

# SYNERGY TIMES

The Newsletter of Synergy School

Spring 2023



6th/7th Grade Students Painting

## Middle School Mural Elective

by Pam Heyda, Visual Arts Teacher

In Spring 2022, Synergy 6th and 7th grader students had an opportunity to paint a mural on Synergy's "Triangle Building" in Orange Alley as part of Middle School Electives. The students collaborated with Precita Eyes, a mural arts organization in the Mission.

The elective students worked with Pam for the first few weeks of the trimester. They learned about the history of mural painting, looked at notable murals in San Francisco and Los Angeles, and watched documentaries about well-known street artists Keith

Haring, Banksy, Shepard Fairey, and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

For two weeks, mural director Flavia Mora and her assistant Teresa Benson facilitated classes where the students brainstormed, sketched, and designed the mural. Discussions focused on issues closest to the hearts of our students: identity, community, equity, and the environment. They combined all the ideas and sketches to create a scene to narrate these themes. When the students were away at Farm School, Flavia and Teresa created a full-color master design and set

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“Discussions focused on issues closest to the hearts of our students: identity, community, equity, and the environment.”



to cleaning and priming the wall of the building.

Here is a description of the work written by Flavia:

"This mural is dedicated to those finding and reclaiming identity and community. It tells the story of youth finding their name in a world of societal constraints, climate injustice, and inequality, depicted on the wall's left side. In the foreground on the left, we see the image of a young person's head turning into the roots of a tree as they shed tears in a polluted ocean and wonder what their name is. In the background, the young person's head is surrounded by a "missing equity" milk carton and boxes representing the confinement of the male and female binaries. These boxes are spot-lighted by a spaceship in the night sky and a surveillance light further down in the far left. On the right side of the orange tree, we see an alternative world, a celebration of identity through LGBTQIA+ colors and pride, and people protesting unjust policies affecting marginalized communities and

climate change. In the background, a mushroom sits on a hill representing multi-cellular organisms, and in the foreground, water moves through fish and a coral reef, symbolizing symbiosis.

the design with charcoal, then painted it with acrylic. To avoid the dangers of working on ladders, our Synergy artists worked on the lower five feet of the mural while Flavia and Teresa finished the top.

"The mural tells the story of youth finding their name in a world of societal constraints, climate injustice and inequality, which is depicted on the wall's left side."

The colors and patterns in the mural represent water, land, and outer space weaving together throughout the mural. At the center, an orange tree, half fruitful and half bare, represents the juxtaposition and transition between the two worlds. The oranges symbolize creativity and wealth and play homage to Orange Alley."

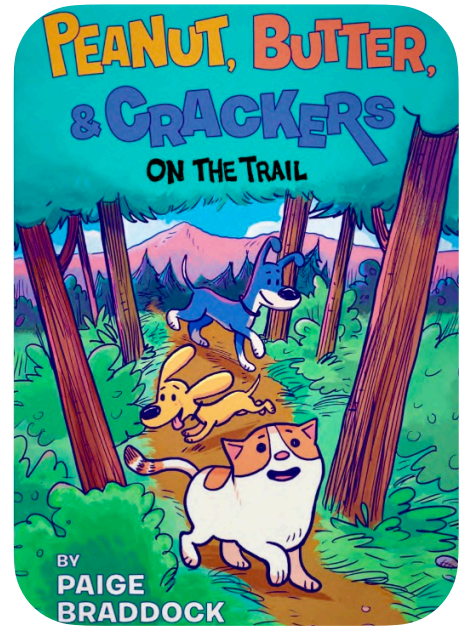
The students took turns working on the wall in two separate groups. They sketched

This project was a wonderful experience for all who were involved and something these thirteen students will never forget about their middle school years at Synergy. Please make sure to turn the corner at Orange Alley and 25th Street to see this dynamic art! For those who want to paint murals, Precita Eyes offers classes for budding artists right here in the Mission. ∞





Paige Braddock Talked with Students About Being an Illustrator and Graphic Novelist



## Cartoonist Paige Braddock Inspires Synergy Students

by Susanne DeRisi, MLIS, Librarian and “Binax Lead” for the Synergy Lab

Synergy School TK-5th grade students welcomed the Eisner-nominated cartoonist Paige Braddock, author and illustrator of two graphic novel series for younger kids, for an entertaining and inspiring assembly on February 28, 2023.

Paige Braddock’s newest graphic novel is ***On the Trail***, the third book in the ***Peanut, Butter, and Crackers*** series which follows the adventures of a sweet and goofy puppy who moves in with two older pets, a snarky cat, and a somewhat high-strung dog.

The author shared that her own pets are the inspiration for the characters Peanut, Butter, and Crackers and that the ideas for the stories come from her experience adding a new puppy to her household. Braddock advised that students can take things that happen in their everyday life and use exaggeration to turn them into funny stories. Students erupted with laughter as she read

parts of the first book and the third book in the series. Braddock explained the process that goes into creating each page of a graphic novel from thumbnails, to drafts in colored pencil, to inking, to digitally scanning, cleaning up, and digitally coloring each page. Students were fascinated to find out that Braddock inks her drawings using an old-fashioned dip pen with a metal nib and a pot of ink.

Braddock asked audience members to raise their hand if they were eight years old, and shared that she was their age when she decided to become a cartoonist. The author shared that sometimes her stories are inspired by her artwork. For

example, she shared her artwork of a nattily-attired blue jay and how, with input from people, she started to assign the character a personality (extroverted) and create additional pictures of the blue jay having fun with other bird companions. Braddock then shared with the students her artwork of a dinosaur dressed in business attire holding up a coffee cup in its tiny arm. The students were excited to share loads of ideas with Braddock including what they think the dinosaur’s personality could be, what other animals might work in its office, and what might happen on the dinosaur’s first day at work (hint: dinosaurs eat other animals).

