

# TOPS NEWS

## TOPICS FOR BEGINNERS

By Sandi Kurtz

If it were my choice, I think I'd do "Painting with String and Marbles," or maybe "Day of the Dead Folk Art."

As a new kindergarten parent, I've been overwhelmed with acronyms this year. Some of them came with translations attached, but one seemed to need no introduction—TOPICS. I've seen references to it in the newsletter and take-home packets, watched parents and teachers haul boxes of materials into the building for it (and seen students carry the results out at the end of the day), and heard chat about it in the hallways, but I wasn't too clear about what it was and how it worked, so I did a little asking around.

TOPICS are short courses or single class sessions on specific issues or subjects outside the standard curriculum, taught by parents, teachers, staff or students for grades 1-4—which is a stuffy way of saying that TOPICS is an opportunity to turn the tables, make students into teachers, share expertise, or explore something new. In a average week, there might be 12-15 different sessions for students to choose from, making hundreds of TOPICS topics over the course of a year.

TOPICS is one of the oldest ongoing programs at TOPS, going back to the beginning at Stevens School in a handful of portable classrooms. It is an outgrowth of the political and social climate in the late 1970's and early 1980's, with a desire to make education "relevant" and improve the connection between schools and communities.

As TOPS has grown, TOPICS has changed as well, but the core concept, bringing different perspectives and skills to the school and reinforcing a larger sense of "family" participation, has remained.

For Linda Korbus, who teaches "Building Bridges," TOPICS provides a chance to share her skills and participate in her child's education, certainly, but TOPICS is also an opportunity to let students see that women can excel in engineering. As kids make trusses out of straws and tape, she draws their attention to the I-5 bridge outside the window, connecting the small-scale physics of their models to the "real thing" in the real world. Gretchen Chambers offers a different connection to the world in her landscape painting class, a skill she brings from her professional work, but she's also planning a TOPIC on writing letters to the editor, encouraging participation in the life of the community.

From the profound to the silly, past TOPICS have explored art, science, literature, and sport. People have built with Lego blocks, listened to classical music, read obituaries, made paper, learned swing dancing, practiced calligraphy, made comics, explored the origins of their names, followed election campaigns, and studied the habits of the ubiquitous Pokémon. In some cases, people have taught from their professional experience, while other sessions have come from hobbies or similar obsessions.

I'm still thinking about what I might be able to contribute to a TOPICS class, but in the meantime, I'd like to sneak into a couple of sessions. Maybe I could take "Thumbprint Art," or "Maps and Travel. . ."



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**Principal:**  
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**Site Council Chair:**  
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### NEWSLETTER ONLINE

The TOPS newsletters are available online in PDF format, usually before the printed copy arrives in your mailbox! From the TOPS home page (<http://www.ssd.k12.wa.us/schools/tops>), click on Hot News Spots, then TOPS Newsletters.

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS!



**SATURDAY, MARCH 18,  
5:30 PM AT THE  
ASIAN RESOURCE CENTER**



# SITE COUNCIL MEETING FEBRUARY 9

All members of the TOPS community are invited to attend Site Council meetings: second Wednesdays in the Library, 5-7p.m. Next meeting March 8.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

### *Capital Improvements, Which and When? Site Council Issuing Requests for Proposals for 2000/2001*

Site Council Chair Heather Worthley redistributed the Site Council Strategic Plan reminding members that its goals and progress toward them needed special evaluation in light of current spending opportunities and 2000/01 Requests for Proposals (RFP).

The current spending opportunity is presented by The Friends of TOPS cash reserves now totaling \$117,800. This reserve has been built up over the years with emergencies and capital improvements for the new school in mind. Some of the critical questions to be answered now are "How much of the reserve should be permanent? What projects can the Site Council approve funding for now with certainty that they will have lasting value to the TOPS community."

RFPs are due March 17. Heather asked members to spread the word via room reps. TOPS webmaster Jack Lee agreed to put the RFP form on the TOPS Website as well. Heather asked that applicants prepare the proposals with input from appropriate committees and staff. (See the inside back cover of the TOPS Family Directory of Committee Chairs.)

Facilities Committee Chair Debra Walker discussed the "Wish List for Capital Projects," the result of a long and in-depth combined meeting of the Facilities and Financial Committees. Debra highlighted the immediate need for cork strips for mounting artwork, posters, etc. Free installation labor is available if the materials are made available in the next few weeks. A motion was passed to purchase cork strips immediately.

## DRAMA

Fund Development Chair Penny Bolton distributed copies of a bid prepared by Pacific Northwest Theatre Associates, Inc (PNTA), which analyzes and prices acoustical, lighting, staging, and seating needs for the Gym as a multipurpose space for sports, performances, presentations, and other events. She added that PNTA also looked at the cafeteria as a performance space and suggested portable bleachers could be used in both the gym and cafeteria.

## WORLD LANGUAGE

Bruce Kochis reported that the committee is developing a proposal for integrating language studies into the 7<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum. The current 6<sup>th</sup> grade parents support the move.

## PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

### *Speech Tournament*

Mr. Tubbs is working on preparations for the Speech Tournament to be held in March and April. He asked the members to help him invite "dignitaries" to serve as judges. Anyone interested in contacting someone should ask Mr. Tubbs for the dates and times of the events.

### *Staff's Response to Strategic Plan*

The staff is in agreement on the Site Council strategic plan. They have also decided to have only one staff business meeting a month and reserve the other meetings for discussing curriculum ideas and problem solving.

### *Miscellaneous News from Mr. Tubbs*

Voting will take place in the building on February 29<sup>th</sup>.

Assessment Testing will begin at the end of February.

Standing in for Middle School student reps, Mr. Tubbs reported that the students are very busy with homework and extracurricular activities and haven't made much progress on the Commons project. The next dance was set for February 18<sup>th</sup>. This dance represents the first trial of having outside guests (only with valid school I.D.)

Assistant Principal Clara Scott reported that 15-20 members of Garfield High School's Cultural Relations group were holding discussion groups on race issues with TOPS middle schoolers the second week of February. The discussions were intended to supplement the theme of the Middle School play. (See article on page 9)

## DIVERSITY ISSUES COALITION

Coalition Co-Facilitator Garry Owens said new parents keep calling to express interest in the Coalition. Gary said that some of these parents are concerned that it's too late to join in. He emphasized that the Coalition is open to any and all and must stay that way. Currently the Coalition is planning an all-school event (May 4) to focus attention on diversity issues and bring the school community together. It is also developing a list of books on diversity and culture for the library collection.

Joby Moore asked Garry if the Committee could address a welcoming process for new students. Garry said that a welcoming process, as well as other systems that help to recognize and celebrate diversity, need to be institutionalized.

