

this month at

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stoneridge

CHILDREN'S MONTESSORI SCHOOL

"Dawn of an Era"

By Rick Boomer, Head Teacher, UE A

The students of UE A, after a semester studying the U.S. Government and Constitution, graciously agreed to let me out of the classroom for a couple of days to visit the capital and experience the weekend there with my family.

A little utopia existed in Washington D.C. on Inauguration Weekend. A great buoyancy of mood prevailed, with high energy, and a clear and common understanding of the historic proportions of this event by residents and visitors alike. On the days prior to the inauguration, the sidewalks were overcrowded with friendly gestures and smiling kindnesses. Eyes met, grins formed, and knowing, spirited nods were repeatedly exchanged by strangers of every skin color. A palpable pride permeated the atmosphere. It was a pride and admiration arising partly from an appreciation that the people of the United States had finally overcome another stubborn barrier to achieving this nation's full promise. Stoneridge parent Jay Panetta, who was

also in the capital with his family, made the following eloquent assessment, "Elation was the governing emotion throughout the city. And the four-day revel was possibly the most integrated celebration in the history of the Republic."

As for our small family, we stayed with a friend on V Street at 14th NW. Great African American history resides everywhere you look in this area. The neighborhood is home to the oldest black Catholic church in America and the house where Duke Ellington grew up, and it was victim to great fires during the riots after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. Monday night the streets were closed to cars and were packed with people. Drummers pounded an invigorating percussive rhythm on the corners. For block after block, street vendors sold every Obama product imaginable from hats and buttons, posters and calendars to T-shirts socks, wristwatches, and even lampshades. Spontaneous chants of "Oh-Bah-Ma" erupted along the avenues and in the public houses. Enormous banners and bunting both welcoming and thanking the

new President were hanging in gallerias, broadly draped across massive hotel facades, and taped inside the windows of the smallest shops. Of course, the Stars and Stripes flew everywhere.

We joined 1.8

million others on the Mall for Tuesday's inauguration. A cab driver told me he had started taking people down around 4 am, and that, "In thirty years, I ain't never seen nothin'



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Calendar at-a-glance

CH/K Room Changeover Day - Friday, January 30, 11:30 am dismissal. There will be no Kindergarten class or Extended Day Program for all CH and K students.

Parent Education Series - Charles Terranova, "Children: Stewards of Our World," about Stoneridge's sustainability curriculum. Thursday, February 5, 7:30 pm. (see page 5)

Basketball Game - Wednesday, February 3 at Glen Urquhart. Boys: 3:45 pm and Girls: 4:45 pm

Coffee with Alan and Camilla - Wednesday, February 4, 8:30 am, Library. See page 2 for details.

Re-enrollment contracts and deposit due - Friday, February 6.

No School for TH and CH students - Monday, February 9 due to Applicant Visiting Day for prospective students.

Lower Elementary Valentine's Breakfast - Thursday, February 12, in the multipurpose room.

February Vacation - Monday, February 16 through Friday, February 20.

Parent Education Series, with Jan Schlichtmann, "Confessions of An Environmental Warrior" - Tuesday, February 24, Brown Bag Dinner 6:15 pm, talk 7:30 pm. More information to come.

Parent/Teacher conferences - Early dismissal, Thursday, March 5. **No School** Friday, March 6.

SSAT for MS Students - Saturday, March 7, 8:00-1:00 pm.

Middle School Host Students from Mexico - Saturday, March 14 - March 28.

Bread Drive: Beverly Bootstraps - February 9-13. See page 6 for details.



Stoneridge Next Year?

Alan Feldman, Head of School

When I sit down to write my column, as I do on this snowy day, I always ask myself two related questions, What is likely on the minds of Stoneridge parents right now? What is on my mind?

Today, these are easy questions to answer. With re-enrollment contracts sitting on the desks of our families—due back to the School in a week—the question likely on the minds of many parents is, *Am I ready to sign?* Parents signing the contract is certainly on my mind!

I have talked with over a dozen families during the course of January about this commitment they are about to make. This year especially, when all of us are being cautious with our financial decisions, this decision is one being thought out with even more care. So, let me address the issue, then: *Why sign and return the contract?* Or put another way, *What is special about the education my child receives at Stoneridge?*

I imagined writing this column with a list of top ten reasons, in the style of David Letterman. 10, 9, 8... But nine of the reasons, while important, are not nearly as important as Reason Number 1:

Our faculty is outstanding.

This assertion reflects my experience at Stoneridge, and I know that the vast majority of parents, given a moment to reflect on this, will agree.

Why do I place such great emphasis on faculty? You won't be surprised to learn that research says your child's teacher matters more than anything else about his or her education. This general finding was underscored by a survey of current and prospective parents done last spring by a consortium of Montessori schools, which indicated that the quality of the teachers was parents' top reason for being at an independent school.

Let me say it again: *Our faculty is outstanding.* Not just OK. Not just good. Not just very good. *Truly outstanding.*

I'm not alone in recognizing how outstand-

ing our Stoneridge faculty are. Hardly a day goes by without a parent giving me this same message. Not mild words of praise, but deep appreciation for seeing the effects of the faculty's work with their child.

Parents see their highest hopes for their child's relationship to learning and to their peer group being realized. Parents who have the patience and confidence to see the educational process through—which can sometimes require several years—are always pleased with their child's development. Yes, always! Anyone who has a child in our Middle School—or spent time in our Middle School classroom—sees ample evidence of the maturity and purposefulness of our students. Each and every one.

