



# Shepaug Valley Middle School Newsletter

December 2011/January 2012

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Dear Shepaug family,

On November 29, we had a special guest with us, Mr. Ed Gerety, a graduate from University of New Hampshire who majored in communications. He has presented in all 50 states, Canada and Europe and his ability to connect with audiences is amazing. Ask your child about his visit.

I would like to share quotes from his presentation:

- *Be respectful of one another just because*
- *Be grateful*
- *Be kind*
- *Be responsible and make good choices*
- *You have the power to tear people down or build them up*
- *Remember this word, "attitude"*
- *We can always go farther than we think we can*
- *We can be influenced without realizing it*
- *Surround yourself with positive people and positive messages*
- *Build a dream board and hang it up in your room*
- *A powerful phrase: I love you*
- *A courageous phrase: I am sorry*
- *Have courage to ask for forgiveness*
- *If you don't reach your goal, try again or change it*
- *Don't sell yourself out to reach your goal – lying and cheating are not good characteristics; build your character; be honest*

I encourage you to ask your child about the program. Mr. Gerety is the author of Combinations: Opening the Door to Student Leadership and he provided every student with a copy of his book. We have started using the book in our advisories. I hope that you encourage your child to build a dream board of future goals.

As a school we are working together to spread these same messages and parents are welcome to become a part of our Safe School Committee. Please do call me if you are interested.

I have added a new section to the newsletter – *Faculty Spotlight* that will provide an opportunity for us to share personal interests/hobbies. I hope you will enjoy getting to know our staff.

May you and your loved ones enjoy a safe and blessed holiday season and all the best in 2012.

Warm regards,  
*Teresa DeBrilo*

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS



December 1.....	Holiday Bazaar
December 2 .....	Bridgewater Tree Lighting
December 2 .....	Picture retakes
December 6 .....	PTO meeting at 9:30 a.m.
December 8.....	Choral concert at 7 p.m.
December 9.....	Holiday in the Depot
December 13.....	Report cards go home
December 15 .....	Band concert at 7 p.m.
December 22.....	Health & Wellness Day
December 23-January 2.....	Holiday Break
January 16.....	No School-Martin Luther King
January 25, 26.....	Two hour delay

### Late Opening on January 25 - 26

This is a reminder that we have delayed openings on January 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>st</sup> in order to accommodate the high school exam schedules. School will start two hours late, so students should report to their bus stops two hours after their normally scheduled pick-up time. Middle school homeroom starts at 9:50 A.M. If we experience school closings, these dates may change.

**Students cannot be dropped off early as there is no supervision prior to 9:30 a.m.**

### Faculty Spotlight



*Did you know* that Mrs. Ermini has been a dynamic guidance counselor since 1989? *Did you know* that Mrs. Ermini loves gardening? One of her future goals is to become a master

gardener. *Did you know* that Mrs. Ermini enjoys yoga – it's her escape and she gets to relax. *Did you know* that Mrs. Ermini has been happily married for 33 years and is very involved with her family? Now you do know!



### **Superintendent's Award**

Every year, the Litchfield County Superintendents present students with the Superintendent's Award. This award is given to a student who is strong in the areas of academics, work ethic and character. Congratulations to this year's Shepaug Valley Middle School recipient, Jacob Marsh! Students from Litchfield County were honored at a dinner on November 16<sup>th</sup>.

### **Principal's Wall of Fame**

Each month, Shepaug students from grades 6, 7 and 8 are honored as *Students of the Month*. Nominated by their teachers, students who are selected have demonstrated outstanding academic scholarship or have shown significant effort and improvement in their studies. Student photos are placed on the Principal's Wall of Fame in the main office, and students are invited to attend a breakfast with the Principal at the beginning of the month in which they were celebrated. Congratulations to the following students who will be honored in December:

Grade 6: Emma Krebs & James Foote

Grade 7: Eva Jones & Fernando Pires

Grade 8: Sadie Fleming & Daniel Kotas

### **Health and Wellness Day**

December 22<sup>nd</sup> marks our annual Health and Wellness Day for the middle school. This is a day of activity and healthy ideas that is fun for both students and staff. Students are entertained by the famous Forbes Flyers jump rope team, and participate with the team learning new rope tricks. Students also take part in health skits, poster contests, and Dance Dance Revolution to get the heart pumping. Basketball, jump roping, team initiatives, swimming and Zumba will be enjoyed by our students this year, along with healthy snack choices sponsored by our PTA.

