



May 19, 2005

THE CHILDREN'S DAY SCHOOL Weekly

Words from Rick

The Natural Injustice of the Mind

Mr. John came to class in a pink shirt last week. In kindergarten there had been a few occasions of students remarking that a certain toy or activity was “just for boys” or “just for girls.” He and Jen were coming in prepared to do some lessons on gender equity. When the students entered class, one of the boys asked with hesitation, “Is that a pink shirt?” “Yes, why?” John responded. “Really?” he started to smirk and cringe his face. “Yes, pink.” Just before the giggling could ensue, Hunter Biel-Clark interjected, “Only a real man can wear pink.” This, of course, is exactly what the teachers needed to start the class off on a day of discussions about biases, stereotypes and justice. The result was just (or even more) than John was hoping for.

In the musical comedy *South Pacific* Lieutenant Cable expresses his rage at racism in a sarcastic song, “You’ve Got to be Taught:”

*You’ve got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made
And people whose skin is a different shade
You’ve got to be carefully taught*

*You’ve got to be taught
Before it’s too late
Before you are six
Or seven or eight
To hate all the people your relatives hate
You’ve got to be carefully taught.*

We can relate to the sentiment, but my years in education have taught me that Hammerstein got it backwards. Kids do not have to be carefully taught in order for them to pick up the prejudices of their relatives—that happens naturally. On the contrary, they have to be carefully taught to break down the generalizations they inherit from their culture, and liberated into rigorous and creative thinking. All kindergartners can observe in their environment that it is the female who usually wears pink and the boys who tend to be shooting baskets. The old textbooks tell us that Christopher Columbus was a great man because he discovered America and made our country possible. The new, practically universal curriculum teaches that Columbus was bad because he enslaved or exterminated the peace-loving Native Americans who had discovered America long before he got here. The truth is more complex than either version of the story. I want our students to challenge both textbooks with interesting questions. The idea of a “real man” is more complex than the color of one’s shirt. Today, gender ambiguity pushes open our notions of what

Hot Dates

Friday, May 20
10:15-10:30 a.m.
Friday assembly
Tadpole class presenting

Saturday, May 21
9, 10 a.m.
Family Farmer Training
CDS garden



constitutes a real man or woman. A student like Hunter who can see a pink shirt on a man and turn an old aphorism on its head is a student who will be a good problem solver in an increasingly complex world.

Teaching about gender equity or social justice is much more than teaching good values like respect and kindness. If our business is to graduate critical thinkers and creative problem solvers, we need to create an environment where it is not only safe to have your own gender preference, but also safe to have new and unusual ideas. In the dozens of teacher interviews I have had in the last three years, it's gratifying to see the candidates' delight at finding a school where intellectual challenge is an integral part of academic achievement. It seems most classrooms (private as well as public) are focusing on getting the right answers. "Thinking" is usually guessing what is in the teacher's head. By seventh and eighth grade, students are afraid to think creatively about how to solve a problem because the price of getting the wrong answer is too high. In fact in some schools, apparently, cheating is the smart way to be successful because it is the surest way of getting a good grade.

Not only will this approach not produce the kind of workforce America needs, but it will also produce graduates who are headed for failure of one sort or another because their brains are not prepared for the kind of critical and creative thinking a diverse and changing world requires. A long and happy life requires that a person discover his unique being and his unique calling. For this we need to create the conditions in which each of us can transcend the generalizations we have a tendency to make about ourselves. For this we need to keep popping each other's stereotypes.

There are those who think that social justice should be a part of a school's curriculum, and there are those who think schools should stick to academic topics. When John wore a pink shirt he transcended the dispute by requiring creative thinking about a real problem. Education is leading a person out. Out of what? Out of narrow-mindedness and into open fields of possibility. Out of banal (and cruel) generalities and into an infinite world of unique people and unique events. Of course, it is mean to mock someone for the shirt they wear or to make any kind of gender-related slur. For this purpose most kindergartners just need to be reminded about meanness. However, for school to be an education we must create an environment in which these young humans can create something beautiful, something brilliant, some new line of poetry like, "Only a real man can wear pink."

The Dirt

Needed: Family Farmers

Are you tired of reading the same blurb over and over each week? Do you miss the days of snail anecdotes, reports of saving native plants and moments of courageous worm digging? Well then give Misty a call at x2I and sign up for a family farmer training, to be held on Saturday, May 21 at 9 and 10 a.m. There are still spaces available for six family farmers. You only need to commit to two weekends and/or holidays during the next four months and in return you'll have the chance to bury your fingers in JoJo's warm, soft wool and collect fresh eggs for Sunday morning breakfast. Call Misty (x2I) today!

From the Office

Teacher Support Initiative

Parents, grandparents and friends of CDS will soon receive a letter introducing this spring's fundraising campaign for CDS teachers. The goal of the Teacher Support Initiative, chaired by second grade mom Susi Alexander, is to raise \$60,000 by September 1 for professional development and the expanding music and drama program.

Money raised will be used to send our teachers to workshops and conferences that enhance their classroom skills. In addition, it will help CDS hire a music teacher to focus on the middle school music program, so that Ms. Emilie can expand drama offerings while continuing to teach music to preschool and elementary students.

We are asking parents for information as well as donations, so please take a moment to let the committee of volunteers know if you have a business or personal contact who might be willing to help reach this goal. Thank you for your help.