This transformative power of our teachers is evident to me every day as I sit in classrooms and talk with teachers about their children. It was underlined earlier this month as I read over the progress reports that the teachers had written. In case after case, I was delighted to see enormous leaps. Some of these leaps:

- a non-reader, after a year of intensive tutoring, cracking the reading code;
- a perpetually distracted student suddenly "getting it" and becoming excited about his own learning;
- a socially awkward student taking important first steps into the social world of her peers;
- two MS students moving from being enthusiastic writers to being published authors (see story on page 10).

Donald Schön, an organizational development expert who authored *The Reflective Practitioner*, defined professionals as people who are continually learning—from workshops and courses as well as from their own experience: not just learning, but solving new problems every day. Our teachers are professional in exactly this sense: they are continually reaching beyond their Montessori training to understand and meet the needs of each one of their children. As they acquire additional understandings, they



integrate their new knowledge into the developmental framework and curriculum that they acquired in Montessori training. Writers' Workshop, Literature Circles ("Lit Os"), inquiry-based mathematics from the *Impact Math* and *Investigations* mathematics curricula, guided reading with an emphasis on fluency and comprehension, careful attention to spelling, knowledge of the needs of children with a variety of social and learning issues, ability to work with outside experts—all of these represent specific ways that faculty bring the very best in contemporary educational thinking to their classrooms.

Charles and I play a supportive role for the faculty by placing professional development at the heart of the teacher evaluation process. Called "Meaningful Faculty Evaluation," the professional development and evaluation program that we formalized last spring asks every faculty member to set his or her own learning goals for the year for which they are accountable. The Board provides the critical financial support for this active program of faculty professional development.

In another week, I expect I'll have a thick folder of re-enrollment contracts on my desk to sign. As I sign each one, I'll pause and think about *your* child and the progress he or she has made and is about to make. Each child is a unique story, and we are as proud as you are about your child's ongoing transformation at Stoneridge.

Coffee with Alan and Camilla

Wednesday, February 4, 8:30 am

Have you had some curriculum question on your mind? Thinking what the future holds for Stoneridge? Want to discuss an idea you have about our community and school with Alan and Camilla?

Please join them on Wednesday morning at 8:30 in the library for informal open meeting and a good cup of coffee. See you there.



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like this. People comin' from everywhere. Seattle. California. Minnesota." Even though the weather was a cold, blustery 25 degrees, the sun did break through the thin, high clouds. There was also warmth to be found in the crowd's enthusiasm. When the Jumbotron (enormous outdoor TV screens) displayed Malia and Sasha walking to the Capitol balcony in their adorable, candy-colored J.Crew outfits, the throngs on the mall whooped and cheered. Finally the momentous occasion arrived. When Barack Obama swore his oath of office, hundreds of thousands of onlookers on the mall and, I imagine, hundreds of millions of others around the world, were united in hopeful and reverent silence. Then, people of all colors began roaring, crying, kissing, dancing, screaming, fainting, jumping, hugging.

A headline from the Washington Post the next day aptly read, "A Vast, Diverse Sea of Humanity Celebrates the Dawn of an Era." It felt wonderful to be a drop in that ocean.

Our Turn: Mexican Exchange

Amelia, Middle School Student

Last year the Middle School class had the opportunity to visit another country. We stayed with Mexican students at their houses and went to school with them. We experienced their culture first hand, and were fully immersed in their way of life. We had to speak another language, find out the different customs and expectations of someone our age in such a different world. We were the foreigners, alone and wide eyed with wonder at the realization that somewhere not so far away a world exists that is so vastly different that it takes actually being there to comprehend it.

This year we are not the gawking strangers. The time has come for us to have a different kind of experience; one that may seem less of an adventure, but one that is a truly more difficult thing to accomplish: Sharing our culture with students from Mexico. The Middle School will be hosting students from Mexico this March. Eight (possibly ten) students will be coming from the Apostòlica

School in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, from March 14th to the 28th. They will attend school with us during the day and stay at students' houses at night. We are planning to have another raffle to raise money for the students. Proposed activities include watching sports games, performing the Winter Play that was written by two of our students, visiting historical sights and visiting the Audubon sanctuary. Anyone who is interested in sharing possible activities for us to do with the Mexican students is welcome to do so. Ideas can be proposed to the Middle Schoolers and teachers.

We are excited to now be the ones who share our American customs and traditions, history and government, its language and arts... even as we are still finding all of this out for ourselves. We will be in charge of a person, making sure that they understand what we say and are happy and feel welcome without overwhelming them. We have to give them a view of a stunningly different world and at the same time make them feel safe and at home. We need to make sure they eat and sleep well, and that they don't get homesick. We need to stop just asking questions and for the first time begin answering them. We are about to undergo a life altering transformation, one that we will remember and take something from for years and years to come.

