



The Blue and Gold

Winter 2020

the student newspaper of the Ben W. Murch Elementary School

Founded in 2013

Kids Interview Writer of Kids' Books

By SAHAR GIOVACCHINI
and CORA NUAMAH

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.

Lulu and the Brontosaurus.
Two Boys Booed.

These children's book titles have something in common.

All were written by Judith Viorst, a well-known author who welcomed us to her home in Cleveland Park recently to talk about reading and writing.

Reading was an especially important part of her childhood, she remembered. "Reading made me very, very happy. Me and my mom loved books," she told us.

Ms. Viorst said she enjoyed writing stories and poetry at an early age.

"I wrote the saddest poems ever," she recalled.

Why sad? She remembered that in a favorite poem of her mother's, a character ended up dead, leading her to assume that all good poems end in death.

So at the age of 7 or 8, she wrote:

*I wonder how the angels look,
And what they do and say.
They took my mom and daddy
And carried them away.
They took them up the golden stairs,
Far away from me.*



B&G Photo by Aaron Epstein

Judith Viorst in her home office in Cleveland Park

*I wonder if ever again
My parents I will see.*

Her parents, who were still alive, weren't pleased.

Ms. Viorst writes for adults, too. She wrote a

book for most of the decades of her life. Their titles: *It's Hard To Be Hip Over Thirty, How Did I Get To Be Forty, Forever Fifty, Suddenly Sixty, I'm Too Young To Be Seventy, Unexpectedly Eighty.*

(see VIORST on page 4)

Do You Think You Know Your Teachers?

By Lila Davies

You sit in class day after day and you think you know everything there is to know about your teachers.

But you don't.

Take 3rd-grade teacher David Dunnet, for example. He plays eight instruments, including piano, guitar, trumpet, trombone and drums.

"Music is like learning a second language, and it's fun to speak it on different instruments," he said.

Or Victoria Otten, a longtime 5th-grade teacher. She writes odes (poems) every year for Murch graduating classes and every member of her family. More about those odes later.

And you'll never guess what surprising thing teacher Meredith Grindrod does when she's not in her 3rd-grade classroom.

(see SURPRISE on page 2)

Exploring Murch's Mystery Tunnel

By HARPER BARLOW
and JOSEPHINE CASPAR

When we got permission to explore a mysterious tunnel in the old part of Murch, we felt really special because kids aren't supposed to go there.

Our adult guide was head custodian Joseph Hodges, who handed each of us a flashlight and opened a door labeled: "Staff Only."

We journeyed down the stairs, opened a door, and stepped into the darkness of a passageway that felt a bit creepy, like we were digging our way out of a prison.

The first things that came into sight were crumbling pipes along the walls and pieces of insulation on the floor.

As we stepped deeper into the tunnel, our shoes kicked up dirt from the floor. We progressed deeper into the tunnel, crouching as the ceiling got lower.

With the help of our flashlights, we were able

to brush our hands against the wall, which turned out not to feel smooth, but very rough.

We came across a small crawl space lined with boxes. We continued to walk further into the passageway until we came across a small set of stairs.

From there, we spotted many old wires connected to old light bulbs. The bulbs didn't work. Soon we came to a bunch of pipes, which blocked our path. As we tried — and failed — to step over them, we realized that the exit door was right in front of us.

As we stepped out of the darkness into a bright hallway, a gaggle of 1st-graders peered through the open door.

"What's that?" a few kids asked curiously.

That was the right question. What was the Murch tunnel used for?

There is a rumor around the school that, at one time, it was a shelter to protect people at the school from the effects of a nuclear bomb attack. But we could not confirm that rumor.



B&G Photo by Aaron Epstein

Blue and Gold reporters Josie Caspar (l) and Harper Barlow, each using a flashlight, examine the wall of the Murch tunnel.

(Editor's note: Several DC public schools were designated as fallout shelters in the 1960s during the height of the Cold War against the former Soviet Union.

A Washington Post reporter and a Smithsonian curator inspected one such shelter, beneath the Oyster-Adams Middle School, in 2017.

Unlike the narrow, low Murch tunnel, the Oyster-Adams shelter was wide and high enough to protect more than 100 people.

And, in contrast to the Murch tunnel, water barrels, tinned crackers, first-kits and latrines were found at Oyster-Adams, *The Post* reported).

