



## Book Banning Boom --But Not in D.C.



Illustration by Misha Zvoncov, Grade 5

By THOMAS McCORMACK

The number of books that have been banned or challenged in parts of the United States has skyrocketed in recent years — and your favorite books might be among them.

Books that have been banned include such award-winning favorites as the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling, and *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll.

Many famous books for children are on lists of banned books compiled by the nonprofit American Library Association (ALA), an organization of more than 50,000 members, mostly librarians.

And in 2022, that organization reported “the highest number of attempted book bans since ALA began compiling data about censorship in libraries more than 20 years ago.”

Yet no book has ever been banned in the District of Columbia

Public Schools (DCPS), according to Murch librarian Rebecca Burton. She said she obtained that information from Kevin Washburn, the director of library programs for DC public schools.

In fact, many of the books banned or challenged elsewhere as unfit for children are available on the shelves of the Murch Library. (A list of them appears on page 3, and new reviews of four of those books are on page 2).

Ms. Burton said she opposes the banning of books because it “restricts the number of books that children can experience.”

A recent report, titled “Banned in the USA: The Growing Movement to Censor Books in Schools,” concluded that there has been a dramatic increase in book censorship in (see BAN on page 3)

## Mr. Hawkins Meets the Press

Many Murch kids and parents know little about Devario Hawkins, 35, who is completing his second year as the school’s assistant principal. So here are edited excerpts from 2023 interviews by former B&G reporters Desmond Ajinkya-Brake and Noura Connor:

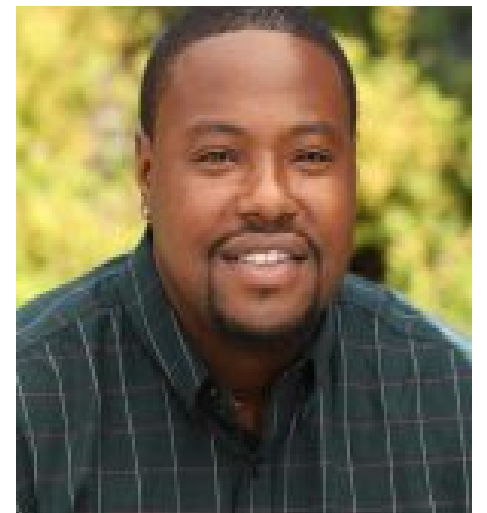
Q: Where were you born and where did you grow up?

A: *I was born and raised in Petersburg, Virginia, and was in the same city through the 12th grade.*

Q: What are your most lasting memories of your childhood?

A: *Fishing every day with my grandfather and listening to Stevie Wonder. Field trips in summer camp. Skating, bowling, swimming, Six Flags, King’s Dominion, Busch Gardens. I remember going on roller coasters with my friends. It was a really cool part of my upbringing.*

Q: Can you tell us more about fishing with your grandfather?



A: *The deal was that once I finished my homework we would go fishing. So we would go down to the river, which was probably about three minutes from my childhood home. If we needed bait, we’d go get worms or crickets or minnows. We’d fish for bass or perch or shad, whatever was coming up the river at the time.*

( see HAWKINS on Page 8)



Illustration by Misha Zvoncov, Grade 5

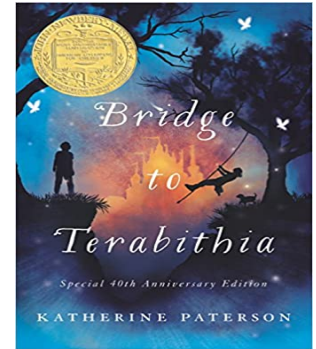
### HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO US!

Ten years ago, nine 5th graders met weekly over lunches, learned fundamental journalism, wrote stories, and gave birth to a Murch student newspaper they named *The Blue and Gold*. For the next decade, the paper has been published regularly -- a rare, if not unique, achievement among the nation’s public elementary schools. For a closer look, see pages 6-7.

# Four kids classics -- all targets of censorship

By **MOLLY SHARP**

A WRINKLE IN TIME, by Madeleine L'Engle. (ages 10-14)  
BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA, by Katherine Paterson. (ages 10 and up)



Banned or challenged as unfit for children to read. That has happened to many books — and I've read two of them.

Both are now considered classics of children's literature. Both won the John Newbery Medal, which is awarded each year to the most distinguished American children's book published during the previous year.

The prize went to *A Wrinkle in Time* in 1963. That's 60 years ago. The book is a fantasy about a girl named Meg, her brother, and her friend, who go on an adventure through time and space to find her missing father. Along the way, they fight an evil force named the Black Thing.

Conservative Christians in many towns in Florida, Alabama and North Carolina complained that the book was too complicated for children and undermined their religious beliefs by describing scientific discoveries that appeared to conflict with the Bible.

I don't agree. I did not find it too complicated, although it might be for kids younger than me. And without discussing science and religion, this book wouldn't be as good as it is. As it turned out, *A Wrinkle in Time* was often challenged but not actually banned from any school library shelves.

*Bridge to Terabithia* is about a girl and boy who make up a magical land called Terabithia. It is a getaway for them until an important character dies and the others have to figure out how to recover.