Trustee Update Thinking Diversity

Melissa Dimond, Board Member

In the fall of 2007, parents, faculty, and members of the Board assembled at the first meeting of the SCMS Diversity Committee. Our purpose is linked directly to the school's strategic plan, which outlines the objective to "enhance the educational experience of our students, to foster tolerance and understanding, and to prepare our students to successfully navigate the world beyond Stoneridge". I have opted to be part of the Committee both for professional and personal reasons. Professionally, I am fortunate to work at The Food Project, a setting where teenagers from all walks of life come together to learn about themselves and

make a difference in their community. At my job, I am struck daily by the depth of the learning that happens for young people in this environment. Personally, as a member of the SCMS community and as a mom, I want my son and the students around him to have the benefit of this same kind of learning. In our world today, we are consistently reminded of the ways in which "diversity" is the healthiest or most protective path. A diverse financial portfolio is the most robust way to guarantee earnings over time. A diverse ecosystem is the most likely one to ward off disease and the harmful effects of draught or flood. So how, I wonder, can this same concept play out meaningfully in an educational setting – when we are talking about people?

Stoneridge is a school where creative problem solving is highly valued and where student initiated work is the norm rather than the exception. Particularly in a school where students' ideas and perspectives are so much a part of the educational culture, diversity is truly an asset. Our children's learning will be broader and deeper when the room is full of as many viewpoints as possible. In my work setting, we often talk about "cross cultural" experiences, and that terminology sits well with me because "culture" can mean a lot of things. It gives us room to talk about where people live, where our ancestors are from, what languages we speak, the music we listen to, what foods we eat. Over the course of the coming months and years, the Diversity Committee and the Board of Trustees will be looking at ways to broaden Stoneridge students' experiences by giving them the opportunity for meaningful cross-cultural connections. And this can happen both within our current classrooms and outside of them. If you have any ideas, comments, or questions to share we welcome them. Do not hesitate to email or call me. I look forward to it.

Members of the Diversity Committee include Melissa Dimond (parent, trustee and co-chair), Bella Jackson (parent and co-chair), Alan Feldman (head of school), Chris Ney (parent), Susan Steiner (parent), Anne-Seymour St. John (parent and board chair), Catherine Cordova (parent) and Victor Young (faculty).



“Great Job!” and Other Dangerous Phrases

—Michelle Mustone, Stoneridge Parent

On Saturday January 24, education reform advocate Alfie Kohn spoke to an assembly of 400 Montessori teachers at the conference for Montessori Schools of Massachusetts Annual Conference. He talked at the Wax Academic Center at Endicott College. The topic of his presentation was, “Children and Choices: Rethinking Control, Supporting Autonomy.” Stoneridge hosted the conference this year, and over 25 Stoneridge faculty and administration and a handful of parent volunteers were in attendance. Kohn’s presentation was very well received by the large audience.

Kohn opened his talk describing a study that attempted to measure the effect that children’s choice doing a task had on the final product. Children were told they would be creating a collage. Some were told they could choose the materials they would utilize in the project and for some the materials were mandated. For example, a child would come in the room and choose whatever he wanted from an array of materials. The second child was then given the materials the first child had chosen and instructed to create a collage. Each pair of children were treated this way to create two groups: one with maximum autonomy and one with minimal autonomy. The collages were collected and a panel of artists, unaware of the purpose of the study or instructions given to the children, judged the works for level of creativity. The collages of the children who were allowed free choice of available materials were judged consistently “more creative” than the collages of the children who were given no choice of their materials. Kohn asked the audience to consider why they thought this was the result. Some in the audience explained that the creative process started at the moment a student chose their materials, so choice enhanced the creative process. Others thought the students who chose the materials were more invested in the project.

Building on this evidence of the importance of authentic choice, Kohn focused on how children could be given authentic choice in a classroom setting to increase learning. He

spoke about the necessity of faculty listening to children and using the children’s questions and curiosity to increase learning. He gave the example of a teacher allowing circle time to become a vehicle for deciding on the lessons of the day or days to come rather than just a time to greet children. Kohn related the example of a student during circle saying, “My cat has been really tired lately. We had thought he was a boy, but we found out the cat was a girl, ‘cause she had kittens yesterday. I thought kittens were cute but when they came out they were pink and wrinkly and she licked them.” Another student chimes in, “Yeah, I saw kittens and they didn’t have their eyes open yet!” Another commented on cats, “My mom says tigers are cats, just bigger, but still cats. Is that true?” Kohn pointed out that this is not the moment to say, “OK, circle time is ending, and we have to start studying whales.” Be flexible enough to turn your lesson on animals to cats. Not that you necessarily dump the lessons on whales, but do not forget the interest in cats, make the math lesson somehow use cats, be creative! Listen to your students and build on their interests.

Kohn discussed other areas students could be given choice, such as decorating the room. Most Montessori teachers already do this, but he talked about how students’ ability to participate in the room decoration gives students a feeling that it is their classroom and can be used to inspire other lessons. He highlighted the experience of a teacher who let the students choose what to put on the walls. They decided they wanted to put up blue construction paper on one of the walls and allow each student to hang up whatever work they were most proud of that week. The teacher said she would do that. “No,” they said, “we want to hang up the paper!” So she let them. It did not turn out as they had hoped! They discovered they needed to measure things to ensure the end result they desired. The teacher was able to turn this moment into a lesson on measurement and fractions. In this way, the mathematics of measuring and fractions became relevant to the students.

