



The Student Newspaper of
Murch Elementary School

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The Blue and Gold

What the Lunch Lady Does For Kids

By Journey Gianna

If you're ever in need of breakfast or a hot lunch at Murch, then Tiffany Darlene Massey is your woman.

With a warm smile, she greets you every day with "Good morning, baby. Whatcha need?"

Ms. Massey is our new lunch lady and this is her first year at Murch. For her, a typical day consists of cooking food based on meal plans and dietary restrictions. She gets the meal plans from a nutritionist, the school nurse and her boss, Chartwells, the company that brings food to public schools in the District of Columbia.

Ms. Massey and an assistant work together to prepare breakfast and lunch for a small number of kids. "My day goes really well most days," she said.

She serves 80-100 students on regular days and 110 on pizza days. Breakfast is free for students and staff. Lunch costs \$2.10. About 55 kids from low-income families get lunch at a reduced price or free.

Murch's lunch lady was born and raised in Washington D.C. In her free time, she loves to paint, shop, travel and cook.

"I like to create meals that I see on a cooking show or in a recipe book. My favorite appetizer is fried pickles with spinach and

artichoke dip. My favorite entrée is Thai curry chicken or salmon in a bag. Everyone loves my cooking. I often get special requests."

Ms. Massey has two older brothers and no sisters. "I was the baby. I was pretty much spoiled. They were always mad because they had to take me everywhere they went."

As a kid, she loved school. Her favorite subjects were reading, history and English. She especially remembers Mr. Tyler, one of her junior high school teachers:

"Mr. Tyler believed in me and, in return, made me believe in myself. Mr. Tyler has always seen me doing big things in my life. He was always rewarding my grades and effort."

As a result of that one teacher who believed in her, Ms. Massey said, she became the first person in her family to go to college. She has an associate degree in business management from Potomac College in Washington, and holds a food-handling management license after studying the subject at the University of the District of Columbia.

Ms. Massey had many different jobs. "I've worked everywhere, from waitressing to retail to home health to management. Literally everywhere."

When she was young, she wanted to be a teacher.

(continued on back page)



Tiffany Massey, known as the lunch lady, greets hungry students daily

Spending a Morning With the Principal

By Rigby Zentner and Maia Bester.

In late December we were invited into Principal Chris Cebrzynski's office one morning to find out what he does. Is it exciting? Interesting? Dull? Busy? You decide:

9:36: Mr. C. meets with Asha Mathur, a 4th grade teacher, and two minutes later with math specialist LaToura Pendleton comes in. They talk about 2nd grade math topics. "Some new stuff will be happening after the break," Mr. C says.

9:50: A 5th grade boy walks in, carrying a notebook. He asks Mr. C if he has written in

the book for Amy Feng, a 5th grader who is moving to China. Mr C says yes.

10:03: Assistant Principal Terri Fuller walks into Mr. C's office to drop off a folder and binder.

10:05: Ms. Fuller writes down important dates, then gives them to Mr. C. Ms. Fuller asks Mr. C if he has read a certain email. He says no. Ms. Fuller gives him a copy. They whisper. It's a private matter.

10:10: Mr. C tells a joke that only grownups under-stand. A student peers into Mr. C's office and says, "Hi, Mr. C, how are you?" "Good, how are you?" the principal replies, The student puts his thumbs up.

10:15: Ms. Fuller asks, "Where did you get that shirt, Mr. C? I haven't seen one like it."

(It's a gray sweatshirt with "Murch" and a mustang on it.) "It might have been a sample," Mr. C says.

10:17: Daniel Hayden, the special education coordina- tor, strides into the office and asks Mr. C for someone's correct phone number.

10:30: Mr. C walks out of the room to go to a second grade musical performance in the gym. On the way, people stop him to say "Hi, Mr. C!" and "Happy holidays!" The crowd is huge. People are squished.

10:35: Mr. C talks to a 2nd grade aide, smiles contentedly and whispers to 3rd grade teacher Monica Davis. There is a look of pride on his face.

11:15: The show is over. Mr. C goes back to his office to finish his day.

MOLDY TEETH

A Poem

Yesterday I had a snack,
Of all the things in my lunch-pack.