What Our Student Council Does

By EKATERINA LYUBIVAYA
and MAYA LEACH

Many kids know that there's a student council at Murch, but why does the school have it and what good does it do?

"It's important to make well-rounded students at Murch," said Kimberly Dresbach, a special education teacher who is in charge of the student council.

"Being a member of student council provides the opportunity to be a part of something that benefits our school, sometimes the community, and

sometimes the world.

"It makes children aware that not everyone has what we have. We organize events that help other people," Ms. Dresbach explained.

One of the council's projects this school year was to join a national campaign to raise money for the Make-a-Wish Foundation, which tries to make the dreams of seriously ill children come true.

For example, a boy from Frederick, MD, wished that he could hunt for dinosaur bones.

(see COUNCIL on page 2)

WHO WAS BEN MURCH?

Edited excerpt from our
edition of June 2013

Ben W. Murch was a respected District of Columbia principal, supervising principal and assistant superintendent.

Mr. Murch was known for seeking high achievement in education.

He was born June 29, 1858 near the city of Bangor, Maine. After graduating from Central High School there in 1876, he went on to receive degrees from Yale and Bates colleges.

In 1887 Mr. Murch moved to Washington, DC,

where he began a long career in the public schools. First, he was principal of the Curtis School in Georgetown for five years. Then he worked as the principal of Force School from 1892 to 1899, and again from 1901 to 1908.

"If you give the world the best," he was known to say, "then the best will come back to you."

Memories of his contributions to education have faded like an old t-shirt, but his name remains with us today.

Three years after his death in 1927, an elementary school bearing his name opened for the first time.

Murch's Classroom Newcomers

By NAOMI MOREIRA
and JACK LEON

If you enter Corri Deegan's 5th-grade classroom, you can tell right away that she is a huge Washington Redskins football fan.

You'd see Redskins pillows, wreaths, posters, flags, teddy bears, pencils, and a picture of herself with a Redskins player.

Ms. Deegan, one of several teachers who are new to Murch this year, explained that she has loved the Redskins since she was a kid and lived 15 minutes away from the team's old stadium.

She tried to make her students love the team, too. Whenever the Redskins won a game, she gave excused her kids from doing part of their homework.

But the students didn't gain much. The Redskins won only three games and lost 13.

Ms. Deegan said she was inspired to teach by her 4th-grade teacher.

"I was struggling," she said, "and she tutored me. She helped me to like school, and I wanted to do the same for other kids."

Mary Carney, a new Murch kindergarten teacher, said she decided to teach because "my Grandma was a special educator in New York City and I wanted to be just like her."

One day at Murch, she almost spoiled a planned surprise appreciation event for the principal and assistant principal.

"I accidentally sent an email to Mr. C and the social committee, including part of the surprise. Luckily, I don't think Mr. C...saw the



B&G Photo by Aaron Epstein

Ms. Deegan gathered some of her Redskins souvenirs and posed for this photo shortly after the team completed one of its worst seasons.

surprise but, still, it was embarrassing!"

But Ms. Carney said she has enjoyed happy times almost every day at Murch.

"I think my most rewarding moment was receiving a thank-you card from the parents in my class around the winter break. I've never been in a school where kindness towards teachers is so valued and I've never felt so appreciated," she said.

Another new teacher, Kelly Crabtree, teaches 5th-grade math and science.

On some days, when she plans a fun science project, she dresses up as the bright and kind, but strange, Ms. Frizzle of the Magic School Bus book and TV series.

She decorates her clothes based on the lesson for that day.

our newspaper staff -- and a letter

5TH GRADE: Jana Alkebsi, Lila Davies, Emma Cappelloni, Logan Coleman, Sahar Giovacchini, Jack Leon, Klementyna McGuire, Naomi Moreira, Cora Nuamah

4TH GRADE: Harper Barlow, Josephine Caspar, Abigail Dannenberg, Samuel Kallauer, Maya Leach, Ekaterina Lyublva, Ronan Shah, Molly Snyder

EDITOR: Aaron Epstein

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Jacqueline Epstein

First Rule: We Shall Not Bore the Reader

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Sahar (Giovacchini) and Cora (Nuamah) were quite wonderful -- well-prepared and very professional and full of excellent questions. I was most impressed with how they handled themselves as young journalists, and congratulations to you as their coach.

