggie is the Harvest Moon Dance at the local high school. Knowing David, this promises to be yet another fantastic play. SO: KIDS... auditions will be after spring break, starting on April 14. As usual, please prepare a short poem or monologue and a song. PLEASE... no Shel Silverstein. He’s fabulous but it’s so rhymy that it’s difficult to see your own interpretation of the work. We will also have dance workshops for those primarily interested in dance. Parents, your ongoing support of drama at TOPS deserves thanks. As you know, drama is funded by the No-Bake Sale and the auction. So thank you! And see you on May 30 for the opening of THE MOON ROBE!