There was candy, soda, and Lunchables,
But it left some grime in my munchables!

I looked in the mirror and let out a scream:
"My teeth are black and blue and green!"

So I told my good friend Gus,
But his gums were full of pus!

He said my teeth were soft and chewy,
And may even go kablooeey!

Our eating habits were a disgrace
So we headed to a vegan place.

Their food was organic, also not tinned,
But when we were done, it made us break wind

-- Vera Hershberg, 5th grade

By Journey Gianna

Murch is an old, overcrowded school -- but a permanent solution to its physical troubles is still many years away.

Unfortunately, plans to build a modern elementary school at Murch have been delayed once again.

The major reasons:

First, the new mayor, Muriel Bowser, must decide how much of the city's money should be spent on fixing schools.

Second, millions of dollars in additional money must be found to pay for construction at Murch.

And, third, some other place must be found to educate Murch students while the school is being rebuilt.

"Murch is the most overcrowded school in the city and completely inaccessible for those with disabilities," Caroline Hurley wrote recently for the Murch parents organization.

A few years ago, construction at Murch was supposed to cost \$16 million. In 2013 the amount set aside for Murch was doubled to \$32 million.

Then, last summer, a new city study concluded that the cost of the Murch project would almost double again.

That means another \$30 million must be found somewhere this year -- or Murch will have to be renovated in phases.

Such a piecemeal approach would allow the project to begin in June 2016 and continue for years with an unknown completion date.

Where would Murch education take place during construction? The city is considering the University of the District of Columbia on Connecticut Ave., Fannie Mae on Wisconsin Ave., and Saint Ann's Academy at Wisconsin Ave. and Yuma St.

What about choosing an architect to design the new Murch? That has been put off, too. Last year, Principal Chris Cebrzynski said an architect would be named in October, 2014. Now an architect is expected to be chosen in February 2015 -- this month.

Whenever workers finally do begin construction, the work is expected to last two-and-a-half years, Mr. C said.

The S-l-o-w Crawl Toward the New Murch

A Student Editorial: Life in the Trailers

By Lucy Chamberlain and Tessa Furlow

There's a lot to like about the 4th-grade trailers.

We don't hear noise from other classrooms, so we're able to focus. The trailers are well lit, have shiny new desks and private bathrooms.

No need to worry about getting permission to go down the hall, either. And when it's time for dismissal, we can get outside very quickly.

The new trailer classrooms aren't perfect, though.

For example, there isn't a lot of space so we don't have much room for storage, and sometimes we get into human traffic jams.

Another issue is the stability of the doors. The hinges have broken on some of them, causing them to fly open and hit students. Khalab Blagburn is one student who experienced this. "I think they should make the hinges stronger," he said.

When repair people do come to fix the doors, the classroom becomes noisy, making it hard to concentrate.

Also, the weather is a problem in the trailers, especially in winter when teachers and students have to get their coats on before going anywhere. And because the doors lead straight outside, every time someone goes in or out of the classroom, the cold air seeps in, and the warm air rushes out. BRRR!

There should be awnings to stop snow or rain from falling on students when they're lining up outside, Asha Mathur, a 4th grade teacher, told us.

As we said, we like our private bathrooms but sometimes the toilets break or overflow, allowing water to seep out. At other times, the toilet doesn't even flush and we have to go next door. Also, sometimes the water from the faucets won't warm up at all.

We know that school officials can't fix every problem in the trailers. Unless they build a tunnel, we'll continue to go outside to get to our special classes. And they can't make the trailers any bigger than they are.

But we do have some practical suggestions for improving trailer life.

One idea is to replace the door hinges with stronger ones that won't break. Another is to build shelves up to the ceiling along one of the bathroom walls. We could store some of our supplies there and free up some space in the main part of the classroom.

A plumber should be hired to figure out what's causing the toilet and sink problems and fix them for good.

To keep the weather from getting into our classrooms and on our heads, we suggest that awnings be built (thanks for the idea, Ms. Mathur!).

We recommend vestibules, too. A vestibule is a small enclosed space with a door. If vestibules were built, people would have to go through two doors to get in or out. Since only one door would be open at a time, less cold air would seep in or out when people come and go.

