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Tell Me a Story: Two ISB Authors

by *Gustav Peebles*

In a recent Unit of Inquiry, entitled “Tell Me a Story,” our kids were learning all about books and writing. To pursue the topic outside the classroom, our students headed off on a fieldtrip to the Brooklyn Public Library the other day. But truth be told, they could have just stayed put on Park Place, so long as they had managed to lasso parents David Shenk and Nancy Woodruff after they dropped off Henry Shenk in French 1 and Owen Lancaster in Spanish K.

Lassoes being scarce in our urban environment, my son Rex (Spanish K) and I opted for a simple phone call as we set out to discover more about these two Brooklyn authors, both of whom have just delivered exciting new books to the world. David’s book, *The Genius in All of Us* is an eye-opening non-fiction book, whereas Nancy’s *My Wife’s Affair* is a page-turning combination of historical and present-day fiction.

Combining the knowledge developed in Senorita Lina’s classroom with my own background, Rex and I decided to try to wow these two authors with our deep and incisive interview questions—questions such as, “Is it a sad or a happy book?” (Spoiler Alert: David’s is happy, Nancy’s is sad).



The Genius in All of Us

Why Everything You’ve Been Told about Genes, Talent, and IQ Is Wrong



David Shenk

David stumbled onto the idea for his latest book while writing and researching for his last book, *The Immortal Game: A History of Chess*. In that book, he pursued the question of what distinguishes a mediocre chess player from a stellar one, and he discovered that there exists an entire scientific field that tackles this question of intelligence and development. Immediately sensing that there was a broad gap between the popular understanding of “inherited genius” and the actual science behind such understandings, David realized he had a great (and exceedingly helpful) story on his hands. People (and parents, perhaps, in particular) are wont to think that genius is something innate, something serendipitously created by good genes. But David found that the development of intelligence is far from deterministic; in so doing, he has provided parents, educators,

and policy makers with powerful tools with which to grasp that “there’s an extraordinary potential in all of us that hasn’t necessarily been tapped.”

For reasons such as this, David noted in response to Rex’s question that this was “the first real happy book I’ve ever written.”

Moving from future superachievers to past ones, Nancy’s latest book, *My Wife’s Affair*, provides us with an intricate dual narrative—one that weaves back and forth between a present-day family in London and one of England’s most famous but now most forgotten actresses of the Georgian era. In order to tell this story, Nancy spent over two years in the immense British Library, digging into the life of one Dora Jordan, a renowned comic actress as well as 20-year mistress to the future King William IV. Prior to becoming king, William spawned 10 children with Dora and they lived a life of domestic bliss on the outskirts of London. But it all ended because the scoundrel William had to run off and run the empire, and he wasn’t permitted to marry outside the nobility.



But if Dora’s political life and times were tumultuous, so too are the domestic life and times of the narrator of *My Wife’s Affair*, who is trying to come to terms with the dissolution of his family. In the wake of his wife’s affair with a local playwright, the narrator finds his life crumbling around him, causing Nancy to respond to Rex’s question that this is, indeed, a classic tragedy. But while this family drama unfolds, Nancy simultaneously challenges us to see the surprising ways in which the pitfalls confronting a woman of the 18th century can be all too similar to those confronting a woman of the 21st century.



Speaking of centuries, Nancy seems to have a thing for time-travel, as her next book is a children’s book about time-travel and the Iraq War, replete with some of the current science on the always tantalizing topic. Ironically, you have to wait prior to getting your hands on a copy of this for your kids, but *My Wife’s Affair* is out in your local bookstore. David, meanwhile, is busy touring *The Genius in All of Us*, which has rocketed onto the New York Times Bestseller List since being published in March. You can also just try to spot either of these busy ISB parents in the school halls. If you do, ask them to “Tell Me a Story.” They’ve got that Unit of Inquiry covered.

