

## Fourth Grade Class Publishes a Book of Short Stories

*By Christopher McDermott – Berkshire Record; January 18, 2018*

GREAT BARRINGTON—After making a splash in the publishing world, a whole class of fourth graders at Muddy Brook Regional Elementary School were able to walk home with a printed, published book featuring their very own stories.



“A Collection of Adventurous Stories” by Ms. Molly Cosel’s class of 2018 appears on blurb.com, available with a laminated softcover illustrated by one of the students. In the book, Lexi Carpenter presents the story of Scarlet the Mouse making her way back home to her human. Alesia Curletti writes about a kid venturing through an episode of “Teen Titans Go,” and Everett Pacheco tells us about a family stuck on a deserted island in the final story, “Three Cups of Adventure and a Pinch of Magic.”

With several stories about fantastic creatures and places and journeying home, it was perfectly fitting to dub the collection “adventurous,” Cosel said. “It’s so fun and also an interesting learning experience for me to watch and see what the students’ interests are”, Cosel said. “Any writer uses what they know. [The kids] are drawing from the things they’re passionate about, what they’re dreaming about, what their interests are. They’re learning about themes too, and we see through that what they care about: fairness, getting along with friends, good and evil.”

The publishing project was the final result of a six-week unit that let the students read and discuss fantastical stories, brainstorm their own ideas, write a story, undergo group workshopping and then edit and revise their own works—all to meet a sharp deadline for the last day before their winter vacation. They took inspiration from the works of Chris Van Allsburg (famous for “The Polar Express” and “Jumanji”) and similar writers.

When they were coming up with ideas for stories, Cosel had the students think in terms of a few scenes, starting with a story board like a comic book. Then the students could refine the scenes into a story arc. “We have a visual of a mountain, that goes up and down, and it builds over time to a climax,” Cosel said. “Then we work on how to come to a resolution without that coming out of thin air.”

The students all typed up their own work on personal Chromebooks and Google Drive accounts and then gave each other constructive criticism. A large part of the unit was teaching the students to work together effectively.

“It’s important for the kids to collaborate,” Cosel said. “We’ve worked on how to give criticisms in a positive way so that the person making the changes wants to make the changes and feels empowered to do it. The kids also learn that how the other person reacts shows how well they gave the constructive criticism.”

The students received extra help from local editor Anastasia Stanmeyer who came in to give the students feedback. “It was cool for them to notice how many changes you can make to a story,” Cosel said. Learning to edit and revise can be a challenge for many people of all ages, but Cosel said this project can offer some extra encouragement.

“We were able to put a real book in their hands,” Cosel said. “Then we had a celebration after their lunch.”