Taking steps like these would benefit the students by making the trailer classrooms safer, more sanitary, and better for concentrating on learning.

... the cold air seeps in, and the warm air rushes out. BRRR!

Hoops: Boys Stong, Girls Improve

By Marlowe Verheyden-Messineo and Lucy Chamberlain

In a noisy Janney gym, the Murch boys basketball players displayed strong passing, rebounding and foul-shooting to whip the home team, 32-18, and end its season with a 6-2 record.

But a few days later, a West Education Campus team knocked the Mustangs out of the playoffs in the first round by two points.

Coach Tim Johnson said that the Murch players made lots of progress during the season.

"At the beginning they didn't work as a team," he said, but later they were "playing as a team and making smart decisions on defense and offense."

Fourth-grade player Demetrius DeMammos agreed, saying that the No. 1 lesson he learned was that "in order to win you need to come together...and play as a team."

The Lady Mustangs got better, too. They managed to win only two of eight games but Coach Daniel Hayden thinks that improvement, not winning, is the most important thing.

"I am really proud of how far they have come, especially with how well they play defense," said the coach, noting that the girls improved with every game.

It took time for the girls to get used to the noise and pressure of the games.

"Most of the players on the other teams are taller," 5th-grade player Reese Kolasky said, "so it's harder to get the rebounds and shoot." The girls learned to concentrate on moving the ball, passing and making quick decisions.

To Coach Hayden, the game against a much taller Shepherd team stood out.

In that game, the Murch girls felt intimidated during the first half and fell behind badly. But they used their speed and defensive skills to close the gap in the second half, losing by only seven points.



Coach Johnson and players after Murch beats Janney.

Time + Work = New Life in the Garden

By Lucy Chamberlain

In these gray days of winter, the Murch vegetable garden seems dreary. But soon it will be sprouting to life again.

When spring comes, students and adults will see some new plants and some old favorites, too.

The familiar "three sisters" (corn, beans and squash) will be back, and new plants will emerge from okra seeds selected by 5th-graders while visiting Mt. Vernon last year.

Lisa Burke, leader of the garden volunteers, said the corn attracts young students, who "marvel at how tall it grows," adding, "I'm really excited for the okra this year because okra flowers are beautiful!"

But before anything can grow, there's a lot of planning, digging, planting and weeding to do. Kid artists can help, too, by creating garden art and signs.

Tashima Hawkins, Murch's science coordinator, will work with teachers to plan garden activities that support what kids learn in their classrooms.

If winter goes on too long, then "we have to ... make the garden think spring has come early...to trick Mother Nature," Ms. Burke said.

"Some of our tricks are starting the seeds under lights in classrooms, covering the soil with plastic so that it warms up sooner than the rest of the ground, and covering the gar-

den beds with plastic greenhouse tents."

More volunteers are needed, Ms. Burke said.

Students and parents who want to pitch in should contact her at lavelleburke@mac.com and watch the Murch website for garden updates.

When all that work pays off, Ms. Burke looks forward to seeing "lots of children, freed from indoor recess at last, scurrying with the squirrels, running and laughing in the grass and among the trees ... and watching seed leaves unfold and give way to new plants."



Soon okra flowers will appear -- in full color

BLUE & GOLD STAFF AND LETTERS

STAFF

5th GRADE STUDENTS: Isabel Duarte, Journey Gianna.

4TH GRADE STUDENTS: Maia Bester, Lucy Chamberlain, Alexandra Lange, Naomi Rea, Tessa Furlow, Marlowe Verheyden-Messineo, Rigby Zentner

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The Blue and Gold is the only published elementary student newspaper in the DC public schools.

Our First Commandment:
Thou Shalt Not Bore the Reader

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In addition to being newsworthy and loads of fun to read, The Blue and Gold is a work of art. I love the layout, pictures, poetry. An amazing achievement. Kudos to you and your student team.

-- Susan Murray, former OASIS tutoring coordinator

This is a winner. It's interesting, colorful, and well laid out.

