



SHARP FOCUS

Literacy, Inc.  

VOLUME 9 | 2008-2009

SHARP Students Read and Write!

The SHARP Edge

For more than a decade now, **SHARP Literacy** programs incorporating the visual arts have given thousands of at-risk Milwaukee elementary students an important edge in research, interview, reading, writing, vocabulary and presentation skills. The reading gap between urban children living in poverty and more privileged students has widened to a distance Americans cannot afford to get used to, and SHARP – the nonprofit **Student Historical Art Resource Program** – is committed to bridging that gap.

National studies continue to show that students exposed to the visual arts regularly test at higher levels in reading, writing, oral language skills, science and social studies, and SHARP knows that our poorest children are also the least likely to be exposed to the visual arts, art history and art museums. In what has become its signature approach, SHARP develops and provides lesson plans, teacher/student workbooks, Writing Challenges, field trips, activities, special projects

and in-classroom guest visits (featuring everyone from writing coaches to master artists) for second-, third-, fourth- and fifth-graders who reside in some of Milwaukee's most challenging neighborhoods. In addition to harnessing the power of the visual arts, all of SHARP's core literacy programs and materials connect directly to Wisconsin's mandated elementary curricula: *Weather, Water and the Environment* (second grade), *Community* (third grade), *Wisconsin* (fourth grade) and *Building a Nation* (fifth grade).

The SHARP philosophy springs to life when 4,000 to 5,000 students each year spend a day with SHARP-trained docents at the Milwaukee Art Museum, an experience that would be absent from almost all of the students' lives if not for SHARP. At the museum, students interact with and explore works of art connected to their curriculum – art they're already very familiar with thanks to preparation in the classroom.

Toward the end of the school year, SHARP students express their newly acquired knowledge in written works and drawings, and the hard and soft cover books SHARP produces each year turn thousands of children into published authors and illustrators. Many of the books written by the students are in turn used as textbooks by other students for years to come.

SHARP's success is considerable and measurable. Working with approximately 25 to 35 public, private, parochial, charter and choice schools each year, SHARP to date has touched the lives of more than 43,500 urban students. An impartial assessment of SHARP has confirmed that 40 to 70 percent of SHARP students can increase writing and vocabulary skills over the course of just one year, receiving significantly higher end-of-the-year test scores than peers not in the program. ■

A SHARP Idea: The Eight Building Blocks

The SHARP school year rests firmly on the foundation of the following **Eight Building Blocks**:

- 1. Teacher Summer Workshop (June).** Each June, SHARP gathers a diverse group of its participating schoolteachers to review SHARP materials and student workbooks for each grade level, ensuring that the most up-to-date, effective teaching tools are in use for the coming autumn.
- 2. Teacher In-Service (September).** An all-day in-service session held at the Milwaukee Art Museum gives teachers a look at SHARP's core curriculum and a preview of the SHARP Literacy Museum Tour for their grade level. SHARP's annually changing elective writing and book enrichment projects for students are also introduced at this time.
- 3. Workbook Distribution (October).** Annually updated student and teacher workbooks – designed to build vocabulary by drawing on the strengths of multiple learning styles – are provided for each grade level and each student.

4. First Semester In-School Presentations (October-December).

A SHARP educator visits each of the 250 to 300 classrooms to introduce students to new vocabulary related both to the curriculum and to art appreciation. Students explore with the SHARP presenter how artworks they view via PowerPoint relate to their other classroom subjects.

5. SHARP Milwaukee Art Museum Tours (December-March).

Thousands of participating SHARP students are brought to the Milwaukee Art Museum each year to interact with SHARP-trained docents and see first-hand many of the artworks viewed earlier in the classroom during the First-Semester In-School Presentation. Because the students are prepared for the SHARP Literacy Tours through the curriculum, SHARP students learn more and behave more appropriately in the museum.