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## ABOUT THE OUTRAGEOUS PUBLISHING SERVICE

Welcome to the seventh monthly newsletter of the 1999-2000 school year, edited by Julie Pickering, Jim Wells, and Sandi Kurtz. Cindy Suzumura handles layout. Coach Don Zemke provides great photos, and Gretchen Chambers always provides informative news. Bruce Pulmano maintains the mailing list and gets the newsletter out to you.

We need your contributions — news from the classrooms, faculty, committees, and the larger community, opinions, profiles, compliments, congratulations, kids' art, photographs, additions to the calendar, and anything else that needs to "get out there."

Submit your contributions to the newsletter box in the Main Office or to Julie Pickering (by e-mail at [jpick@halcyon.com](mailto:jpick@halcyon.com) or by snail mail at 2624 East Olive Street, Seattle 98122-3144). We prefer electronic contributions by e-mail or on disk (IBM or Macintosh, accompanied by a paper copy when possible). Shorter contributions can be faxed to 720-0916.

Newsletter deadlines for 2000

March 9, April 6, May 11, and June 8.

Anyone interested in working on the newsletter should contact Julie at 720-4552.

# SPRINGTIME IS BUDGET ALLOCATION TIME!

By Heather Worthley, Site Council Chair

As the bulbs shoot up through the soggy soil, we turn once again to that other inevitable cycle: allocating our hard-earned Friends of TOPS funds for the 2000-2001 school year.

All the money you have so generously contributed through the No-Bake, plus all the funds we're about to raise at the Auction, gets divvied up for a variety of enriching purposes at TOPS. Request for Proposal (RFP) forms are in the Site Council box in the TOPS office.

There's still time to submit a proposal for next year. Please don't do it in a vacuum, though. Call me at 789-6092 and ask questions.

RFPs are due March 17<sup>th</sup>, and we'll spend the next few months discussing the proposals with staff and parents. Look in the Wednesday Go-Homes for notices about public budget meetings. We will adopt a final budget in June. I want to thank everyone who takes on the thankless task of proposing something! This is a concrete way to help make your vision of TOPS a reality.

## HELP WANTED!

The Art Walk is marching into its third year and its first back at this beautiful new school. June 2 will be a great day to showcase our children's artwork and the new building. Think of the walls covered with student art. Think of the front courtyard festooned with student installations. Think of the food (I'm sure there'll be some.)

And think of what it takes to pull all this together. Carmen Cook is helping Luzita Roll curate this year's Art Walk, and she is looking for parent volunteers to help. Please give her a call at 527-4089.

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## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

**Drama Committee Chair**—Are you looking for an opportunity to work with TOPS students while including your love for theatre arts? Drama Committee Chair leads the committee in organizing the school plays, directing drama volunteers, and submitting proposals to Site Council on behalf of the TOPS Drama Program. **WE NEED YOU NOW!**

Please contact Linda Downing at momdowning@aol.com or at the school office with any questions you may have.

**No Bake Bake Sale Coordinator**—For the 2000-2001 school year. Are you looking for an opportunity to assist the Finance & Budget Committee that you can commit to from October to February? The TOPS Family Recipe has been passed down through the years with the former Head Baker available to mentor your new baking

assignment. You will be using your No Bake baking skills toward on behalf of Friends of TOPS, which provides many of the extras not provided by the School District. Contact Penny Bolton at pennyb@halcyon.com or 325-5074. This year's Head Baker, Sue Wardle, is ready to pass on the Family Cookbook/Recipe. For more detailed information, you may reach Sue at jaywardle@prodigy.net or 547-6097.

**Middle School Health Program Coordinator**—For the 2000-2001 school year. This position will assist the Middle School teachers in obtaining curriculum materials and seeking out/contacting members of the TOPS community and beyond to speak to students about subjects being covered in Health Class. Please contact Karen Dyson at kdyson8227@aol.com or 783-9473.

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Site Council, continued from page 2

### TRANSPORTATION

#### *Bike Riders Deserve a Bike Rack!*

Committee Chair Andrew Schmechel explained that the Gas Wise Wednesdays idea wasn't working for staff because of Wednesday staff meetings. In light of the parking problem, Andrew said that several staff have indicated that they are considering taking the bus or riding bikes to school. He noted that three students, Roland and Jasper Demombynes, and Eric Messerschmidt, are riding to school every day and that they deserve a bike rack.

### TECHNOLOGY

Kevin Crozier, 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and Technology Committee member, introduced Dwight Harris from the

school district who will be facilitating planning for the installation of roughly 100 computers. Mr. Harris explained that his role is to ensure that the implementation of this technology is successful. The district's goal is that these computers help students with academic achievement. The implementation will be staged and will include in-depth training for teachers.

### OTHER STUFF

Speaking for Jay Pickering, Penny Bolton announced that the Small and Simple Grant Planning Grant for Rogers Playfield has been approved. Debra Walker also announced that work on Franklin Avenue was progressing slowly but surely and is expected to be done in March.

# DRAMA NEEDS IDENTIFIED

By Penny Bolton

TOPS Drama and Fund Development Committees commissioned Pacific Northwest Theatre Arts (PNTA) to work with us to come up with proposals for improving the gym/drama space at TOPS. We matched hours for a grant from the City's Small and Simple Neighborhood Matching Fund Grants.

Since the principal activities of the space are physical education and general school meetings, it is important that anything added to the space be physically durable, and take up as little space as possible. It should also be easy to use, since events will usually occur with little changeover time and probably be managed by the already busy school staff.

Events in this space may include musical soloists or groups, speeches, plays, awards presentations, graduation, lectures, audiovisual presentations, discussion groups, guest performances, and more.

## PNTA PROPOSALS

PNTA proposed the following improvements. It is up to the Facilities Committee and Site Council to prioritize the improvements and decide how and if to fund them. We anticipate applying for a larger Neighborhood Matching Fund Grant in March to do some of this work at the beginning of the next school year. Any and all donations of supplies, money or skills will be welcome before then.

1. Most events prefer or require controlled light, so "AV" or "blackout" curtains are proposed to cover the high windows at the west end of the gym, and to cover the entire wall in the back of the stage. Large panels hanging from wheels in tracks are preferable to covering individual windows—they will more effectively block the light and be much simpler to operate and maintain.
2. Many events involve stage performances, so it is proposed to "dress" the stage with curtains: a front curtain and valance and a set of backdrop drapes forming a surround behind the performers.
3. The existing lighting instruments barely light the stage area. Since the existing dimmers have additional capacity, PNTA suggests that we add more instruments to better cover the stage area. This will allow some choice of switching from one area to another.
4. It is difficult to effectively operate the sound system unless the operator is in the audience space listening to the results, so it is proposed to add wiring and connections to allow the sound control board to be operated from the wall of the gym opposite the stage.
5. Many events involve audience participation, so it is proposed to provide two portable step units that can be placed in front of the stage apron for direct access from the audience when needed. Storage will have to be found.

