

# Four Rivers Currents

December 2015

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

## **LEARNING TO NAVIGATE COMPLEX ISSUES, FREE SPEECH, AND CONFLICT**

One of our greatest hopes as educators is that our students care about themselves and the world around them. What do we do, then, when caring leads to wanting to limit someone else's liberty? In news stories and conversations at school over recent weeks, students have been objecting to language, content, and actions that offend, trigger, or upset. What responsibility does each all of us have not to offend, trigger, or upset? And what about freedom of speech? The true test of liberty is whether we support it when someone's ideas or speech deeply offend. Freedom of speech and thought are especially put to the test in schools where we are supposed to create safe communities in which all students have the opportunity learn. How can one student learn if another uses hateful speech?

At Four Rivers, our teachers encourage students to think for themselves, take a stand, and take action on their beliefs. For some, this can mean raising awareness about what offends them, what upsets them, or what makes it hard for them to learn. Others, then, try to adjust their language. Individual students need to feel safe and that they belong in order to be able to learn. How can a learning community both protect individuals and at the same time help students learn to handle conflict?

Some say knowing right from wrong was easier when the violations were more obvious. It was harder to miss when someone was denied the right to vote or use the same drinking fountain or have equal opportunities. Today, with legal protections requiring fair treatment, it might be that inequities, unfairness, and disempowerment take on more subtle forms. We make assumptions, we label and mislabel, we forget our own privileges. As one example, so-called racial micro-aggressions -- the subtle, oftentimes unconscious words or actions that are committed against people of color that denigrate them and may cause emotional and physical harm (Sue, Capodilupo et al., 2007) -- can happen in the most well-meaning, progressive communities.

There are frequent opportunities to offend in our day to day lives; how should we approach such moments in school? I believe we should talk about these moments, and not simply shut them down. What better setting is there than school to engage complicated, important situations and our different perspectives on right and wrong, injustice and fairness? We should not shelter students from questions or topics that are upsetting -- like evolution and climate change, or the Holocaust, or dystopian literature. We do need to warn and protect any students with trauma histories when approaching these. But that does not mean shielding students from anything that might be upsetting.

Conflict is part of life. So how do we prepare ourselves to handle it? How do we teach our students to deal with conflict? George Packer in a recent New Yorker article described this territory as the "messy realm of exchanges between individuals who have to learn how to reason and argue and get along". Four Rivers is an open and accepting community, creating a safe learning space for all students. At the same time, our teachers seek to expose students to important questions and subject matter and to teach them how to reason and argue and get along. We want to create a community that is sensitive while embracing communication about sometimes uncomfortable topics or viewpoints.

In these weeks between Thanksgiving and the new year, may our thoughts turn also to topics that inspire, illuminate, and elevate. Thanks for being part of this vibrant community.



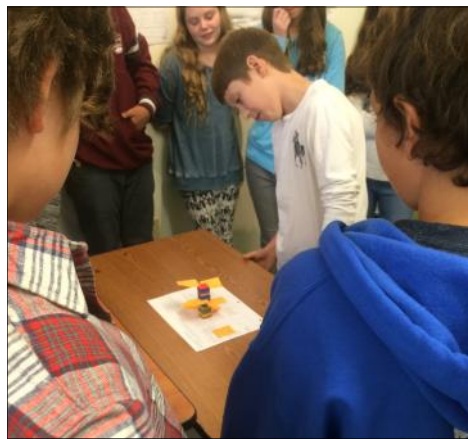
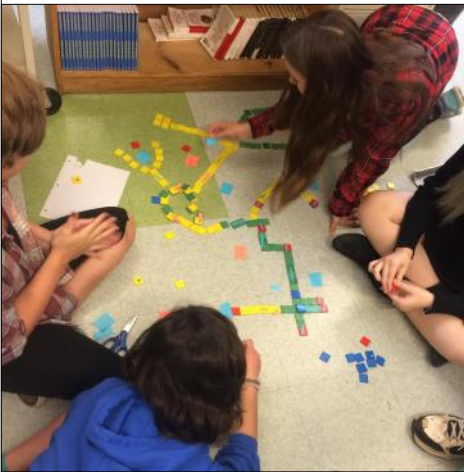
*Peter Garbus, Principal*

## Grade 7 News

### Social Studies ~ Ms. Hobbs

Seventh grade social studies turns to hands on projects to help students more fully understand the transition humans made from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic time period.

