

# Four Rivers Currents

April 2014

**From the Principal's Desk...**

## **DEDICATED, OPEN, THOUGHTFUL: FOUR RIVERS TEACHERS STRIVE**

I just completed another round of performance reviews for our faculty. As I reflect on a teacher's work over the year and as I read their reflections, I'm reminded of what a truly great group of people we have here. It's what I see when I go classroom to classroom on my mini-observations; it's what I hear as I sit in on Monday meetings to talk about students of concern; it's what I read in random emails of appreciation, as well. These teachers care a great deal about the students they work with, about the subjects and skills they teach, and about our school. What's more, they work hard to get better and better at what they do. That's right -- our teachers embody a growth mindset.

We made a decision last spring to change the way we conduct our process of evaluation. Luckily, the changes we wanted fit well into the new educator evaluation state regulations we'll have to implement next year. Our aim was to make evaluation as clear, as fair, and as constructive as possible. One part of the task was to name our standards and learning targets. We created a document called STANDARDS FOR TEACHER PRACTICE, which was derived from Expeditionary Learning Core Practices Benchmarks and which will be revised with the new state rubrics in mind. Every teacher does a self-assessment against those standards and identifies 1 or 2 that they are going to work on in the year ahead. They try to identify what indicators might show that they have met a goal, with specific focus on how their implementation of a new practice might impact student learning. We also created a new structure called TEACHER-LED CONFERENCES. As you might guess from the name, these are similar to our student-led conferences. The teacher meets with me for about 45 minutes to discuss several things: what goals did they set out at the beginning of the year, what steps did they take to meet their goals, and what were the results of their efforts? The teacher gathers artifacts and evidence that show what they've done, and the teacher reflects on what's worked and what hasn't.

To open up to feedback, data, and reflection takes courage. It also takes an attitude about growth. Teachers at Four Rivers know that all of us are trying to learn. We're not trying to be perfect; I'd say we're trying to be effective. When you're a teacher, being effective means finding ways to help every student learn and grow. That is an incredibly dynamic process, because what works for one student might not work for another. What one student needs in order to move forward might be completely different from what another needs. Then there's the state telling us what's important, and parents, and other educators, and so on. It is up to the teacher, just as it is up to the student, to own what they set out to learn, because that's the only true way it can happen.

Here are some of the goals our teachers set out to achieve and brief descriptions of the results:

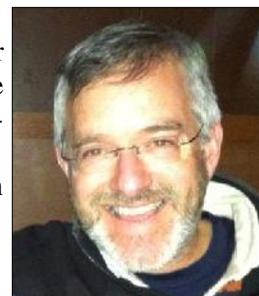
I want to provide clear learning targets for students every day. Results: clear targets have improved student understanding, the class covers more without losing depth, and clear targets guide planning.

I want to craft long term and daily learning targets that are written in kid friendly language and relate to specific content we are covering. Results: students work with purpose, help each other meet the targets, and produce higher quality work.

I want to differentiate learning by giving students challenges and tasks according to their readiness. Results: students are more focused and more engaged when they have straight-ahead, hilly, and mountainous options because they're working at an appropriate level of challenge.

The examples go on and on, and all serve to illustrate the link between teachers focused on examining and improving their practices in order to help more students learn better.

As we adapt to the state requirements next year, there will be some additional layers added. But the basic process of improvement will remain the same. Hats off to a faculty who care about learning!



*Peter Garbus, Principal*

## Grade 7 News

### THE HOUSE OF THE SCORPION

Over the course of about two months 7th graders have been reading *The House of The Scorpion*, by Nancy Farmer. To prepare for our final product, a reader's guide website, we wrote chapter summaries and character analyses; created discussion questions; drew illustrations; defined vocabulary words for a glossary; researched the science behind the science fiction; and we even compared technologies in the ancient world to the technologies in the book. We put lots of effort into these assignments! Below are examples of some high quality pieces of work.

#### **Example from social studies by Olivia:**

Lassieur, Allison. *The Ancient Romans*. Canada: Scholastic inc, 2004. Print.

According to Allison Lassieur "Rich Romans might own hundreds of slaves." Some slaves worked as clerks or secretaries. "Most Romans believed in treating their slaves humanely." Child slaves were some times bought and sold as status symbols. People would sometimes sell themselves into slavery because they were too poor to feed themselves. Children would sometimes be abandoned and turned into slaves. (2004) So, what a slave's life was like depended on who owned you and where you worked.

Miquel, Pierre. *Life in Ancient Rome*. United States: Silver Burdett Company, 1980. Print.

