

# SHADES OF GREY

News  
From the  
R.J. Grey Junior High School  
October 2008

## Alignments.

Astrologically, we may all still be living in the Age of Aquarius, but that term probably wouldn't even ring a (school) bell with the current 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. No, they are children of the 90's and if you can believe the posting on Facebook this summer entitled "you're a 90's kid if...", their world has been shaped by things like Power Rangers, Razor scooters and 'Where in the World is Carmen San Diego'? So they come to the Junior High with a different perspective than those of us born in, well, let's just say a "different" decade.

And speaking of perspective, it really does start there. These kids (all 1003 of them) have no problem finding their way around RJ Grey without a navigational system, (a 90's invention...) despite the administration's attempts to thwart them with the change of wing locations. (And I just want to say that it's not really fair to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents who thought they had finally mastered the floor plan...) (But I digress...) Even the addition of a new team, 7 Blue, has been absorbed into the grid with no problem.

So the school year is off and running...even without light up sneakers, another 90's invention. And while a lot of time, appropriately, is spent on academics, the social side of junior high can and often does take center stage. In the 08-09 school year, there are 2 socials and 1 dance scheduled for the 7<sup>th</sup> graders and 3 dances scheduled for the 8<sup>th</sup> graders. This is not to say you can't dance at the socials or be social at the dances, but again, I digress. The real question is who will be doing the Macarena (90's dance...) at these socials/dances. (Be a chaperone and find out...) (<http://abrptso.ab.mec.edu/JHvolunteerform08-09.pdf>)

But the kids don't have to wait for the dances to connect with one and other. RJ has many after school clubs ranging from Adopt-a-Grandparent where kids can spend some time with elders at Acton Life Care to the Speech Team to sports. Then they can go home and get on Facebook and IM. (90's inventions) For the rest of us, make sure you're on the PTSO Chatter emails by going to <http://abrptso.ab.mec.edu> and click on "Join the R.J. Grey Email List". (Join the PTSO EMAILS loop, too.)

So whether or not Jupiter is aligned with Mars, it is the dawning of a brave new world for our 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. They may have come of age in the tough times when Beanie Babies would routinely sell out, but at RJ, Otis Spunkmeyers will never be in short supply. (Ask your kids...)

Accordingly, in these times, in this decade, let's hope that 'peace shall guide the planets and love will steer the stars' but most of all, let's hope that this really is THEIR time. Wishing everyone a great school year,

Beth Farley, Editor  
[Farleys5@verizon.net](mailto:Farleys5@verizon.net)

## From the Principal...

On behalf of the RJG staff, I would like to welcome all parents, guardians, and students back for another year of learning and growing together. I know we are all working hard to promote our students' educational achievement; supporting their learning and celebrating their accomplishments.

An essential factor in the success of providing education services to all students is effective communication with our families. In this regard, I would like to thank all the parents and guardians who completed our Opening Days of School Feedback form distributed at Back to School night and on our web page. We received many responses and are extremely appreciative of the positive feedback we received. Overall, our parents and guardians are very pleased with the start of the school year at RJG and particularly impressed with the teaching staff. Specific comments of commendation include:

- RJG staff viewed as supportive and reassuring; teachers are responsive and helpful.
- Home/school communication continues to be outstanding; Grey Matters, summer information, and regular e-mails are appreciated.
- RJG provides an excellent educational experience for children with meaningful transition activities for students and parents; Parent Forums and 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Curriculum Night from last year were highlighted as particularly useful. Many parents noted that having only 7<sup>th</sup> graders on the first day of school was very reassuring for their children.

As for those conversation highlights between parents and their children, we heard the overarching theme of children feeling very grown up and independent. There were many comments regarding the sense of freedom students felt as compared with elementary school with many opportunities to socialize. Many children seem to be coming home enjoying the dynamics of different classrooms with different teaching styles while others view lunch as the high point of the day. Some quotes I enjoyed hearing were:

- “Switching classes is easy!” and
- “I get to see kids from other teams during lunch and during Grey Block!”



Similar to last year's Opening Days survey, our most negative feedback pertained to the size of lockers, overfilled backpacks and heavy student binders. Other important suggestions included:

- Requests to provide team assignments and class information earlier in the summer.
- Requests to provide the student supply lists earlier in the summer.
- Requests to reduce and/or coordinate the amount of homework and to continue our positive efforts to have all teachers develop websites.

