

# AROUND THE WORLD

## River Woods Elementary School Naperville, Illinois

The “Around the World” Series started as a parent initiative during the 1996-97 school year. Two River Woods parents felt that students would benefit by having opportunities to understand the variety of cultures that are a part of our school community. They held a Parent Information Night to share their ideas and gain input and participation from other parents. As a result, the parents formed teams, based on their common culture, in order to organize presentations for students. Each parent team appointed a captain, and were self-managing. A presentation week was scheduled by each team. The teams chose the artifacts, information, and presentation format they would share with the students.

An area in the Learning Resource Center (LRC) was designated as the “Around the World” presentation site. Each team made decisions about the number of presenters, the number of sessions offered, and the presenters’ schedule. Teachers reserved a time for their class to participate in the presentation of each culture.

Colorful exhibits resulted from each parent team. Presentations not only stimulated student interest in the culture, but they were also highly interactive. Visual images were transmitted through videotapes and artifacts. National anthems and ethnic music and instruments represented the cultures through sound. Students sat on Persian rugs, smelled herbs and spices, modeled traditional costumes, counted in other languages, and viewed examples of different characters used in written languages.

The activity is now in its third year. River Woods students have had the opportunity to learn about a number of cultures. Parent teams have escorted students on “tours” of India, China, Canada, France, Muslim countries, Scandinavia, South America, and Iran.

Students eagerly anticipate the opportunity as each new country is featured. The displays are a popular attraction as students visit the LRC throughout the week. Spurred by the “Around the World” series, spontaneous conversations occur in the classrooms, throughout the building, and in students’ homes. Our second language learners at River Woods feel an important connection, as their culture and/or native country is highlighted. The exposure and new learning that our students acquire help to establish links between our attendance area students and those who attend River Woods as a part of our English as a Second Language (ESL) program.

Teachers think this series ties in well to the Information Literacy Goal in our School Improvement Plan. Teachers see an increased interest in and awareness of

students in their global community. The series also supports the District 203 Diversity initiative of creating a greater awareness and understanding of others. Staff members report that this on-site opportunity has been helpful in increasing their own general knowledge base. This is a direct connection to the District's staff development plan for multicultural awareness.

It has been our experience that through this series our parents have developed a higher level of ownership in and sense of belonging to the River Woods School community. Their strong commitment to this project has been evidenced by the high level of participation, enthusiasm, enjoyment, and quality of the presentations. Parents have even adjusted their work schedules to make themselves available to our students.

It is the hope of the River Woods staff and parent community that, as students construct new knowledge about other cultures, their abilities to become effective "real world" problem solvers and critical users of information will increase as they progress toward adulthood. We look forward to the continuation of the valuable collaboration between our parents and staff that provides meaningful and relevant experiences for our students.

Laura Peterson, Assistant Principal  
(630) 420-6638