According to Pierre Miquel slaves were put to work in the mines and "working conditions in Roman mines were appalling." In *The House of the Scorpion* eejits' lives were sometimes like the lives of Roman slaves. They have to do whatever their masters say and their lives depend on where they work and who owns them. For example, the eejits are forced to slash the poppies to release the opium as explained by Tam Lin in chapter eight.

#### **Example from Science by Thia:**

The children eating plankton in the Plankton Factory, made us wonder: Can people actually eat plankton? And, can people survive on only one food?

Eating plankton as food, could happen, just not as a main food source as the season for it is very short (but abundant). It would most likely be mixed with food instead of being eaten on its own, because it is fishy and gritty (not pleasurable). However, you may have had medicine that has plankton in it. A kind of it called Spirulina was eaten by the Aztecs, and was traditionally eaten in Africa and Mexico. Plankton was also thought of for a backup source of food in WWII by the British.

Look for our class website—coming soon!

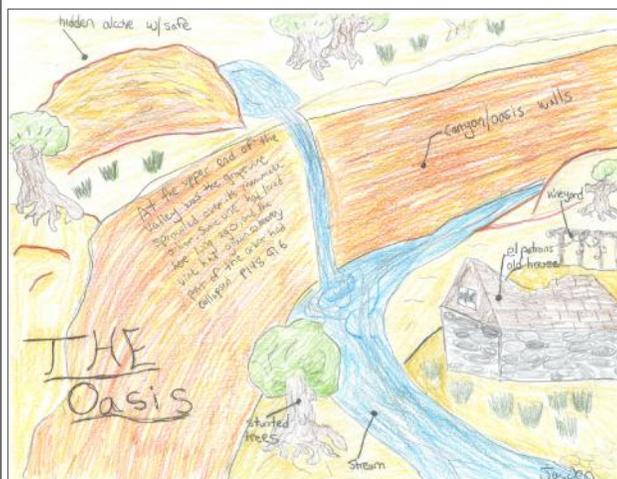


Illustration  
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Jayden.

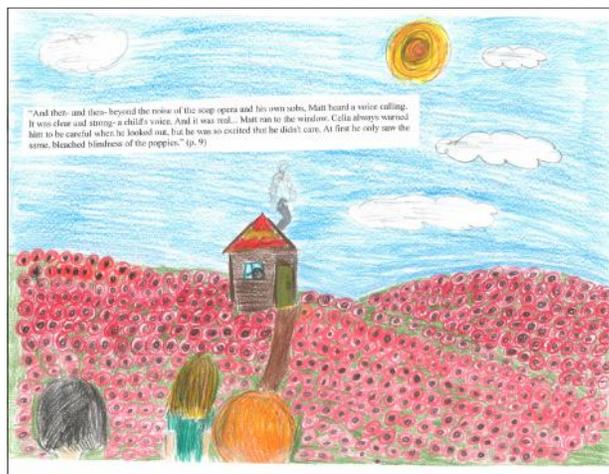


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Grace.

## Grade 8 News

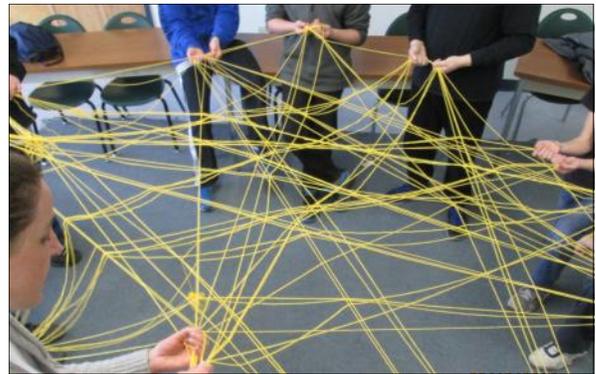
### HUMANITIES ~ Ms. MacNeish

**Romeo and Juliet:** Students finished up strong with student performances of Act I Scene 5, Act 3 Scene 1, and Act 5 Scene 3 of *Romeo and Juliet*! Directors earned Polaris Awards for their Perseverance. Actors and Actresses donned costumes, braved the cold, and gathered props such as light sabers to make the show come alive!

**Renaissance:** The students chose from among artists, leaders, thinkers, explorers, inventors, scientists, and writers of the Renaissance to research and write speeches about. Some Renaissance names you might hear them talking about are Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, Isabella d'Este, Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, Miguel de Cervantes, Louise Labé, and Nicolaus Copernicus, just to name a few! Speeches are in the works and to be presented before Intensives and April break.