Finally, we were very appreciative of the families who provided advice for future parents/guardians. As we work together to support our children, these words of wisdom may be helpful:

- “Relax. The JH staff makes the transition as smooth as possible. No matter the level that your child is in, or the child's overall personality, the school does its best to fit his/her needs.
- “Learn about the JH by attending the orientations and parent forums.”
- “Have an open mind about your child making new friends.
- “The supply list is helpful. Provide your child with all necessary materials. If the teacher says you need it, you do!”
- “Being organized is important. Emphasize time management, by explaining to your kids what is important and what can wait until later. Encourage your children to avail themselves of library time, after school and extra help.”
- “Keep copies of your child's schedule everywhere; the locker, the notebook, the assignments, the refrigerator!”

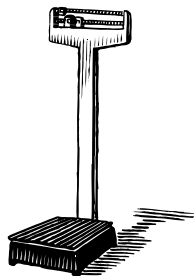
Within the RJG school environment, the importance of valuing and nurturing a students’ self-esteem, self-awareness, and self-reliance cannot be underestimated. Recognizing the importance of belonging in the process of learning, RJG students have also been asked their opinions about the opening days of school as well. Look for this important feedback in an upcoming edition of Shades.

Craig Hardimon  
Principal

### **From the Health Office...**

As a reminder, students are not allowed to carry medication to school (other than inhalers and EpiPens when appropriate paperwork has been filed in the health office). Medication that needs to be taken during the school day needs to be brought to the health office by an adult in a prescription labeled container accompanied with a doctor's order.

Annual height and weight checks and postural screenings will be completed over the next few months at RJG (students will be notified of dates of postural screenings in advance). Parents/guardians of students who are presently under treatment for spinal problems are encouraged to inform the school nurse in writing as soon as possible. For any questions/concerns related to the screening process please contact Erin Livie, RN or Cathy Loeb, RN at 978-264-4700 X3318. Thank-you.



### **From the Physical Education Department...**

The Physical Education Department is off and running full speed ahead. 8th graders are participating in flag football, tennis and field hockey units. Once they have cycled through each of these they will start a team handball tournament. 7th graders worked on improving their fitness levels, participated in sprinting activities and understanding how to run a relay on the track. They will begin an ultimate Frisbee unit and compete in a tournament.

Please make sure your child has a change of clothes for PE and that they dress for outside weather.

Mr. Biron  
Mr. Maver  
Mrs. Sikalis

### **From the Counseling Department...**

The R.J Grey Counseling Department would like to welcome back all of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders and their families! Also, we wish to extend a big hello and welcome to all of the new 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students and families to our building! Moreover, we would also like to welcome and introduce three new staff members to our Department: Ms. Katie Chakarian, who works with 7 Green and 7 Gold, Ms. Michelle Dancause, who works with 8 Gold and 8 Red, and Ms. Rachel Kalinsky, who is our new School Psychologist. We are very excited to have their talents and their energies.

Beyond the welcomes, we would like to invite families and students of R.J. Grey to check out the Counseling link on the R.J Grey website. Important information and timelines for work permits and Private School applications can be found and downloaded from this link.

We hope the school year is off to a good start for everyone. Here in the Counseling Office, we are very excited to be working together again to promote the academic and social emotional growth of our students.

### **From the Clifford A. Card Library @ R.J. Grey Junior High...**

Did you know that since the late 1990s, over twenty substantial research studies have been conducted in our nation's school libraries? Conclusions: *"Effective school libraries are much more than books. They are learning hubs, each with a full range of print and electronic resources that support student achievement ... research studies show that school libraries can have a positive impact on student achievement whether measured in terms of reading scores, literacy or learning more generally."* Please go to the R.J. Grey library website (<http://mail.ab.mec.edu/~jhslibrary/>) and click on "School Libraries Work" in the yellow features column on the right for more information on these eye-opening studies. Meanwhile and more locally, as of September 25<sup>th</sup>, 650 books have been circulated, 500 seventh graders have been introduced to the library's resources and procedures, 360 eighth graders have arrived for book talks and to research. Busy as usual!

## TEAM NEWS

### **From 7 Green...**

7 Green is up and running! We began the year by focusing on Getting-To-Know- You activities on team and adjusting to school with a modified schedule. By the second week, everyone had mastered finding their way around their new building, sorting out their T classes, and conquering their lockers. The following is a look inside our classes.

