



## Authors Inspire and Entertain at TTP Partner Schools

Through Turning the Page's Author Visit program, local children's authors volunteer their time to visit our schools during Community Nights to celebrate literacy. Our fall author visits proved to be an exciting and educational event for TTP families and authors alike.

To kick off the evening at MLK Elementary, Ms. Gilbertson's first grade class performed a poem titled "Our World" to welcome children's author, Corkey DeSimone. Ms. DeSimone enchanted the children and adults with a reading of her book, *The Planet Hue*, which teaches children to celebrate diversity and welcome cooperation. After the reading, the children got a chance to ask her questions like, "did it really take you ten years to write this book?" and "how did you pick a title?" During the parent workshop she encouraged parents to emphasize their children's strengths and recognize each child's special talents and individuality.

### Volunteer Spotlight

Each year, TTP gratefully welcomes a group of dedicated Child Mentor volunteers who dedicate their time to connect with the children. Emma Martin and Jennifer Perry volunteered with us through the GW office of DC Reads this semester. Their willingness to step forward and help out in all aspects of Community Nights showed their commitment to ensuring the program's success. Additionally, their independence and leadership was seen as they took on the role of prepping the other mentors for the evening's activities. Here, they reflect on their time with Turning the Page.



*Students welcome Barbara Alexander to River Terrace Elementary in November 2007.*

At River Terrace Elementary, Barbara Alexander read her book, *Papa's Penny Party*. Mr. Frazier's second graders created a giant sign to welcome Ms. Alexander to their school. Ms. Alexander is a former early childhood educator and captivated everyone from the youngest babies to grandmothers and grandfathers. She led the group in exciting songs and dances while reading a story about her childhood in her book.

Jerry Craft, a cartoonist and writer came all the way from Connecticut to

speak to families at Garfield Elementary. He led the students in a drawing activity and told them all, "Now look, I can see you all know how to draw, don't ever say you can't!" He told caregivers to encourage their children's creativity and artistic interests and "never say never." To celebrate Mr. Craft's visit, Garfield held a student art contest. Ms. Barton, the school's Special-Education teacher, judged the contest and awarded the winner, Mark Keitt, a second grader in Mrs. Amponsah's class, with a board game featuring Mr. Craft's *Mama's Boyz* characters.

Turning the Page would like to thank all of the authors who volunteered their time this semester: Sheree Fitch, Charisse Carney-Nunes, Robin Ringgold, Corkey DeSimone, Barbara Alexander and Jerry Craft. Thanks to the dedication of these wonderful people, children and caregivers had fun while recognizing the importance of literacy.

#### **Emma Martin, GW, Class of 2010**

"The best part about Community Nights is the kids that really throw themselves into the projects and are so full of positive energy. I especially enjoyed our Parent Leadership Day this fall because the kids were so enthusiastic and curious... It was impressive to see how many parents were willing to give up their Saturday to improve their children's school experience."

#### **Jennifer Perry, GW, Class of 2010**

"I think it's extraordinary to be a part of a program that puts forth incredible efforts towards the children as well as the parents. Though the benefits of TTP are



*Jen Perry and Emma Martin*

unbounded, one in particular has struck me personally...Volunteering at Community Nights generates a sort of reciprocal learning. While I help the children read and create, they teach me about their community and culture - right down to the hand-claps and dances. I think that the unique situations in which this can occur is something to be recognized, to be valued."

## Parent Leadership in Action at Garfield Elementary

At James A. Garfield Elementary in Southeast D.C., school is not just a place for children. It's a place where parents are welcome, as well. Just ask Esther Turner, the aunt of two girls, Doniece and Janeeka. "We have a new Parent Resource Center now that we didn't have before. The teachers are making more of an effort to reach out to parents in a generous and courteous way. I feel very welcome each time I visit the school."

An active member of the school community for 5 years, Ms. Turner has witnessed some significant changes. With TTP support, the PTA at Garfield Elementary has undergone a rapid transformation in just one year. What started out as a group of six newly elected officers with nothing more than a dream for increasing parental involvement has now become a full-fledged organization with over two dozen people who participate

on a regular basis. All it took was a little motivation from a well-known community figure.

At the request of the Garfield PTA officers, Turning the Page invited Marion Barry, Councilmember from Ward 8, to make a guest appearance at the PTA kick-off event in the beginning of the school year. Mr. Barry impressed upon parents the importance of getting involved, *and staying involved*, in their children's education. In the meetings that followed, parents brainstormed some ways that they can participate and be a part of the school community. The new Parent Resource Center is just one example of how parents can do that.

Housed in what was, until recently, a storage room, the resource center has evolved into a meeting room for parents



*Councilmember Marion Barry and PTA president Eloise Gibbs started the year off right for the Garfield PTA!*

to gather, share concerns and successes, and strategize ways to move forward with PTA projects. A new Parent Volunteer Program is in the works and a dinner dance fundraiser is being planned. All this is positive news for Esther Turner. "The Parent Resource Center is a big accomplishment for the PTA. We have more opportunities to visit the school now, and more choices for involvement."

## Literacy Through Photography Puts Students Behind the Lens

All the hard work of the fall 2007 semester really paid off as River Terrace and Garfield elementaries completed their Literacy Through Photography programs just before holiday break. This year's LTP



*Torey Lawrence, a Garfield student, proudly shows off his work at the school's Exhibit Opening. (photo courtesy of Ruth Weston)*

team was led by TTP's new program manager, Mary Beth Kochman, whose 11 years as a classroom teacher brought a new dimension to the program.