6. Second-Semester In-School Presentations (January-March).

After reviewing vocabulary and concepts with a SHARP presenter and viewing additional curriculum-related visual art, students are asked to develop well-thought-out ideas for the Year-End Writing Challenge.

7. Year-End Writing Challenge (March).

After students complete the challenge to pen a short story, poem or essay about what they have learned from the SHARP curriculum, all student works are published in colorfully bound Writing Challenge Books for each grade level – each thick book containing the creative efforts of hundreds of young writers from across Milwaukee. In addition to being given free to each SHARP school and classroom wanting an archival copy, the Writing Challenge Books are also available at family-friendly prices as keepsakes for students, parents and guardians.

8. FARES: Family Achievement Recognition Events (April-May).

It is at these events celebrating the students' achievements that the Writing Challenge Books debut, and children can't wait to show a parent or guardian that they are published authors, an excitement that generates even greater student effort as children progress to the next SHARP grade level. Skits, stories, songs, poems, food and fun are the order of the day at these family events held at Serb Hall and the Milwaukee Art Museum. ■

Spring 2008: Young authors and their book bags

Chips Off the Eight Blocks

- The cost to provide this year-round program is approximately \$100 per student.
- "The SHARP Eight Building Blocks," a three-credit graduate course at **Cardinal Stritch University** offered to elementary teachers leading classrooms enrolled in the SHARP Literacy program, enters its third year in 2008-2009. Teachers are instructed in how best to use the SHARP workbooks in enhancing a student's research, interview, vocabulary, reading, writing and presentation skills per Wisconsin Model Academic Standards and Milwaukee Targets for science and social studies core subjects. ■



5,925
Books distributed for A Book in Every Child's Hand initiative in 2007-2008. At the beginning of the school year, all SHARP students receive their very own book – a special extra social studies or science title – to use in class as a springboard for the second-semester Writing Challenge. At the end of the school year, all children are given the book "for keeps" to begin their own personal libraries.

SHARP People

The American Dream Book “Comes True” at October 7 Novel Event

SHARP's just-published student-authored book *The American Dream* lists one of the necessary ingredients for the continued vigor of The American Dream: Young people need to see that those who have achieved The American Dream care about The American Dream coming true for others. Throughout the lunch hour on Tuesday, October 7, Milwaukee's Pfister Hotel will be filled with achievers who care about the Dream coming true for others as SHARP debuts *The American Dream* at our annual Novel Event fundraiser. After an 11 a.m. reception and auction and a noon lunch, **Wisconsin First Lady Jessica Doyle** will share her own thoughts on *The American Dream*.

This year's Novel Event honors, among others, the 17 companies, organizations and institutions researched by students for *The American Dream Book*. Serving as co-chairs extraordinaire for this 2008 Novel Event are **Bev Greenberg**, Vice President Public Affairs at Time Warner Cable, and **Patty Cadornin**, Senior Vice President and Corporate Communications Director for M&I Bank. Thank you Bev and Patty! ■

Doerr Prizes Three Awards

A widening awareness of SHARP's impact on the community became apparent in 2007-2008 with the announcements of one coveted award honoring the SHARP Literacy organization and two other prestigious awards recognizing the enduring efforts of **SHARP Executive Director Marlene Doerr**:

• **2007 Kairos Award.** Presented by the **Patrick and Bernice Haggerty Museum of Art** in September 2007 to Marlene Doerr, the Kairos Award is given in recognition of distinguished service in advancing the fine arts at Marquette University through its Haggerty Museum and community work in other arts-related activities.

• **2008 Eddy Award.** Nominated by **Sara Marquez**, principal of Forest Home Avenue Elementary School, SHARP Literacy was named the 2008 winner of the **Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts Eddy Award**, in part for the bilingual integration of art into existing classroom vocabulary, writing and social studies activities.