6. As you could hear at the Middle School Play, the acoustics are difficult for children's voices, especially individual voices. Discussion has begun with an acoustical designer to determine ways to quiet the gym. This will probably involve applying a surface treatment to the ceiling.
7. Projecting the sound of performance from the stage into the audience can also be improved by hanging a set of microphones above the stage to pick up the entire stage area. These can be connected into the existing system.
8. Audience seating is required for at least 300 for a typical school program, and potentially 600 for a full school program or for public performance. We propose either a full retractable set of bleachers or eight light moveable aluminum bleachers that can be moved around the space.
9. Individual speakers or small groups of speakers could be placed closer to the audience, both physically and acoustically, if they stood on several platforms immediately in front of the stage, perhaps 4 or 6 feet deep (could be used with the stairs). The platforms would be portable and collapsible for storage.
10. Actors in a play presentation could project more easily if they were performing within the gym closer to the audience, rather than distanced back in the stage box. There would be a set of platforms 12 or 16 feet deep, at least 24 feet wide, portable and collapsible. Adequate stage lighting would require the addition of at least one more lighting position, a pipe hanging from the gym ceiling, parallel to the existing one, with electrical circuits run to it.

## ESTIMATED PRICES

- |   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| 1a) Backstage black-out curtain, cord-operated (estimated installation—\$2500)                                      | \$2400              |
| 1b) Gym wall black-out curtain, cord-operated (estimated installation—\$2500)                                       | \$1500              |
| 2a) Grand drape, cord-operated, and valance (estimated installation—\$2500)   | \$3640              |
| 2b) Masking (backdrop) drapes (estimated installation—\$3500)   | \$5000              |
| 3) Additional lighting instruments  | \$1700              |
| 4) Remote sound console (wiring/installation not included)  | \$514               |
| 5) Two step units with railings   | \$870               |
| 6) Acoustic treatments—doing study of needs and making recommendations  | \$1500              |
| 7) Microphones (installation not included)  | \$794               |
| 8) Seating—moveable aluminum bleachers for 160<br>Build to initial bid—rollaway built-in<br>bleachers for #? people | \$3500<br>~\$90,000 |
| 9) Apron platforms  | \$2000              |
| 10a) Thrust platforms   | \$7200              |
| 10b) Light pipe, raceway, additional instruments (installation not included)  | \$2725              |

## SUMMER ANYONE?

Spring is almost here, and it's time to start planning for summer. The newsletter staff welcomes your suggestions for summer activities—official programs and unofficial family fun. Send in your family favorites to [jpick@halcyon.com](mailto:jpick@halcyon.com) or mail box in the Office), and we'll publish a list in the April newsletter. Remember: Many popular programs fill up early.

# TOPS STUDENTS ON CHILDREN'S FRINGE STAGE

Four students from TOPS will be appearing in the Broadway Bound Production "Your A Good Man, Charlie Brown" on March 12th at 3:15 p.m. and March 19th. Kel Chima, Brendan Griffin, Justin Savage, and Ben Uri, as well as 30 other elementary and Middle School students will perform this award-winning musical based on the Charles M. Schultz's comic strip "Peanuts."

Both performances will be at the Richard Hugo House, 1634 11th Avenue on Capitol Hill. This production is part of the Children's Fringe, a new "Fringe" effort spotlighting productions featuring children. For information on tickets, contact Fringe at (206) 526-1959 or see their website at <http://www.seattlefringe.org>

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## TUTOR TRAINING AVAILABLE

For parents and students who wish to enhance their tutor skills, free seminars and training are available. These training sessions are also for those who want to tutor but lack the experience.

One option is the Hollywood for Literacy organization. Hollywood for Literacy was organized by various film industry members. The program has grown to a national level including a chapter that works out of Miller Community Center. Hollywood for Literacy provides tutoring for young and old as well as thorough tutor training. The training is available during regular open hours of Monday through Friday 2:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. and Saturday noon-4:00 p.m. No appointment is necessary.

The training program allows individuals to proceed at their own pace.

For more information, contact Tops Parent, Kristi Strickland at [kristi@mikestrickland.com](mailto:kristi@mikestrickland.com) or 285-4863.

Study Buddy is another national tutoring program sponsored by several Jewish organizations that serve all communities. The Study Buddy program provides tutor volunteers as well as training seminars. The training seminars are open to anyone interested. The people at Study Buddy have offered to conduct seminars at TOPS for groups of 10 to 12 people. A specific date for a seminar is currently being sorted out. Watch the Wednesday Take Home letter for more details.

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## TOPS WELCOMES AMERICORPS MEMBER NEESA SONOQUIE

My name is Neesa Sonoquie. I am 24 years old, graduated from high school in 1992, and have since gone to community college and obtained my AA in Arts.

I am from California. I grew up in a small town in the mountains called Westwood. It is an area deep in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and gets lots of snow!

I moved to Seattle from Chester (a small town near Westwood) the day before I began work at TOPS. I had been waitressing, and chose AmeriCorps in order to pursue a more career-oriented field.

My interests are in English, art, and literature. I love to read and write poetry and stories. I hope to pursue a

career in English, possibly writing children's books.

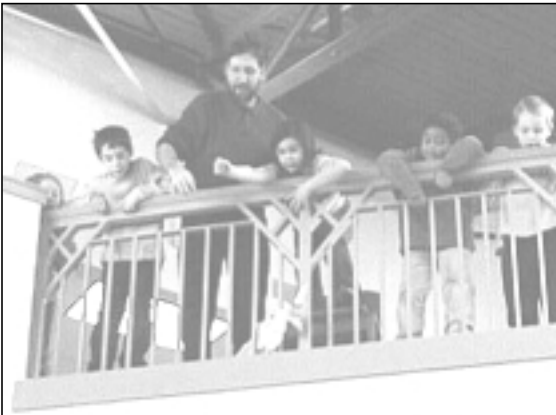
I came to TOPS to see how I feel about the possibility of teaching as a career choice. In my off-time, I like to cook, watch movies, listen to music, and do arts and crafts.

So far I love TOPS—the kids are great, the teachers are great, and Lauren Grinnell, the other AmeriCorps member, and I get along wonderfully. I look forward to spending this year in Seattle—there is so much to do, and the Service Corps offers me many opportunities.