After helping students for two months as they took photographs, and then wrote and revised personal stories, River Terrace and Garfield displayed the photographs and writings at in-school exhibits in December. Family and community members, and fellow students attended the exhibit openings. Principal Thomas from Garfield attended the evening celebration and commented that she, "thoroughly enjoyed the Literacy Through Photography exhibits. The pictures were phenomenal."

Luckily for those who missed the openings, the photographs and writings are still on display at both schools. "We have put them up on a wall where the majority of the students must pass by in order to see them. It's kind of like our Wall of Fame," says Principal Thomas.

Participating teachers were thrilled

as well. Garfield teacher Claudette Carson commented, "My students enjoyed the eight-week program. They eagerly participated in the discussions, enjoyed responding in writing to prompts, (they wrote everyday) used the language presented, and felt like amateur photographers."

While the students at Garfield and River Terrace will be enjoying the fruits of their labor, Turning the Page will be starting the program at Aiton and Gibbs elementary this winter. TTP staff member Erika Widmaier looks forward to the coming semester: "It is so exciting to see what kinds of choices the students make in their photographs. The student writings really seem inspired by the photographs they have taken. I learn so much about the students and their communities."

## Parent Leaders Use Information as a Tool for Action

On Saturday December 1st 32 parent leaders from TTP's six partner schools gathered at the Thurgood Marshall Academy in Southeast D.C. for a full day of learning, skill-building, and action planning. The Parent Leadership Certification Program is a TTP parent leadership initiative held every winter and spring. The passion and drive of these 32 individuals made for an exciting and productive day.

Parents learned more about their rights under No Child Left Behind and discussed issues of family engagement with guest speaker, Arnold Fege, a national education leader and TTP board-member. TTP presented parents with school report card data, which shows how schools perform on standardized tests each year and whether they are making "adequate yearly progress" as defined by NCLB. Parents used this data

as a tool to share information with their school administrators and other parents. In the afternoon, Laurent Ross of the D.C. College Savings Plan shared information with parents about saving for their children's education. The day ended with parent leaders creating a mock meeting agenda to introduce other parents to the standardized test administered at all D.C. public schools.

As a capstone to the day's achievements, parents gathered in their respective school groups to create a goal chart which helped them visualize their plans for 2008. Through this activity parent leaders were engaged in setting goals, analyzing resources, recruiting members and planning for follow-through on all projects.

Many parent leaders put information into action immediately after the training to make their goals a reality. M.C.



*Arnold Fege addresses parent leaders at the December 2007 training.*

Terrell parent leaders led a meeting with Principal Deskins to discuss their school report card data. Parent leader Patrina Swinson has taken on the position of Parent Resource Center coordinator at Aiton Elementary. She has several ideas for parent workshops to be held within the center. Her main goal is to create a space where parents can come to be involved in their child's school and gain professional skills as well.

## Community Partners Featured at Community Night Workshops

The 2007 fall Community Night series brought new and exciting workshops led by leaders from the community as well as teachers. A writing workshop helped parents use DCPS writing standards to improve their children's writing skills. After a teacher from each school presented on the writing standards, Kwame Alexander, a published poet and playwright who has appeared on many television and radio programs, led a discussion with the parents. Mr. Alexander, an incredibly dynamic speaker, often used his poetry and spoken word to make his points. He discussed the importance of writing and answered questions about his experience being a writer. Mr. Alexander provided many ways to help parents encourage their children's writing; as one parent, Jena Richardson commented, "Mr. Alexander helped



*Kwame Alexander speaks with MLK parents during a Community Night workshop.*

my family learn how to write and use poems in our everyday living."

Another workshop featured the Anacostia Watershed Society. Located in Southeast D.C., AWS is a nonprofit that works to protect and restore the Anacostia River through education, action and advocacy. Representatives from AWS led a hands-on presentation for parents and their children, teaching families about

the watershed using maps and photos, and showing how pollution affects our river and beyond. The presentation ended with what one parent, Pearl Adams, called an "amazing demonstration"—an activity where groups made filters out of natural substances and saw how those substances cleaned water.

Each school also had teachers who prepared and co-facilitated workshops. TTP would like to thank the following teachers for their hard work: at Aiton, Ms. Page-Baxter, Ms. Washington, and Ms. Howard; at Garfield, Ms. Barton, Ms. Walker, and Ms. Carson; at Gibbs, Ms. Oliver, Ms. Chu, and Ms. Lyons; at MLK, Ms. Awunyo-Akabo, Ms. Gilbertson, and Ms. Emminger; at River Terrace, Mr. Frazier and Ms. Morriner; and at Terrell, Mr. Parks, Ms. Pettus, Ms. Neely, Ms. Hsu, Ms. Keith, and Mr. Leesam.



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### About Turning the Page

Turning the Page links D.C. public schools, families and our community so that, together, we can ensure that D.C. students receive valuable educational resources and a high-quality public education.

### Host a Carpe Librum Book Drive!!

Beginning in April, Turning the Page will be hosting our seventh annual Carpe Librum used book sale. We expect to have 100,000 books available for sale, but need your help to reach that goal.

#### Would you be able to host a book drive in your apartment building or office, or at your place of worship?

Ask your friends to "clean off their shelves"! All donated books are put on sale for five weeks in April - May, with proceeds from the sale benefitting our programs on behalf of DC students, their teachers and their families.

Please contact Kathleen Rice at [krice@turningthepage.org](mailto:krice@turningthepage.org), or (202) 347-9841 x14, for further information.



*Customers peruse the racks at Carpe Librum VI.*

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