**Writer's Cafe:** Each student chose one piece of their writing from their Writer's Journal to refine, edit, publish, as well as perform! Date and time to be announced!! We will gather for tea, scones, and some mighty fine readings!

**Crew:** We have begun Team Challenges! The first was The Machine, followed by The Web (see photo at right), and then we did The Costume Contest! More Team Challenges to come, such as The Marshmallow Challenge and "I Found the Cat!"



### MATH AND SCIENCE

This month, 8th graders are exploring exponents and exponential growth in Math. They are learning rules for representing and calculating with numbers in exponential form, and comparing patterns of exponential growth to linear and inverse patterns that they have seen before. There's a great connection here between this work and their Science studies of patterns in population growth, consumption, resource use, and pollution. In Science, we've begun a unit called "Lifestyle Technologies and Sustainable Innovations," which is being led by our student teacher, Mr. Dave Bradt. After investigating technologies that we use in our daily lives and considering how to evaluate their benefits and impacts, students will develop a set of criteria for a sustainable innovation, and then research and develop their own. This unit will culminate in a design fair where students pitch their ideas.

**Math and Science MCAS**—The dates for these upcoming assessments are set: the Science and Technology/Engineering test is on Thursday, May 8th, and the Math test is on Thursday and Friday, May 15th and 16th. Even though these tests are several weeks away, we have begun to prepare for them. Each day, 8th graders will have about 2 problems from each subject to work on for homework. The practice problems represent multiple choice and short answer problems, organized by topics. We'll go over the problems in class each day. As we get closer to the tests we'll work on how to do open response problems. We'll also do some practice tests so that students can experience the mix of problems, the directions, and the type of setting that they'll experience on the actual test days. As you've likely read before, we value our students being able to do well on the types of standardized tests that they will continue to encounter in their school careers. This approach allows us to get ready through consistent practice and to keep our focus on other topics in the curriculum.

## DIV 2 NEWS

**SPANISH** — *Ms. Rice & Ms. Beardslee*

Ninth graders in Ms. Rice's Spanish are beginning their investigation of Latino immigration in the United States, with a focus on Mexico and US relations. They kicked off this investigation by viewing presentations from seniors in Spanish 5 about Latino stereotypes in the US. Ninth graders in exchange shared presentations about their ideal countries and their plans for improving our country in Spanish. It was great to see the two age groups interact together! (*photo top right*)

Photos below are from Ms. Beardslee's classes. *Below left: La madre, el padre y la novia en Bodas de Sangre. Below right: Leonardo y su mujer.*

**U.S. HISTORY**— *Ms. Tabachnick*

**U.S. History 1** - Ninth grade students just finished investigating a current issue of their choice that challenges our constitutional rights - for instance mass shootings and gun rights, right to a just trial and Guantanamo Bay, legalization of marijuana and states rights, etc. Students researched the issue, looked at both sides, chose a side, interviewed two people (one of which was a Four Rivers senior civics student) and wrote a position paper which, depending on the quality, will be sent to the appropriate legislator. Pretty cool. We just kicked off an immigration expedition - last one of the year!!!

**U.S. History 2** - In grade 10 we recently kicked off the **Why War?** expedition. Students looked into the wars we have been involved in during the 20th and 21st centuries and chose a U.S. conflict/war to investigate. They are looking at why we became involved, the opinions for and against the war, U.S. foreign policy specific to that war, etc. Last week was Court Dorsey's (artist in residence) first week with us. He will be helping students write and stage a vignette that will be performed in Washington D.C. - very exciting! On Friday, students did field work at Soldier On in Leeds, MA. They spoke with veterans and saw the amazing services offered to help veterans succeed after their military service. It was an amazing and eye opening trip, to say the least.



*Aiden, Emory and Kenny work on a skit to perform in Washington D.C. later this spring.*

## DIV 3 NEWS

## SENIOR ENERGY EXPEDITION IS WIND ENERGY A VIABLE OPTION FOR WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS?

In April, 2010, Governor Deval Patrick enthusiastically announced his approval of the proposed Cape Wind project:

*"Mr. Secretary, on behalf of the hundreds of men and women who will build this project, the thousands of Massachusetts citizens who will benefit from stable electric rates, and the millions of Americans whose security and prosperity depend on energy independence, thank you for this decision. America needs offshore wind power. And with this project, Massachusetts leads the Nation. (Boston Globe Apr 2010)*