# EGG DROPPING TOPIC

*By Gregory Tuai*

In late January, Middle School science teacher Dan Bloedel, with me as an assistant, taught a TOPIC involving eggs. The goal was to package the eggs so that they wouldn't break when dropped from the balcony in the library. The kids used parachutes, packing foam, packing peanuts, and bags of air (like the Mars Lander a few years ago). Only two out of 12 broke. Quite a good yield!



# TOPS DOUBLE DUTCH REIGNS

*By Don Zemke*

The TOPS Double Dutch teams have been working hard and making great progress toward our goal of competing in the Seattle School District's Double Dutch Challenge and Records Day event on Tuesday, May 2.

Weekly practice is part of our after school sports program. Besides learning to do tricks inside the double ropes, we are improving flexibility, gymnastic skills, and dance.

Special thanks to assistant coaches Erica Badgley and Natalie Springer for consistently volunteering their time to help with the primary group. Also, thanks to BOC Instructional Aid Mercedes Sandoval for helping with our intermediate gram's Mambo dance routine.



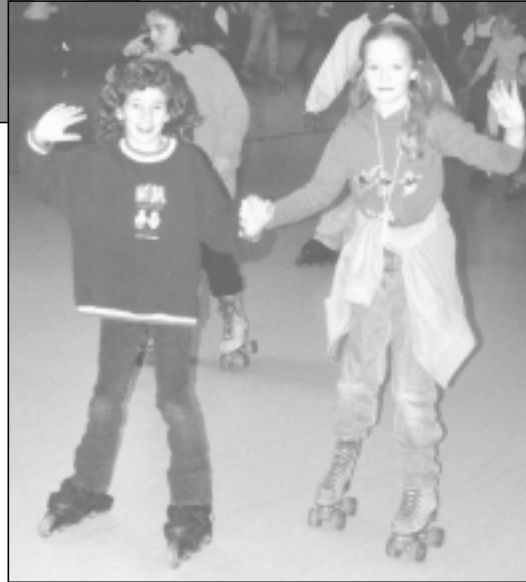
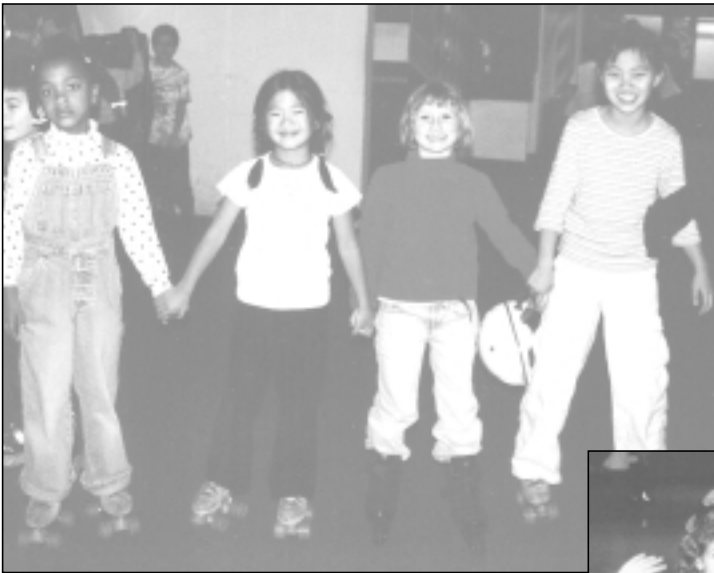
# COMMUNITY AT SKATE KING

*By Joby Moore*

On January 21, our roller-skating experience went well, considering we went with the entire elementary school. The thing that saved us was courtesy and consideration. We had prearranged that the 5th graders would help the kindergartners get their skates on and give one go around the rink. This transformed into a quality of helping that spread everywhere. Children reached out to help others, picked them up from their fall, held their hand for awhile. It was a general sense of caring, so many specific incidents I can't begin to enumerate.

We brought crayons and paper, books, and puzzles, assuming the kindergartners would give up quickly. We didn't use them at all. So many of my class proudly testified that they had gone around the rink three or six or 10 times.

Some proclaimed that they fell a lot. And I responded "That's how you learn." In the end, we all agreed that we had fun at Skate King. This is what community is about: Helping each other triumph.



## FROM SKATE KING TO TOPS GYM

*By Don Zemke*

TOPS elementary students' day at Bellevue's Skate King was a great time! Too many students to list were caught being very helpful with younger and less skilled skaters.

Look forward to skating in the TOPS gym for two weeks beginning March 31. If students have their skates or in-line blades, they can bring them, provided they bring and wear wrist and elbow pads, kneepads, and a helmet.

## YO-YO 2000

*By Eric Herndon and Don Zemke*

TOPS PE has been working on the alternative sport of yo-yo. In February, Yo-yo champion Dale Oliver visited for an assembly featuring incredible tricks, tips on getting started, gender equity, safety, and the science of the yo-yo, including gyroscopic stability, distribution of mass, friction, air resistance, and kinetic energy.



# MS PLAY OPENS TO RAVE REVIEWS



February 11-12 marked the opening of the new TOPS Theater, also known as the gym, with a remarkable performance by TOPS Middle Schoolers of Linda Barry's *The Good Times are Killing Me*. Three performances attracted large crowds to the new space, and everyone came away amazed at the talents of our kids.

Three cheers to the whole cast and to the folks backstage who helped make it all happen.



## A LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHER'S VISION OF LITERACY

By Sally Buckley

When asked recently what inspired her to develop a new unit on the Nez Perce tribe and Chief Joseph for her 7<sup>th</sup> grade students, TOPS Middle School Language Arts teacher Lori Eickelberg responded that one of her chief objectives for her students is to enhance their cultural literacy.

She reflected that Middle School students often seem to have a "big brush" picture of American history—the Colonial Era and the Civil War. Yet they do not recognize the names of Chief Joseph or the Nez Perce tribe, a leader and a people prominent in both past and present Pacific

Northwest affairs. In fact, she continued, other key aspects of an 8<sup>th</sup> grader's cultural preparation should be to recognize and discuss W.E.B. DuBois, Plessy v. Ferguson, segregation, Brown v. Board of

Education, the 1930's Dustbowl, and Japanese internment. Who knows which of these will be her next LA unit?

Ms. Eickelberg's instructional goal in presenting the Nez Perce unit was to introduce her students to the Nez Perce as a group and to help her students see that the Nez Perce were and still are a people of great intelligence and courage whose civil rights were violated as European newcomers took over the Western United States.