Another example Kohn discussed was the choice of how to study something. Why can’t a teacher say, “How do you want to study this?” Why must the teacher say we are going to read this book, or watch this movie, or take a quiz? He proposes giving students a role in this choice. He is not recommending teachers abdicate their role in the classroom, just to re-evaluate it and share the control with their students. He gave the example of a traditional, old-school style teacher who has the quietest classroom, children working diligently, no distracting behavior, perfect angels. What typically happens when that teacher leaves that room? Chaos—yelling, paper-throwing, pencils in the lights. What happens when the teacher returns to find the chaotic state of the classroom? She responds with, “See, you can’t be trusted!” She comes down hard with increased control, more homework, taking away recess and free time. Why would this teacher expect a different outcome? She never lets those students make any decisions nor have any input. They are fantastic automatons, at least when the teacher is present—but to what end? He challenged teachers to find ways they could allow students to practice making decisions.

Kohn’s final focus was on how teachers (and parents) who think they are doing something wonderful for their kids may really be creating people who act to please authority and not focus on their own fulfillment. We all know someone who says, “Great job! I am so happy to see you share your lunch with Bobby! You are such a giving person! Nice sharing.” Kohn contends that this praise merely creates a need in the child to hear more praise. It is particularly empty praise if the teacher/parent does not know the intent of the child in doing the action. Does it make a difference that she shared because Bobby was hungry or that she saw you watching and knew you would like it? Kohn refers to a statement made by Nazi leader Rudolf Hess where he states he was instructed at an early age to care for others and have concern for their needs. Kohn believes it is more valuable to comment on the behavior by describing it. For example,

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"I see you added toes to the drawing of that person" which keeps the focus on the drawing as opposed to "Great job, that is so creative, I'm so happy to see that!" which puts the focus on the praise and praiser. If you do not allow the student to make the choice about what to care about and merely reward them, then your comments do not help children develop their autonomy.

A final point made by Kohn was that raising children and puppies should entail different methods, since dogs and humans have such different mental capabilities and we do not treat our children like animals. "Positive reinforcement" and "Logical consequences" are used to produce behavior that adults want to see but do not help children develop a moral compass or a set of values of their own. Using euphemisms like "positive reinforcement" and "time out" makes the methods of "enforced conformity" and "extreme forced isolationism" more palatable to parents and educators. He admitted giving up control can be difficult, and you have to decide how you can evolve towards this goal consistent with your own approaches. You have to be willing to live with the choices that the children make. He related a personal anecdote of when he let his 4-year old daughter help decide what might help her get ready to leave for school on time. She felt that she took a lot of time getting dressed so she thought it would help if she wore her school clothes to bed. Although not the solution he had in mind, he agreed. It worked, and from the age of 4 to 11 she wore her school clothes to bed!

Kohn ended by reminding administrators that these principles apply to administrators working with faculty. He challenged all of us to give up control in furtherance of our true goal: the authentic development of each human being.

Alfie Kohn is a nationally known author and speaker. More information about his work can be found at his website: www.alfiekohn.com. You can find a list of his books there as well as copies of articles he has published.

Michelle Mustone is a Stoneridge parent who works in the Education Department at Endicott College.

Children: Stewards of Our World

The Green Curriculum

Thursday, February 5, 7:30 pm

"We shall walk together on this path of life, for all things are part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity."

Perhaps you've noticed this quote on the bridge in the entryway of Stoneridge. The meaning of this quote from Maria Montessori will become clear on Thursday evening at 7:30 pm. From Toddler to Middle School, our teachers and Charles Terranova will present the Montessori Curriculum as it addresses Global Climate Change and environmental sustainability for our children. As Montessori teachers our task is to prepare a series of experiences that provide a key for the child to understand how the earth functions. The awe and wonder of this planet and its intricate systems can inspire in a child a deep reverence for the special place we inhabit in the universe. Come see how we do it?

Sixth Graders to Washington D.C.

The 6th Graders

The 6th graders are planning a trip to Washington D.C. to learn about the government and U.S. history. We have talked this over with the teachers and Alan and they have approved it.

The dates will most likely be Monday, May 18, 2009, to Saturday, May 23, 2009. Two Upper Elementary dads will be chaperoning along with Mary and Cathy. We are going to be flying from Boston to D.C. and be staying in hotels and motels around D.C.

We have been working really hard researching transportation, accommodations, historical sites, museums, etc. We will keep you posted as our plans progress.



Sixth Graders planning their upcoming trip to D.C.



Bread Drive

The Community Service Committee is very appreciative for all the generous holiday donations collected on behalf of North Shore Head Start and Star House. The drives were very successful and really made the holidays brighter for so many. Thank you!

In the spirit of Valentine's Day, we hope you will join us in opening your hearts to our greater community. During the week of February 9, we will be holding a bread drive to support Beverly Bootstraps. This organization provides much needed groceries for many local families. However, as needs grow, perishable food items such as bread run short. Please help by bringing in a loaf of bread during the week of February 9-13. If you are interested in delivering bread donations to Beverly Bootstraps on Cabot Street, please contact Stacie Grasso at staciegrasso@gmail.com or 978-750-1090. Thank you and Happy Valentine's Day!

Auction Update - Great Gatherings!

Gretchen Putnam, Auction Chair

New to the auction this year is an exciting and fun way to donate. A Great Gathering is an event hosted by your family for a limited number of people. It can be for adults, for children, or for adults and children together.