Music and Art Come to Life at ISB

by Muriel Stallworth

When you enter a music class led by Maxine Feldman (Nursery–1st Grade), it takes only one look at the children to appreciate how much sounds and body movements share an intimate bond. In her energizing classes, Maxine is a puppeteer using sound waves as invisible strings to set in motion the children's articulations.

She sings in high pitch, they rise. A clap of her hand will make them swirl, a diminished intonation results in a softer walk, a loud sound produces a bounce. Abrupt silence, they freeze. One of two programs brought to ISB by the Brooklyn Queens Conservatory of Music (BQCM), the Music Adventures Program follows a course of musical discovery and surprises using voice, piano, wooden xylophone, tamborines, and maracas. Through play and active—very active—listening, the children are developing an acute ear for rhythm, high/low pitch, sound intensity, and sensitivity to sounds and timbres. They just adore this class!

Also from the BQCM, Recorder Ensemble teacher Sean Moran teaches his 2nd and 3rd Grade students to understand music as a structured, codified art form. Using the recorder, he develops concepts introduced in the 2009–2010 school year: notation, rhythm, note values, scales, and technique. Playing together, the students learn to listen to each other, tune their ear to the sounds of harmony, and build confidence as expressive individuals in a group. Sean has expanded the scope of the ensemble by inserting percussive instruments to the ensemble.

When teaching art to her students, Cristina “Pinky” Leos focuses on the process side. She introduced the concept of lines to the Nursery/PreK students with a two-minute animated film called ‘La Linea’—a cartoon that some of us might remember as a childhood favorite. A conversation followed that emphasized descriptive vocabulary related to lines: curved, straight, bent, thin, thick, moving, etc. The children were then invited to use a string to delineate areas in the classroom environment: a straight line along a table leg, a curved one around a ball, a corner's bend... With this experience now in their hands and minds, they started the creative part of applying the line concept on paper using the string to express an abstract or figurative idea on paper.

She uses a similar approach in all of her classes. For example, she introduced the Kindergarten–3rd Grade students to the cubism art movement. In this unit, Picasso's Weeping Woman was the inspiration, and different media (paint, collage and clay) were used to express understanding of cubism, developing students' appreciation of this art movement. In the same way, Cristina related the 2nd–3rd Grade Migration unit to her art class by using the concept of family origins and places as an inspiration to create a beautiful quilt, based on the work of New York “story quilt” artist, Faith Ringgold.

To encourage them to produce work in an individual and creative way, she might use a studied content, have them explore a medium, explore a feature of the art curriculum, or expose them to a well-known artist's work. She then equips them with what they need to make their own art and bring the walls of ISB to life!



**ISB's 5th Annual Spring Benefit "City Lights of Brooklyn" was a huge success!
Check out the next issue of the newsletter for details and photos!**

Campaign for New Building Receives Largest Gift to Date

by Rebecca Skinner

Teach Local, Reach Global: The ISB Expansion Campaign has now received almost \$300,000 in gifts and pledges toward its total goal of \$500,000 based on a recent anonymous gift of \$100,000 from a close friend of the school. Prior to this gift, the largest single contribution to the campaign was \$50,000, made by a grandparent at the school who has been supportive of ISB's growth for many years. The campaign has also received many other gifts from ISB parents, grandparents and friends that have helped us get closer to our goal.

Nancy Woodruff, Co-Chair of the Capital Campaign Management Committee says, "The Committee is thrilled to accept this generous donation

"The Committee is thrilled to accept this generous donation as further evidence of the enthusiastic and dedicated support our school enjoys."