- Judith Viorst, author, Washington, DC

Letters to the editor may be emailed to aajacks@starpower.net

Teachers' Other Lives

(SURPRISE from page 1)

She is learning how to box in a class for adult men and women.

"It was always something I wanted to try," Ms. Grindrod explained. "It helps me with my strength and skill. It's mostly hitting a bag."

She already has learned how to throw jabs, hooks and uppercut punches -- and how to duck the punches of others.

In the months ahead, she said, "I would like to learn more defensive moves and get better at my footwork."

What about our music teacher, Eugene Branch Jr.? Sometimes he's a mixologist, meaning that he mixes cocktails at parties.

And now back to Ms. Otten and her annual Murch odes.

"It's the traditional teacher send-off to the grad-

uating 5th-graders," she said. "We each read a stanza or two, and it has been great fun writing them over the years."

Here is a sample from Ode to the Class of 2018:

*You've hit the road, to Fruitvale you went,
Followed the journey on which Lewis and Clark were sent,
Operations you can order,
You can write longer or shorter,
And almost complete a project without help from a parent.*

*At Naturebridge, we found fish, frogs and an occasional bone,
Your enthusiasm and scientific knowledge well-known,
All the food had great taste
Learned to reuse and not waste
And managed to have fun without an iPad or iPhone.*

*You should leave feeling great about these years,
You have grown out of naps and even some fears,
Look back with such pride
On your entire Murch ride
And the impact you have had on us and your peers.*



B&G Photo by Aaron Epstein

A one-man band, 3rd-grade teacher David Dunnet practices on a trombone, accompanied by some of the other musical instruments that he also plays.

Projects to Help Others

(COUNCIL from page 1)



Isaac Wallsten

Make-a-Wish said on its website that last year the boy went on a family trip to South Dakota, joined a dig there and found a raptor tooth.

Children from many U.S. schools, including Murch, wrote letters to Santa, and placed them in special boxes. Macy's donated \$1 for each letter to the Make-a-Wish Foundation. The foundation said it received a total of \$2 million from Macy's.

During Thanksgiving, Murch students "collected and donated food to people who otherwise would have gone hungry," Ms. Dresbach said. The council also encouraged Murch students to participate in the Pen Pal Initiative by exchanging messages with kids in other schools.

"Projects like this make children aware...how people live in other places. We learned that children live in this city

who do not have clean water and hot food," Ms. Dresbach said.

Some projects benefit only Murch. They are designed to "make the school a happier and better place," council president Isaac Wallsten said.

These include Pajama Day, Pizza Day and other special days meant to give students a feeling of school spirit.

The current council was formed last fall after 5th-graders applied for council positions, made speeches to students, and waited for election results.

The candidates who got the most votes became council members, met after school on Wednesdays, and discussed their ideas for what they might do each month.

"When we come up with ideas, we vote on the best one. We then talk to Ms. Eckstein (Mary Eckstein, the administrative director), Mr. C (Principal Chris Cebrynski) and other adults. 'If they agree, we work together to make the idea a reality,'" Isaac said.

TWIST ON AN OLD TALE

By LLOGAN COLEMAN

HANSEL AND GRETEL by Bethan Woollvin {ages 7 and up}

In the original tale, Hansel and Gretel were good kids and the witch was evil. The witch locked Hansel in a cage and stuffed sweets into it to fatten him for her dinner.

I don't want to spoil the ending for those who haven't read it, but the witch died and the children lived happily ever after.

This version is different. Hansel and Gretel are mean and the witch is kind.

The story begins in a gingerbread house with the good witch sweeping it up. She follows a trail of breadcrumbs and comes

upon two kids. She asks them to clean up the crumbs, but they say no.

Soon the rude kids are eating pies and cakes in the witch's gingerbread house. They don't even save any desserts for her.

They pull lots of pranks on the witch, too. But she is the nicest person and keeps her temper -- except when Gretel shoves her into the oven.

I liked the illustrations, although it did look like the unnamed artist drew with a pen and used only three or four colors.

At the end, though, this book made me feel weird. I was used to the witch being evil. But after realizing that the witch is now good, I just didn't know who to root for.