It was banned by officials in nine towns in six states after they heard complaints that the book contained witchcraft and included some cursing. But I don't think it deserved to be banned, especially when the characters in the book only pretend to do witchcraft.

And yes, words such as "damn" and "hell" do appear, and they may offend some people. But an entire book shouldn't be banned for all kids just because it contains some mild curse words.

Also, I believe that Ms. Paterson's story teaches children an important lesson: If something terrible happens, you should try to get over it and move on with your life.

By **SYDNEY McELVEEN**

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH, by Roald Dahl. (ages 7-12)  
HARRIET THE SPY, by Louise Fitzhugh. (ages 8-11)



These two books have been loved by young readers for a long time, yet they have been banned as unfit for kids in several parts of this country. Why?

You may remember that *James and the Giant Peach* is about a young boy named James who was sent to live with his two mean aunts after his parents died. All James wants is to get away from those aunts.

When he magically discovers a huge peach, James makes friends of lots of bugs and shares adventures with them. In the end, the peach rolls over the mean aunts, his insect friends become rich and successful, and James lives happily in the peach pit in New York's Central Park.

The book was banned in several places because it is scary, contains a few mild curse words, and mentions drugs, whiskey and tobacco. And on one page, the Grasshopper says, "I'd rather be fried alive and eaten by a Mexican." Some people thought that remark was racist. Overall, this is a funny and fun fantasy. I do not think it is scary or offensive. If the book didn't have curse words, I would recommend it for children under 7.

(Editor's note: Last February, the publisher announced that it was rewriting parts of many of Dahl's children's books, including *James and the Giant Peach*. There were numerous protests against the censorship).

*Harriet the Spy*, first published over 50 years ago, was banned in many parts of the southern United States. Protesters in Ohio said that the book encouraged children to disrespect their parents by talking back, using curse words, spying on others, and lying. It became a series of three children's books and sold an estimated 2.5 million copies.

The author could have used more appropriate words, but I don't think the arguments against her book were strong enough to prevent all kids from reading it. Kids know that Harriet is a fictional character. They do not need a book to show them how to be disrespectful to their parents.

In Ms. Fitzhugh's book, Harriet M. Welsch is a curious 11-year-old girl who writes everything down in her notebook. Some are good things, some hurtful, but all are Harriet's true feelings.

When the notebook falls into the hands of her two best friends, she knows she is in trouble. They took Harriet's honest opinions to be offensive.

Harriet wanted to get her friends back. So she turned to her babysitter, Ole Golly, who gave her this advice: "Little lies that make people feel better are not bad."

After much thought, Harriet realized that Ole Golly was right. She apologized for what she had written in her notebook, even though she had expressed her true opinions about her friends. They believed that Harriet was truly sorry. Her life was back to normal.

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Our First Commandment:

*Thou Shalt Not Bore the Reader*



**BAN** from page 1)

schools. The report came from PEN America, an organization of more than 7,500 writers, editors, publishers, translators and agents who support freedom of expression.

The PEN America report found 2,532 instances of bans or restrictions affecting 1,648 books by 1,261 different authors at all school levels from July 2021 to June 2022.

The report identified race and gender issues as the leading reasons for the fast-growing campaigns to remove books from libraries.

The researchers identified Moms for Liberty among “at least 50 groups involved in pushing for book bans at the national, state or local levels.”

Several news outlets reported that Texas, Florida and Pennsylvania led all states in book-banning efforts.

In a large Texas school district, a new rule allows parents 30 days to review book titles before a school decides to buy them. As a result, librarians ordered thousands of books less this school year than they had in the previous year.

In all, at least 10 states have passed laws giving parents more power to limit student access to books.

The censorship drive also is affecting social studies classrooms. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, now running for the Republican nomination for president in 2024, has attacked textbooks that draw attention to race or gender.

Florida passed a law last year that forbids the teaching of information that could make white students feel guilty for what other members of their race did in the past.

For example, some Florida school districts are trying to stop teachers from using the diaries of Christopher Columbus, who wrote of enslaving natives living in the so-called New World.

**First Book for Kids co-written by Computer**

ALICE AND SPARKLE, by Ammaar Reshi with Chat GPT (co-author), and Midjourney (illustrator). (ages 7-10)

By PHYLICIA LEE

We live in a time when computers are starting to think like people and do things to affect our lives.

This technology is called artificial intelligence (AI) – and *Alice and Sparkle* is the first children's book written and illustrated with the help of AI. I was curious to see if I could tell that the book was generated by AI.

In the story, a young girl named Alice builds a robot all by herself. She names it Sparkle. They do homework and play video games together.

They always have fun – until Alice starts to get scared of Sparkle's growing power and ability to make its own decisions. But Alice is able to guide Sparkle in the right direction. They spread knowledge of AI to everyone and live happily ever after.

After reading the book, I realized the power of AI. I could not even tell that AI wrote it. The story made sense and it was fun to read.

However, the illustrations were a bit off. In some of the pictures, Alice's eyes looked too big, and there were too many fingers on her hands.

I understood the message of the book to be that AI was a good thing for society. It already is solving complex problems, freeing humans from boring tasks, improving health care, handling money, making better weather predictions, and helping to manage disasters.

However, there is danger. Imagine AI writing the books we read, doing the work adults do, or deciding things that change our lives. What if AI's decisions aren't good ones?