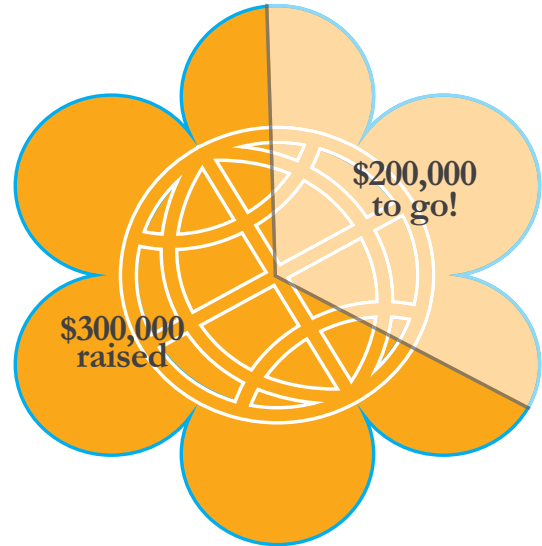
as further evidence of the enthusiastic and dedicated support our school enjoys. We have been working very hard in our outreach both to ISB families and to the wider community,

and it is very gratifying to know that our efforts are paying off." The Capital Campaign Management Committee and ISB Board of Directors will continue to plans events for and meet with potential donors to raise additional funds through the end of 2010.

In January 2010, ISB took possession of the new building and began renovations in order to prepare for the opening in September 2010. To follow the progress of the renovations, check out the blog at

<http://isbrooklyn.org/expansion/blog>. As the work is being completed and fundraising for the campaign progresses, the Capital Campaign Management Committee is looking for opportunities to match current and future gifts with naming opportunities.

If you would like to speak with a member of the Capital Campaign Management Committee about donating to the campaign, please contact Teresa Santamaria or Nancy Woodruff at campaign@isbrooklyn.org.



Building a Tradition of Service

by Catherine Colton

ISB planted its roots of community service in its second year with a Clothing and School Supplies Drive for the International Rescue Committee (IRC). The IRC helps refugees ease into a new life in the US. The whole school, just 32 families from Nursery to Kindergarten at the time, collected

heaps of gently-used clothing, backpacks, notebooks and basic school supplies for recently-transplanted children. A year later, an official Community Service Committee (CSC) was launched to organize more ongoing community activities.

Today, ISB's community service outreach touches many fronts, affecting local and international communities and organizations. The CSC's activities complement ISB's mission of teaching its students global citizenship and community involvement in many ways from visits with the elderly at Prospect Park Residence to procuring holiday gifts for Winter Wishes as well as fundraising for various programs around the globe including Kids for Kids (Sudan), Yele Haiti (Haiti) and Pennies for Peace (Central Asia).

The January 12, 2010 earthquake that ravaged Haiti affected some within ISB's circles. Immediately, Corinne Zalanskas, CSC Chair, turned her focus to identifying impactful ways to contribute to Haiti relief efforts. While monetary and other donations were left to the discretion of families, Corinne organized a grass-roots activity involving all ISB students. "[A few weeks after the earthquake], I heard a story on NPR about students from PS. 269 in Crown Heights who were brainstorming about ways to help with relief efforts in Haiti," said Corinne. "On a much greater level than ISB, PS. 269 was affected on a personal level by the devastation as their school population is 50 percent Haitian descent. I immediately thought of how our own children could reach out both locally and globally by uniting with these students in a mutual effort," she added. "I contacted the school the following day and organized an opportunity to help in Haiti."

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Building a Tradition of Service, *continued*

In previous years, ISB collected money via the green dinosaur bank in the school hallway to fund scholarships via Yele Haiti's Primary School Scholarships program. After the devastating Haiti earthquake, the community service activity was brought inside the classroom to help students understand and process the events abroad. ISB partnered with PS. 269 to create a total of 210 hygiene packets which were sent to Haiti via a local Brooklyn ministry with Haitian ties. ISB families raised money to purchase ablutions for 60 hygiene packets including soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, wipes, combs, deodorant, and face clothes. Each ISB class assembled the packets and added a personal touch of handmade paper flowers and messages of hope (see photo).