### **Sports Information**

Sports updates are found on our school website ([www.region-12.org](http://www.region-12.org)). Select *SVMS Athletics Schedule*. Game times and practices are listed daily, weekly, and monthly. If you would like to receive e-mails of updates, select the "Parents Guide to High School Sports" and you will be able to sign-up to receive updates for middle school as well.





## **Blue Team News**

(Mrs. Barksdale, Mrs. Beilinson, Mrs. Roberti, Mrs. Weik)

### **Humanities with Mrs. Weik**

Students in Mrs. Weik's Humanities classes are working in their Asian focus country groups. There are six teams studying China, India, Japan, South Korea, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. We have been examining the essential question, "How is American culture similar and different from these Asian cultures?" We start by evaluating pictures from the country. Then, we watch a video that highlights an urban and rural family and their traditions. Finally, we read and analyze a current article. The class is learning a great deal about customs, government, religion, economy, food, clothing, and current challenges. Students are also half way through their Asian fiction books. They have completed their first response in blog form. Once they finish their assigned book, they will be free to choose other Asian fiction titles.

### **Science with Mrs. Barksdale**

Your sixth grade scientists were given a challenge. As a small group, they were given 3 unknown metals. Your scientists had to come up with three different procedures that they themselves carried out in order to determine the identity of the unknown metals. Some groups set up an electrical circuit to evaluate the conductivity of the unknowns. Other groups decided to check the magnetic properties of their unknown metals. Most groups looked through a stereoscope to observe physical features of the metals. Still, other groups banged the metals with a hammer to determine malleability. Building on prior knowledge, all groups had to determine the mass and volume in order to calculate the density of each of their unknown metals. Using all these pieces of data, most students were able to deduce the proper identity of the metals.

Next, your students were introduced to one of the main methods of scientific communication, the formal lab report. Each member of the group wrote, typed and then collaboratively assembled one report on their unknown metals. Writing lab reports is a very meticulous process.... the hypothesis, procedure, data, sources of errors, and dependent and independent variables all need to be addressed. The more our scientists communicate in this manner, the more effective their scientific communication skills will become. Lastly, we are now completing our Big Book page of the periodic table. Your child should be able to explain to you why some elements react more readily than others. Go ahead...ask them!

### **Mathematics with Mrs. Barksdale**

Our sixth grade students are undergoing incredible growth mathematically. They are solving not only numerical patterns and sequences but also algebraic patterns and sequences. They just completed a unit exposing them to problem solving strategies for algebraic equations. Imagine that.... your child is doing algebra in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. As part of our routine, we start our day with student generated warm-up problems. These problems continue to incorporate all the math concepts we have mastered thus far. The students are still very eager to be the "professor" for that time. Your students continue to be very engaged and active learners.

### **Spanish with Mrs. Roberti/Mrs. Holst-Grubbe**

Pen-pals are here! Sixth grade Spanish classes are in the process of writing pen-pal letters as we wrap up Chapter 1. Who will those pen-pals be? Are they from the same town? ...the same class? ...blue team? ...white team? Stay tuned...the big reveal will come up in December! Also coming up in December, we will do an in-depth study of Spain which includes a little culture, a few holiday activities and some history. ¡ Viaje a España!



## **White Team News**

(Mrs. Holst-Grubbe, Mrs. Hopkins, Mr. Parkosewich, Mr. Scarola, Ms. Zenobi)

### **Grade 6**

#### **English with Mrs. Zenobi**

Happy holidays! Our 6<sup>th</sup> graders will be reading a novel in class called *Ask Me No Questions*. It is a suspenseful novel about a young girl in a Muslim family who is living in the United States illegally after 9/11. We will continue to work on responding to literature, which will incorporate the literary terms we studied in November. This will tie into the social studies curriculum which is presently focusing on Asia. Students will begin to grow their understanding about people and how they are affected by world events.