Students already are using AI to do their homework and write their papers. Adults, including leaders of countries, are using AI to spread lies, fooling people into believing things that aren't true.

Even the authors of *Alice and Sparkle* recognize the danger. In their story, Alice sees that her creation can be good or evil, depending on how it is guided.

We really have no choice but to watch closely as tech companies continue to expand their uses of AI. I think that if too many bad things happen, we should push for laws making crimes of them. Tech companies should use AI to prevent or uproot the bad things before they can do much harm.

And teachers should educate students about the dangers of AI and teach them to be more critical of what they see and hear on their computers.

**BANNED OR CHALLENGED BOOKS AVAILABLE IN MURCH LIBRARY**

(Compiled by Librarian Rebecca Burton)

Christine Baldacchino: *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress*

Jerry Craft: *New Kid*

Roald Dahl: *James and the Giant Peach*

Roald Dahl: *The Witches*

Alex Gino: *Melissa (George) \**

Louise Fitzhugh: *Harriet the Spy*

Madeleine L'Engle: *A Wrinkle in Time*

Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds: *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism and You \*\**

Leslea Newman: *Heather Has Two Mommies*

Katherine Paterson: *The Great Gilly Hopkins*

Katherine Paterson: *Bridge to Terabithia*

Dav Pilkey: *Captain Underpants* series

Todd Parr: *The Family Book*

Gayle Pitman: *This Day in June*

Patricia Polacco: *In Our Mother's House*

Richardson/Parnell: *And Tango Makes Three \*\*\**

J.K. Rowling: *Harry Potter* series

Shel Silverstein: *The Giving Tree*

Shel Silverstein: *A Light in the Attic*

Lane Smith: *It's a Book*

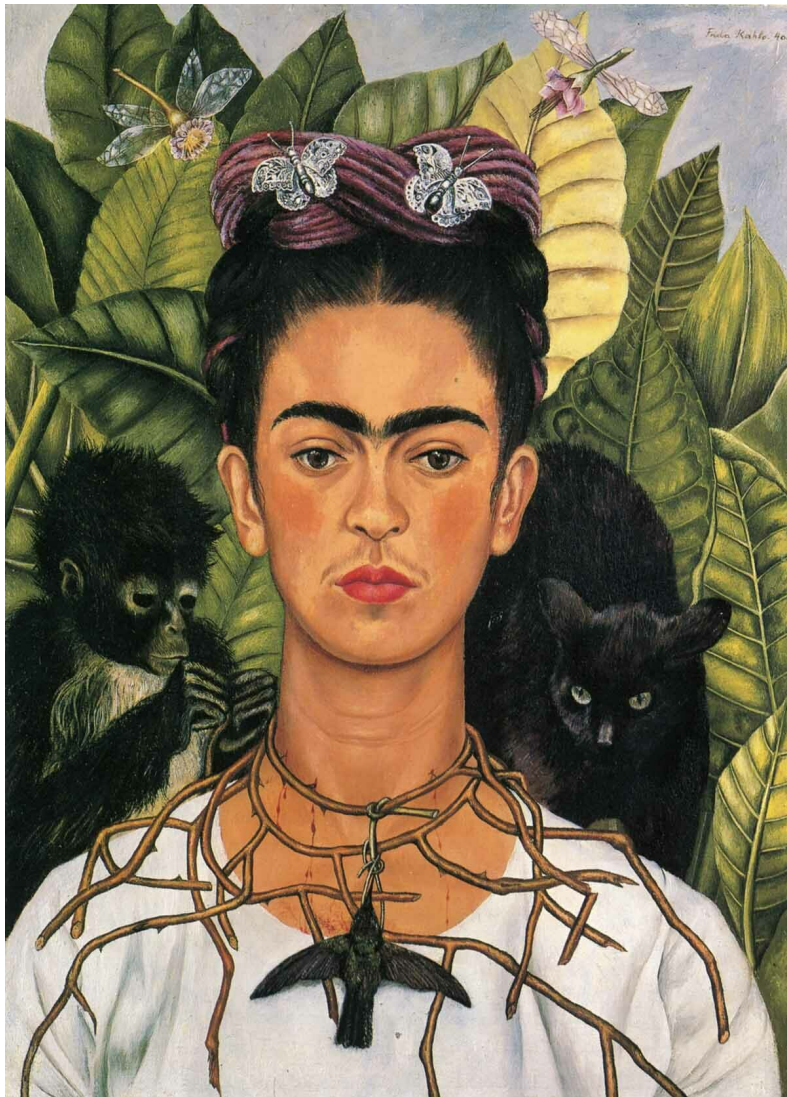
\* #14 on CBS News list of “50 Most Banned Books in America.”

