

Notes from Classroom 303

Matoaka Elementary School
Williamsburg, VA



February 23, 2011

Volume 1
Issue 1

“Hello!” from Mrs. Ammirati

Today marks the start of my ten weeks of student teaching in Mrs. Ferrara’s class! We have all been together since school began in September and have enjoyed some terrific lessons together. A few of my favorites are an animal adaptations “circus”, a Dr. Seuss-inspired exploration of oobleck, and our recent paper airplane investigation for the recent science fair. I’m looking forward to the next three months of learning in room 303.

I am currently finishing my Master’s degree in Education at William and Mary and will graduate in May with licensure in Elementary Education. My undergraduate degrees are in business and Chinese from the University of Pennsylvania; my early career was in international trade and management consulting. When my husband was assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, China, I taught one year of fifth grade in an international school and then shifted to ninth grade to teach algebra and world history for a year.

Our family later lived in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Manhattan where I was in your position - volunteering in schools and helping my children learn and grow academically and socially in their many different locales. Most recently, I worked for ten years as director of a cooperative preschool in Arlington. Now that my two children are both in college, I am thrilled to be able to return to classroom teaching!

Inside this issue:

Student Teacher Introduction	1
Book Recommendations	2
Handling Test Anxiety	3
Healthy Snack Choices	4
Mind-Body Fitness	5
Upcoming Events	6
Volunteer Opportunities	6

To share information and give you a glimpse into all of our third grade activities, I have created a classroom wiki at: <http://classroom303glimpse.wikispaces.com/> I welcome your feedback about this evolving communications tool so please leave a message or any suggestions for improvement on the [Questions and Feedback](#) page. For other issues, feel free to call 757-259-4704 or email me at cmammirati@email.wm.edu. I will return emails by the end of the day and am happy to conference with you by phone or in person. I’m excited about a wonderful spring with your terrific students!

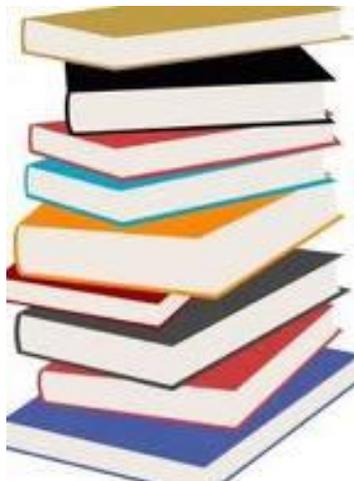
All the best, Christine Ammirati

The Readers' Nook



March is an exciting month for readers in third grade and beyond! This month kicks off with **Read Across America Day** on March 2nd. This is a day for students (and adults!) to spend some extra time reading a book. And why March 2nd, you ask? It's **Dr. Seuss's birthday!** On March 2nd, take the time to read a Dr. Seuss book with your child, or perhaps even ask your child read a Dr. Seuss book to you. Many children have read *Green Eggs and Ham* and *Hop on Pop* so often they know it verbatim, so here are a few Dr. Seuss books that are more appropriate for your worldly third grader:

- *Hooray for Diffendoofer Day*
Published after Dr. Seuss's death, this book was written with a little help from some friends.
- *The Sneetches and Other Stories*
These four different short stories is sure to please.
- *Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are?*
This playful story reminds people how lucky they are by highlighting folks who are not quite so lucky.



Women's History Month is also in March. Help your child celebrate the achievements of women throughout history by reading a book. Here are some suggestions for picture books:

- *Amelia and Eleanor Go for a Ride*
by Pan Munoz Ryan
This great story is based on a little-known airplane ride shared by Amelia Earhart and Eleanor Roosevelt.
- *The Story of Ruby Bridges*
by Robert Coles
Six-year-old Ruby Bridges was the first African American to attend a New Orleans elementary school after a court ordered it to desegregate in 1960. This book is a true testament to the strong character of a six-year-old child.
- *A Picture Book of Helen Keller*
by David A. Adler
The story of Helen Keller is an inspiration for all readers.