**From Mr. Wilson:** Students in the Spanish classes have started to look at the areas of the Spanish-speaking world and are learning greetings, introductions, and the alphabet. French classes were introduced to the francophone world and are learning greetings, the alphabet, nationalities, and the numbers 0-20.

**From Mr. Driscoll:** Many students have asked why, in the first three weeks of social studies class, we have not done any work with history. They are surprised to find out that social studies is so much more than a history class. Social studies also includes disciplines such as geography, political science, civics, economics, culture, sociology and even psychology. It is through these lenses that students examine how humans interact throughout the world. Unit one in our curriculum is entitled *Understanding Ourselves*. When 7<sup>th</sup> graders enter RJ Grey they are entering a new society, one in which they must find their place. By examining ourselves and understanding the forces that shape our identity, we can better understand how and where we fit in society. Students look at the categories that shape their identities such as family role, age, gender, hobbies and interests. They begin to appreciate individual differences as well as discover interests and beliefs they share with their classmates. Students have just completed their first important project of the term, the “Me-Box”. This assignment enables the students to move beyond discussion and see concrete examples of these similarities and differences.



We will then broaden our examination to other groups in American history and take a look at some of the obstacles they’ve encountered when entering the existing society. We will also study the origins of the US government and the structure that it provides our society by looking at some of the founding documents and the rights guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. Along with our rights as American citizens or residents, we will look at geography of the world and the United States and how and why that affects our identity while influencing our interaction with today’s global village.

**From Mrs. Doiron:** The highlight of October in science class is our trip to the Christa Corrigan McAuliffe Challenger Center at Framingham State College. This unique simulation of a space shuttle mission to the Mars always surpasses any and all expectations. It is truly amazing to watch our students carry out their assignments with such seriousness of purpose. After only a brief introduction, they participate in a two hour mission that flies by in what seems like minutes. We also attend a program in the FSC planetarium entitled “Tilt” We are very fortunate to have such a wonderful resource so close by.

Back in our science classroom, we have just completed the Scientific Method/ Inquiry Unit and will begin to study food chains and food webs in a biology unit entitled Interactions.

**From Mrs. Hadden:** Math classes are going well after three weeks of school. All students are taking PreAlgebra and are using the new Glencoe PreAlgebra book. Everyone is able to have a text at home and use a classroom text in school, so students do not have to carry that heavy book in their backpacks. I give homework every night that is listed on my assignment sheet and handed out on Mondays. Each student should have it at the front of his or her homework section in the math binder. When an assignment is completed, I would like the student to check it off on the sheet. I have a rule of 30 minutes maximum for homework. If a student finds that homework is taking much longer than 30 minutes, please let me know. I will try to help—either give strategies to work more efficiently or reduce the assignment.

I am delighted with our 7 Green Team—hardworking, friendly, interested students! I am glad to see good work habits and positive attitudes. After the Chapter 1 Test on September 25, the Accelerated/Enriched classes will begin to move at a faster rate through the text material. In addition, throughout the year, all 7 Green students will have opportunities for math enrichment activities.

**From Ms. Scalice:** In English, students started the year by bringing in their favorite books of all time, and reflecting on what makes the book their favorite. Then, we began our first Independent Reading Project. In this assignment, students begin by selecting a book of their choice, then reading independently at their own pace throughout the first term. Near the end of the term, students will complete a two part assignment. First, each student will write a formal letter about the book summarizing the plot and analyzing certain aspects of it. Students on the 8Green team also do this assignment, so 7Green students will be partnered with 8Green students, and they will write their letters to each other. At the end of the term, 7Green and 8Green students will meet for a special luncheon to exchange letters. This is a great opportunity for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders to get to know each other and talk about good books!

Secondly, our students will create a visual display relating to their chosen book, which they will present to the class. Once this process is completed at the end of the term, we will repeat it with a new book in terms 2, 3 and 4, so that by the end of the year, students will have read four different free choice books. Feel free to discuss this assignment with your child and ask him or her about the books he or she is reading!