Great Gatherings are fun! Instead of the entire event being bid on, each "seat" or place is sold on the night of the auction, so the event can be a great way to meet new people and try new things. As the host, you decide the number of people, location, date and time, cost per person as well as other parameters such as age or skill restrictions. Each donor writes a description for the gathering. All events must be "booked" through the Great Gathering coordinators, Anne Brady and Maria Teigeiro, in order to avoid scheduling conflicts. Events can be scheduled for any time after the live auction event on April 4. We hope to have gatherings spread throughout the year, including during the summer as well as next fall and

winter. Great Gatherings are a way for you and your kids to have fun and make new friends while supporting Stoneridge.

Some exciting ideas have already been generated including:

- Moroccan evening
- Hayride and picnic at Green Meadows Farm
- Spanish dinner of tapas, sangria, and paella
- An afternoon of cookie making
- Hike to Agassiz Rock with a geologist

Keep your eyes on the auction website's Great Gatherings section at stoneridge.cmarket.com, get your day planner and come to the auction ready to sign up for these and other wonderful events!

Parent-to-Parent: "Confessions of an Environmental Warrior" with Jan Schlichtmann

February 24, 7:30 p.m. (brown bag dinner at 6:15 pm)

The Parent Education Committee together with Sustainable Stoneridge is proud to announce that our speaker for this year's Parent-to-Parent talk will be current Stoneridge parent Jan Schlichtmann. Jan became famous for prosecuting the Woburn case against W.R. Grace and Beatrice Foods for the contamination of the Woburn city water supply that became the basis for the book, "A Civil Action," and the movie of the same name. In 2007 he founded The Civil Action Center in hopes of educating people about alternatives to litigation.

His talk, entitled "Confessions of an Environmental Warrior," will take place at Stoneridge on February 24 at 7:30 p.m. Please join us for what promises to be an inspiring evening. In addition to Jan's talk, there will be a brown bag dinner at 6:15 p.m. where interested parents can talk informally with Jan. Bring your own sandwich, and drinks will be provided.

Music Notes

Hannah LaBonde, Music Director

Not too late for lessons!

We still have a few After School Music spots remaining for students who would like to try piano, drums, guitar, or a brass instrument. Please contact Hannah right away if your child might be interested: hlabonde@stoneridgecms.org.

Spring show: Mark your calendars

I'm excited to announce that all students in LE, UE & MS will take part in performing a show this spring. Our gracious neighbors at Endicott College have offered us the use of their brand-new Center for the Visual and Performing Arts. Please note a calendar change: we will not perform the concert that was scheduled on May 14th; instead, we will perform our show at Endicott early June. (More information soon.)

All students LE-MS will participate in the musical components of the show, and I will be inviting interested students to perform in drama segments between the songs. I don't expect the show to follow a narrative format, but instead to include many poems/skits that revolve around a central theme. That way, many students can be involved without the reliance on a few "leads"; this format also eliminates the need for extensive sets/costumes.

Interested students will help to put together poems and skits for the show during the month of February; drama rehearsals will be held during recess times starting in mid-March. Parent help with the show is welcomed! Please e-mail Hannah if you're interested in learning more or offering help: hlabonde@stoneridgecms.org.

Friday,
January 30 is
Children's House
Changeover Day!
11:30 am
dismissal



Selecting Safe Personal Care and Cleaning Products for Your Family

Neal Grasso, Sustainable Stoneridge Committee and Stoneridge Parent

On January 15th, Elizabeth Saunders of Clean Water Action gave a talk to a small group of Stoneridge parents, students, and faculty about the prevalence of toxic chemicals in personal care, cosmetic, and cleaning products and how to seek out natural, safe alternative products. Clean Water Action is a non-profit organization working with the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow (www.healthytomorrow.org), a coalition of non-profit organizations who are promoting legislation in Massachusetts to protect children from being exposed to potentially dangerous chemicals. This group has been actively lobbying the Massachusetts General Assembly to pass the Safer Alternatives Bill (Senate Bill 2481), which is a comprehensive law that requires the state to replace toxic chemicals with safer alternatives in consumer products. In addition the Alliance is seeking a ban on the sale of all children's products (for ages 3 and under) containing bisphenol-A (BPA)

According to Ms. Saunders, since World War II, over 80,000 new chemicals have been introduced in the US yet very few of them are regulated by the federal government. US laws actually lag behind other industrialized regions with regard to regulating chemicals used in consumer products. For instance Europe has recently enacted a comprehensive law requiring industry to assess the toxicity of, and provide safety information for, chemicals used in consumer products.

Ms. Saunders recommended a web site (www.safecosmetics.org) to help identify safer personal care products. At this website, one can look up a specific product (e.g., Suave shampoo) and determine how this product ranks against other similar products with regard to its chemical ingredients. One can also look up a specific class of products (e.g., deodorants) and see how the list stacks up. During the meeting, Anne Brady pointed out that the National Geographic Green Guide's website (www.thegreenguide.com/) provides information on environmentally friendly products ranging from flat screen TVs to food containers and ranks the best

performing products in each category. However, for a simpler approach, one can also look out for three "red flag" ingredients on product labels: "Fragrance," "Parabens (Methyl-, Ethyl-, Butyl-, or Propyl)," and "Sodium Lauryl Sulfate". Fragrances typical include a suite of chemicals known as phthalates, which are suspected hormone disruptors, which can cause a myriad of health effects following long term exposure. Dermal contact with parabens has a possible link to breast cancer, and sodium lauryl sulfate is a harmful irritant. The biggest concern about these chemicals and others used in many personal care products is that their harmful effects have not been fully studied, leaving the public unaware of the potential risks associated with using particular products. In addition, as mentioned above, chemicals with known harmful effects are not regulated in the US.