*From left to right below: Charlotte, Lily, Maddy, and Sage use blocks to represent a timeline and map for where and when humans migrated before they began to settle into city life; Gavin explains the transition from hunter-gatherers to agricultural practice; Melina and Sylvia gather acorns as hunter-gatherers.*



### Math & Science ~ Ms. Locke

READING THE ROCKS - Seventh graders try to discover the stories in stone by identifying rocks at the GCC rock park and using them as pieces of the past. This fieldwork launches them into the study of Earth History and sets the stage for their mission to be able to assemble enough evidence to tell the tale of the events that shaped our local landscape.

*Below L—R: Ben and Henry; Abby and Lenora!*



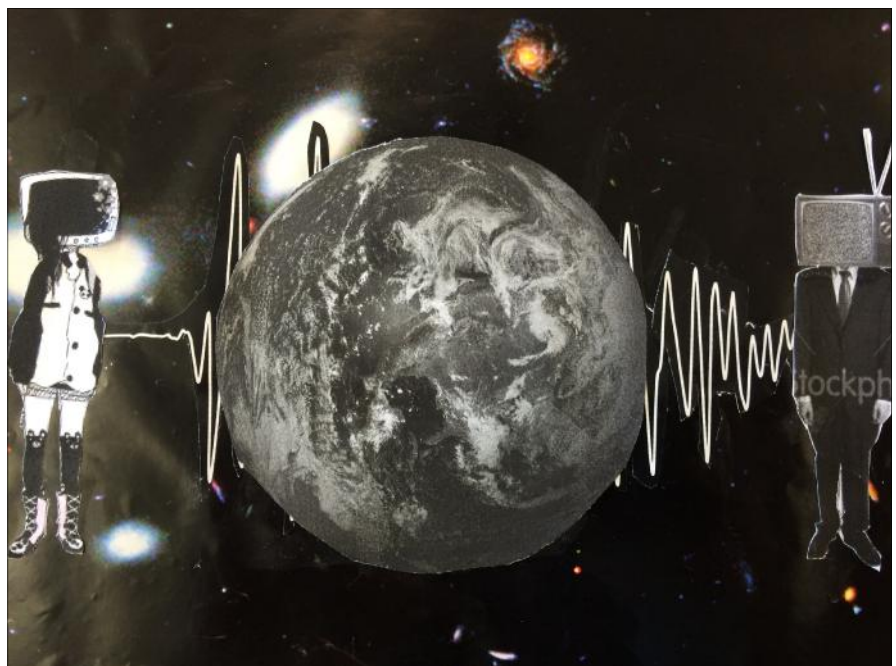
## Grade 8 News

### REPRESENTING COMPLEXITIES OF SOCIETY

In 8th grade Humanities, we just finished studying, discussing, and creating Society Collages with Artist Statements. This has been a very interesting and contemplative process! Most of the students' collages relate to eight elements of society: technology, government, arts, class, labor, beliefs, media, and education. Students studied and analyzed these elements of society, and then created a collage to represent their feelings about it. They also composed Artist Statements to express the details and symbolism in their collages. Two examples are pictured:

Hjordis Aho focused on the complex topic of poverty in America with black and white images on one side of her collage, and colorful images on the other, separated by a jagged edge. Hailey Weller's is the image of two TV heads connected by a zippy line, floating in space, between the earth. Below is her artist statement.

