

## Red Ribbon Week at Springhill Elementary John Abrams Presents "The Bully Game"

By Jean Follmer



John Abrams involves the young audience

Photo submitted

Red Ribbon Week, a nationwide youth drug prevention program, came to a close after many related activities at Lamorinda schools. Part of preventing future drug use is to foster positive character development and saying "no" to bullying can help. Many drug users have been either a bully or the victim of one. Springhill's Red Ribbon theme was "Good Character-Good Decisions" and was coordinated by Karen Elliott. An anti-bullying program may reinforce "Good Character-Good Decisions" and help keep kids out of trouble.

Springhill Elementary kicked off Red Ribbon Week with a presentation by actor John Abrams called "The Bully Game". Mr. Abrams developed the program in 2006 and said it "caught on like wildfire." He saw a need in a parenting conference he facilitates where he asks three questions: 1) Is your child a bully? 2) Has your child been bullied? and 3) Do you remember a bullying situation from your childhood? A few folks answered "yes" to #1, more to #2 and everyone to #3.

The bullying presentation is given separately to grades 1-3 and grades 4-5 with slightly different subject matter. When asked what bullying was, a 1st grader replied

"Pushing people out of the way and turning them into little balls." This drew a good laugh from the crowd. Abrams responded that bullying can be "big people picking on little people that can't defend themselves". He told the kids a good way to avoid being bullied is to stick with your friends. The three most common bullying locales are the playground, the hallway and the bathroom.

Presented in a humorous, magical Game Show format, students were called as contestants. They were given whistles to use as buzzers and were asked questions to differentiate between teasing and taunting, gossip and chatter, tattling and telling and bystander and witness. Abrams asked questions and the contestants blew their whistles if they knew the answer. Abrams called on the first whistle blower, score was kept and ties were broken.

The students did a great job differentiating between bullying and non-bullying acts. They recognized that one friend calling another a "chicken head" was teasing while a bigger student taking the seat of a smaller student was taunting. Teasing leads to taunting when "feelings get hurt" and taunting is a bullying act. Abrams stressed to "never start gossiping" because it's a monster and when it comes to cyber gossiping, it never goes away. He said you "tattle to get someone into trouble" and "tell to get someone out of trouble". Abrams assured it's ok to tell in order to help someone. A witness "tells" and a bystander doesn't. When a student sees bullying going on, he needs to help. If he can't help directly, he needs to find the nearest adult and alert them. With the 4th and 5th graders, he unraveled a huge roll of toilet paper & yelled "wipe out bullying!" It seems potty talk can be a teaching tool...that balance between humor and serious subject matter.

## Beauties and the Beasts

Submitted by Ava Tajbakhsh (4th grade)



Foreground (LtoR): Hana Sun, Paige McGill and Beth Evenhuis take in the sights with the Troop, and parent chaperone Cindy Newton

It was a dark and stormy night...a gaggle of Girl Scouts huddled in the rain outside of the Oakland Zoo on a recent wet Friday evening, waiting for their chance to share a snooze with the Zoo's furry, feathered and scaly residents.

Junior Girl Scout Troop 734, 4th graders from Los Perales and Rheem Elementary schools, got a nice surprise at the first meeting of the year from Troop leaders Jennifer Gerst and Karen Diemoz, when they announced that the Troop would be attending one of the Zoo's overnight educational programs. The Troop had to learn lots of rules about staying at the Zoo, including what's okay to bring and what's not okay to bring because some things might hurt the animals, such as people food.

Other Girl Scout Troops were at the Zoo that night also, but because Troop 734 was the last group to be called inside, they got to set up their sleeping bags on the stage at the Education Center. After they left their things they grabbed raincoats and flashlights and went out to tour the Zoo in the dark with a guide. The great thing about being at the Zoo at night was that the Troop had a chance to see all of the nocturnal animals while they were awake, like the bats, while daytime animals, like Scout Ilene Drobny's favorites, the bunnies, were sleeping. It was too dark to see the alligators in the water, and the black

widow spider was really creepy. The girls also got to paint little flower pots that night. Afterwards, the Zoo gave the girls some hot chocolate, a snack and little time to chat among themselves, then it was time to go to sleep. They left the hall light on in case anyone woke up during the night.

In the morning, everyone had breakfast and packed up their stuff. They got to meet a couple of animals in the Education Center, a bearded dragon and a cute chinchilla! The girls planted flower seeds in their pots, and learned how zookeepers train animals to come when they are called. They do this by giving the animals rewards.

Before leaving they got another tour of the Zoo in the daylight, and saw zebras, elephants, giraffes, monkeys and all sorts of birds. "We learned a lot about animals," said Scout Uma Gaffney, "like what alligators eat and that the oldest tortoise at the Zoo is at least 120 years old but nobody knows for sure because they didn't really keep good records back then."

Troop 734 thinks that other Girl Scouts will like this trip. If you go, says Scout Ellen Gerst, "You'll wish you could stay more than one night!" Uma recommends that you "Sleep outside if it's not raining, and bring your camera!"

For more information on the Oakland Zoo's educational programs, go to <http://www.oaklandzoo.org/education>

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## Making the Transition to Sixth Grade and Middle School

By Margie Ryerson

Entering sixth grade can be daunting for many students and their families. It is a time of huge growth and development for children, and for parents it is often the beginning of the process of "letting go."

My own wake-up came when I was in the process of calling a babysitter for our sixth-grade daughter, and the phone rang. It was a neighborhood mom calling to see if our daughter could babysit for her children!

It is easy for parents to get confused during this transition period. Sometimes our children behave in a competent, sensible manner; other times they seem to regress back to the irrational and demanding toddler stage. You can help by overlooking small transgressions and moodiness, and by offering support and encouragement whenever possible.

Sixth grade is a time of increased complexity for our children. They must adapt to a larger school, different teachers with varying styles and expectations, more homework and responsibilities, and a more complicated social environment. In addition, they may experi-

ence hormonal fluctuations leading to mood swings and physical changes. Having friends and fitting into the peer group become more important. The developmental process of discovering oneself and forming an identity usually begins around this time.

With so much going on, it's no wonder this time can involve such a huge adjustment. Change is rarely easy, yet changes are occurring on a regular basis. One sixth-grader, Kelly, came home during her first week at a local middle school crying and discouraged. She told her parents that she had no friends in her classes and that no one even liked her. Naturally her parents were dismayed and worried. The next week there was a complete turn-around: Kelly had been elected class representative to the Student Council and had been invited to hang out with several new friends.

Social issues abound in middle school. Friendships shift, cliques form, and unfortunately, gossiping and bullying are more prevalent than in prior years. Children need help navigating this new territory and learning how to problem-solve and express themselves effectively.



Margie Ryerson, MFT, is a marriage and family therapist with offices in Orinda and Walnut Creek. Contact her at 925-376-9323 or [margierye@yahoo.com](mailto:margierye@yahoo.com).

Parents can be avid listeners and advocates, and school personnel are highly trained and ready to assist. Be sure to utilize all available resources in your school and community to help your child with any difficulties he experiences; none are too small to tackle.

Even though your child may push you away at times, your presence at this stage is very important. You are the only ones who can provide the unconditional love and acceptance that every child needs from his parents, especially when times are challenging.

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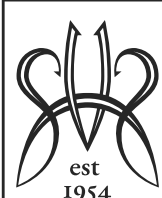
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