She wanted students read a fictional account of a young Nez Perce boy's experience of his people struggle to keep their homeland and their freedom, for knowledge and information, and to understand and analyze. She expects students to draw inferences and take information and facts they have learned about Nez Perce history, culture, and political conditions as they look at a piece of fiction and make a determination as to whether the history of this novel was accurate.

As a continuation, students recently finished making beaded medicine bags in Luzita Roll's art class, assisted by a parent who beads and by samples of Nez Perce beadwork.

### UPCOMING MIDDLE SCHOOL FORUMS

8th grade	February 29 <sup>th</sup>	Parents only
7th grade	March 7 <sup>th</sup>	Parents
6th grade	March 23	Parents only

# GARFIELD GROUP WORKS WITH TOPS KIDS ON IMPORTANT ISSUES

By Tilman Smith

Attending this year's Middle School play, "The Good Times Are Killing Me," was one of the true highlights of my seven years as a TOPS parent. The acting, direction, music, and story came together to create a moving experience for all who attended. But, even more importantly, this play provided an opportunity for a forum in which the entire Middle School was able to begin a discussion about racism.

Taking the lead in this effort was a remarkable group of students from Garfield High School who work collectively to form the Community Relations Program. The program was originally started by a group of Garfield students in 1992, in response to the Rodney King incident and the growing numbers of racial violence. Since then, the program has helped get young people involved in educating and understanding diversity and intercultural issues. Its goal is eliminating cultural dissonance.

Guided by a core of eight Garfield students this year, the Cultural Relations Program provides education, support, and a space for students to learn from one another around issues, such as racism, homophobia, and sexism. With over 100 participants at Garfield, the Program has had a critical impact on the development of a more tolerant and accepting school community.

These topics have a powerful influence in the lives of students, and the Program participants receive intensive training each year to educate themselves in specific areas, as well as to create support groups. This year, 30 or so participants made a commitment to work outside of Garfield High School to provide this same critical guidance to youth throughout Seattle.

## CULTURAL RELATIONS WORKSHOPS AT TOPS

TOPS was fortunate to be able to work with this group on three different occasions in conjunction with the Middle School play. In each instance, the Garfield facilitators provided a comfortable and respectful environment for students to begin a collective understanding of stereotypes, cliques, and racism. With several TOPS alumni in the group, the Garfield students had a solid understanding of our student culture and were able to ask relevant and challenging questions to deepen everyone's understanding of the dynamics of racism.

TOPS Diversity Issues Coalition hopes that our school community will be able to strengthen our relationship with Garfield's Cultural Relations Forum. We hope to work together to create more opportunities for our students to discuss these critical topics, as well as begin to train our own cadre of TOPS facilitators to ensure that these discussions continue for many years to come.

The Garfield students were generous enough to donate their time to TOPS this year, but we will seek funding for future training sessions so we can aid their group in its efforts to be financially sound enough to remain a resource in the Seattle community. Please call EunJean Song at 720-4552 for more information or if you would like to donate to this vibrant and inspirational group.



TOPS MIDDLE SCHOOL ART

# INTERVIEW WITH VICTOR LARSON ON PARENT/CHILD FORUMS

By Gwen Demombynes

Victor Larson led three parent/child forums this last semester, one for each grade of Middle School. He will conduct three more before the end of the year. I interviewed him to see how he regarded this first series.

**GWEN:** Did the first round of forums meet your expectations?

**VICTOR:** Yes, I was pleased. The 7th grade had a particularly good turn out. It would have been better with a wider representation in the 6th grade meeting because it was all

boys. You get a certain flavor of questions when it is all boys. There was a good turn out with the 8th grade class as well. You know, you always want more people. The 7th grade class had a turn out with the 8th grade meeting as well.

I think you have to look at it as a two- or three-year project, where it becomes part of the culture of the school for the parents and kids to get together in a relatively organized way. That way a dialogue can begin throughout the Middle School on the questions, both serious and non-serious, that students and parents might have for each other. So I think it was a really good beginning, and we'll have another series of meetings toward the end of the year.

**G:** For those who haven't been able to attend, could you recap the purpose of the forums?

**V:** I think the purpose of the forums is to provide an experience where students and parents begin a dialogue, with each other, about concerns that they have. Whether the meeting is lively, or difficult, or even contentious, is not so much the point. What I'm really after is that the experience of coming together will provoke further conversation between the parent and the student. So that even coming to a meeting, and watching what the concerns of the students in general are, or, listening to the questions that were asked by the parents, would provoke some thoughts or feelings that hopefully would be discussed with your child after the meeting was over. It's not so much what exactly happens *at* the meeting, but what happens *after* the meeting. That's the reason we would want a larger participation.

My experience with this type of meeting is that when the word gets out, and parents talk to other parents, then participation goes up. I would hope, that for parents who weren't there, they would be curious enough to show up next time, to see what their peers as parents are concerned with, and what the students are concerned with as well.

**G:** There were some concerns expressed by the parents after the 8th grade forum that a small group of kids dominated the conversation and prevented a broader discourse. Did you see that as the case, and what is your response to those concerns?

**V:** Certainly the 8th grade meeting was the most difficult meeting that we had with regards to the expression of what might be called "negative" thoughts or feelings that the kids had.

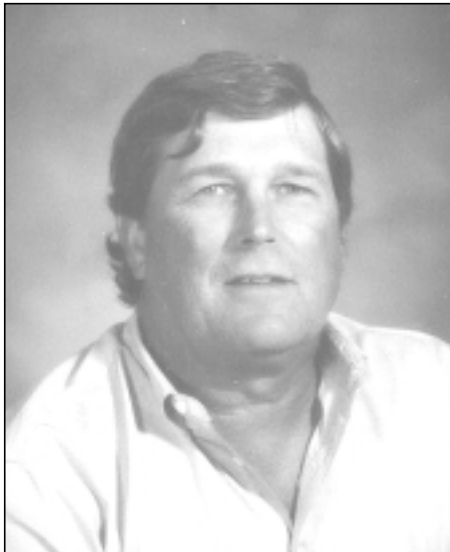
**G:** About their parents?

**V:** Yes. Some of those negative feelings did dominate the beginning of the meeting, particularly with regard to how some students wanted their parents *not* to be involved in their lives at all. I think, had I known the community better and had it been a meeting further on down the road, it would have been easier to move off that topic onto others.

I think that the kids who dominated the meeting may, in fact, be the kids who dominate the overall thinking of the 8th grade class. I think it was important to have those feelings aired in a public way. I would hope that the parents who felt it was a difficult meeting would be provoked to further conversation with their children. Which, of course, is the point.

