



Grade 3-4

December 7, 2007

Dear 3rd/4th Grade Parents,

This past week I have been reflecting on emergent curriculum. Unless you have been temporarily sequestered on Pluto you will have been thinking about head lice. Well, in an effort to calm worries and cut through embarrassment, I decided to teach a little about them. Far from being anxious about lice, they seemed quite thrilled with the adventure of it.

Did it end there? Of course not! In library time, while Ms. Gellar read Diary of a Fly, Shanti mused, "There should be a "Diary of a Head Louse". "We could write it," added someone else. Well, why not? As a teacher you just can't pass up an opportunity like that. Here is a student-inspired, student-driven writing project that involves studying an author's style, incorporating research, working cooperatively, writing, revising, illustrating, and publishing.

We reread the author's other books, and brainstormed ideas for our own. We read up on head lice, figuring out how to incorporate the facts. Students wrote in small groups, and I typed everyone's ideas into one document. Several students then spent their Friday Choice Time working on illustrations. (Making a head louse look cute is no mean feat, believe me!) As part of their homework this week they are revising that collective first draft, and trying to sequence the ideas. The next step will be to share all those new improved ideas and decide how to combine them into one final draft. They have already been refining their cartooning techniques with Mr. Sahadi in art classes, so they have some great preliminary illustrations. The timing has also been perfect – right in the midst of the project we got to meet with our visiting author and hear her talk about the process of writing, revising, and publishing.

You cannot 'plan' for emergent curriculum. You can guide, nudge, and hope, but projects like these grow organically out of the collective experience of the class community. Some projects develop from curriculum that I have prepared and students respond to and grab hold of something that sparks their imagination, like our Jamestown Drama. Yet you also have to be ready for the odd curve ball, like "*Diary of a Head Louse*" by the 3rd/4th grade!

Sincerely,
Liza Butler

Preschool, Pre-K 215A Blackfield Drive Tiburon, CA 94920 (415) 381-8181

K-8 70 Lomita Dr. Mill Valley, CA 94941 (415) 381-8183 Fax (415) 381-8484