• **2008 Women of Influence Award.** Later in June 2008, Marlene was an honoree at what has become one of the city's most highly regarded events, the annual Women of Influence Awards presented by *The Business Journal* of

Milwaukee. Just 21 women of the 225 nominated were selected for the award, and Marlene was one of just two winners in the non-profit category. ■

New Faces Help Keep Us SHARP

Since the publication of last year's annual newsletter, SHARP – in a continuing effort to provide students, teachers and the community the highest levels of professionalism and creativity – has proudly welcomed the following staff members to its dedicated, enthusiastic team:

- **Director of Programs James Griswold.**
- **Director of Fund Development Edie Boatman.**
- **Director of Special Projects George Gonis.**
- **Executive/Program Associate Lindsey Bowman.**

Together, these four offer a combined 90 years of experience in education, public affairs, museums and publications. ■



Marlene (far left) and renowned children's author Lois Ehlert (center) with SHARP participants young and old at the 2007 Novel Event

4,933

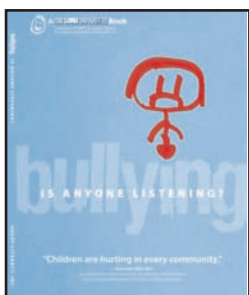
Students and teachers from 32 schools were served by SHARP Literacy in 2007-2008.

Hitting a SHARP Triple

Thanks to dozens of compelling student authors, an ambitious and fruitful 2007-2008 publishing schedule resulted in three brand new SHARP *We Love to Learn* books – books by children for children – that can be provided free to eager young readers to begin their personal libraries or used for years as classroom texts.

Bullying: Is Anyone Listening?

With a first-run printing of 7,500 hard and soft cover copies, *Bullying: Is Anyone Listening?* debuted in January 2008. Parents, teachers and other children's services professionals across the city have praised the 85-page English/Spanish book as a vital contribution to recognizing this all too prevalent but all too overlooked critical issue. How the subject of bullying perfectly complements the SHARP Literacy mission is best summed up by one of the adult contributors to the teaching activities found in the back of the book: *Academic achievement will only flourish in a civil and safe school environment.*



Sara Marquez, principal at Milwaukee's Forest Home Avenue Elementary School, saw the need for a student project that addressed the subject of bullying – physical, verbal, emotional and relational. Along with many other teachers, Ms. Marquez had witnessed numerous cases of bullying and was concerned about the lack of attention these incidents received from the community. She contacted SHARP Literacy and asked if we could create a student project to address bullying.

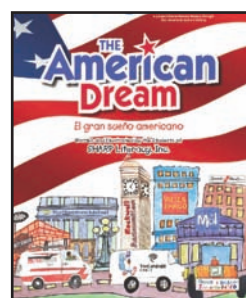
After researching facts about bullying, 500 children in grades three through five responded with a wide range of illustrated stories and poems describing their own experiences with bullying or being confronted with violence. The student pieces are regularly moving, disturbing and heartbreaking, whether they are narratives of courage in the face of bullying or stories of compassion as young hearts and minds seek to understand the motivation of the bully. Corresponding grade-two-through-five lesson plans are being developed so bullying can be addressed in all SHARP classes, and discussions to expand in the coming years the impact of the *Bullying* book continue in earnest as requests for even more programs related directly to the book continue to pour in from Milwaukee educators and families.

The American Dream

Open this new book, just published in Summer 2008, and you'll see that *The American Dream* – a guarantee not that we can all be rich, but that we can all live richly – is alive and well in Milwaukee and Wisconsin. As part of a 2007-2008 SHARP Literacy project, students from 17 Milwaukee-area schools learned how they might achieve *The American Dream* in today's economy. Fifth-graders had the opportunity to conduct face-to-face interviews with some of Wisconsin's most influential leaders in business, the arts, education, healthcare, sports and entertainment. Supplementing these interviews with outside research and on-site visits to 17 different venues, SHARP students penned and illustrated an insightful series of stories reinforcing the notion that even in the 21st century, hard work, perseverance and playing it honest are still the surest steps to *The American Dream*.

