

West Side Middle Senior Biographies

Sixth-grade students, with teachers Ms. Samira Clough and Mrs. Ann McLean, from West Side Middle School in Groton participated in a language arts project that combined the learning goals of researching, writing and publishing a biography with the service goal of creating a positive memory with local seniors and documenting their lives in a professionally bound narrative. The project began with one section of 20 students and spread to include all 105 sixth-graders at the school.



Students from West Side Middle School, Groton.

The class that originated the project with their teachers identified seniors at a local senior living facility. Seniors volunteered to be interviewed, and students conducted four different interview sessions with their senior partners. During the interviews students gathered information about the seniors' childhoods, their education, where they worked and played. Students then drafted the biographies and learned how to lay out text, graphics and pictures they collected using digital scanners and Power Point. After a draft of the biographies was completed, students returned to their seniors and provided them an opportunity to edit their text. During the process, one student said, "Editing, editing, editing... now I know the work of a writer."

In reflecting about the project, students noted their favorite activity was the time spent in interviewing the seniors. History connections were also made during the interviewing as students recognized how different society and technology were during the seniors' childhoods. Students were surprised to learn about root cellars, butter churning and the lack of TV - and the Internet! When asked for their impressions about these observations, one girl noted: "I am very thankful for everything we have. I am glad to be growing up today!"

On the fourth visit with the seniors, the students held a celebration that included the seniors' final opportunity to edit their biographies. The celebration also included cake and ice cream and entertainment by the school jazz band. The mayor, school superintendent, school principal and several reporters from local papers were invited and attended the event. The activities director for the senior center noted during her opening remarks: "The process has been remarkable bonding activity for the students and seniors. I have heard the seniors talk about 'their child' in reference to their interviewer." After the celebration, the students made their final revisions, print and send the biographies off for hard binding. The final biography will be presented to the seniors after the students return in the fall.