**Team News:** The 7Green team will be sponsoring the 13th Annual R.J. Grey Coats For Families Drive in November. This worthy cause has become a Thanksgiving tradition at our school. Our annual goal is to collect at least 200 winter coats by Thanksgiving. (Last year we collected over 500!!!) These are delivered to Anton's Cleaners for cleaning and distribution to those less fortunate. Please take a moment to check your closets to see if you can help.

#### **From 8 Green...**

The students and teachers of Team 8 Green have enjoyed a very smooth start to the 2008-2009 school year, and we are already planning and taking part in a number of special and exciting team activities. First term has already featured Team Lunch and the 8 Green Community Service Day field trip. Team Lunch took place on Monday, September 22. Groups of four and five students collaborated beforehand on planning a lunch by assigning responsibilities for various food items. The team went out onto the hillside by the high school football field, relaxed, and enjoyed a picnic style lunch on an overcast but fairly comfortable afternoon. The small groups dined together, and then the team mixed informally and got a chance to get to know one another a little better as the year began.

At the time of this writing, the 8 Green Community Service Day field trip is about to take place on Tuesday, September 23. Groups of 8 Green students will go to several parks and other public areas around Acton and Boxborough to do a wide range of activities including cleaning, weeding, spreading wood chips, and planting. Mr. Warner oversaw the organization of worksites, materials and logistics for the trip. Several parent chaperones will accompany us, and students will work very hard to complete their given tasks. Community site managers are ready to assist and guide us in completion of our tasks, and we are grateful that we can pitch in and make a difference.

The team extends a special welcome to Ms. Cence, our new team Math teacher.

All Math classes will be covering topics in Algebra. At present, classes are finishing order of operations and word problems. Ms. Cence stresses that effort is key to success, and that she is available for extra help every week.

Students can also choose to do practice work at home, using the math websites Ms. Cence provided in class. In Mme. Gilfix's French class, students have been reviewing last year's material to insure a solid foundation for our continued studies. As part of this review, students created an acrostic poem using letters from their names to describe their physical traits and personalities. Additionally, students will be performing skits which include all major seventh grade vocabulary and grammar topics.

In Ms. Vacca's English class, students have completed a review of complete sentences, fragments and run-ons. We have also reviewed paragraphs, and are learning the first of the Six Traits of Writing: Ideas. Students are also undertaking a This I Believe Essay. For more information, visit your student's English binder, or go to [www.thisibelieve.org](http://www.thisibelieve.org). Social Studies classes with Mr. Nolan have just completed introductory lessons and activities to familiarize themselves with the concept of culture and the Five Themes of Geography. We will soon begin mapping exercises for the newly instituted grade 8 India unit, the first of the three major units we will experience this year in the World Cultures curriculum (along with the Middle East and China).



Mr. Warner's Science classes are very busy working through the physics curriculum. Our studies will be highlighted with the section project which will challenge the students to build small cars out of household junk. The challenge comes in having the cars propelled by balloons and traveling within certain boundaries. The fastest doesn't necessarily win. This is a great exercise in using the Three Laws of Motion of Sir Isaac Newton.

### **From 7 Red...Changing the World...**

This year, the 7-Red team is going to change the world. It is our fervent belief that each one of us can make a difference and that young people can, in fact, change the world.

In mid-September, the entire team gathered in the auditorium to watch an inspiring video about a group of students from all over the United States who spent the year learning about poverty, education, health, and development in Kenya. Their education inspired them to raise both awareness and funds to build a school in that African country.

After we left the auditorium, students shared what struck them most from the video and what change they would like to bring about if they had the power and resources to do so. Many spoke about the need for clean drinking water, some shared their desire to cure disease, and others talked about the importance of constructing classrooms and libraries. Their enthusiasm was palpable, and within minutes, students began to brainstorm all they could do to make a difference of their own.

We encouraged our students to "think big" and reminded them of the Margaret Mead quote one student offered in the video: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Students came up with dozens and dozens of ways to raise money -- car washes and carnivals, babysitting and bake sales, dodge ball tournaments and talent shows.

We have been in touch with the founder and executive director of One Kid One World, an organization dedicated to making a difference in the lives of young people around the globe. They are a grassroots organization partnering U.S. schools with rural schools and kids in refugee camps in war torn and poverty stricken areas of the world. The organization has always partnered exclusively with U.S. high school students, but after hearing about our students and their excitement, they would like for ours to be the first middle school group with whom they'll work.