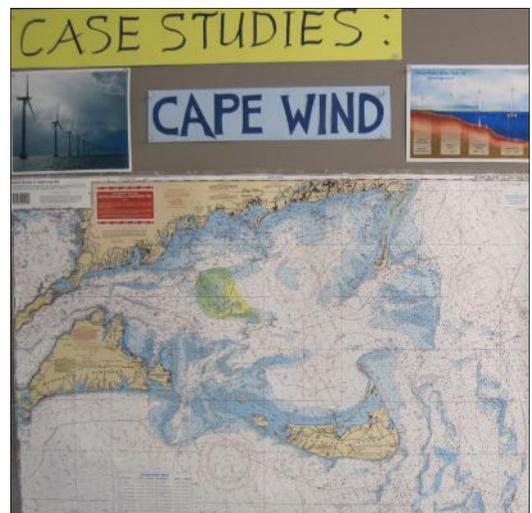
Four years later, the project is contentious. Four Rivers seniors have spent several months investigating the project's issues through environmental, economic, and scientific lenses. They have met with stakeholders, traveled to the proposed site off Cape Cod, considered market variables, researched Wind Turbine Syndrome, and built their own energy circuits. Using skills of systems thinking, seniors have applied their knowledge of Cape Wind to weigh in on whether a project like it would be a viable energy source for western Massachusetts:

*"As with every debate, there are many arguments contributing to the fight for wind power in western Massachusetts. Both the supporting and opposing sides offer legitimate arguments for or against local wind energy. The main concerns are the environmental, economic, and scientific factors of the issue. Will it affect wildlife? Is it affordable? Should wind turbine syndrome be concerning? All of these questions address understandable concerns, and when it comes to making a decision that will affect the future so heavily, all arguments are to be considered. However, after examination of the facts and statistics of wind energy, it becomes obvious that wind energy is in fact a viable option for western Massachusetts." - Nicole Zabawa*

*The cheapest source of renewable energy is commercial wind. But to fully determine if wind can replace traditional sources of energy, one must compare all of the social and environmental factors for all energy possibilities. For those who live in Western Massachusetts, wind energy has become a real possibility as government legislature and private energy companies have begun to draw focus and priority to installing renewable energy in the area. As shown in the confidence of government spending and the pressing importance of environment health, wind energy is indeed a viable source of clean, renewable energy on which Western Massachusetts can rely for the future." - Sullivan Fraser*

This month, seniors are putting finishing touches on their action projects (*see page 8*), which reflect the complexity of the issues and encourage regular citizens to make an impact on energy consumption. And, though the Energy Expedition has come to a close, the larger debate about wind power has not. On March 15<sup>th</sup>, the US District Court upheld Cape Wind's lease while citing some environmental concerns. Maybe Judge Reggie Walton could benefit from some Four Rivers systems thinking:

*"The ruling by US District Court Judge Reggie Walton in Washington, D.C., won praise from both sides, with Cape Wind calling it a "major victory" and opponents predicting it would be a significant setback that could further delay financing and the start of construction" (Boston Globe Mar 2014).*



## SUMMER ULTIMATE

The Four Rivers Summer Ultimate Intensive will take place June 30 - July 3. Now it its third year, the program is geared towards having fun, making friends, building skills, and playing a lot of ultimate.

Further details can be found at:

[www.fourriverscharter.org](http://www.fourriverscharter.org). Click on *Our Programs*, click on *Summer Ultimate Intensive*. If you have questions contact Terry Plotkin, Athletic Director, at the school at 775-4577, ext. 218. OR [tplotkin@fourriverscharter.org](mailto:tplotkin@fourriverscharter.org)

## Nature Class News

We've been watching for signs of spring, keeping tabs on the beaver family near GCC, learning about uses for bones and tendons and counting down the days till the buds open.

In the coming months we'll get back to the garden and are seeking ongoing donations of grass clippings, bagged leaves and divisions of Hosta, Daylilies, and Mints. Just leave them by the garden shed. Thanks!

*Felix Lufkin*

## NURSE'S NOTES

Believe it or not spring WILL arrive! Two items to keep in mind:

1. "FLIP FLOPS" are totally inappropriate for sports / P.E. They offer no support and contribute to injury. I am aware they are a major fashion statement and cannot be eliminated. Please make sure your child has sneakers at school for all running and extended walking activities.

2. ALLERGIES: the season is predicted to be one of the worst in a long time. If your child exhibits watery eyes, frequent sneezing or nasal congestion, please contact his/her physician re: over-the-counter allergy medication such as Claritin or Zyrtec which do not cause drowsiness. Allergy medications are best given in the morning **before** going outside.