As I said, even difficult meetings can have profound effects on people in the community, especially if you look at it in terms of the kind of discourse that comes out of the meeting. Even if parents talk amongst themselves about how difficult that experience was, and wanted to make it different, I would hope they would come to the next meeting and voice their concerns. Because what we're really doing here is trying to begin to build a culture where a public discourse about developmental issues can be the norm in the community. And I think the best way to do that is to include both parents and students in a public forum. Could the meeting have been handled better? Absolutely. Can any meeting be handled better? Absolutely. Will it be different next time? Most assuredly.

**G:** Your social work experience, it seems, would help you understand that some parents come to meetings, such as a forum, because they are having difficulty communicating with their children, especially at this age group, around these kinds of topics. Some parents *may* want some guidance on these issues, perhaps someone outside the family structure, to suggest to the child that there are other ways of looking at things, or to even tell the students to "get a grip" and face reality. How would you respond to those desires from parents?



**V:** I truly believe that when 7th, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9th grade students in groups, both in classrooms and other settings, express negative feelings about adults, they are clearly being told over and over again that they need to be more civilized, to have more respect, to “get a grip,” as you put it, or to not be quite so surly.

Had I stood up and said, “O.K. you guys, it’s time to get a grip and stop being irritating,” I would have fallen into the group of adults who do that on a consistent basis, both at school and at social events. Even though it could have been more gently directed, perhaps in a more positive direction, I think it is important to have a conversation play out even if it plays out negatively.

So, do I have expertise in helping individuals on how to have better communication with their children? Yes. But the meeting is not set up for me to show my skills and come up with all the answers. The point of the meeting is to begin a dialogue with your child. If that happens, even if a dialogue happens between other parents, then the meeting was successful. The meetings are not designed to be “parent education.” They are not designed for me to show all of my wonderful knowledge I have learned over the years. The meetings are designed to be a forum. The dialogue that is important is the one between parents and their kids.

**G:** You told me that the 6th grade meeting was interesting, because clearly the students had not begun to separate from their parents.

**V:** I wouldn’t use the term “separate” from their parents. I would use the terminology “to be aware of the judgement of their peers.” No self-respecting 8th grader would come into a meeting of parents and students and sit with their parents. They would be compelled by their development, and by their social awareness of the dynamic of the group, to find a peer or group of peers to attach to. That process had not developed in the 6th grade yet, so you saw parents and students sitting together at the beginning of the meeting. It’s not something I’ve ever seen in 7th grade meetings.

What that means to me is that the process of development that is on-going in the Middle School years, in this particular group of students at this particular meeting, had not progressed to the point where peer interaction with any of the other kids was stronger than the child’s need to stay attached to the parents. This is not a negative, just an observation. I thought it was quite beautiful. But I would bet my house, that if we had the same meeting when they are 7th graders, you would not see many kids sitting with their parents. That’s another reason for the forums, to watch development as it happens, so parents can have a concept that their children are moving through this world and rapidly changing. This necessitates the parents’ ability to develop new ways of continuing the dialogue with their student, so that the connection that fuels adolescent development is not broken. *There is no*

*question* that adult influence in adolescent development is the crucial factor with regards to helping kids avoid risk factors.

**G:** The 6th grade class is a target class for you then, because you might participate in this dialogue development for the longest time, and you are catching them right at the moment of change.

**V:** Yes, and I’m looking forward to continuing this on for the next three years. Hopefully, having this dialogue between parents and students will assist in helping parents think about how their kids are changing and how parents need to develop ways of maintaining connection.

By the way, connection doesn’t mean maintaining connection at the expense of limits. It just means that the dilemma parents face, particularly in the Middle School years, is how you maintain connection and set limits at the same time.

**G:** What would be your ideal scenario for the last three forums?

**V:** In my mind, the next 6th grade forum should build upon what came out of the first forum, which is: the significance of peer development is something that will come. I think building on the 7th grade forum would be a continuation of the first one, maybe different questions would be asked, and other parents and students would come through.

The 8th grade forum may need to be a parent-only forum, in the sense that some of the difficult issues that were raised may need to be discussed with the parents, with an eye toward the 9th grade. I think the 8th grade class is beginning to look toward high school, and for some parents that is scary, and for others it’s a continuation of the same thing.

All that being said, what I would hope for would be for greater participation, a greater turn out. If anyone has any ideas, i.e., Should these forums be held on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, etc., I am willing to accommodate any ideas on how to build up greater participation. Ultimately, the idea is to get as many parents and students as possible so the conversation really becomes community-wide. The whole idea of the Middle School grant and these forums is to help the issues of adolescent development be recognized in the larger culture of the school.

*If you have questions, Victor can be reached at (206) 522-5084.*

## **CHESSE SOFTWARE IN THE LIBRARY**

Thanks to the efforts of Mark Morales, able leader of the TOPS Chess Club, a grant has paid for instructional software now on the computers in the library. There’s something for all levels, so encourage your kids to take advantage of this great new resource.

# MEET YOUR TEACHERS

Each month during the 1999-2000 school year, the TOPS Newsletter is meeting the people most directly involved in your child's education. In this issue, Jim Wells continues our series with 6th grade teachers Lana Fuller and Julie Trout.

## LANA FULLER

**TOPS NEWSLETTER:** Can you tell us about your path to teaching?

**LANA FULLER:** Most of the jobs I've had since college have been related to teaching in some way. I have worked as a naturalist in Glacier National Park, as a high-school trail crew leader for the Student Conservation Association, and in other similar positions. Finally I decided I needed to move from seasonal positions into the world of "real" jobs. When I was in school for my certificate, I had my student internship with Nani Castor-Peck at TOPS. It was a very positive experience, and from then on I was interested in working here at TOPS.

**TN:** What's it like having your own class of students for the first time?

**LF:** I like the fact that no two days are ever exactly the same. Teaching is a job that makes you think on your feet, mostly because you are dealing with up to thirty-two individuals at any one time. You never quite know what is going to happen next. I love the learning that goes along with teaching. I love watching the students learn, especially when they have "aha!" moments. Also, I am constantly learning more about what I teach, about my students, and myself.

**TN:** How can you take advantage of the new space here at TOPS?

**LF:** I plan to give my sixth graders an opportunity to use the science lab, so they can get a jumpstart on learning to use some of the equipment. They seem very excited about this prospect. Also, there will be plenty of opportunity to use the school grounds for ecological research next year.

**TN:** Can you tell us how you address diversity issues in your curriculum?

**LF:** I don't yet feel that I address diversity as well as I could, but I expect this to come in time. One approach I'll take will be to have my students research scientists. Among other things they'll discover from this is that scientists come from many different backgrounds. I also plan to discuss the use of math in different cultures. I am looking for books that handle this well on a middle school level, and I'm certainly open to ideas on how to present this material.