Grandpa's Escape

By RONAN SHAH

THE RUNAWAYS, by Ulf Stark. Illustrated by Kitty Crowther. (ages 6-11)

This book is about a grandson's relationship with his grandfather.

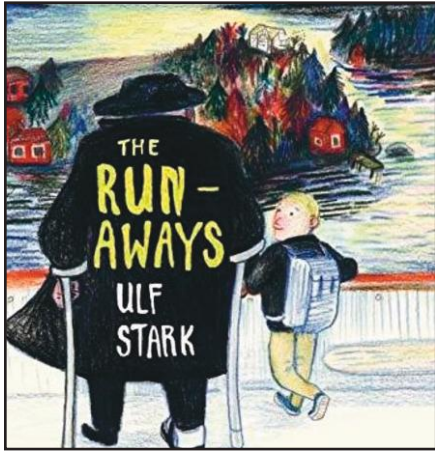
It starts with the boy visiting his grandpa in the hospital. There they plan to run away together to see the island home where the grandfather had spent his happiest years with his wife.

To make the hospital visit and the trip to the island possible, the boy had lied to his mom and dad, telling them that he was going to an overnight football training camp.

At first, I found it hard to tell whether the actions of the grandson and his father were good or bad.

This is one way of seeing it: The grandson was right in trying to help his grandpa go home, even though his dad tried to stop him.

But another way of seeing it is that the



Swedish writer Ulf Stark (1944-2017) wrote many books for children.

father simply tried to keep his son from running off with a grandfather who is unable to take care of him. So it is all about how you look at it. The boy's father and grandpa dislike each other. Since the boy loves both of them, he is stuck in the middle of a difficult relationship. But he is the only person holding the family together.

Maybe that's a good thing because it might help the father and grandfather get to like each other. On the other hand, their conflicts might get worse.

And was it good or bad for the boy to lie to his parents? The lie made it possible for the grandfather to revisit the scene of his happiest days.

But for the boy, there was a bad side to the trip. He felt a surge of guilt because he had lied to

his father.

I loved this book, particularly the way that the feelings of the grandfather changed during their time together. The grumpy, even angry, grandpa became happy once again.

PADDLING DOWN THE HUDSON

By SAM KALLAUER

RIVER, written and illustrated by Elisha Cooper (ages 6-11)

A tale of an adventurous journey, this children's picture book tells of a woman's solo travels in a canoe down the entire length of New York State's Hudson River, from the mountains to the Atlantic Ocean.

Along the way, she spots lots of wildlife, such as a soaring eagle, a bear cub, and a moose. She also encounters the proud builder of her canoe, and a night sky full of stars.

The author does a good job of showing how the main character feels, right from his opening statement:

"She is alone, far from home. Gray clouds bump into the mountains. Three hundred miles stretch out in front of her. A faraway destination, a wild plan. And a question: can she do this?"

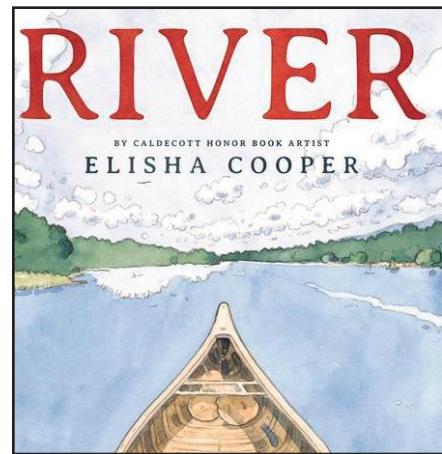
From that point on, readers realize that she is excited — and possibly scared — about the adventure that lies ahead.

It isn't an easy trip. Waterfalls, storms, and a big, fast-moving tugboat threaten her, but she makes it to the end.

The book is well illustrated with watercolor paints that help create a mood of suspense.

I could not tell how the other characters, such as the canoe builder and kids she meets, were feeling. I felt that explaining their point of view would have improved the book.

But overall, this book is an intriguing story-time read for 1st, 2nd and 3rd graders. Older children can enjoy it as a descriptive book about what it's like to be alone with the beauty and challenges of nature.



An invitation to a Hudson River adventure in words and watercolors.