As a result of this talk, Sustainable Stoneridge will provide parents with a recommended list of products we believe are safe to use at home, as well as products that should be avoided. While these lists will not be comprehensive, they will be a starting point for parents to create a chemically-safe environment for children. The School has already gone to great lengths to ensure that cleaning chemicals in use in the building follow similar guidelines, and we will cross-check our recommendations with the ones that the School has put into practice.



*The School cell phone policy can be found on page 25/26 in the *Parent Handbook*.

Library News

Martha and Cruz

Bullying/Teasing Resource List:

Inspired by the impressive and important lecture by Peggy Schleicher, the library now has a preliminary list of Stoneridge's available resources on bullying and teasing. If you are interested in obtaining a copy, the list (still a work in progress) will be available on the new Parent/Professional shelf just inside the library or by email (mmorgan@stoneridgecms.org). Please know that the materials on this new shelf are available to all staff and families. Please come take a look.

Returning Books:

As the year is almost half way over (can it be?), here is just a brief reminder, especially for families whose children visit the library weekly, to check around your house for any ready-to-be-returned library books. These books, just waiting to get back on the shelves, can be returned at any time.

Finally, here is a thank you to all the families, all of you, who share your love of books and learning at home. We hear so many stories of families enjoying books and learning together. So thank you for reading aloud, for buddy reading, for asking your child about what he or she is reading. Thank you for sharing newspapers and learning on-line together. Thank you for donating library books in honor of your child or in honor of your child's teachers. For as the great doctor wrote: "The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."



Toddler House

Pam, Paulette, Sarah

Winter has hit the Toddler House. We enjoy listening to the crunch of the dry snow under our boots as we walk from our playground to the benches for dismissal. One day it was warm enough to be out for an extended period of time, and we put on all of our layers quickly enough that we were able to go sliding down the hill outside of our classroom. We are anxiously waiting another such day. Sledding was so much fun. We have a few toddlers who are independently dressing themselves in their full snow apparel. We continue to be grateful to our Toddler House families for arriving at school with snow pants, boots, jackets, hats and mittens. Toddlers are able to choose and have a great time exploring with snow and water inside of the classroom too. Since the snow is so fluffy and clean, the children frequently begin to eat it. We redirect them at these times. Soon we will have the opportunity to eat shaved ice.

New works in our classroom include ladling, set up like a punch bowl with small cups; an ever popular band aid work which is used to care for oneself, peers, dolls and animals; biodegradable packing peanut sculpting; squeezing peppercorn grating; flashlight assembling and shining; a nesting doll; tool matching; a tool bench; pipe cleaner flower creating and posting; sorting by magnetic and non-magnetic; assorted sounding bells; etc. Our current food preparation is the peeling of carrots. The toddlers love carrying our overnight suitcase around the room before settling down to open its latches and put on the enclosed blanket pajamas. Our independent snacks typically include three items often requiring scooping or spreading. We now have diluted juice available for the children to pour from a small pitcher into their cup.

We have some additions to our classroom we want to be sure to welcome. Michael joined our classroom prior to the holidays. His sister Mia has been with us in Children's House II. Jack and his mom Karen have just joined us and Jack will be phasing into our classroom over the next couple of weeks.

Please help us to make our dismissal as smooth and efficient as possible. If you choose to stay in the car line at our 11:30 dismissal time, please remain in your car in the driver's seat such that you can drive forward whenever possible, in order to keep the line moving. If you wish to engage in conversation with other parents or your child's teachers at this time, that is fine, but please pull into a parking spot so that you do not inconvenience other families.

Children's House

Linda, Thora, Alison, Genevieve

February Twilight

I stood beside a hill

Smooth with new-laid snow,

A single star looked out

From the cold evening glow.

There was no other creature

That saw what I could see --

I stood and watched the evening star

As long as it watched me.

-Sara Teasdale

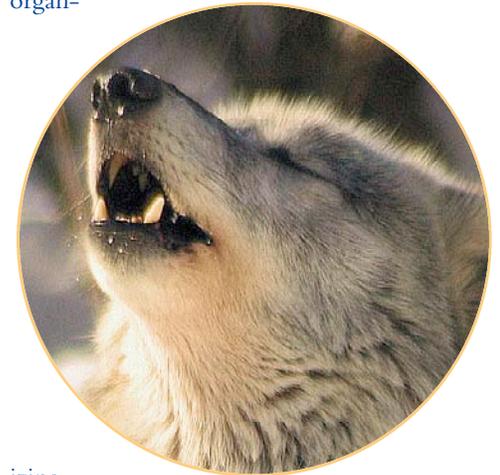
January was a busy month of settling back into the routine of school. We have so much snow on our play yard that every day is a snowy adventure for many of us!! We appreciate all the snow pants, boots, hats, mittens, and warm winter gear you have been sending for your children. This helps to ensure your children have a comfortable, safe, and fun time during outdoor play!

We had been studying amphibians, such as frogs, toads, salamanders, and newts. Amphibians are cold-blooded animals that metamorphose from a juvenile, water-breathing form to an adult, air-breathing form. We labeled frogs, matched frog cards, made books, sequenced frog life cycles, and so much more.