Thanks to 11 generous donors and foundations, 5,000 copies of the

92-page soft cover book are available to complement the required fifth-grade social studies curriculum, *Building a Nation*. Student writers learned about occupations and options they never knew existed. And with interactive projects, Spanish translation text, vocabulary words and job information about each of the 17 companies, organizations and institutions visited, the book will serve year in and year out as a game plan for other young people thinking about the future. Along the way, young authors discovered **10 Secrets of the Dream**, primary among them: *To achieve The American Dream, you don't need to go to college, but you do need a high school diploma and some form of schooling or training after high school. Once you have an education, it is yours forever.*



Greater Milwaukee Circle of Life

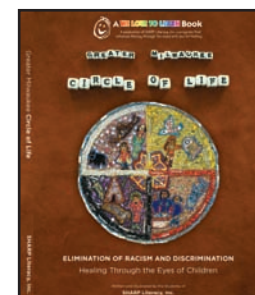
Elimination of Racism and Discrimination – Healing Through the Eyes of Children

Published just on the heels of *The American Dream*, the *Greater Milwaukee Circle of Life Book* continues the four-year project begun in 2006-2007 with the *Greater Milwaukee Circle of Life Mural* – now hanging in Marquette University's Alumni Memorial Union. Mural and book – a one-two punch to racism and discrimination – are the fruits of a potent collaboration between SHARP Literacy and the Forest County Potawatomi Community Foundation, generous funder of both creations.

There is no idea more important to the Potawatomi people than the Circle of

Life, and it is most often symbolized for the human eye as a circle created by four colors – red, black, yellow and white – merging and flowing into one another. For the Potawatomi community, this powerful symbol holds many meanings, including the equality and interconnectedness of all the people on the round earth. Third- and fourth-graders at 18 Greater Milwaukee-area schools were asked in 2007-2008 to use the guiding philosophy of the Circle of Life as inspiration and accept a challenge to research, write and illustrate a book exploring the varied cultures invigorating our community.

Students from five cultural groups – African-American, Asian-American, European-American, Hispanic-American and Native American – received guidance from SHARP educators on how to conduct “heritage interviews” with parents, grandparents and other cultural elders. Students also researched their family and cultural traditions at libraries, museums and other institutions, extending the boundaries of the vocabulary and communication skills they'll need to flourish in a vibrant, multicultural world. The ultimate goal: to learn more about your own culture, more about other cultures, more about times before you were born – and more about how our rich differences are always out-weighted by what we have in common. Five thousand soft cover copies of the 116-page book are available as companion pieces for the required third- and fourth-grade social studies curricula, *Community* and *Wisconsin*. ■



86%

of SHARP students in 2007-2008 responded to the year-end Writing Challenge.

A Debt of Thanks for a SHARP Increase in Gifts

SHARP Literacy has the best donors, each one filled with passion and commitment.

We are able to offer a visual, creative approach to learning the core skills of researching, reading, writing and presenting ideas because of generous individual, corporate and foundation support. The following gifts were received between July 1, 2007 and June 30, 2008.

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In honor of the Forest County Potawatomi Community Foundation

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In honor of the W. J. Avis Family
In honor of Beth Fitzgerald
In honor of the J. Michael Tracy Family
In honor of Kathy Tracy

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In honor of our grandchildren

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In honor of Marjorie Blumfeld

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Raisers SHARP SHARP's Second Annual Campaign Surpasses Goal

Although it was just the second year of a formal Annual Campaign for SHARP Literacy, we again surpassed our fundraising goal.

The members of SHARP's Board of Directors were invaluable partners in raising awareness and funds for SHARP. Special thanks go to Annual Campaign co-chairs **Curt S. Culver** and **Russ Darrow** and to Fund Development Committee co-chairs **Patricia A. Dowd** and **Joel Huffman**. Because of their support and efforts, SHARP was able help more underprivileged and at-risk Milwaukee students than ever before.