Though it is not yet clear what direction our students' passion will take them – especially as this is being written just three days after those initial conversations – it is clear that we will be doing something this year...and given the minds and hearts of our students, it is possible that we could be doing something big. If so, we'll be reaching out to adults and families to help us out in ways both small and large. If you know now that you would like to be involved, in whatever it is that we do, please be in touch with us. This could be the start of something very special.

**From 8 Red...**

8 Red students are off to a great start this year. In science class, we have learned the parts of a microscope, and now we are focusing on plants and photosynthesis.

In social studies, we are studying the Five Geographic Themes and will start the Favorite Place Project next week.

In Spanish class, we have been reviewing what we studied in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

In math, students in A/E are studying exponents and the four step process; students in standard are also studying the four step process as well as order of operation. Honors has also studied the four step process as well as dimensional analysis.

In English we have begun reading novels about identity. We have also reviewed literary terms such as simile and metaphor, and we have studied and been quizzed on vocabulary words.

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September 24, 2008

Dear Parent or Guardian:

In addition to meeting the requirements of the state's education reform law of 1993, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) fulfills the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, which requires schools to demonstrate that students are making academic progress. Every year a school's target Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) is re-established and goes up by a certain number of points.

Students pass an MCAS exam by scoring in the top three of the four scoring categories, advanced, proficient, and needs improvement. Only grade 10 tests in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics are required as one condition of eligibility for a high school diploma, however, assessing students in earlier grades allow our school district to target areas where student learning and achievement can be enhanced.

Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) is determined by both aggregate and subgroup scores. Subgroups consist of 20 or more students in categories such as special education, low income, limited English proficiency, and by race/ethnicity. AYP is determined by both the aggregate and subgroup scores. A school that fails to show AYP for two consecutive years in English language arts/reading or math, either in the aggregate or any subgroup, is put on notice by the state to make improvements. Currently, the science and technology test does not count towards a school's AYP.

The R.J. Grey JH has been identified for improvement, in mathematics for our Special Education subgroup, under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The purpose of this letter is to explain what the designation means, what we are doing to improve teaching and learning in the school, and how you can become involved in helping the school improve.

To enhance support to all students in mathematics, our math department is working closely with special education staff, with Academic Support and Title I staff, with sixth grade teachers and with math teachers at the High School to increase the coordination and articulation of our curricular content and our methods of delivery. The goal is to strengthen the presentation of basic skills and important concepts using age-appropriate, intellectually stimulating and research-based materials and strategies. We have increased supports through the purchase of new math books. We have refined how we assess students in grade six for more accurate and appropriate leveling within our seventh grade math classes. We are also designing our professional development plans at R.J. Grey JH to enhance our teachers' already strong foundation in math pedagogy for middle school age children with a wide range of learning styles. We are confident that our efforts to improve what is already a strong math program at R.J. Grey JH will have a positive impact on all our students, as well as meet the state's expectations for the performance levels of each subgroup of our population.

Involving families as full partners in the education of their children is a cornerstone of Acton-Boxborough. When families support learning, children are more successful in school and school success helps children become successful adults. We encourage you to become involved in helping us improve. Some of the ways you can become involved are:

- Attending parent-teacher meetings and other special meetings
- Serving as a volunteer at RJG
- Encouraging other parents to become involved

For more information or questions regarding this issue, please feel free to contact: Craig Hardimon, R.J. Grey J H Principal, at 978-264-4700 ext. 3304.

Sincerely,

Susan Horn  
Assistant Superintendent

**R. J. Grey Calendar**

October 3 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Dance 6:30-8:30 PM  
October 9 NO SCHOOL  
October 13 NO SCHOOL  
October 14 Mid-Term Reports Mailed  
October 14 Principal's Drop in Hour; 6-7:00 PM  
October 14 School Council; 7-8:30 PM  
October 22 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Minutemen Field Trip; 8-12:00  
October 24 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Social; 2:30-4:30 PM  
October 31 Halloween dress-Up Day  
November 4 NO SCHOOL; Professional Day  
November 6 Student Council; 12:22  
November 7 Quarter 1 Ends

**Shades of Grey**

*Shades of Grey* is produced monthly by a team of teachers, students, and parent volunteers. We welcome any input or feedback.

Beth Farley 978-263-5618

Shades of Grey  
R. J. Grey Junior High  
Charter Road  
Acton, MA 01720

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