"While bringing beauty and humor to all, marionettes are a catalyst for enrichment and a magical kind of storytelling." This past month we had a visit from Yorick's Marionette Theater. Dusan Petran, a native of the former Czechoslovakia, hand carves his own marionettes for his theater. He has

received a Folk and Traditional Fellowship from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts. All of his marionettes are perfectly balanced and perform movements that are precise and elegant, as well as artistic. The Theater performed "All about Doggy and Kittykat," a tale of a dog and a cat who hire a robot to clean their house. The children were mesmerized by this funny and unusual story, made even more magical by the quirky, fun, and artistic marionettes. In the afternoon the "K's" attended a puppet workshop where they were able to put together their own bird marionette. What a special day for all of us!

The Kindergartners also braved the cold, one January afternoon, to see a pack of wolves and howl along with them. They traveled to Wolf Hollow in Ipswich to observe the pack in their habitat. They were able to identify the alpha male and alpha female of the pack and learned about how wolves are so important to our environment. After observing the pack, we all went to Bruni's for hot chocolate. We send our thanks to all of our chaperones for braving such a cold day, and a special thanks to Gretchen, Melissa and Leslie for organ-



izing
our hot
chocolate treat.

Next month, the Children's Houses will mark Valentine's Day by exchanging cards on Friday, February 13th. The Kindergartners will celebrate with a "red-themed" luncheon on Tuesday. Think strawberries, cherries, tomatoes and even lobster!

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continued from page 8

February also brings the study of reptiles; air-breathing, cold blooded vertebrates that have skin covered in scales as opposed to hair or feathers. We will learn about their life cycles, habitats, and so much more!

Lower Elementary

Heather Grice, Diane Sullivan

What's going on in Lower Elementary? How do the children know what to do? How do they know how to start? Do they do whatever they like? How do the teachers keep track of each child's progress?

These are some of the typical questions visitors to Lower Elementary have. Here's a 'snapshot' of a recent morning in our classrooms to help explain how Lower Elementary ticks:

A small group of children are writing on slips of paper and then walking around the classroom, sticking the paper onto various objects. Then they actually leave the classroom with more slips and continue the labeling.

How do they know what to do?

These children are doing follow up work related to the function of the article, using 'a' to label one of many or 'the' to indicate the only one. (a chair, a table, the clock) They are able to choose the work themselves because they had already had a lesson on the noun and article, and they are able to continue doing it as long as they are working purposefully.

How do they know how to start?

The children start each day by greeting their teachers and taking out their work journals. Here they record the date and think about their first work of the day. It may be something started on the previous day, a recent lesson given, or an invitation from a friend or a teacher. Each child has a bookmark with a list of recent lessons given in each subject area. The bookmark is kept in the work journal as a reminder of work options.

Each child also has a file folder containing all of their written work, so if a child wonders which math problem to do next, he may look in his math copy book and see that he last completed stamp game division card 4 and is now on card 5.

In the case of the labeling, the children had received the lesson together and decided to repeat the lesson. The real learning takes place when the children are self motivated to do this follow up work, not necessarily when they are sitting with a teacher.

Do they do whatever they like?

The children choose their work based on the lessons they have been given. Each day, the teachers give many lessons, so each child has a variety of work to choose from. As long as a child is concentrating, she may continue with her chosen work.

How does the teacher keep track of all of each child's progress?

It is the teacher's responsibility to keep detailed records of lessons given, follow up work by each child and observations of work styles and potential for new lessons. Daily assessment and record keeping is essential.

What if a child does not choose to work, or has a difficult time concentrating?

Some children find it challenging to stay on task, follow a sequence from start to finish, or organize their work materials. These children may be given a short check off list to get them started in an organized way. The list of work gives them the structure and predictability they require to learn to manage their time in the future.

The girls who had been labeling the school with articles and nouns, showed that they were ready for the lesson on the adjective. They are currently writing a book using colors (adjectives) and are labeling the articles, nouns and adjectives. This is considered the very beginning of their understanding of the functions of speech. Many new lessons will follow.

Upper Elementary in a pickle...

Victor Young

Students coming to science one day were faced with a strange sight, a pickle with two rods sticking out of it. Wires were attached to the rods. You could feel the curiosity. After the children were seated a strange teacher appeared and turned on a switch. The pickle began to glow. It was a shocking sight. It was the Electric Pickle. We watched the light dance from one end of the pickle to the other as it began to sizzle and smoke poured out of it.

After watching for a few moments, the pickle was turned off and we began our discussion of energy. What had caused the pickle to glow? Students touched the pickle. It was warm. Why? What was going on here? Could we use pickles instead of light bulbs? ... and why did it sizzle?

A great discussion followed as we began our study of energy. The kids were excited and engaged. It definitely wasn't a dill lesson.





Becoming an Author

Courtney Stephens, MS English Teacher

If I aim to teach my students one thing throughout their time in Middle School, it would be to realize their full potential as writers. The writing workshop structure in our Middle School Language Arts curriculum encourages students to exercise free choice and write about topics that inspire them. This nurtures not only the student's emerging writing skills but also a love for the writing process. As I prepared for this teaching position at Stoneridge last spring and summer, I reflected on how I could encourage even more student ownership and feelings of success in their written work. Attending Lucy Calkin's conference this fall on incorporating a writer's workshop in classrooms reinforced my idea and encouraged me to see it through: I wanted to challenge my students to become authors.