\*\* #49 on CBS list

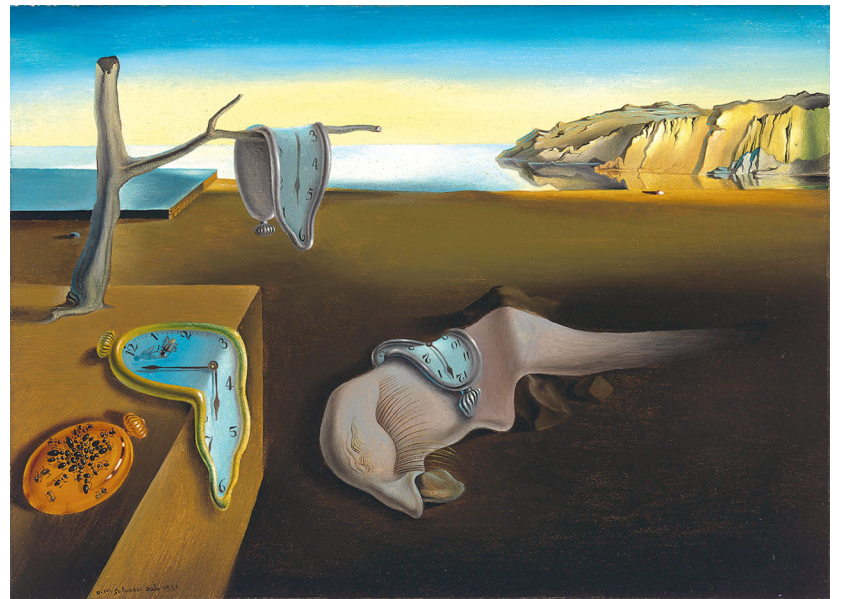
\*\*\* #50 on CBS list







"Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird" by Frida Kahlo



Salvador Dalí's "The Persistence of Memory"



Final Photograph in "Blow Up" by Ori Gersht

## A BOOK THAT MAY CHANGE THE WAY YOU LOOK AT ART

By PHYLICIA LEE

*HOW TO BE AN ART REBEL*, by Ben Street. Illustrated by Jay Daniel Wright. (ages 6-8)

*I used to think that art was boring because I believed that I had to do what most people do when looking at art: Just stare at the colors and shapes for a minute or two.*

*But there is much more to it.*

*Sometimes art can be fun or even wacky. Sometimes it can be dark and scary.*

*And sometimes the meaning is hidden.*

*In this book, Mr. Street shows readers how some real art rebels shared the meaning of their unusual art in different ways.*

*Frida Kahlo, for instance, used her creativity to paint dozens of portraits of herself. A famous 1940 example, titled "Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird," shows her in a jungle of huge leaves with a monkey and a cat near her shoulders.*

*The necklace cuts her and makes her bleed. That may be telling the viewers how she suffered from many painful health problems during her life.*

*But the determined look on her face and the jungle scene behind her tell me that she still felt wild and free despite her constant pain.*

*Another art rebel shown in the book is Salvador Dalí. He was known for his surrealism, a style of art in which objects and ideas are combined in a strange way, as if in a dream.*

*In one of his surrealist paintings, "The Persistence of Memory," the viewer sees a bunch of melting clocks. What do they mean? I think the artist shows us how memories fade over time, so we need to enjoy life before that happens.*

*Mr. Street, the author, also describes Mr. Dalí as a fun-loving artist who enjoyed playing with his goofy mustache and lobster-shaped telephone.*

*One last example of an art rebel's work: Ori Gersht's "Blow Up," a series of large photographs of red, white and blue flowers. In the final photograph, the flowers explode.*

*In my opinion, these pictures show us how beautiful life is and how quickly it can end.*

*After reading this book, I believe I am now able to look for the hidden meanings in many works of art.*





## Teachers Remember Days When They Were Kids in School

By DANIL SMOLAR and MEGAN O'KEEFE

It's hard to imagine your teacher as a kid in elementary school.

So when Daniel Marcus showed us a photo of himself as a 6th-grader in a Melbourne, Australia, classroom, it looked old, as if it came from another world.

Mr. Marcus, who now teaches math and science to Murch 5th graders, remembered most of all a three-day field trip to see The Twelve Apostles, which are tall limestone pillars standing in ocean waters "in the middle of nowhere," Mr. Marcus said. .

Three days far from his family, with his friends, near the oceanfront: What an adventure it must have been!

Other Murch teachers also shared their childhood memories with us. Some spoke of food or music, others about sports or performances. Still others described the loving atmosphere they felt as students in their classrooms years ago.

Monica Davis, a 4th-grade teacher of history and literature, was a musician as a 4th-grader in Flint, Michigan. She played the flute in a band. "Going to band practice was the best part of my day," she said.

Kindergarten teacher Chloe Fisk's most lasting memory was when she played Oliver Twist in the musical "Oliver" as a 4th-grader in a Kentucky elementary school.

"I felt excited to be included in the arts community," she said. **(Photo above left shows Chloe, age 9, with her stepmom at her first Broadway musical, "Hairspray," in 2007).**

Pre-kindergarten teacher Katie Webb **(photo above center)** recalled a particular day in a Lutheran elementary school in Richmond, Michigan, when she dressed as a character in her favorite book, *Charlotte's Web*.

"I dressed up as Fern, in 'farm girl' clothes. I believe it was denim overalls and a flannel shirt. I safety-pinned a spider Beanie Baby to my shoulder to represent Charlotte, and carried a pig Beanie Baby with me to stand in for Wilbur. I loved to dress up. It made me feel free."

Other teachers remembered simple, warm moments in a classroom.

Meredith Grindrod, who teaches English language arts and social studies to 3rd graders, still talks about the teacher at the piano in her 3rd-grade classroom in Avon, Connecticut.