**TN:** How do you include parents in your classroom?

**LF:** I am still in the process of figuring that out. As a first-year teacher, I'm still working out my own routines, and it is hard to have any helpers until those routines are

set. In the near future, parents will be helping me set up the materials we will be using for a new unit on plants and plant growth. A parent who is a plant expert will be coming in to discuss plants with the students over the next few weeks. Also, in math, the sixth graders currently have an assignment to redecorate the interior of their rooms at home. Any parents who work in interior design, general contracting, or with building or decorating materials are welcome to visit the classroom and give the students some tips.

**TN:** As a first-year teacher, what are some of the first goals you've set for yourself?

**LF:** My goals are pretty basic so far. Right now I'm just trying to keep my head above water, teach to the best of my ability, and still have some sort of a life for myself outside of school!

**TN:** What's your life like outside of TOPS?

**LF:** My outside interests are just that. I love being outside, whether it is gardening, biking to work, cross-country skiing, birdwatching, hiking, rafting, and so on.

## JULIE TROUT

**TN:** What drew you to TOPS or to teaching in general?

**JULIE TROUT:** I have always had a special connection with kids. My partner often claims that I am a "kid magnet"—perhaps because I am somewhat small and tend to be rather mischievous. I was drawn to teaching through a natural progression of experiencing a variety of careers that led me to teaching at just the right time in my life. I was also drawn to teaching out of sheer determination that my teaching would bring positive experiences in learning for students.

**TN:** What do you like about teaching?

**JT:** I love working with young people and feeling their positive vibe. I also love that one never knows what to expect and that every day is different and full of adventure. I will let you in on a little secret, though: The students are actually the teachers, and I am the student.

**TN:** Any changes you've seen in the kids over the last few years?

**JT:** I am fortunate to be in a position of working with students I had when they were in 4th and 5th grades. I enjoy seeing how their core personalities have blossomed, and I enjoy seeing them branch out and take issues to a deeper level.

*continued on page 13*

# FIFTH GRADE & TECHNOLOGY

By Kevin Crozier

This year's fifth grade students are fortunate to have technology available for use in our Literature and Social Studies classes. With the help of the Gates Foundation and our school Site Council, each group of four students has the use of an iMac computer, a scanner, a networked printer, various software, and high-speed Internet access.

So far, we have used the technology for Internet research, accessing encyclopedia CD's, PowerPoint presentations, working with pictures/graphics, writing reports, enhancing mapping skills, and uploading wonderful poems and favorite links on individual WebPages. You can view them at [http://www.psesd.org/~kcrozier/tops\\_students.htm](http://www.psesd.org/~kcrozier/tops_students.htm)

The students have been able to practice and improve their reading skills by analyzing online and CD data. They have honed their writing skills via the use of word processing and boosted their communication skills via presentations to the class. They have also enhanced their knowledge of our country's history via research, analysis, and synthesis of data.

I have found the opportunity to use fast and efficient computers, along with the accompanying technology, very rewarding. It has helped me toward my goal of assisting fifth graders to reach their learning benchmarks while using "the tools of tomorrow."

Please feel welcome to visit my classroom any time of the school day, see the fifth grade students, and join in the learning.

*Teachers, continued from page 6*

**TN:** Can you tell us how you address diversity issues in your classroom?

**JT:** Diversity is the fuel for my teaching. My love for travel and experiencing different cultures allows me to thread diversity throughout my core curriculum via the arts and literature. Diversity is really a huge word and encompasses many things. I try to approach diversity in learning styles as well as cultural backgrounds. I am dedicated to seeking authentic resources to bring the world into my classroom so my students can make the world their classroom.

**TN:** What do you think about the new space we have this year?

**JT:** Ahhh, the library. Need I say more?

**TN:** What are your philosophy and goals both in and out of the classroom?

**JT:** I have a rule in my classroom that if you say anything negative about yourself or others, you must say two positives. This assists me in my goal to make the environment a positive and safe one for all students. I also make sure every day to make some personal connection with each student. Of course, I should mention that my latest and most physically obvious goal in the near future is having a natural childbirth in April. Assisting me in that will be the amazing midwife, TOPS parent-extraordinaire Michelle Sarju.

**TN:** How can parents help out in your classroom?

**JT:** I think parenting is the most important job when it comes to our future as a society. So the most effective way parents can help me in my classroom is to spend quality time with their kids, share a few laughs, and talk about issues that are important in their—and their kids'—lives.

**TN:** What are your interests away from TOPS?

**JT:** Painting, running, swimming, yoga, performing with a dance group (The Samadhi Yoginis), and travel. I am quite proud of the fact I can stand on my head and actually spin all the way around.



**TOPS MIDDLE  
SCHOOL ART**

# CAMP TOPS 2000

By Penny Bolton

Sitting on the beach at Camp Casey with a handful of 5<sup>th</sup> grade kids, seeing who could stack the highest pile of flat beach rocks while the great blue herons stroll along the sand. Hiking up Mt. Constitution in March to find an inch of snow on the top! Getting up early to cook breakfast for 65 kids and 10 parents . . . Ten pounds of bacon and gallons of pancake mix. Cooked up with increasing skill by 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Playing "Capture the Flag" with 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders at Camp Warm Beach. Learning how to make a basket, do groovy tie-dye and dye with natural plants we found in the woods. Doing a "blind walk" with Mr. Bloedel . . . a cold March night in the dark, small groups of kids trying to cooperate enough in the dark to navigate a string-marked course they can't see.

All of these are TOPS camping moments. Even though there is no official camping "program" at TOPS, all grade levels participate in a camp experience appropriate to their age. Mr. Bloedel, the Middle School science teacher, organizes the Middle School camps, and each year the kids take on more responsibility for cooking and chores. Parents are there to support the kids in getting things done. In the lower grades, teachers or groups of parents organize the details.

June ?      K-2<sup>nd</sup> grades go to Camp Long in West Seattle for the day

June 8-9      3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grades go to Camp Warm Beach on Camano Island for one night.

June 7-9      5<sup>th</sup> grade goes to Camp Kirby on Samish Island near Mt. Vernon for two nights.

March 29-31      6<sup>th</sup> grade goes to Camp Moran on Orcas Island for two nights.

May -2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> week      7<sup>th</sup> grade does the Ape Caves and Mt. St. Helens for 2 nights.

June ?      8<sup>th</sup> grade goes to Deception Pass.

Camp is a time for kids, teachers, and some parents to do something outside of the classroom together—go for walks, sing songs and do silly skits, cook, learn about the flora and fauna of Puget Sound country, work on TOPICS type projects.