Please contact me if you have questions or concerns.

*Jeanne Milton, RN*

## College Admissions Information Evening

*Recommended for Juniors and their Families*

**Tuesday, April 29th from 6:30 to 8:00 in the Common Room**

*with Karen Kristof, Smith College Admissions Office*

*and Andy Stenson, Four Rivers College Counselor*

**We will talk about details of the college application processes including: Developing a "Good Fit" list. What do college admissions officers look for? Essay writing suggestions & Interview tips. The Importance of college visits. Academic preparation. Standardized testing. Financial aid resources.**

**The evening is open to parents and students of all Four Rivers families.**

**Junior families are strongly encouraged to attend.**

**Questions? Email [astenson@fourriverscharter.org](mailto:astenson@fourriverscharter.org)**

## COLLEGE COUNSELING & GUIDANCE

### Juniors and College Admission.

Spring of junior year is the time to start getting serious about the college application process. In junior seminar we will be shifting our focus from planning our internships to researching and exploring colleges. That said, there is plenty that juniors, and their families, can be doing outside of school:

- Register to take the SAT's on June 7th. The registration deadline is in early May.
- Do some SAT prep/practice – use the college board website, online resources or print materials. We will also be doing some SAT work in English & math.
- Visit some colleges. April break is an ideal time. Even if you can't get to visit colleges you are really interested in, visiting different types of schools close to home can be helpful. Our local five colleges (Amherst, Hampshire Mount Holyoke, Smith and UMass; Worcester area (Clark, WPI, Worcester State, UMass Worcester) and Boston provide lots of opportunities.
- Research schools and start developing an initial list. Try to keep track of what it is that you like about particular schools. Share the list with your parents and talk about your choices.
- Make summer plans – make it productive and fun. Use your time well.
- Plan on attending the college admissions evening on April 29th.
- Meet with Mr. Stenson, if you haven't yet done so, to talk about your ideas and get answers to any questions you may have..

**Questions? Contact Andy Stenson, [astenson@fourriverscharter.org](mailto:astenson@fourriverscharter.org) 413 775-4577 ext. 222**

### 2014 COLLEGE ACCEPTANCE NEWS

Students that applied early are beginning to hear back from colleges. Schools that have ALREADY said YES to Four Rivers seniors include:

***American University (DC)! Bard! Baruch! Bay State College! Brandeis! Champlain! Clark University! Clarkson! Colby-Sawyer College! College of New England! College of the Atlantic!, Colorado State! Drexel! Emmanuel! Evergreen State! Fashion Institute of Technology! Fitchburg State! Fordham University! Framingham State! Franklin Pierce! Goucher! Guilford! Hampshire College! Ithaca College! Lasell! Lesley University! Lyndon State! Manhattan College! Middlebury! Mount Holyoke! Naropa University! Newbury College! Salve Regina! San Diego State! Simmons! Smith College! SUNY Oneonta! SUNY Fredonia! Suffolk! Syracuse! Unity College! University of British Columbia! University of Colorado-Boulder! University of Georgia! UMASS-Amherst! UMASS-Lowell! University of Miami! University of New Haven! University of North Carolina! University of San Francisco! University of Vermont! Villanova! Virginia Polytechnic Institute! Wentworth Institute! Wheelock College! Whitman College!***

**Congratulations to our seniors!**



# BIKES NOT BOMBS



## BIKE DRIVE

Saturday, April 26 from 9am - 1pm

Greenfield Community College, parking lot A

Requested \$10 donation with each bike

Four Rivers Charter Public School and GCC's Green Campus Committee are collaborating with Bikes Not Bombs, an organization that "uses the bicycle as a vehicle for social change." They repair bicycles they collect and ship them to locations around the world in need of affordable and sustainable transportation. If you have old bikes of any size or condition\*, we strongly encourage you to bring them to our bike drive. We really appreciate any donations you're able to make!

For more information, visit [bikesnotbombs.org](http://bikesnotbombs.org) or email [slink@fourriverscharter.org](mailto:slink@fourriverscharter.org).

**\*MINIMAL RUST!**

"This institution is an equal opportunity provider. To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Washington, DC 20254."

Four River Charter Public School is dedicated to educating young people for lives of learning and service. The school offers a rigorous academic program aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and an emphasis on character development for moral and social responsibility. Three central themes – nature, technology and community – pervade the teaching and learning at the school. Four Rivers works closely with parents and seeks both to serve and learn from the many resources of Franklin County.



Four Rivers Charter Public School  
248 Colrain Rd., Greenfield, MA 01301