They Were Friends -- And Foes

By HARPER BARLOW

WORST OF FRIENDS: THOMAS JEFFERSON, JOHN ADAMS AND THE TRUE STORY OF AN AMERICAN FEUD by Suzanne Tripp Jurmain. Illustrated by Larry Day (ages 9 and up)

"Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were best friends -- even though they were completely different." This is Ms. Jurmain's straightforward first sentence. From that point on, she explains the complicated relationship of our second (Adams) and third (Jefferson) presidents.

They traveled overseas to talk to kings, merchants, and prime ministers in an effort to raise money for their new nation. They wrote thousands of letters to each other.

In fact, they were such good friends that Jefferson even bought corsets for Adams's daughter. Since Jefferson didn't know the

daughter's size, he bought 17 corsets of different sizes.

But their friendship was disrupted in 1790 when Jefferson and Adams disagreed about how the country should be governed.

It was a conflict that started the first two great American political parties, the Federalists and the Antifederalists.

Adams, a Federalist, argued that having a strong president would make a strong government. But Jefferson, an Antifederalist, said that permitting too powerful a president could allow him to act like a king.

Their political dispute lasted 11 years, ending when Adams wrote a Happy New Year letter to Jefferson, who replied. After that, they sent letters to each other for years.

The illustrations are hilarious. My favorite shows Adams's 14 grandchildren having a pudding fight and climbing all over the furniture.

This book puts history into a clear, fun package for almost all ages.

The Perseverance Of Maya Angelou

By MOLLY SNYDER

RISE! FROM CAGED BIRD TO POET OF THE PEOPLE, MAYA ANGELOU by Bethany Hegedus. Illustrations by Tonya Engel. (Ages 7 to adult)

The author takes the reader on a journey from Maya Angelou's childhood to her adult achievements as a poet and civil rights advocate.

With the help of beautiful illustrations and poems, the reader learns that Ms. Angelou's early life was not easy.

One illustration in particular depicts how life was unfair to African-Americans. It shows a seesaw, with white children high and black children low.

When Maya was 3, her parents couldn't take care of her. So she was sent to live with her aunt, Momma Henderson, in Stamp, Arkansas, where she read books to escape her harsh, racially segregated life. At 12, she moved to San Francisco to live with her mother, who was then able to care for her daughter.

Maya began to realize she had a powerful gift for reading aloud. Her voice was strong and deep and, as an adult, she used it often to move and persuade others.

She wrote a memoir about her battle against racial discrimination called *Why the Caged Bird Sings*. So many people have read — and been

inspired by — that book that Ms. Hegedus wrote *Rise* to celebrate the memoir.

Ms. Angelou was not only a successful poet, but also an activist seeking fairness and justice. She read her poetry both to make money and bring attention to civil rights. She read her poems at President Bill Clinton's inauguration and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama in 2010.

This book is appropriate for almost all ages. Even younger readers can learn why Maya Angelou's life was so special.

Ms. Engel's illustrations are colorful, detailed, and help explain the meaning of the words on the page. Some younger readers may need help to understand-

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

"Still I Rise" - Maya Angelou

ing the metaphors, which compare one thing to another.

So, when the author states that Momma Henderson was "as tall as a sycamore," those readers would have to know that a sycamore is a tall tree.

The book is inspiring because it shows how Ms. Angelou overcame the hard times of segregation, racism and family troubles, and yet remained kind and compassionate.

A central theme of *Rise* is perseverance, or never giving up even when life is cruel and difficult. Many students at this school will understand. They talk a lot about perseverance at Murch.



Maya Angelou also wrote books for kids: *Life Doesn't Frighten Me*, *Kofi and His Magic*, and *My Painted House*, *My Friendly Chicken*, and *Me*

Dr. Branch: From Peter Pan to Murch Music Man

By KLEMENTYNA MCGUIRE
and EMMA CAPPELLONI

As a 5th-grader, Eugene Branch Jr. appeared in his first musical, *Peter Pan*. He played the lead role.

"I remember my mother making my costume," Murch's music teacher said. It was all green, he recalled. His mom even dyed his pants green. He said he looked like the Peter Pan who led the Darling children to Neverland in the 1953 Disney movie.

Young Eugene had to sing a difficult song, *I've Gotta Crow* ("I've gotta crow!/I'm just the cleverest fellow/'Twas my fortune to know")

"That was challenging because I had to chirp and crow within singing the lyrics," he said. "I remember it like it was yesterday."