-- Ed Gordon, retired medical scientist



B&G lunch meeting. Clockwise: Tessa, Alexandra, Naomi, Rigby, Journey, Marlowe, Lucy. Absent: Isabel and Maia.

Fiction Books:

a tiny elephant, a wimpy kid and some gnomes

By Tessa Furlow

LITTLE ELLIOTT, BIG CITY by Mike Curato (ages 4-7)

A tiny elephant moves into the big city. As he walks around town, he enters a store and tries to buy a cupcake. But he can't because he is so small that the clerk is unable to see him.

On his walk back home, Elliott meets a mouse tangled in a net. Elliot helps and befriends the mouse, who then helps Elliott buy a cupcake by standing on top of the elephant.

I liked the book's pictures because they view adults just as Elliot sees them: from the waist down. This book is good for kids who like unusual friendships.

DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE LONG HAUL by Jeff Kinney (ages 7-10)

Greg Heffley's Diary #9 in the popular Wimpy Kid series is full of problems and disappointments for Greg and his brothers Rodrick and Manny. All of them are funny.

During a summer vacation, the three brothers are hauled by their parents to a

"world-famous" museum featuring Carvings of Presidents in Butter and a corn field with The World's Largest Popcorn Kernel.

Greg and his brothers lick the buttery Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, denting their legs. The huge popcorn kernel, it turns out, is actually made of wood.

The hilarious problems in Greg's diary are caused not only by his family, but also by total strangers.

For example, family members ransack a hotel room, believing that the occupants had stolen their car keys and wallets.

Greg's dad ends up running out of the room with his pants around his ankles, chased by a fat stranger with hairy legs.



an undersized elephant explores the BIG CITY

WINTERFROST by Michelle Houts (ages 8 to 12)

Bettina Larson and her family are having fun on Christmas at their house in Denmark.

But they forget to leave a bowl of rice pudding for gnome-like creatures called Nisse. The Nisse people get upset and steal Bettina's baby sister, Pia. Bettina must get Pia back before her parents find out.

As Bettina journeys back and forth

through the worlds of humans and gnomes, she realizes that she was wrong to believe that the Nisse weren't real. She becomes friends with the gnomes in their home inside an oak tree, where they use nuts for tables and chairs.

The story is funny, adventurous and magical. When Bettina goes inside the oak tree, the Nisse magic draws her in and makes her smaller.

The writing is so lively that I felt as if I was traveling along with Bettina.

Non-Fiction Books:

Soccer, Sylvia and Frida

By Marlowe Verheyden-Messineo

GOAL by Sean Taylor. Photographs by Caio Vilela (ages 4-8)

Taylor's book tells how boys and girls play soccer in Togo, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Nepal, China, Spain and many other countries.

I especially liked the photographs. One shows poor kids in Tanzania playing with a ball made of rags and socks wrapped in string.

There also are pictures of children playing in bare feet or in sandals or on a beach, showing that kids can have fun playing soccer without expensive gear.

There are stories from many countries, including one about Pele, the great soccer player who led his Brazilian team to three World Cups. In 1967, when his team traveled to Nigeria during a war, both sides agreed to pause their battle just to watch Pele play.

The photographs alone make this book good for all kids, even those not yet old enough to read.

SEPARATE IS NEVER EQUAL by Duncan Tonatiuh (ages 7-10)

This book is about the struggle for civil rights of Sylvia Mendez and her family in California, beginning in 1945.

The Mendez children were required to go to schools for "Mexicans" only, not to schools with "white" kids. People who wanted to keep the races apart argued that schools could be separate but equal.

But the fact was that non-white children did not get an equal education. The "Mexican" schools were shacks where the children ate outside in the dirt and had no playground.

Sylvia's family hired a lawyer, David Marcus, who won a lawsuit against the school system in 1947,

ending segregation in California public schools.

This case was important because it led to the 1954 US Supreme Court ruling that public school segregation was unconstitutional in the entire country.

President Obama presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Sylvia Mendez in 2011 because of her continuing fight for equality.

Lots of people should read "Separate Is Never Equal" to learn about the fight for freedom and justice, which is still going on today.

VIVA FRIDA by Yuyi Morales. (all ages)

This beautiful presentation of the life and work of the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo tells her story with images more than words.

