



MS English: Grades 5/6

April 18, 2008

Dear Parents,

I hope you all had a wonderful Spring Break! I would also like to thank you all for coming to Parent/Teacher Conferences before the break! If you have any questions or would like further information about your child's English Conference Report, please feel free to contact me at any time.

The last two weeks before vacation deviated a bit from our typical English schedule, but nonetheless, it was a busy and productive time. First of all, both the 5th and 6th grade English classes finished their Fiction projects, and we had a fantastic time sharing them with the K/1/2 students. The younger students felt engaged and enthused by the older kids' stories, and truly appreciated the amount of work it takes to write and illustrate a good story. After pairing off with reading buddies, both classes reconvened on the community rug and answered one another's questions about the creative writing process. I particularly enjoyed hearing the advice that older students shared with their younger buddies, such as: don't worry about all the spelling stuff at first, just let your ideas flow; take time to really paint a picture with words so that your reader can use his/her imagination; (and my personal favorite) listen to your teacher's ideas about how to make the story better!

The 5th grade class moved quickly through a simply written book that tackles enormous questions: *The Music of Dolphins*, by Karen Hesse. So far, their discussion of the text has centered on questions like: "What does it mean to be human?"; "Was Mila more or less human before being 'rescued'?" "Why are Shay and Mila progressing so differently?" and, "Should they have taken Mila in the first place?" Truly, the narrative style of the text belies the depth of its themes. It was difficult to channel the students' enthusiasm into a discussion without interruptions – everyone just had so much to say! I am looking forward to the next two discussions before break, as well as to our final one upon returning from the vacation.

Since returning on April 14th, the 6th graders have begun a text set during the Great Depression. In order to build some background knowledge of the time period, as well as to work on poetry writing and analysis, we first read excerpts from *Something Permanent*, by Cynthia Rylant and Walker Evans. The former penned all of the poems, inspired by the latter's moving photographs of 1930s America. At the table, students read the first few poems and discussed examples of imagery, rhythm, and syntax that particularly moved them. They then were encouraged to choose one or more photographs to inspire their own poetry, with or without a Great Depression theme. Their new text is the Newbery Award-winning *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, by Mildred D. Taylor. It follows the trials

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and triumphs of the Logan family, as they face racial and economic hardship in 1930's Mississippi. Although this classic middle school text tackles some poignant issues, the author does so in a sensitive, questioning, and beautifully crafted manner. Moreover, the discussion table can be the most effective and open forum for addressing and processing such issues.

Sincerely,
Andrea Gough

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