

*"This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us."*

**Western Union (Internal Memo - 1876)**

# Grey Matters

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One of the worst memories I have of elementary school was the monthly class “spelling bee”. I was so bad at spelling that I would spell my first word wrong on purpose just to get the embarrassment over with and be able to sit down. I imagine that I am not alone in this experience. While I have since learned to spell, or at least to use a spell check, not everyone has such a hard time with spelling. In fact, some folks, adults and kids alike, are outstanding spellers. Last Saturday, RJG’s own 7<sup>th</sup> grader, Amol Mehta, competed at The Lowell Sun’s Northern Middlesex Spelling Bee. Amol competed against 50 other students from the surrounding area for a chance to compete in Washington DC. He beat out 48 other students in 3 hours of spelling to come in second in an amazing and exciting competition. Congratulations Amol on a job well done!

Are you familiar with AOL’s Instant Messenger (IM)? As I understand it, it is sort of like an ongoing chat room. When you have IM and are online, anyone on your “list” can start up a conversation with you. When all goes according to plan, multiple friends can chat away as if they were on a telephone party line. The problem is that kids often give their password to their “best friend”, who lets it slip to someone, who slips it to someone else. Sometimes, someone with a grudge goes online and signs on as somebody else. That is when things get interesting. Every year, a few serious conflicts bubble over into school, or warrant police involvement, because rude and offensive comments are made, lies are spread, and threats are made via IM. Surprisingly enough, these issues do not frequently spill over into email. Perhaps it’s the time delay between messages when using email or that sending an imposter email is more difficult than forging an IM. Whatever the reason, IMs appear to cause more problems than email.

I am not suggesting that IM is inherently evil. I do, however, feel that parents need to be aware of the potential problems that regularly arise. If your child has IM, please talk to them about keeping their password hidden from *everyone*! They should change their password on a regular basis. More importantly, they should think twice about what they say on IM and maintain a healthy level of skepticism about who is writing to them.

Acton Town Meeting is just around the corner and your voice is needed. The first session of town meeting will be on April 7<sup>th</sup> but this session will be very brief and cut short for the holidays. Town meeting restarts in earnest on Monday, April 12. On the docket will be a number of items relating to the schools. I encourage you to attend and vote.