6<sup>th</sup> graders in January will be finishing *Ask Me No Questions*, a novel about a Muslim family in the United States after 9/11. Mrs. Hopkins (our social studies teacher) and I will be assigning a research paper that will incorporate their Asian studies with their expository writing skills. We will focus on citing sources, main ideas and details, and library and internet research. 6<sup>th</sup> graders will continue their effort to carefully edit their own work as we work together in a writer's workshop.

#### **Social Studies with Mrs. Hopkins**

We are just beginning our studies of southwestern Asia and will be focusing on the countries of Saudi Arabia and Israel. While learning about the cultures of these countries, we will learn about the religions that began in this area of the world: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. After "visiting" this part of Asia we will investigate the South Asian countries of India and Pakistan. While studying the cultures of India and Pakistan, we will also learn about the religions that found their roots in this part of Asia: Hinduism and Buddhism. I look forward to more very interesting discussions in our classes!

#### **Science with Mr. Parkosewich**

6th grade Science students will dive into the study of water and how its unique chemical and physical properties affect us every single day of our lives. As you know water supplies are limited, so by unit's end our students will appreciate how, "Water is the next oil".

#### **Mathematics with Mr. Scarola**

Mathematics Classes Have Completed chapter 2 in the Holt McDougal Course 1 titled Introduction to Algebra. We will continue studying Pre-Algebra throughout the year as these concepts are the basis for the Mathematics courses in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. We are starting our study of Chapter 3 titled DECIMALS. One important idea to remember is that we are not simply dealing with decimals. We are working with DECIMAL FRACTIONS. Every decimal number can should be thought about the same way it is read out loud. The decimal fraction .6 should be stated as 6/10, .375 should be thought of as 375/1000. We spend a great deal of time converting between the fractions and decimal fractions. Many students have a difficult time reasoning out the fraction 5/8 being equal to 625 out of 1000 or .625. We will add, subtract, multiply, and divide decimals as well as connecting our ideas to percents. Please Use the Video Tutorials, Interactivities, Interactive practice quizzes, along with the online homework help if you or our students are having trouble.



## **Grade 7**

### **Language Arts with Mrs. Zenobi**

Happy holidays! As we come to the end of the year, we will be finishing our classroom novel, No Promises in the Wind. We will then be able to focus on reading the classic Dickens story, "A Christmas Carol." Students will read the play version and will enjoy having a role in this holiday-themed play which also corresponds to our classroom theme: "doing the right thing."

January is grammar time! We will focus on the comma and other forms of punctuation, as well as homonyms and synonyms. We will also read some non-fiction material and discuss the variety of ways that this material is organized in order to more clearly communicate with the reader.

### **Social Studies with Mrs. Hopkins**

For most of December, we will be discussing the various events that led to the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, and will discover that not ALL of the Roman Empire was run over by the barbarians and living in the dark ages after the collapse. In fact, the eastern part of the empire continued on for hundreds of years, with its capital of Constantinople as the center. But, we will focus our studies on what was going on in the western part of the fallen Roman Empire in Europe in 500 A.D. to begin our studies of the medieval time period. Students will also be working on designing a panel display for Room 37 that contains a scale model of the city of Rome at its peak in the Museum of Culture in Rome. Ask your child to show you their project folder with the directions and the various structures that were available to choose from. If they don't have it, check out my web page for the direction sheet. Each student will decide on how he or she wants to do the project – a written report, visual presentation, or model. As always, there will be check points along the way to be sure no one waits to the last minute. Please remind your child of the directions, check points, getting information from my web site Porta Portal links, and the rubric.

After we have finished discussing the Roman Empire, the seventh grade will imagine it is in Europe 1500 years ago, and it is not a pretty picture. There are barbarians attacking everywhere, no laws, no system of government, and people are afraid to travel, or live in a city. The main goal is to survive to the next day.