"We sang songs like 'The Star-Spangled Banner' and 'America the Beautiful.' I think I still know most of the lyrics," Ms. Grindrod remembered.

"We would start every morning with a song. Our teacher would print the lyrics and we would all sing together. It was a lovely way to start the day."

Second-grade teacher Heather Kuduk-Hsu recalled the warmth in her 2nd-grade classroom in Hawkins, Wisconsin. The teacher (Ms. Sika) would read a book and serve milk and cinnamon crackers to all the children.

"Ms. Sika always made us feel loved," Ms. Kuduk-Hsu recalled.

To young Kathleen Bergin **(photo above right)**, school meant sports. She remembered how active she was in the fifth grade in an elementary school in Hyattsville, Maryland. She played soccer, basketball and softball. Her softball team was especially good.

"We won the championship and we all got jackets and trophies. I was very excited!" she said.

Ms. Bergin, who teaches Murch 1st-graders, is still an active athlete.

"I do not play team sports any more, but I do triathlons. I swim, bike, or run every day and do races in the summer," she said.

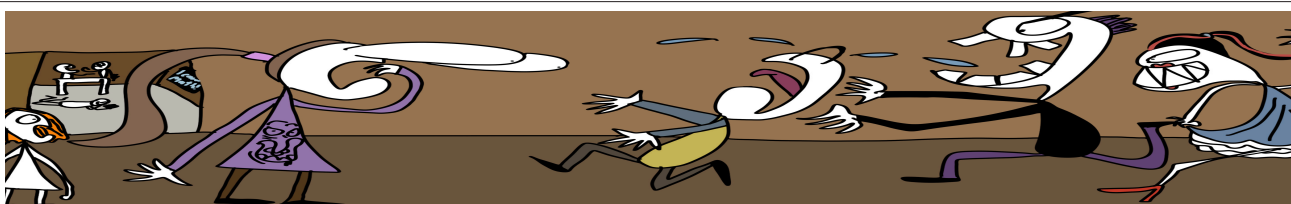


Illustration by  
Misha Zvoncov, Grade 5

## When is it Bad Behavior and When is it Bullying?

By EDWARD WILLIAMS and ELLA DuFRESNE

A student remembers the day when a group of kids "started to make fun of me...After that, I was so sad that I ... cried," the student said.

Was that bullying? Is it bullying to tease a student about a test score? Or insult a kid with a common curse word? Or shove another student? Or steal a kid's snack? It all depends on how bullying is defined.

Lauren Miller, the guidance counselor at Murch, said that "when someone hurts someone else on purpose, that's bullying." Timothy Brady, a 4th-grade teacher, said he believed bullying occurs when "someone repeatedly does something unkind and knows it's unkind."

But bullying is a more complex and serious matter as the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) defines it.

The district's definition stresses a persistent act of conduct – physical, electronic, or verbal – that attacks a person's distinguishing characteristics, such as race, gender, sex, age or disability. When a group of students organize a campaign against another student, that is bullying, too, according to the district's rules. That high standard is a good thing, Principal Chris Cebzynski (Mr. C) said, because it requires full, high-level investigations to the most serious cases.

Mr. C said that, in his 12 years as principal, he could recall no more than five cases "serious enough to meet DCPS's standard of bullying."

But even a single incident of hurtful behavior can be devastating for the victim, Ms. Miller noted. "I've seen people at Murch teasing each other because of their differences. It makes people feel unwanted, helpless. Sometimes they don't want to come to school. They might have trouble sleeping at night. They just feel sad."

What should students do when they believe they were targets of bullying? "They should tell a trusted adult in Murch at once and then tell their parents," Mr. C advised. Or they can inform someone on the mental health team: Ms. Miller, psychologist Sam Fisk or social worker Allison Worship.

The alleged victim of the harassment mentioned at the beginning of this story did just that. "I told Ms. Miller what had happened," that student recalled. "After that, each of the kids who bullied me had to go to Ms. Miller's room and personally (apologize) to me."

(Editor's note: To protect privacy, the B&G omitted information that could help readers to identify the students involved in this incident).



# Highlights of a Decade of Our Student Newspaper

*It was a momentous time for the many kid journalists of The Blue and Gold from 2013 to now — as you can see from the sampling below of their memorable year-by-year contributions:*

## **2013**

Principal Chris Cebrzynski (Mr. C), interviewed for the first issue of the student newspaper, confessed that his least favorite subject as a kid was math. “It was just too boring. And I didn’t understand it well,” he said. He also confided that he loved the old Murch building (as it was then) and its neighborhood because “it reminds me a lot of my childhood in Chicago.”

## **2014**

Kid reporters Olivia Roark and Emma Harris dropped in on children’s book author Erica Perl, who said she often tested her work by reading aloud to kids. “If they don’t like what I’ve written, I’m going to find out. They’re not going to hide it.”

Two staffers named Olivia wrote the first poems to be published in *The Blue and Gold*. “Different,” by Olivia Wood, included this verse: *“From unnoticed creatures/To people of fame/Everyone is different/No one is the same.”* Olivia Roark’s verse about bullying began: *“I never thought I’d go to war/at such a youthful age/But here and now I find myself/completely, totally enraged.”*

## **2015**

Lucy Chamberlain and Tessa Furlow, eager to express their opinions, wrote the B&G’s first editorial. It pinpointed the weaknesses of the Murch trailers (anyone remember those?) and proposed practical ideas for “making the trailer classrooms safer, more sanitary and better for concentrating on learning.”