But his musical education began even earlier when his mother, Georgia, signed him up for piano lessons at age 7. Then, at 12, he began saxophone lessons, followed by vocal lessons at 14.

After elementary school in Fairview, VA, he attended George Washington Carver High School there.

"Dr. Pamela Randall was my high school choral teacher," Mr. Branch recalled. "She inspired me in so many ways to become a musician. She told me that I had an extraordinary gift of music and that I should think about sharing my talent with others. So I set the goal for myself to study music education as my college major."

He and Dr. Randall remain in contact with each other to this day, he said.

From elementary school to several colleges

and throughout his years as an elementary school music teacher, "I was always involved in theatre," Mr. Branch recalled. "I enjoyed building sets and props, designing costumes or just anything music-related. I had roles in my high school and college stage productions.

"That is how I learned to put together children's musicals at all the schools that I have

worked for..."

He arrived at Murch in September, 2016, earned a doctorate degree in music education in 2018, and now is known as Dr. Branch.

One of his major goals was to bring the performing arts to Murch. He did that by organizing December holiday concerts for all students, musical performances for 4th-graders at the

Kennedy Center, and big theatre productions at the end of the school year.

Dr. Branch, who turned 50 on Dec. 1, directed *The Lion King Jr.* in 2017, *Willy Wonka Jr.* in 2018, and *Beauty and the Beast Jr.* in 2019.

But "this year I am taking a break from doing the musical," Dr. Branch said. "Building a musical takes a lot of work."

The Murch Home and School Association (HSA) decided to hire Levine Music to organize the 2020 theatre production of *Mary Poppins Jr.*

The families of cast members will be asked to contribute \$100 each to help pay the costs of hiring Levine. But needy families can be excused from paying the fee, the HSA wrote in a paper posted outside the principal's office.

Now, Dr. Branch explained, "my goal is to build the music department" by adding a band to the curriculum and making sure that all students perform some choral music. "We also now have dance classes for our 4th and 5th grades, which I oversee once a week."

He said that all kids in 2nd through 5th grades are learning to play the recorder and read music. He hopes that will lead them to play in the Murch band. What does Dr. Branch do in his free time?

"I love to be around family (two sisters and four grandchildren) and my closest friends," he replied. "I enjoy dining out, traveling and, most of all, sitting on my porch on a warm day gossiping and laughing at the crazy things people do in my neighborhood (Fairlawn in Southeast DC). I'm kind of nosy."



B&G Photo by Aaron Epstein

With Dr. Branch on the keyboard, 3rd-grade music students sit on the floor to practice their recorders.

New Wish Lists for New Murch

By LLOGAN COLEMAN
and JANA ALKEBSI

The new Murch building seems perfect, right? Well, there are some teachers and kids who'd like a few changes.

For example, art teacher Nicole David-Martinez wants the kiln (a machine that bakes clay) to be kept in a separate room, not near the art supplies. Right now, students can't get their supplies while the kiln is operating.

She also would like to control the room temperature in her room and place electrical outlets on every wall for charging electronic gadgets.

The school nurse, Meseret Gebre, would like her office to be located closer to the playground because that's where most injuries to students happen.

Location is important, too, to 3rd-grade teacher Meredith Grindrod. She wishes that the cafeteria could be closer to the classrooms, but not too close (because of the smell).

Kelly Crabtree and Corrie Deegan, both 5th-grade teachers, would like a microwave, mini-refrigerator and air freshener in every

room.

Another 5th-grade teacher, Victoria Otten, wants a copying machine in every classroom.

Shaquanda Gainey, a physical education teacher, suggested the largest and most expensive addition to the school: a swimming pool. Reading specialist Katelyn Brady wishes that the cubbies could be moved outside the classrooms so there would be more space inside the classrooms.

Security officer Patricia Cuff suggested a lounge for the guards with TV, telephone, microwave, refrigerator and chairs. Principal Chris Cebzynski said that he'd like more color on the walls of Murch and a bigger couch in his office.

The wildest recommendations came from the kids. Here are a few of them:

Nora Karpowski, 4th grade: a ball pit, slides and bubble gum machines.