SHARP is proud to announce that the co-chairs for the third Annual Campaign are

Kristine Rappé,

Senior Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer for Wisconsin Energy Corp., and **Charles Groeschell,** Managing Director/Senior Portfolio Manager for Baird Advisors. Both Rappé and Groeschell continue the SHARP tradition of campaign chairs who are highly regarded in the Milwaukee community and dedicated to helping our children.



1,926
Attended Spring 2008 Family Achievement Recognition Events.

SHARP by the Numbers, 2007-2008

Formal assessment of the SHARP Literacy program by **Applied Measurement and Evaluation Services** has shown the following:

- The mission of integrating the visual arts and art history into science, language arts and social studies curricula has content validity.
- Students in the SHARP Literacy program have dramatically increased vocabulary skills compared to those who are not a part of the program.
- Students have increased writing skills and comprehension of material learned.
- The SHARP program is an effective tool in decreasing discipline problems for many at-risk students.

Looking SHARP: Other Highlights of 2007-2008

• **Thomas Boelter, Executive Director of the Forest County Potawatomi Community Foundation,** spoke to SHARP teachers at the Autumn 2007 Teacher In-Service about the *Greater Milwaukee Circle of Life Book* as a continuation of our efforts to work with the Foundation in showing children the value of diversity and developing their cultural competence. Mr. Boelter emphasized that it is only through the eyes and voices of children that we can hope to eradicate racism.

• Good food – along with student literary presentations and kid-created, SHARP-inspired songs and dances – made April/May Family Achievement Recognition Events a feast for stomach, eye and ear. One of the events featured **WTMJ-4 Television meteorologist Michael Fish,** whose entertaining,

animated and vivid presentation exploring tornadoes, thunderstorms and safety tips blended perfectly with the second-grade *Weather, Water and Environment* curriculum. Another welcomed **Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson of the Wisconsin Supreme Court,** whose inspiring discussion of our important freedoms was a passionate and timely exclamation point to the fifth-grade *Building a Nation* curriculum.

• In Autumn 2007, *All About Wisconsin,* a gift-worthy student-authored publication, was made available at all **Border's** and **Harry W. Schwartz** bookstores throughout the Milwaukee area just in time for the winter holidays. ■

Two student authors read their work at a 2008 SHARP spring FARE.



A SHARP Memory

On an average weekday, you expect to see many things in the grand lobby of a venerable Fortune 500 company like Milwaukee's Rockwell Automation – vintage and new schematic drawings, people coming and going in business suits, information about the company's history. You don't expect to see a school-aged child contentedly asleep in a chair. But if you came through the lobby on March 7, 2008, that's exactly what you would have seen.

Several students from two central-city schools crisscrossed the lobby that day as they worked on a project for SHARP Literacy. Three fifth-graders from one school were there to interview Rockwell Chairman and CEO Keith Nosbusch for a chapter in *The American Dream*, SHARP's new *We Love to Learn Book*, and two students from the other SHARP school were there to take photographs for the book.

The interview and photo session went well, and the three fifth-grade writers climbed into their van and headed back to school. But the transportation for the student photographers was delayed, so the two young women ended up lounging in the lobby.

It wasn't long before one of the girls curled up in an oversized chair and fell asleep. SHARP Executive Director Marlene Doerr, there to oversee the entire interview process, noticed the dozing student and walked over to the girl's supervising teacher. "I was concerned about how it might look to business visitors coming into the Rockwell lobby," said Doerr, "so I asked the teacher if the student was okay."

The teacher surprised Doerr with his answer. "I think it's amazing that she feels comfortable enough to fall asleep here," he said. "Being able to work on this book project has given her a level of dignity she never had before. She sees that her creative abilities can take her places and that she can be as comfortable as anyone else in environments that would have intimidated her in the past."