Each grade level needs parents to help plan and to chaperone these trips. The lower grades can order food from the camps or parents can do the cooking. The Middle School classes take care of their own cooking with the help and planning of parents. Except for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, all classes stay in cabins—some heated, some not. Transportation is usually by school or charter buses. All of this costs money, but the usual TOPS field trip policy apply—if you can pay, please do. If it's too much for your family to pay, let the planners know. We always include scholarships in our pricing. The costs every year range from \$20 to \$75 per kid depending on transportation and food arrangements.

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## ADDRESSING BIAS AND HATE CRIMES

By Julie Pickering

The February meeting of the Diversity Issues Coalition featured a talk by Erik Ward, Regional Coordinator of the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment. Erik discussed the organization's work, the nature of bias in schools and the larger community, and networking opportunities in the community.

Eric likened the spread of bias and hate to the dissemination of haute couture to the broader consumer market. The outfits worn in fashion shows often look too outlandish to wear, but it isn't long before they begin to show up on store racks around America. Similarly, the seemingly wacky ideas of extremists gradually make their way into the mainstream if we don't consider what they mean and respond effectively. Erik explained that his work, and ours, is thinking about what it means to be an American and asking who is going to define what it means.

Erik closed his presentation with a brief rundown of networking opportunities in our community—groups that we can access for help in our efforts to encourage openness and defend against bigotry and stereotypes. The Diversity Issues Coalition looks forward to hearing from Erik again. He and his organization are great resources for TOPS and other schools.

For more information, contact the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment at (206) 233-9136. The next meeting of the Diversity Issues Coalition is set for March 8 (W) at 7 p.m. in Tal Troy's room on the first floor of the Middle School building.



Erik Ward speaks to Diversity Issue Coalition.

The coalition comprises over 250 human rights groups, local organizations, civic groups, and agencies working together to honor diversity, overcome hate group activity, and promote legislation. Its core focus is on youth at the Middle and High School levels. Erik described many of the coalition's activities and a few of his own experiences in the field.

# JULIE TROUT: MAKING DIVERSITY HAPPEN!

By Sandra Hinojosa  
Co-Facilitator, Diversity Issues Coalition

The TOPS Diversity Issues Coalition is up and running! We have begun the process of identifying some of our main objectives, and now it is time to buckle down and get to work!

Some of you may have read in previous newsletters that one of the main goals of the Coalition is to identify and celebrate places in the TOPS community where issues of diversity are being addressed with success. One such place is on the second floor of the Middle School, in Julie Trout's 6<sup>th</sup> grade class.

Those of you who have had the privilege of having a child in Julie's class, either in this, her first year as our 6<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts/Social Studies teacher, or in her previous incarnation as a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, probably already know that her work is a shining example of how diversity can be seamlessly incorporated into a curriculum.

Last year when one of my children was in Julie's 4<sup>th</sup> grade class, I found myself consistently impressed with the way that diversity was infused into every aspect of the daily learning process. Whether it is in the literature that is read, the guest professionals who work with the children on special projects, holiday celebrations, or math textbooks, every child in Julie's classroom can look

around and see themselves represented in this learning community in a very tangible way.

Recently I sat down with Julie to talk about how and why she makes diversity a daily part of her curriculum. She explained that meeting this challenge is what keeps her passionate about teaching. Julie believes that it is vital to the success of every student that they see people who look like them, their families, and their classmates represented in a natural free-flowing way in their classroom. Although finding good materials that reflect our diverse society does take some effort on the part of the educator, Julie remains committed to this goal and is always looking for new and better texts that will foster a healthy self-esteem and help all our children excel.

Perhaps the next time you are at TOPS, you can swing by and see what's going on in Julie's room. We almost hope that you won't be able to tell where the three R's stop and the diversity lesson begins, because quite frankly, that is the point!



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## VOLUNTEER JOB OPPORTUNITY FOR NEXT YEAR: NO BAKE BAKE SALE CHAIRPERSON

By Sue Wardle

Looking for an easy job with lots of flexibility and only one deadline? It's fun to thank people who support our school financially, and we have a job where you can do just that: No Bake Bake Sale Coordinator for 2000.

If you like to delegate, it's only 15 hours a month for a few months beginning in October. If you like to do all the work yourself, it's about 30 hours a month from October

through January. You don't need to reinvent the wheel; a good mentor-baker and "cookbook" are available.

Most of the work involves getting things printed, coordinating the stuffing, buying postage stamps, and sending out thank-you notes. Finance Committee deposits all the checks. Contact Sue Wardle at 547-6097 or e-mail her at [jaywardle@prodigy.net](mailto:jaywardle@prodigy.net).

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## 2000 TOPS CALENDAR

### MARCH

6-31 ..... ITBS testing (4 weeks)  
8 (W) ..... Site Council Meeting 5-7 p.m.  
8 (W) ..... Diversity Issues Coalition Meeting,  
7-8:30 p.m.  
10 (F) ..... Teacher workshops. No school  
17 (F) ..... End of 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester (K-5)  
18 (Sa) ..... TOPS Auction, Asian Resource  
Center  
22 (W) ..... *The Midwife's Apprentice*, SCT ,  
Grades 2-6, 10:30 p.m.  
24 (F) ..... K-5 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester report cards  
come out

### APRIL

5 (W) ..... Site Council Meeting 5-7 p.m.  
5 (W) ..... Diversity Issues Coalition Meeting,  
7-8:30 p.m.  
7 (F) ..... End of 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter (Middle School)  
10-14 (M-F) .. Spring break  
24-May 12.. WASL testing

### MAY

2 (Tu) ..... Class picture day  
2 (Tu) ..... Double Dutch Challenge and  
Records Day  
4 (Th) ..... All School Diversity Celebration  
6-9 p.m.  
10 (W) ..... Site Council Meeting 5-7 p.m.  
10 (W) ..... Diversity Issues Coalition Meeting,  
7-8:30 p.m.  
10 (W) ..... *When I Grow Up*, SCT , Grades 2-6,  
10:30 p.m.  
12 (F) ..... Teacher workshops. No school  
29 (M) ..... Memorial Day. No school

### JUNE

2 (F) ..... Art Walk  
2-3 (F-S) .... Elementary school play—*James and  
the Giant Peach*  
7 (W) ..... Site Council Meeting 5-7 p.m.  
7 (W) ..... Diversity Issues Coalition Meeting,  
7-8:30 p.m.  
11 (Su) ..... Site Council Retreat  
16 (F) ..... Last student day  
19 (M) ..... Last teacher day

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