The entire B&G staff met with architect Ronnie McGhee about his design team’s vision for the Murch modernization project, expected to cost an estimated \$65 million (which turned out to be low by millions). “I can’t say that it will look like any of the other (DC) schools,” McGhee said.

In a personal column, Tessa Furlow nominated herself to be Murch’s No. 1 medical patient during school hours. “I’m pretty sure I went there (the nurse’s office) at least 20 times, more than any other kid, I think,” she wrote. “I kept getting stomach aches. My stomach always hurt in math class. If I have to have a stomach ache, I’d rather have it during math, especially when we’re dividing fractions.”

And Maia Bester drew the newspaper’s first cartoon, which commented on the worldwide craze of taking self-portraits with a hand-held phone. Maia drew a girl posing for her phone-camera and saying, “Never mind the unicorn. I’m busy taking selfies.” Indeed, peering into the frame from the right was a unicorn, who moaned to himself, “I used to be a star.”

## **2016**

Maia Bester and Lucy Chamberlain combined to turn in a profile of then-Assistant Principal Penelope Miller. They learned that Ms. Miller grew up as a country girl in a rural part of Washington State. “She was an only child but had 15 ducks, a dog and two cats — not to mention a wild raccoon living in her backyard,” the girls reported.

Lily Shaw reviewed “Welcome to Mars,” a fact-laden book co-authored by former astronaut Buzz Aldrin. At the end of her review, Lily asked: “So is it possible to live on Mars?” Her answer: “Yes, it is.”

Mary Louisa Leopold reported on the plan to move our school temporarily to the University of the District of Columbia campus “while the overcrowded 86-year-old Murch building gets a multimillion-dollar facelift.” Headline: “Murch Goes to College.”

In a separate article, Mary Louisa, on the verge of graduation, expressed fond memories of the school she knew intimately for six years. “This school was like a home for me,” she wrote. “Murch made me feel as if I had a name and an opinion that mattered to others.”

And for the first time, *The Blue and Gold* ventured into fiction. The idea came to Editor Aaron Epstein while he was tutoring 3rd-grader Adrian Belmonte in reading and writing. Mr. Epstein discovered that Adrian was fascinated by Leonardo da Vinci and tales of time travel, and suggested that Adrian merge those interests into a short story. For months, Adrian worked on a first draft and rewrites.

The result: “The Strange Case of the Stolen Mona Lisa” appeared on pages 3 and 5 of the June issue. A 5th-grader, Tavaline (Beaver) Inthavone contributed a twisted tale of Cinderella and a detective story that began with the theft of iPads at Murch.

And there was Maia Bester’s lengthy narrative poem of a nocturnal adventure that began when *“I clamber out of my bedroom window/Careful not to wake my father/And listen to the sounds of the night around me/I can hear the chirping of crickets/Feel the beautiful nature/Taste the wind/Touch the moon/Out here I can be anything/Anyone.”*

## **2017**

An opinion column by 5th-graders Lila Chesser and Rachel Kolko concluded that gender bias lingered at Murch. They cited evidence that “reinforce the stereotype that girls are weaker and less athletic than boys.” They cited an instance, for example, in which a substitute gym teacher introduced a game of kickball with hockey sticks. “I don’t think the girls can do it,” the sub said.

Third-grader Iain Walter introduced his Mr. Mustang comic strip with a student’s surprising discovery that the central character was a clerk in the main office. “What, never seen a horse type with hooves?” Mr. Mustang exclaimed.

## **2018**

Bea Marchesani and Maia Riggs donned hard hats and protective glasses to explore the construction site and tell Murch kids and adults what they would find when the \$83 million modern Murch opens.

In another Iain Walter comic strip, a downhearted Mr. Mustang appeared at the construction site, wailing, “What? NO STABLE?!”

The June issue featured a boxed front-page story by Lorelei McIntosh and Margaux Colleye, who made this announcement: “Finally, after 85 years of use, several years of battling over design and budget, and two years of construction, a Murch Elementary School for the 21st century is about to open.”

But Mr. Mustang refused to leave Murch’s temporary site on the UDC campus. Why? “I did so well on PARCC, I got accepted into UDC,” the Murch mascot explained.

And Bea, about to graduate and assigned to recall her standout memory of Murch, wrote: “A boy in my kindergarten class proposed to me one day. He said that if I didn’t accept his offer of marriage, he would cut his head off and put himself in prison. I didn’t believe him. I declined, even when he begged me. The boy isn’t at Murch any more. As far as I know, he’s still alive, not married and not in prison.”

## **2019**

Lucy Spellacy-Baah investigated the ways in which classroom pets help kids learn. She found that pets make kids excited about school, teach them to enjoy — and care for — living things, and acquaint them with grief. When a fish died in a 1st-grade classroom, the teacher taught the class about the process of life and death. “The kids found a nice spot out in the garden. Together, they buried the fish,” Lucy reported. “Then they made a gravesite by wrapping straw with duct tape and placing berries around it.”