Becoming an author means learning not only how to feel inspired by the process of writing, but also how to follow the steps of a professional writer. The writer's routine may seem familiar to most students and Language Arts classrooms; writers brainstorm ideas, confer with peers, edit their work and then turn it in to editors. Yet, there is a final step that authors take - they submit their writing for publication. Why not have our students follow this last step as well?

Throughout this year, I have encouraged students to submit their poems, short stories and personal narratives for publication in the various magazines and writing contests that are open to young writers. Students are then not just turning work in for my assessment or reading it out loud for their peers during our writer's workshop celebrations, but by submitting it for publication they are declaring that they are ready to share their ideas with the world. I believe that this motivates students to do their best work and gives them a deeper sense of ownership over what they produce. As the Middle School students have explored their creative freedom this year, I have been amazed with their tremendous talent and increased self-confidence because of participating in these publication opportunities.

Two of our emerging authors in the middle school, Maddy and Mia, were recently chosen as finalists in the Creative Communications Writing Contest and will become published in this year's anthology, *A Celebration of Poets*. This is an honor for Maddy and Mia as they were selected from among thousands of young writers who entered this contest from around the country. Screams and laughter echoed throughout our classroom the day that Mark and I announced to the girls that they would become published authors. That was an exciting day, as will the day when we see their names in print along with their poems. Maria Montessori said, "The ability to write will be acquired as a result of the ... activity of one's mind which is interested in such a magical conquest." My hope is that the experience of becoming authors and seeing their peers published has infused these students' written words with some magic and the power their ideas deserve.

Because

By Mia, Middle School Student

Eve bit the apple, you see
 And Pandora opened the box.
 You should not want a parrot, dear,
 Because you know it talks.

You know what they say about folks in glass houses
 And how throwing stones is never the best
 If you have a gun, my dear,
 You'll need a bulletproof vest.

Mistakes

By Maddy, Middle School Student

Words are permanent... and sometimes that can hurt your own... friends and feelings.
 Can you take back the words... that you muttered under your breath...and at least you will have the warm feeling of no regret, at your death.

Chorus:

Mistakes... so hard to erase, and ever so hard

to chase, and to find... a little piece of mind,
 to rub across the fine black line; And now it's
 time to grab that little pink square to erase
 mistakes, time to take, the thing that'll erase
 mistakes that I make, and when I'm pressed
 for time, I keep it on my mind, the fact that
 not everything is written in pencil. Mistakes
 so... hard to erase... and when I look at
 your face I realize you need to borrow my
 eraser.

My words...are pinging at the solid wall,
 words that I cannot take back... wishing
 wanting just that I could rearrange these
 words just to make it better.

Chorus:

We all make mistakes. My mistakes are permanent... and so are God's. We aren't all perfect... so says the song. Live long...Mistakes

Mary Cookson and a few other parents at Stoneridge would like us all to know about an upcoming event to benefit HAWC:

Share the Love: A Valentine's Day Moment . . .
 February 12, 2009
 4 p.m. - 7 p.m.
 at RERUN

(a "gently used" shop to benefit HAWC - Helping Abused Women and Children)
 330 Rantoul Street, Beverly, MA.

Come, shop for those unique fashion finds no one else is wearing - (although major clothing lines are also represented, including, yes, I kid you not - BODEN!)

A few of us have given Rerun a makeover to celebrate Valentine's Day.

Music! Delicious Treats! Drink! Free Gifts! (gossip, dressing-up, giggling, too) Really, this is too fun to miss, and all to benefit HAWC.

From the Art Room

Cameron Sesto



stoneridge

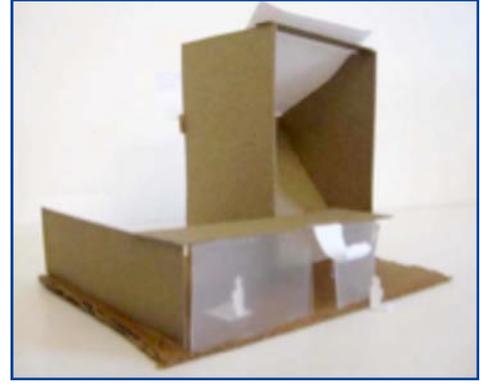
CHILDREN'S MONTESSORI SCHOOL

Valentines are just one item children make at this time of the year to give to those they love. Lower Elementary students, Will and Phineas, asked for extra time in the art room to make a birthday present for their new assistant teacher, Holly. This was to be hush, hush a big surprise. So, over a 4 or 5-week time span, working during open studio on Wednesdays, they carefully constructed a cat. Collaboration, sharing and learning new construction techniques are evident in the final product along with the children's sense of humor. The two boys decided that the cat should swallow a fish. You can see it swinging from a thread in the middle of the cat's belly!



And speaking of construction —

Heather Dietrichson, architect and parent, has generously donated her time and talents to work with Middle School students showing them how to create architectural models to scale. The materials used are cardboard and stiff translucent plastic, cut from recycled objects. Heather and I have enjoyed watching so many creative ideas flow into these small buildings.



As part of a healthy winter, the artists here at SCMS hope you eat lots of clementines and please save the box for us. Lower Elementary students especially love to create rooms and homes out of the boxes for their people and furniture made out of clay. Also, corks, bottle caps, buttons and any other small items are appreciated.