In case there is not enough already going on in March, there's even more! March celebrates the birthday of the prolific children's author **Lois Lowry** (two-time Newberry Award Winner), the birthday of Louis Sachar (author of the Newberry Award winning *Holes*), and the birth anniversary of **Randolph Caldecott**, the man who would give his name to the Caldecott Award. Whatever the reason, March is certainly a month for reading.

Soothing Nerves and Reducing Test Anxiety



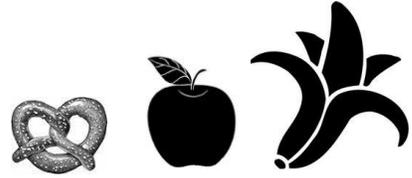
Third grade is a busy and challenging year for our young students. For the first time, they must deal with an increase in the homework load, are taught by two different teachers, and need to juggle the organizational challenge of carrying assignments and supplies as they travel between classrooms. In addition, third graders face more frequent classroom exams in preparation for their four Standards of Learning assessments in May. This load may sometimes feel daunting for our eight and nine-year-olds and test anxiety can arise. In fact, recent research suggests that high stakes testing may result in student feelings of academic pressure and concerns about test performance. As teachers and parents, we can help our young children weather anxiety and learn how to relax in high-stress situations such as these upcoming standardized tests.

At home, parents can create a solid base for academic performance by providing **ample sleep, good nutrition, regular play and relaxation, and positive energy**. Solid preparation for an exam has been shown to be one of the most effective ways to reduce test anxiety. Making sure that your child **completes homework and reviews study guides** is often the best defense against those test day jitters. If children feel confident and well-prepared, their nerves are easier to manage.

At school, we are preparing for those upcoming SOLs by teaching **test taking strategies** and honing specific skills through regular practice. You might have heard your children talking about frequently working on reading passages and comprehension questions or reviewing content by using our (very fun) Qwizdom response system. These are some of the many ways we are working to bolster student knowledge, skill, and test-taking attitudes. We're keeping our energy high and the fun factor in mind and are telling the students that these **practice sessions** are specifically intended to prepare them for the SOLs. We are working (and practicing) together to get them ready.

For students experiencing test anxiety, **deep breathing** and **guided relaxation strategies** have been shown to be successful in reducing stress. Slow, focused breathing - inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth - has documented results. Another proven calming strategy is a progressive relaxation technique where students tense and then release different muscle groups. **“Stop, Drop, and Roll”** is a method where students put their pencils down, drop their heads forward, and then roll their heads gently back and forth while taking three deep breaths. In the coming weeks, we will take brief study breaks during seatwork to learn and practice these techniques. Our students will have all three tools in hand if they have a bout of anxiety during a test. We encourage you to try these strategies at home as a cool down from a Wii session, after biking, or even while finishing up a homework session. Whatever works and feels fun for you! If you have any concerns or questions about test anxiety, take a look at the following resources and please feel free to contact me at cmammirati@aol.com.
http://www.aboutourkids.org/files/articles/test_anxiety_E.pdf
<http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=283>
<http://www.jsc.montana.edu/articles/v8n19.pdf>
<http://www.schoolcounselor.org/files/6-2-162%20Cheek.pdf>

March is Nutrition Month!



Since we have gotten comfortable in our school routine, March is a good month to be reminded about nutrition and healthy eating. The American Dietetic Association wants to raise awareness of healthy eating throughout the day, including snack time. As you pack snacks for your children please make a conscious effort to pack healthy and nutritious snacks.

We call our snack a “working snack” because we are doing work while we are eating snack, therefore, it should be a snack that is easy to eat. While parfaits, smoothies, and fruit cups are fun and healthy foods to eat, they are not the best for a snack at school.

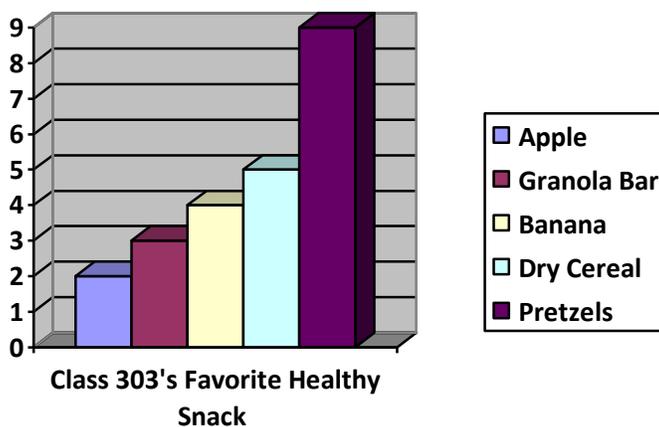
We prefer healthy treats such as:

- dry cereal
- pretzels
- apples
- dried fruit
- grapes
- berries
- bananas
- granola bars

Chips, sweets, candy, and other junk food does not give students the energy they need to get them through the day. For a list of healthy snack options, check out the ADA website, <http://www.eatright.org/Public/content.aspx?id=206>. Keep in mind as you review these ideas, that while some are excellent healthy options, we are going for a “working snack”.

Let’s work together to encourage our students to become healthy, active individuals!

And our favorite healthy snack is ...



We recently applied our math knowledge of charts and graphs to questions about our own preferences. In a recent poll of our 23 students, we discovered that pretzels were classroom 303’s favorite healthy snack. How many students preferred pretzels?

The Student Page



Mind – Body Fitness

Let's get fit for learning! But where do you start? Remember, your mind and body work together and if one is not functioning at the highest level then neither is the other. Do these five things regularly to keep your mind and body in sync so learning will be a little bit easier.

Stretch: There's nothing worse than trying to read a book while your muscles are tight and your body is tense. Take some time to relieve your muscles and get blood flowing smoothly through your entire body. Stretching doesn't have to be intense. Here are two simple and easy stretches...

- Stand up tall and reach for the sky. Put your hands together and lean to the right for 30 seconds, and then to the left.
- Bend over and just hang your arms loosely to the floor for 30 seconds. If you feel pain then try not to bend over as much.

Sleep: The brain is the muscle that controls your thoughts. It is constantly at work for most of the day. Make sure that you give your brain a chance to rest and restore all of its great strength. Eight hours is the nightly minimum recommendation for sleep. If you can't get enough sleep, then try to take a short nap during the afternoon. Here are some tips to help you sleep well at night...

- Turn off your electronics thirty minutes before going to bed.
- Don't eat within an hour of going to sleep.
- Write down your thoughts before going to sleep.

Stroll: So you can't think of the answer to that tough homework question? Take a break and take a walk. Go outside, look at the clouds or stars, and let your mind wander. You never know, you may discover the answer to those tough questions along the way.

Smoothies: There's nothing better than combining your favorite fruit flavors into an ice cold drink. Smoothies are a tasty treat and are healthy for your mind and body. Just pick your favorite flavors and see what you can create. Here's one idea:

- ½ cup frozen strawberries
- 1 cup orange juice
- 1 banana, cut in pieces
- 2 tablespoons milk

Add ingredients together in blender and blend until smooth.

Sunshine: Homework is hard and I know your favorite show comes on at 5:30, but the sun is shining and the park is calling your name. If there is no park, then there is a play place waiting to be discovered. Get outside and discover what nature has to offer. Here's a fun game to play with some friends...

- Freeze Tag – One or two players are "it" and they have to tag all of the others. If you get tagged then you are frozen (you can't move), but an unfrozen teammate can unfreeze you. If you're "it" then your goal is to freeze everyone.



The "Pin-Up" Page



Mark your calendar!

- March 8 Family Fitness Night
March 15 Matoaka Dinner Theater, 1
March 16 Matoaka Dinner Theater, 2
March 18 Career Day
March 24 Photo Make-ups
March 31 5th Grade Chorus Festival
(Warhill HS)
April 1 No school for students
April 4-8 SPRING BREAK



Next up in class ...



Simple Machines
Animal and Plant Life Cycles
Review of Egypt and China
Greece
Rome
Mali
Fractions
Decimals
Area and Perimeter
Historical Fiction
Poetry

In Search of... VOLUNTEERS!

Our classroom is in need of adults to:

- chaperone an upcoming April 21st field trip to the Virginia Living Museum
- help students transcribe their biography projects into Word (11:20-12:30)
- participate in Friday, April 22 Earth Day activities

Available other times? Have other interests?

Just shoot Mrs. Ammirati an email at cmammirati@aol.com