## **2020-2021**

When the coronavirus forced schools to close and confined students to their homes, *The Blue and Gold* published a unique edition titled “The Pandemic Diaries.” B&G reporters and alumni volunteered to write journals, telling readers of their loneliness, the absence of friends, the difficulties of distance learning, their frustrations and boredom, and their worries about the future. Yet their diary entries also showed their hopes, discoveries of new interests, and love for parents, siblings and pets. A retired Murch teacher praised the published diaries as “so from the heart.” A Murch parent wrote that the writings of his son and the other students “helped me understand their state of mind better.”





This was the first staff of The Blue and Gold. In alphabetical order by last names, they are Henry Daschle, Erin Hollar, Chloe Ifill, Alex Holmes, Sydney Schwalb, Ricardo Sheler, Sarah Tilghman, Taylor Webster and Jasper Whitney. They named the paper and wrote the first stories in 2013. All were 5th-graders back then.

## *In the beginning, there was the lede...*

The best writers knew how to start a story, whether it was in the Old Testament (“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”) or “A Tale of Two Cities” by Charles Dickens (“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”).

For journalists, whether professionals or students in elementary schools, the lede is the start of a story – and ideally should be so intriguing that it “hooks the reader.”

With that slippery goal in mind, we’ve listed some of the outstanding ledes written by The Blue and Gold’s kid journalists during the past decade. Do any of them hook you?

*If you think that Murch is old, tired and badly in need of a makeover, you’re not alone.* — Henry Daschle, 5th grade, 2013

*Without people like Ray Berginder and Ahmed El-Hady, our school would get dirty fast.* — Max Wix, 5th grade, 2014

*When we knocked gently on the wooden door of Erica Perl’s green-trimmed house not far from Murch, a woman with short, curly hair appeared, holding a brown and white dog by the collar.* — Olivia Roark and Emma Harris, 5th grade, 2014

*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.* — Rigby Zentner, 4th grade, 2015

*With a warm smile, she greets you every day with “Good morning baby. Whatcha need?”* — Journey Gianna, 5th grade, 2015

*Kids often get embarrassed in school by tripping and falling to the floor or spilling things on themselves. What they may not realize is that teachers have their embarrassing moments, too.* — Rigby Zentner, 4th grade, 2015

*Imagine that a husband and wife -- maybe even your own mom and dad -- work at the same place doing the same thing.* -- Lucy Chamberlain and Taylor Jackson, 5th grade, 2016

*Teachers have been telling students for years that China is halfway across the world. We found it right across the street.* — Molly Nugent and Kate Hilditch, 5th grade, 2017

*How could a time capsule simply disappear?* — Margaux Colleye, 5th grade, 2018

*The life journey of Pablo Giron took him from living in poverty in South America to teaching Spanish in March Elementary School. Along the way, he studied economics in Paris and worked in a place that was so dangerous that he needed protection from criminals.* -- Klementyna McGuire & Emma Cappelloni, 5th grade, 2019

*You sit in class day after day and you think you know everything there is to know about your teacher. But you don’t.* — Lila Davies, 5th-grade, 2020

*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.* --Harper Barlow & Josephine Caspar, 4th-grade, 2020

*I love soup dumplings. We used to go to Bob’s Shanghai 66 all the time. By the time it’s safe to go out, all our favorite restaurants may be out of business.* — Abigail Dannenberg, 4th grade, 2020

*My 10th birthday could have gone better, but what can I ask for? A virtual party and some gifts? It’s not like I can ask the coronavirus to go on vacation, can I? -- Ronan Shah, 4th grade, 2020*

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT MURCH**

There are lots of questions about school. We found some answers:

**Q:** What happened to the driver whose bus crashed into a boulder while returning from a field trip in Virginia last October, causing minor injuries to nine of 44 Murch kindergarten kids aboard?

**A:** He agreed to a deal that required him to spend 8 1/2 months in jail, a sentence that some parents criticized as weak, A blood test showed that the driver’s alcohol level was more than twice the maximum allowed for drivers under Virginia law, The Washington Post reported.

But the prosecutors reduced the charges to minor ones after admitting that they had missed several deadlines.

Later, the DC school district cut its ties with Rome Charters, the company that employed the driver. The crash occurred on the driver’s 48th birthday.

*(more Q&A on page 8)*



# Assistant Principal Talks of Fishing, Family and 'Folk'

(HAWKINS from Page 1)

**Q:** Did you eat the fish for dinner?

**A:** I never liked to eat what I'd catch. My grandfather would. I'd rather go to Long John Silver. We'd use worms to catch the fish so I'd be eating worms. That's how I thought about it.

**Q:** Did your grandfather teach you how to fish?

**A:** Yeah, when I was 3 or 4 years old. He taught me how to use an encyclopedia. If I had a question, he'd tell me, 'go get the encyclopedia.' He taught me a lot of music. He taught me about life, He'd tell me to look on the bright side no matter how hard it was.

**Q:** What did you enjoy most about school?

**A:** My mom and I made a deal where if I made the honor roll, I could get sneakers. I liked collecting sneakers.

**Q:** What did you enjoy least?

**A:** I didn't like that once you finished your work, you had to be quiet. I liked to talk and joke, so I'd get in trouble for that.

**Q:** What kind of trouble?

**A:** Nothing major. My (4th-grade) teacher would say 'stop talking'. I never got suspended or anything like that. I was just goofin' around, being a young boy.