The pages are filled with delightful and spirited drawings, photographs of figurines of Frida, and creatures important in her life. The book's few words are in Spanish and English.

The colorful, inspiring and dream-like pictures show different moments in her life. I especially liked the images of Frida with animals, including her pet monkey and dog.

One picture shows Frida helping a deer that had an arrow in its paw. In her art, she painted her head on the body of a wounded deer.

Frida had polio and, later, a bus accident, both of which badly hurt her body. But her spirit stayed strong.

In a note to readers, author-illustrator Morales said that she was inspired by Frida's "courage and her ability to overcome her own limitations."

"Terrible" Is Lots Of Fun

Movie Expands Alex's Awful Day Into a Family Mess

By Isabel Duarte and Patricia Scott

In the movie "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day", Alexander gets gum in his hair (ouch!), accidentally burns down the science lab (gasp!), and has his birthday party on the same day as the richest kid in the school so that no one will come to Alexander's party (how unfair!).

Meanwhile, other members of his family are having the time of their lives.

But at midnight, Alexander wishes that his family would have the type of bad day that he had. His wish comes true.

His father gets burned. His mother's book has a typo. His brother is suspended from school, fails his driving test and can't take his girlfriend to the prom.

On the other hand, Alexander is having an awesome day. His family



everything seems to go wrong for this film family

learns to stick together, fight the hardships, and ends up having a great day at Alexander's party.

We liked how this movie turned a terrible day into a comedy, and showed how awful events can bring a family together.

We asked Judith Viorst, author of the original Alexander book, what she thought of the movie:

Q. What was your favorite part?

A. I had many favorite parts, includ-

ing Anthony's driving test, Jennifer Garner's desperate motorcycle ride, Dick Van Dyke's book reading, and I... got a big kick out of Steve Carell, especially in the baby-and-me class.

Q. What do you think were the most important differences between the movie and the original story?

A. The movie enlarged the idea of one child's terrible, horrible day to include the whole family. I thought it was a clever solution to a challenging problem.

MURCH KIDS: "MY VERY BAD DAY WAS WHEN ...

As told to Naomi Rea and Marlowe Verheyden-Messineo

... I went to a little park...There were a bunch of rocks..."Look", I yelled to my mom. Then I slid down, bonked my chin and got all bloody."
--- Mary Louisa Leopold, 4th grade

... another kid ran by me with his guitar. As he passed, the guitar accidentally smacked me in the head."
--- Nikole Lordan, 4th grade

... I was little, and there was a show called "Go Diego Go". A kid started teasing me by singing the theme song."
--- Diego Arrieta, 3rd grade

... my parents were planning a bus trip to New York City. I got sick and we couldn't go."
--- Siena Stronach, 3rd grade

... on the first day of school, I got something stuck in my ear and had to go home early."
--- Juan Andres Camacho Ortiz, 2nd grade

... I was screaming and crying in a restaurant when I thought I sprained my ankle."
--- Ben Cole, 4th grade

... my little brother pulled down my pants in public in Central Park."
--- Everett Little, 4th grade

... I was trying to do a back flip on a tram-poline and my pants fell down."
--- August Gleason, 4th grade

... I was trying to go to sleep and there was a thunderstorm."
--- Myles Anderson, kindergarten

... I threw up on my (4th) birthday on my grandma's lap in a park and it was disgusting...I had to go back home and take medicine...I didn't get to eat any cake."
--- Adrian Belmonte, 3rd grade

... I was watching TV and my parents took away the remote control."
--- Kwabena Obeng, kindergarten

Meet a Few New Teachers

Can anyone say "zumba" in Xhosa?

By Maia Bester and Alexandra Lange

Zumba, a reading problem and a South African language called Xhosa.

Believe it or not, these are parts of the personal histories of some of Murch's new teachers.

CHRISTOPHER LYON
Pre-k resource

Mr. Lyon thinks that pre-k kids learn best through art, so he started a new art studio program for them.