*The media, be it social media or otherwise, is an effective way to help people everywhere to connect, learn, and spread information. If it is approached with both respect and enthusiasm, it can be a real blessing. In my collage, I tried to depict this. The people with TV heads on either side of the collage symbolize humans using the media. They have TVs for heads because they are able to share ideas, dreams, and knowledge. The zappy line represents the media itself, connecting the people. The outer space background represents how (with this nearly endless resource) the possibilities and opportunities open to us are vast and almost unknown. Finally, the earth symbolizes that many different kinds of people in the world can make connections through the media, when without it they wouldn't even know of each other's existence. The media exposes potentially new things to different humans in very different places. With all that being said, the media is of course a blessing. Are you responsible enough to handle this gift? ~ Hailey Weller*



## Highlights of High School INTENSIVES Week

### **ROCK CLIMBING** ~ with Dr. Fogel and Ms. Ritchie

The rock climbing intensive took climbers of all levels to nearby crags, including Sun Bowl, Farley Ledges, and Sanctuary. Some students climbed and belayed for the first time, while more experienced climbers learned lead climbing and lead belaying techniques, how to set up anchors, and how to take down climbs. The goal of this intensive was to climb and/or rappel every day, despite the weather, and we did! Although the final two days were shivery, the group kept warm by climbing hard and drinking lots of cocoa. We spent (or “braved”, depending on how you feel about cold weather) the final night of intensives on Northfield Mountain under an almost full moon, snug in sleeping bags, and woke up early to climb some more!



### **COLLEGE BOUND** with Mr. Stenson and Ms. Haxo

The College Bound intensive traveled almost seven hundred miles in four days, visiting seven college campuses: Clark University and Becker College in Worcester; the University of New Hampshire in Durham; the University of New England, Bowdoin College, and Bates College in Maine, and ending at Greenfield Community College. Students met with admissions counselors, toured the campuses, asked many questions, and ate meals in the dining commons. The photo shows the students on the University of New Hampshire Wildcat.



**Ecscapes: Connecticut River** with Mr. Wilson and Ms. Hobbs



This intensive was about appreciating a sense of place, tending to a common resource, and interpreting natural history. The Connecticut River is New England's longest river, stretching for 410 miles from the northern tip of New Hampshire on the Quebec border to the beaches and marshes of Long Island Sound. This intensive explored how the Connecticut has shaped human activity in our region and how we as people

have come to define the river. We spent time, hiking, canoeing, building fires, journaling, visiting area museums, and listening to local experts. Roll on.



**HOW THE OTHER HALF LEARNS**

Mr. Hornick and a group of students visited three high schools that are very different from Four Rivers, met teenagers who live in those worlds, and saw how different Four Rivers really is from other schools.

*Photos: Right—Springfield High School for Science and Technology's MCAS pep rally. The high math scorer was awarded a Nook. Below Right - a Junior ROTC class.*



**LOST ARTS** ~ Ms. Stamas and Ms. Tabachnick

This group downshifted and unplugged for a few days and practiced some arts that seem to get lost in today's multi-tasking culture: lost arts such as storytelling, cooking from scratch, knitting and other handwork, writing letters, drinking tea and reading poetry. Ahhhhhhh. (photos at left)

## POP-UP HOLIDAY STORE RETURNS

Looking for Holiday Gifts? The  
Four Rivers Holiday Pop-Up  
Store returns for

**ONE WEEK ONLY**

**December 16 to 23**

*Check out the Farmhouse Porch  
for Four Rivers goods: Hoodies,  
T-shirts, Notecards, Discs, hats,  
as well as Pierce Brothers' Coffee  
and Cocoa!*

**Hours:**

**Open at dismissal each day for  
30 minutes OR by special re-  
quest.**

**Contact Leslie Taylor at  
775-4577 x202**

## SPECIAL ORDER BASKETBALL, DRAMA OR GENERIC FOUR RIVERS APPAREL

**ORDER NOW FOR HOLIDAY DELIVERY!**

**ORDERS DUE FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4th**

Order forms available at the school office or on the Family Council  
School Store web site:

<http://www.fourriverscharter.org/family/schoolstore.html>

## NURSE'S NOTES

It is becoming increasingly popular for students to call or "text" their parents to come get them because they do not feel well. School policy is that a student must be assessed by the school nurse before going home ill. I will assess the student and contact you for pick-up. If a student will be driving home from school I will contact the parent/guardian first; then have the student call Four Rivers upon arriving home safely. **REMEMBER:** if you receive a request directly from your child that he/she is not feeling well, please TELL them to see the nurse. Thank you for your assistance in observing school policy. Wishing all of you a safe and Happy Holiday vacation. ~ *Jeanne Milton, RN*

## ADMISSIONS SEASON APPROACHES

### SIBLINGS OF CURRENT STUDENTS:

- Siblings of current student are given preference in our lottery each year.
- Siblings of current student who wish to enroll next fall, for the 2016-17 school year, must complete an admission application and submit it by the due date—February 24, 2016.
- Applications are available on the school's web site under Admissions, from Ms. Taylor at school, or at our Admissions Information Sessions:

**Saturdays: January 9 and January 30, 10:00 to 11:30 am**

**Wednesdays: January 20 and February 10, 7:00 to 8:30 pm**

### LOOKING FOR PARENT VOLUNTEERS:

- We are looking for a few current parents to help with the Question / Answer portion of Admissions Information Sessions. Are you available on one or more of the above dates?
- Contact Leslie Taylor for details: [ltaylor@fourriverscharter.org](mailto:ltaylor@fourriverscharter.org) OR 413-775-4577 x 202

## COLLEGE ADVISING

### FINANCIAL AID EVENING \*\* \*\* \* For Seniors and Their Families WEDNESDAY, DEC. 8th, 6:00—8:00 pm

Michael Ireland, Associate Director of Student Financial Services at Smith College, and Andy Stenson, Four Rivers College Counselor, will offer an evening of information about applying for college financial aid. Ample time will be allotted for questions and discussion.

Although some of the evening will focus on information most pertinent to senior families, other families interested in learning about college financing are strongly urged to attend.

#### Topics to be covered include:

- Financing a College Education
- Tool for future planning—Net Price Calculators and EFC Forecasters
- How financial aid is calculated—the impact of income and savings
- Detailed instructions regarding submission and timelines for FAFSA and SCS Profile forms
- Need-based financial aid packages and their component parts:  
    Grants / Loans / Work Study
- Need “Blind” and Need “Aware” school practices
- Merit Aid and Scholarships

#### LAST CHANCE FOR SENIORS TO TAKE THE SAT'S

January is the final opportunity for any current seniors who still need to take, or who want to re-take, the SAT's. The test date is January 23rd and the deadline to register is **December 28th**. Details and registration are available here: <https://sat.collegeboard.org/home>

Question? Email [astenson@fourriverscharter.org](mailto:astenson@fourriverscharter.org) or call (413) 775 4577

#### 7th ANNUAL ALUMNI BREAKFAST ~ Wednesday, December 23rd

**CALLING ALL ALUMS!** The school is hosting its 7th Annual Alumni Breakfast from 9:15 to Noon, hosted by the current seniors—the class of 2016. If you are a graduate, we'd love to have you join us for some socializing, good food, and Alumni Panel Sessions. We want to hear what you are doing now (college / work / family / travel), how you got there, and your advice for our current seniors. Also be sure to visit “Four Rivers Alumni” on Facebook.

## ANNUAL SUSTAINABILITY FUND

### Make your tax deductible donation today!

Your donations support learning opportunities that take our students beyond our classroom walls, to the wilderness, to New York City and Washington DC, the Connecticut River and the White Mountains, to food pantries and farms, to see theater and wind turbines: <http://fourriverscharter.org/sus.htm>

**WINTER IN THE WHITES** ~ with Ms. McNamara, Mr. Patari & Ms. Plath

This year marked the five-year anniversary of Winter in the Whites, an intensive which took 19 students to the White Mountains in Crawford Notch, New Hampshire. We stayed in the AMC Highland Center and learned how to be safely outdoors in the winter, including the importance of food, hydration, and layers. Notable hikes included the 3443-foot Mt. Avalon and a sunrise ascent of Mt. Willard.



"This institution is an equal opportunity provider. To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Washington, DC 20294"

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



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.