This begins our unit about the Middle Ages. Each student will receive a direction packet with a list of topics that he or she can choose from to research. This project will follow the procedures of the ancient Rome project. One change is that there are focus questions that are with each topic. Each of these questions has to be thoroughly answered for a well done project, and after the information for the focus questions has been covered, any additional information would be greatly appreciated. If your child doesn't have it, check out my web page for the direction packet. Each student will decide on how he or she wants to do the project – a written report, visual presentation, or model – and will pick up the appropriate rubric as a guide.

We will be viewing two wonderful videos based on David MacCaulay's books, *Castle* and *Cathedral*, and my own power point on Gothic Architecture, to get an understanding of why these structures, as well as the feudal system, knights, stained glass windows, and the church were so important to this time period. We will also investigate how the Crusades and other historical events impacted the growth of cities, and how nations started to develop. As always, there is an assignment sheet to follow, articles to read, guided reading sheets, and worksheets. Keep checking my website for the latest activities and due dates.

### **Science with Mr. Parkosewich**

Science students discover the unique energy transformations that occur on the cellular level, and then gradually work up the hierarchy to the various human body systems. These will include respiratory, circulatory, digestive, muscular, and skeletal systems.

### **Mathematics with Mr. Scarola**

Mathematics students are completing Chapter 2 Titled INTEGERS and RATIONAL NUMBERS. We will be testing on these topics soon. Chapter 3 will be titled and will focus on APPLYING RATIONAL NUMBERS. This will develop strong number sense which is necessary for Algebra. We will add, subtract, multiply, and divide positive and negative whole numbers, fractions, and decimals. Please continue to talk math as much as possible in your everyday lives. Please Use the Video Tutorials, Interactivities, Interactive practice quizzes, along with the online homework help if you or our students are having trouble

### **French with Mme. Rogers**

Our seventh grade French students completed their second Chapter on Poitiers, France and watched a video. They made great progress learning how to talk about all sorts of activities that they like, dislike, and prefer using “*er*” verb conjugations and infinitive constructions. In Chapter three the students will continue practicing likes and dislikes and learn to tell what classes they have and what their schedules are like and which school supplies they need. They already can read a school schedule in French, express time, count up to one hundred, and handle euro money. They also can agree or disagree with their friends’ opinions. and both ask and answer basic questions. They learned colors and use them profusely as they described their favorite impressionist painting

We ended our National French Week celebration with a field trip to the Hill-Stead museum and French Bakery in Hartford. Students are pictured below. In preparation for the trip we introduced idioms with edible terminology and had fun with daily tongue twisters. We also read and acted out a play called “*Les tranches de pain*” (the slices of bread) while eating in class *baguette, madeleine et petit chou!*and watching a video on the French bakery Lenotre in Paris. We discussed French etiquette at the table (put your hands on the table, please!) and the importance of the baguette. The class is progressing nicely and will continue to have small amounts of homework each night. Please remind your child of the importance of memorizing their vocabulary daily for effective assimilation! *Vive l’école!*



**French students enjoyed themselves on their recent field trip.**

### **Spanish Mrs. Holst-Grubbe**

Seventh grade Spanish students will soon begin their unit on adjectives and on telling time. Our thematic focus will still concentrate on school, with new vocabulary on classes and school schedules. Our regional focus, however, will shift from Spain and move to Mexico. New verb forms, particularly of the verb “to be” (SER) will receive a considerable amount of attention. We continue work on the conversation process of question and answer.



## **Red Team News**

(Mrs. Dougherty, Mrs. Homberg, Ms. MacSweeney, Mrs. Maher, Mrs. Rogers)

## **Grade 8 News**

### **English with Mrs. Homberg**

Students completed their initial unit on persuasive writing. They have read several articles, and mulled over the following question: Should we allow the *Harry Potter* series to be read in our public schools? Decisions were made and letters composed to the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression. Most students supported the wizard.