Through their conversation, Doerr learned that there are more than 7,000 children in Milwaukee Public Schools who are homeless, and this student was one of them. "I was a bit embarrassed by my initial feeling," Doerr recalls, "but so, so glad that SHARP has had a positive impact on this girl's life. By allowing her to use her creative spirit, she had moved to a new place in her life." ■

These SHARP Notes Are Music to Our Ears

Below are excerpts from notes and letters received during the 2007-2008 school year.

"This (SHARP Wisconsin book) project ... challenged our students to use research materials that are considered above their grade level as they prepared to write essays about our state. The struggle was an excellent learning experience for the students, who gained both literacy skills and a sense of confidence. ... SHARP captures the interest and attention of our monolingual and bilingual students, helping them to increase their vocabulary and writing skills. ... In 2004-2005, an independent formal study showed that many of our students in grades two through five had increased their vocabulary and writing skills by more than 50 percent as a result of their work in SHARP. Scores every year since show we have duplicated these results."

Sara Marquez, Principal, Forest Home Avenue Elementary School, Milwaukee

"I am so pleased that (SHARP) has taken on the subject of bullying in such a creative and focused manner. While not all children have the same opportunities to experience the arts, bullying is definitely an "equal opportunity" experience that all children – rich or poor alike – have in common. ... The imbalance-of-power dynamic that is present in bullying comes through loud and strong in the pictures and in the words of the children. This can give victims a voice and supply them with that very important affirmation that they are not the first to experience the pain of a bully, nor are they alone. ... Since the book is written in both English and Spanish, our bilingual

students can share the book's contents and extend these teaching moments at home with their families."

Melinda Wyant Jansen, Counselor, Escuela Vieau School, Milwaukee

"Through a SHARP initiative, over 150 Steffen Middle School eighth-grade students (in suburban Mequon, Wis.) partnered with students from the Milwaukee Public School system. ... After the (younger) students from MPS wrote their essays for (the SHARP book), my students edited and word-processed each child's essay. ... Throughout the process ... SHARP Literacy... helped bridge relationships between a suburban community and the students of Milwaukee. This collaboration helps to break down stereotypes. ... My students commented about the joy they experienced in writing with their partners in Milwaukee and visiting with them at their school and ours. I know of no other project, anywhere, which hits so many positive outcomes for students and teachers."

Lynn M. Doucette, English Teacher, Steffen Middle School, Mequon, Wis.

"... it's great to see the children's beaming smiles ... congratulations on the great work you are doing with SHARP!"

Mark Murphy, President and CEO, Green Bay Packers

2008-2009: Proof That a SHARP Year Is Never Dull

In addition to our flagship yearly school programs, the 2008-2009 SHARP schedule includes:

- Expanding the **Greater Milwaukee Circle of Life** project with the production of an accompanying video.
- Integration of **The American Dream Book** into fifth-grade classrooms.
- Although not officially titled yet, a lively student-authored "Healthy Child" **We Love to Learn Book** exploring how global

health problems affect Milwaukee's youngest citizens and how healthy choices students can make in grades two through five will increase the odds for a healthy, successful adulthood.

- A trial balloon for expansion of the SHARP program into a new grade level – a second-semester **Pilot Project** introducing age-appropriate SHARP curriculum to students and teachers in a sampling of **First-Grade** classrooms. ■

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Clarke Street School	2816 West Clarke Street
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Victory School for the Gifted and Talented	2222 West Henry Avenue
Escuela Vieau School	823 South 4th Street
Westside Academy I	1945 North 31st Street
Westside Academy II	1940 North 36th Street

2007-2008 Special Projects Schools:

Steffen Middle School (Mequon, Wis.); the Schools of the WE INDIANS Program, Milwaukee Public Schools, Division of Bilingual Multicultural Education.



Five of the SHARP student contributors to *The American Dream Book*