A Lemon Tree for Marilyn

On Tuesday, June 7 we will gather our school community as well as friends and family of Marilyn, Bob and Eddie for a tree-planting ceremony in the CDS yard. At Eddie's suggestion, we will plant a lemon tree in memory of his mother. The ceremony will take place as part of a school assembly at 10:15 a.m., and a reception with poetry and refreshments will follow for adults in the CDS library. Marilyn was an avid photographer and her work will be on display in the library all week. We invite you to join us for this special day.

Turning the Tables

The last Friday coffee of the year – only two weeks away on June 3! – will be guest-hosted by the administration and faculty as a thank you to all of the dedicated, enthusiastic and helpful parent volunteers who have made this year so much fun. Please stop by and enjoy a coffee toast by Mr. Rick and treats on the house. From all of us, thank you for all you have done for CDS.

2005-06 Calendar

The 2005-06 calendar is attached to today's *Weekly*. The calendar can also be viewed on the CDS website (www.cds-sf.org/news/calendar.html).

From the Students

Pet Food for PAWS

The sixth grade class is working with an organization called PAWS (Pets Are Wonderful Support). They help support people with AIDS and other disabilities by taking care of their pets. The sixth graders are helping them because they have been studying the history of AIDS and thought this would be a good way to help out in the community. They are currently helping to build the PAWS food bank by working at Safeway and PetCo., asking customers for donations.

They need your help too. If you can, please consider donating a couple cans of pet food in the next few weeks. There will be a bin in the entrance hallway of the school (by the glass doors) where you can place donations. They will be collecting pet food from May 19–June 7. Thanks for your support.

Extended Program News

Summer Camp

Extra summer camp registration forms are available at the front desk. All four sessions are almost completely full. If you are interested in having your child participate, please call or e-mail Jenna at x15 to make sure there are still spaces available. Camps that are completely full:

- Sessions I, II, III and IV: Preschool-K
- Session I: Farm and Garden
- Session III: Farm and Garden, Arts and Crafts
- Session IV: Theater

Boys and Girls Club

After school groups have a new schedule for visiting the Boys and Girls Club. Please make note of this revised schedule.

- 1st grade: Thursdays, 3:30-5:30 p.m.
- 2nd grade: Mondays, 3:30-5:30 p.m.
- 3rd grade: Wednesdays, 3:30-5:30 p.m.
- 4/5th grade: Tuesdays, 3:30-5:30 p.m.

Library Corner

End of the Year Books

This has been an amazing and successful year for the new library, buoyed by incredible enthusiasm from the students and wonderful parent support. Next week, May 23-27, will be the last week for students to check out books. This will allow time for returning all books by the end of the school year. Of course, early returns will be appreciated so volunteers can get the library in good shape before the summer break. Overdue notice reminders will continue to be distributed to students; books more than 6 weeks overdue will be considered lost and a fine assessed.

Please send feedback, insights and comments to library@cds-sf.org. Thank you!

PTTA Update

Meeting Updates

Hello parents, teachers, trustees and administrators. Thank you to those of you who were able to attend the last PTTA meeting of the year. This was a very well attended meeting with parent representatives from preschool, lower elementary and middle school. We finished up a series of discussions on community building and shared ideas relating to parent volunteering and involvement. In addition to hearing from a broad range of parents, we enjoyed getting input from Ms. Margaret, Mr. Rick, Aimee Giles and Marion Quinones.

One spin-off of these discussions has been the creation of our Community Building Committee (new welcoming committee). Laura Pliska, mother of Starfish Iliana, is heading this committee which already had its first meeting. It was very exciting to see a group of parents committed to continuing to build our already wonderful community and to ensure that our community continues to develop as our school grows.

At least one of the classroom liaisons in each class is automatically a member of this committee, and all other members of the PTTA (meaning any parent, teacher, trustee and administrator) are welcome and encouraged to join. The next committee meeting is scheduled for Monday, June 6 from 5-6 p.m. in the library. The tentative agenda includes updates from the first meeting, discussions of possible outreach groups, building parent community through common interests and other community building ideas. If you are interested in knowing more about the committee and how you can be involved please don't hesitate to contact me or Laura (laura@sfbabyworks.com).

Finally, as many of you have already heard, we have an opening for a PTTA officer for the 2005-06 school year. The position is Vice President for Parent Volunteers. If you are interested in the position or know someone we might want to consider please contact me at goevansgo@yahoo.com. Thank you for your continued participation and support.

—Marianne Evans, PTTA president

Hola Familias de CDS

Hola Familias!

The kindergarten class is learning a song called "Arriba Abajo," Up and Down

1st graders are learning a song about body parts.

2nd graders are finishing pictorial dictionaries to help them learn new vocabulary. They are also learning a song about their body parts.

The 3rd graders are working on menus, food items and acting as customers and waiters, all of which culminates in a restaurant project.

The 4th/5th graders are finishing projects on different countries and children's books for kindergarten students.

Ms. Gladys' 6th and 7th grade students are studying how to use the subjunctive tense.

Ms. Geddes' 6th and 7th grade students are reviewing the imperative tense. Several students will teach the elements of the imperative tense to the class. Students will soon begin a final individual project based on topics of their choice.

— Spanish Department

Upcoming Dates

Monday, May 30

Memorial Day

No school

No Extended Program

Wednesday, June 1

10:15-11:10 a.m.

Step-Up Day

Friday, June 3

8:30 a.m.

Friday coffee &

Thank you to volunteers

CDS yard

Monday, June 6

5-6 p.m.

Community building committee meeting

Library

Tuesday, June 7

10:15 a.m.

Lemon tree planting in honor of

Marilyn Tepper

CDS yard

Wednesday, June 8

2 p.m.

End of year ceremony

Thursday, June 9

Last day of school

Noon dismissal

No extended program

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