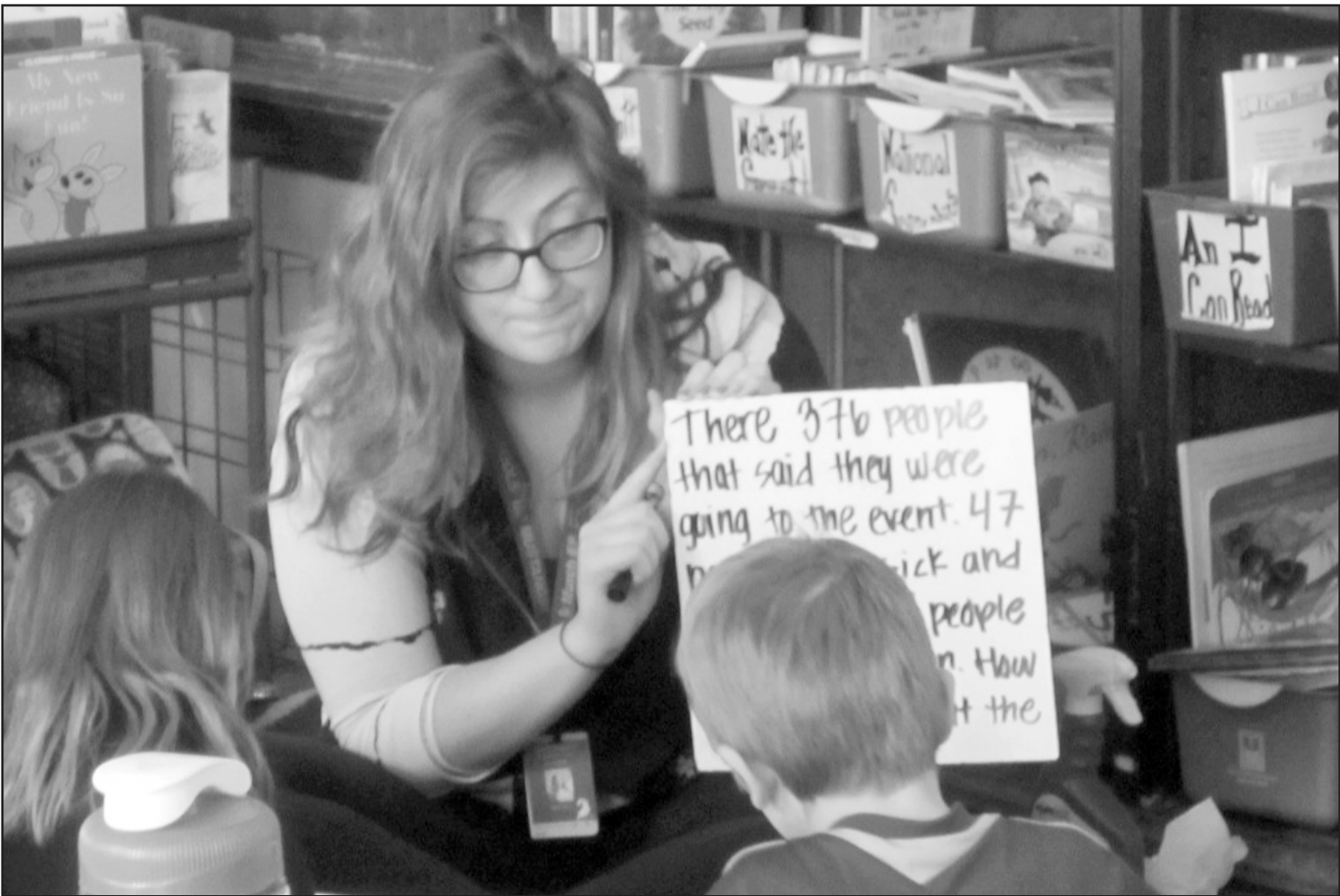
"It allows them to touch and move materials, and that transfers to other academic subjects, like math and reading," he said.

Mr. Lyon said he encourages kids to "explore, create and investigate their world by using found objects or everyday materials in a different way."

As an elementary school student, he wanted to be a dentist. But later he saw what good teaching looked like and decided to become a teacher.