Lucas Sheehy and Asher Fristedt, 1st grade: vending machines containing snacks and drinks.

Megan O'Keefe, 1st grade: motion sensors on doors to bathroom stalls to help those who can't open the doors themselves.

Her 3 Sons are in Her Stories

(VIORST from page 1)

Her latest book is *Turning Ninety* (She turned 89 on Feb. 2). Here's an excerpt from "Trading Places," one of the poems in that book:

You can't read the menu if you don't bring your glasses.

Nor will your hearing aid work with a dead battery.

I used to have these conversations with my mother.

Now my kids are having them with me.

A lot of her children's books, she said, are based on events in the lives of her three sons: Anthony, Nicholas and Alexander. But, she added, she made up some events to help make the story better.

For example, Alexander, her youngest son, was wriggling during story time in class one day and bumped his knee. Ms. Viorst took the opportunity to write a story about it.

But the boy wasn't happy about the story, which was called *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*.

"Why do I have to be having a bad day?" he moaned. "Why can't Nicholas or Anthony be having a bad day, and if it is about me, why can't I be having a good day?"

"Well," his mom replied, "I can change the title of the book to *Stanley and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* ... but your name won't be on the title in big letters and you won't have your name in every page of the book."

"Fine, you can use my name," Alexander agreed. Ms. Viorst led us up the stairs and into her office.

The first thing we noticed was a giant pencil leaning against a shelf containing the books she has written. The entire room is painted green and blue, and packed with toys and knickknacks.

Under her desk was an enormous white tiger named for her husband, Milton, a political writer. He was so jealous, she said, that she bought him a lion to put under his desk.

Kids Learn to Invest

By ABIGAIL DANNENBERG
and JOSEPHINE CASPAR

Murch is known for academics and athletics, but it also offers 5th-graders an early start in learning how to manage money.

The Stock Market Club, led by Spanish teacher Pablo Giron, shows kids how to make money by doing research and then buying stocks (shares of companies) that look good.

As 5th-grader Leo Stitzel said, "We get to learn how to invest in stocks."

The members of this weekly club, which ended in December, learned by playing a competitive computer game called The Stock Market Game.

One of last year's club members, Wesley Paty, led Murch to victory in the elementary school competition. Murch finished second among 18 elementary, middle and high schools, Mr. Giron said.

Club members started the game with an imaginary \$100,000 each. By the end of the session, Wesley made a profit of 98,000 make-believe dollars, giving him a grand total of \$198,000.

He said that he focused on a large technology company and a real estate company. The tech company was Microsoft, which makes and sells computers and computer parts.

Wesley's research showed that the price of Microsoft stock was going up rapidly. He thought it had "momentum" so he invested.

He was right. Each Microsoft share cost \$100 at the beginning of 2019. By the end of May, its price was about \$125.

Why do some 5th-graders join the club? Grace Harschei said she thought that it

would help her to make money later in life. "You can have more opportunities if you have more money," she said.

Mr. Giron uses videos to teach students about companies, their brands, their stock prices and their abbreviations. (Microsoft is MSFT, for example).

Wesley offered this advice to future club members: "Make sure you are watching your investments."

Why does Sr. Giron teach investing? He answered simply: "I love money."



This banner noted last year's Murch victory in the Stock Market Game

Her writing process, she said, begins with an idea, mostly based on real life. Then she writes again and again until she feels the story is right.

"We should not be called writers," she said. "We should be called re-writers."

In her spare time, Ms. Viorst likes to read, watch movies, cook in her red, black and white kitchen, and play with her seven grandchildren, ages 12 to 24.

Asked about the books she most loved in childhood, she mentioned *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, the Nancy Drew series, and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*.

"The girl (in *The Secret Garden*) was a pain in the butt, nasty, bratty and mean. I loved to see her change," Ms. Viorst said.

"I loved Nancy Drew's adventures and how she always solved mysteries. She wasn't just a pretty girl with a boyfriend and her own car. She was active, inventive, smart and brave."

Of *Little Women*, Ms. Viorst said, "I can still quote the first line of the book."

And she did: 'Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents,' grumbled Jo, lying on the rug."

Then Ms. Viorst added a personal comment:

"Jo was what I wanted to be: a writer. And like me, she was less than perfect but someone to admire for her brains and gutsiness and decency."