Leftover funds from the hygiene purchases and change collected from the dinosaur bank will be combined and sent to Bethlehem Ministry, a Georgia-based non-profit organization founded by Père Jean Monique Bruno who has served disadvantaged Haitian families for over 25 years. The organization was chosen through a parent connection and because of its grass-roots structure – small and agile enough to bring supplies directly and swiftly to earthquake-affected Haitians. "I know my own kids were really proud. They felt a part of the entire process of taking action and helping," said Corinne. "Both my son Wheeler (Sp 1) and daughter Finni (Sp N) talk about how they can help others and refer to the special project done in class for Haiti."

"We are continually exploring community-based organizations with whom to partner and support," says Corinne. "As the children become older, community service will become even more important," she added. "My hope is that our next step will more closely tie activities to the curriculum." So far the teachers have been receptive to the idea. Lina Pedraza, Spanish K-1 teacher, com-

mented, "The hygiene packages happened to tie well with our unit 'Children Everywhere'. The activity brought up interesting questions and discussions about the situation in post-earthquake Haiti. It increased our students' awareness about current events and situations around the world and how they can make an impact on someone or a community. Real-life experiences like these make the difference."

On the local front, Jennifer Bernstein, mother of Lee (Sp 1) and Isaac (Sp PK), continues a second year of organizing visits to the Prospect Park Residence (PPR), an elderly-care facility. Groups of 3 to 10 children and their care givers spend 45 minutes to an hour to visit with a few PPR residents and sing to them, share stories or play games. Jennifer organized four after-school visits last year and hopes to do the same or more each year. "The visits benefit all parties involved. The children learn and realize that the elderly are part of their world. The residents really enjoy the interaction and attention," said Jennifer. "The Prospect Park Residence coordinator mentioned that the residents are so thrilled that they talk about the ISB student visit for days and days."

Next on the CSC lineup was a shoe drive for Tennessee-based Soles4Souls during ISB's April 10 free film screening of "Children of Heaven", a 1998 Academy Award Best Foreign Language Film nominee about how two young Iranian siblings cope when the younger sibling loses her only pair of shoes. Sole4Souls takes gently-used or new shoes and redistributes them to adults and children in need in over 125 countries including the US. Following this is a "dinosaur bank" fundraiser for a school in Bogotá, Colombia. Stay tuned for the next newsletter to hear more about these initiatives.

Sponsor Spotlight: Choice Market

by Chris Taylor

The next time you dig into a to-die-for cupcake at an ISB function, be grateful. Odds are you're sampling the delicious handiwork of Thierry Cabigeos and Maya Maxwell. The couple's popular Clinton Hill eateries, Choice Market and Choice Greene, are renowned for their quality and for the lines that snake out the door. But they have a special attachment to ISB, thanks to the enrollment of their daughter Lola (French, 1st grade).

"We go back to France all the time for Christmas or summer break, and my family doesn't speak a word of English," says Cabigeos, who opened Choice Market bakery back in 2006, following prior ventures like a popular Manhattan bistro. "So she has to be able to communicate, so we wanted her to learn the French language and in the French way."

Bakers don't have a whole lot of free time, though. So while the couple couldn't participate in everyday school life as much as they'd like, there is one thing they could handle: Supplying gourmet spreads for ISB events like the film festival, the book fair, and the end-of-year gala. "We start at 4 a.m. and work seven days a week, so we can't give a lot of time to the school," says Cabigeos, who's worked in the restaurant business since the tender age of 14, and managed eateries across England and France. "We figured this was the best way to contribute."

Sponsorship has also propelled the Choice name out far beyond its own Clinton Hill neighborhood. The two locations are going strong, at both the pastry-focused flagship at 318 Lafayette, and the newer outpost at 214 Greene, which offers a wider array of gourmet goodies. The economy is slowly improving, after all, and Brooklynites continue to indulge their taste for high-end fare like sushi and soft cheeses. Now the couple plan on consolidating their mini-empire, maybe enjoying a little R&R now and then, and savoring their roles as dessert kingpins. "Now people know me as the cookie man, the cupcake man," laughs Cabigeos. "So come and enjoy the cake." Contact Choice Market at 718-230-5234; Choice Greene at 718-230-1243.