MERIBETH HEITBRINK
2nd grade

Before coming to Murch, Ms. Heitbrink taught 6th-graders in Cape Town, South Africa, even though she



Ms. Heitbrink explains a problem in math to one of her 2nd-grade students

could not speak their language, Xhosa. How did she do that? By using hand gestures, drawing things and pointing to objects, she explained.

"Words are not necessarily what makes communication," she said.

Ms. Heitbrink graduated last June from Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with a degree in elementary education and psychology.

"I love being a teacher," she said, "and any type of progress is awesome, whether it is social or academic."

MONICA DAVIS
3rd grade

On Saturdays, when she isn't teaching kids in a Murch classroom, Ms. Davis may be found at a Gold's Gym as a teacher of zumba.

That means that she shows adults how to move to the exciting rhythms of hip-hop, samba, salsa and mambo.

Although she loves teaching 3rd graders, Ms. Davis said she would prefer the 4th grade because that's where the Revolutionary War is taught..

"I like to learn about the past, and

how people have fought for their rights," she explained.

MARIA SAMENGA
4th grade

When Ms. Samenga was a 4th grader, she loved reading. But her teacher said she was bad at it.

"I got placed in the second lowest class," she remembered. She kept on reading.

Now, many years later, she's back in the 4th grade -- but this time she's a teacher of reading.

The best books she ever read, she said, are "The Life of Pi" ("It ended completely differently than I expected") and "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince". ("The Harry Potter books are very creative, and I liked to picture what was going on").

Of all the grades that she had taught, she found pros and cons in each.

"The younger kids are sweet, cute and more innocent, but are needy, and the older kids are more independent and opinionated," she said.

Spiderwoman Goes to Kindergarten

She Climbs, Changes Her Looks, Awakens for Class

By Rigby Zentner

The kids in one kindergarten class have their own superpet: the amazing Spiderwoman.

She can leave her skin, regrow her own body parts and walk on walls like Spiderman.

In Room 204, Charles Chalfant's classroom, there's a Chilean rose hair tarantula that the students named Gigi.

"We are excited to see her grow, and my class is definitely excited to see her molt," Mr. Chalfant said.

Molting happens when Gigi grows out of her skin, leaving her shell behind. Gigi can regrow her body parts when molting.

Gigi is a hairy, black and brown spider. She lives in a small, brown log and likes to stretch in the morning.

Chilean rose-haired tarantulas are found in Chile, Bolivia and Argentina. They are not dangerous to humans. Female tarantulas are known to live 15 years or longer.

"I like to see Gigi climb on the walls of the cage," said kindergarten Andrew Leopold.

The students prepared for the arrival of their pet by reading books about tarantulas and watching a 30-minute documentary.

"We learned that tarantulas have eight eyes," Klementyna McGuire said.

On Mondays and Thursdays, it's feeding time for Gigi. The students give her crickets -- live ones. Mr. Chalfant gets the crickets from a pet store.

Tarantulas are nocturnal, so when people are asleep, Gigi is awake. But Mr. Chalfant said that lately Gigi has been up during school hours.

"I think Gigi is adjusting and getting used to our schedule," Mr. Chalfant said.



Evelyn Gallant, Daniel Hudson, Kitty Huang study Gigi

Ms. Massey: "My Dreams Have Changed"

LUNCH LADY
(from Page One)

"I didn't become a teacher because my dreams have changed," she recalled. "I wanted to be a business owner.

"I'm planning on opening up a funeral service. I know you think

it's scary, but it's not. It's life. It's a forever business. I wouldn't mind doing both. I can do it!"

She may not be teaching in a classroom, but every day she shows kids what a healthy, balanced meal looks like and how to put it together.

When they grab the wrong

things, she tells them to read the menu and learn what the balanced meal is for that day.

She wants all kids to know that they are supposed to have something from each food group.

For example, if students try to

get cereal, fruit, milk and yogurt for breakfast, she tells them that their balanced meal consists of one serving each of a carbohydrate (cereal), a fruit and a dairy item (milk).

A yogurt would be a second dairy serving and isn't part of a balanced meal, she says.

Of course, many kids eat only

what they like and throw out the rest.

But Ms. Massey never allows that to stop her from teaching them how to eat properly.

She has a lot of work ahead of her.