We have started our short story unit. The selections by Roald Dahl were favorites. First, students ventured into the living room of Mary Maloney, a seemingly innocent housewife, and witnessed the murder of her husband, Patrick. Then they traveled to Bath, England where they met a mysterious landlady. Ask your student about these adventures. After discussions of plot, character development, imagery, irony and more, eighth graders are ready to write short stories of their own. As a result, their writing goals recently took a fictitious twist. Inspired by illustrations published in Chris Van Allsburg's book, *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*, students are writing mystery stories. This year we can support this unit with the new publication *The Chronicles of Harris Burdick*, where famous writers have composed stories for us to enjoy.

For their next challenge in English class students will read the award-winning novel, *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry.

### **Social Studies with Mrs. Dougherty**

Social studies classes are almost complete with the first half of our American Revolution unit! Students have studied different events and causes of the revolution and have also done an in-depth review of the Boston Massacre, studying multiple perspectives and discussing biases. The beginning of December marks a path to victory and the legacy of the American Revolution. Students will be analyzing various primary sources and creating their own secondary accounts of the war. December will also be the host of our new area of study-The U.S. Constitution!

### **Mathematics with Mrs. Maher**

In Pre-Algebra, we are working on two-step and multi-step equations. The key to solving these problems algebraically is understanding both signed numbers and math facts. You can assist your child by quizzing them on these periodically. We will apply this knowledge to real world problems. In Algebra, we will be learning about graphing linear equations and the different equations for a linear function. We will practice graphing lines using tables, slope and y-intercept, and x- and y-intercepts. All of the 8th grade mathematicians are busy learning new things and expanding their knowledge of previously learned concepts!

### **Science with Ms. MacSweeney**

8<sup>th</sup> graders will be finishing their investigation of Earth's weather this month. They have learned about water in the atmosphere and different types of precipitation. They will be examining different air masses and learning to read weather maps. Students are meant to regularly review their chapter 2 notes and study guides, as well as to use their flashcards to master the terminology throughout the chapter. Please continue to encourage your child to get outside and observe, as well as to check our local weather on TV or online regularly during this unit! Can you tell by the cloud type what kind of weather we might expect? Chapter 2 test is coming up. Make sure to study often for short amounts of time-don't wait till the test is upon us!

### **French with Mme. Rogers**

We celebrated the national French week with a field trip to the Hill-Stead museum and French Bakery in Hartford and increased our vocabulary with edible terminology and daily fun tongue twisters. We discovered French impressionists and presented our favorite painter and paintings to the class. In the process we followed a specific rubric calling for the usage of adjectives, colors, adjective demonstratives, and a systematic review of basic regular and irregular verbs.

We will finish our Chapter five by Christmas and continue to practice basic vocabulary and instructions regarding how to function in a French restaurant or café and to navigate the Parisian subway. The students experienced firsthand the French food etiquette (put your hands on the table please!) and are familiar with names of French pastries and sandwiches. Pictures from the trip are shown below. They have compared typical French menus to American ones and discovered with the visit of a French Chef from the *Absinthe Brasserie* in NYC, how American tasting buds are different! Chapter six will find the students “back in Paris,” where they will continue to explore some of its most famous cultural and historic sites while learning how to make plans and to extend and respond to invitations.

We met our first challenge from our French correspondents reciting a French poem and are waiting to judge their rendition of “Tree House” We are ready to face their second challenge (executing a French recipe).

Please remind your children about the importance of keeping up with their homework daily and the impact it has on their overall performance. Bon appétit!



**French students enjoyed themselves on their recent field trip.**

### **Spanish with Mrs. Roberti/ Mrs. Holst-Grubbe**

Spanish classes are wrapping up their unit on weather, and will soon begin studying the members of the nuclear and extended families. We will learn how to discuss their physical features and personalities in much greater detail than before. Additionally, we will look at and describe our own families, and will soon survey each other regarding the various chores that we each do to help at home. Our culminating activity for this unit will involve the creation of power points of family trees, and will incorporate the writing of mini-biographies of the family members. To keep it interesting and current, our “families” will consist of celebrities, both past and present!

