

January 9, 2008

Dear Parents-

We just wanted to give you a little heads-up about our new social studies unit. For the entire period between now and spring break, our primary social studies focus will be on the African-American experience. As we mentioned at Go-to-School Night in the fall, the centerpiece of the unit will be the television miniseries *Roots*. When the school district's African-American curriculum was being developed, a professor of African-American studies from the School of the Art Institute was brought in as a consultant. She recommended using *Roots* as a core component of the curriculum.

In addition to being a well-written and moving story, another wonderful thing about *Roots* is that it does a fabulous job serving as a timeline for the unit. *Roots* starts in Africa, as does our unit, and follows Kunta Kinte from his capture, to the journey on the slave ship, all the way to America. It follows his family down through three generations, all the way past the end of the Civil War and into the era of Reconstruction. However, we are not watching *Roots* in its entirety. We edited the version of *Roots* that the children are watching, specifically for classroom use. It is, of course, just one of the many pieces of the unit. As we follow the timeline of *Roots*, we will be studying, reading and doing activities related to the many topics presented, or referred to, in the story.

While *Roots* certainly isn't a feel-good movie, it is incredibly powerful and does a much better job at conveying the reality of the African-American experience than any other medium could. We work hard to prepare the students for some of the tougher topics that they will be exposed to, and have always received favorable responses from students and parents. When we talk at the end of the school year about favorite 4th grade experiences, *Roots* is always right up there with Camp Edwards as a top pick.

We encourage you to engage in discussions with your child about *Roots*, as they may often want to more fully debrief what they've seen with you, after our class discussions. However, if you own *Roots* or remember the plot, please DO NOT give away any of the future events. It is a much more meaningful and authentic experience if the whole class can approach it blindly.

Once the timeline of *Roots* ends, we will carry the African-American unit forward, through the Jim Crow laws of the post-Civil War South, on through to the Civil Rights movement, and to present-day issues of racism in the United States. During the unit, there will also be an intense focus on the Underground Railroad.

Please feel free to talk to us, if you have any questions.

Mr. Burleson, Mrs. Shank &
Mr. Wartik