**Q:** What books and movies made the greatest impression on you?

**A:** "As A Man Thinketh" by James Allen is one of the most profound books I've read, and "The Autobiography of Malcolm X."

**Q:** What were the most important things you learned from them?

**A:** Malcolm X taught about race and class and society, and virtue and patience. From James Allen, I learned that if you get in trouble today and you get upset about it, this is just one portion of your life. So it helped me not to take everything so seriously.

**Q:** Movies?

**A:** I liked "Forrest Gump." It's a safe movie to (choose). I started my career in special education, and Forrest Gump was a special-needs kid and he got joked about

and picked on. He went into the military and became a very successful entrepreneur (businessman). It's a story of how things may not go well as you grow up, but as you grow older you can control your own destiny.

**Q:** What would be your dream job?

**A:** My dream is to be like Anthony Bourdain. He traveled all around the world, ate these exquisite dishes and broadcast (his experiences) to the world.

**Q:** If you could pick any job at Murch, what would it be?

**A:** Mr. C's job is hard, so I don't know if I want that job. It's a lot of work. If I could pick a job, I would create a job for myself where I would come in, do interviews like this, work with kids, leave and go home, and I would do this about two days a week.

**Q:** What can you tell us about your family?

**A:** I have a son, his name is Kru and he's 2, and a wife, her name is Destiny. And we have a dog, a chihuahua mixed with a yorkie, about six pounds, a spunky little guy.

**Q:** Does your wife have a career?

**A:** My wife is a data analyst. So she's great with all the technical programs that I have no idea how to do. She works from home. She has a masters degree in business administration, so she does a lot of basically math things, I would say.

**Q:** What did you mean when you described your dog as "a spunky little guy."?

**A:** Metro is my dog's name. He'll be 9 in August. He is always barking. When I come home, he barks the whole time. I say, 'wait, you see me every day.' When we go upstairs at night, he'll make sure to be the first one up the steps. He's a big presence in our house.

**Q:** You told us you have a business outside of school. What kind of business is it?

**A:** I have a clothing line. Me and my friend design sweatshirts, t-shirts, hats, et cetera. We also give back to the community. Clothing, things like that. I'm excited about

design. It (the business) is called "Folk."

**Q:** What do you do as assistant principal?

**A:** A lot of different things. I support and evaluate teachers and give them feedback on their teaching. I lead the specialized instruction department. There's also discipline, so if students are misbehaving, I (handle) the issues and consequences, things of that sort. I also work with parents, and collaborate with Principal C to help him with whatever he needs.

**Q:** What do you like the most?

**A:** That there's always something new every day.

**Q:** What do you like the least?

**A:** The commute. Everything else is doable. I drive an hour (from and to Virginia). Right now it's just too expensive to move closer (to Murch).

**Q:** Were you nervous when you had to take over when Mr. C was absent?

**A:** No, I wasn't nervous because, prior to becoming assistant principal, I was the manager of specialized instruction (at Murch), and there were times when Principal C and the assistant principal at the time (Penelope Miller) had to go to meetings, so I would be the acting principal.

**Q:** What and where did you study in college?

**A:** I went to Virginia Commonwealth in Richmond, Virginia. My major was psychology and my minor was in criminal justice. I got a master's degree at George Washington University here in DC in education and human development, and I'm currently in Georgetown doing an educational leadership program.

**Q:** How did you decide to come to Murch?

**A:** I had started in high school and I always taught high school. However, when I applied to work in DCPS, and when I met with Principal C, we just kinda really hit it off, so I said, 'hey, I don't know anything about elementary but I'm open to learning.' So I got into elementary and I love it.

**Q:** What is in the basement?

**A:** Old files, trophies and sports equipment, Assistant Principal Hawkins said.

**Q:** Is there a shower in the custodians' bathroom. If so, what is it for?

**A:** Head custodian Ray Bargender: "There's one in the locker room, not the bathroom. And it's not used at all."

**Q:** The EPIC! computer reading program disappeared this school year. Why?

**A:** Replied Murch Librarian Rebecca Burton: "When we did school from home (during the pandemic), Epic! was free for school systems during school hours. Then after we all got back to school, Epic! stopped being free. So I think the school system decided that they could get basically the same thing from Sora (another online reading program), but it would not be as expensive."

(Staffers Jane Milton, Louisa Hawkins, Emme Bernards and Thomas McCormack reported the answers).

## More Questions and Answers about Murch

**Q:** What is former Assistant Principal Penelope Miller (shown on the right) doing now?



**A:** She is the principal of Ludlow-Taylor Elementary School in Northeast Washington, DC.

**Q:** What can longtime 5th-grade teacher Victoria (Vicki) Otten tell us about her activities in retirement?

**A:** "I began working with the peer mediators and substitute teaching at Murch. I love being back at Murch. Retirement has allowed me to spend more time with family, and for travel, reading, taking walks with friends — and meeting friends for coffee in the middle of the day.

**Q:** Why didn't our school hire a new Spanish teacher when Pablo Giron retired in 2020?

**A:** Murch does not have the money to pay a Spanish teacher, Mr.C said, adding: "If we were to hire one, that person would have to be an unpaid volunteer."