“Braddock advised that students can take things that happen in their everyday life and use exaggeration to turn them into funny stories”



Paige Braddock in the Big Room



Grandparents Day 2023

The author also answered some questions about her work as the Creative Director of Charles M. Schulz Creative Associates, including how she came up with the design for the Snoopy U.S. postage stamp issued in April 2001.

Parent Ana Freire’s 1st grader, Oliver, was inspired by the presentation, “He loved it and has been talking about wanting to be an author ever since, explaining to me the process of coming up with illustrations, etc.”

Paige Braddock also joined our middle school Pride Club for a lunch meeting, where members learned about her trailblazing web comic, **Jane’s World**, the first LGBTQ-themed nationally syndicated comic strip. When Braddock asked students to share what the Pride Club does, they spoke about social justice issues and politics affecting the LGBTQ community. Drama and P.E. Teacher Jana Barber, the advisor to the Pride Club, said, “their conversations were deep and passionate around many issues

concerning youth today. It was a joy having Paige visit our Pride Club and the students were genuinely excited to speak with her and learn about her career as a writer.”

Synergy students who ordered Peanut, Butter, and Crackers books through Folio Books received a personalized bookplate signed and illustrated by the author. Thank you to Folio Books for donating 10% of proceeds to the Synergy Library and for connecting Synergy School with wonderful authors like Paige Braddock. ∞

## Grandparents & Special Friends Day

Synergy celebrated Grandparents and Special Friends Day on April 28, 2023. Over a hundred grandparents and friends visited Synergy for the morning activities. Our guests enjoyed visiting the classrooms where they wrote poetry in the Rainbow Room, played games in P.E. with Jana, and observed fire in the Middle School science. At the end of morning, they watched the students perform highlights from Synergy’s Music Program in the Big Room.

Please join us again next Spring for this wonderful event.





4th/5th Graders Getting Ready to Collect Trash



## 4th/5th Grade Community Service with Refuse Refuse

by Viviana Runeare and Elliott Irving, 4th Graders

*The 4th and 5th graders did community service with Refuse Refuse, a grassroots organization whose ultimate goal is keeping San Francisco free of refuse through education and action. The students walked around the neighborhood, picking up trash. When they finished, the students collected 16 bags of trash. Two students shared their experiences from that day.*

I know picking up trash might not seem that much fun to you, but it is! When you walk down a street with a lot of trash, you clean it up. When you look back, you feel pride that you are helping your neighborhood. When I did a clean-up with Refuse Refuse for the first time, it surprised me how much I liked it. It was like finding a piece of treasure, except it was not! When we picked up the trash, we compared how much we had picked up, and you'd be surprised how much we got.

Of course, there are some things that we can't pick up, like syringes and other items, and keep away

from them, but I have never seen or picked up anything like that! The teachers make sure we are as safe as possible, so they require us to wear yellow reflective vests so drivers can see us when we cross the street. We were in five groups, with two chaperones in each group. Overall, Refuse Refuse is a fun thing, and it helps the neighborhood. ∞

by Viviana Runeare

grabber so you don't touch garbage, and a trash bag to put the garbage in. So I do suggest Refuse Refuse because it is fun and it helps out the community. ∞

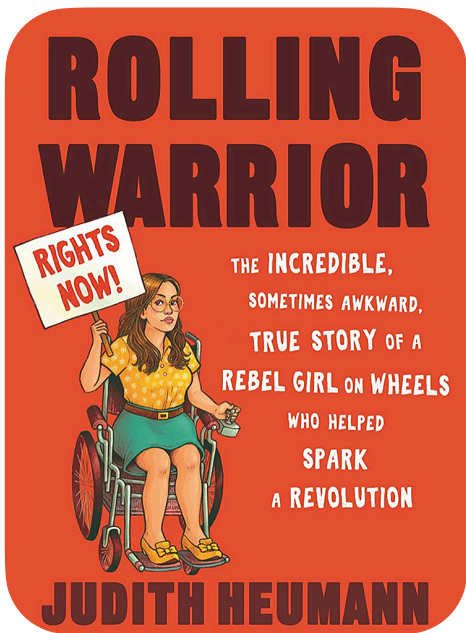
by Elliott Irving

“When you look back, you feel pride that you are helping your neighborhood.”

When we did Refuse Refuse, it was really enjoyable because we went around the block and picked up garbage. I don't know why it was fun, but it is probably because everyone liked it, and the neighbors said thank you. We got a vest so cars could see us, a

Check Out  
Synergy School  
Photos:

[synergyphotos.smugmug.com](https://synergyphotos.smugmug.com)  
Password: bestpics



## All Community Read & Women’s Interview Project

by Jasmine Kitses, Middle School Language Arts Teacher and Nola Evans, 8th Grade

Judy Heumann, the civil rights activist who fought for disability rights, once said: “Together we can speak up for justice, together we can change the world.”

This trimester, as a way to bring us together, students in Language Arts have been reading Heumann’s book *Rolling Warrior* as an all-community read. We’ve been learning about Judy’s life, her role spearheading the Section 504 sit-ins at San Francisco’s Federal Building, and how she fought for equal access to education and the workplace for people with disabilities. Sadly, Judy Heumann passed away shortly after we began reading the book, but her amazing legacy lives on.

As a companion project, students chose an inspiring woman in their own lives to interview. They began by proposing someone they thought would be good to interview—ranging from siblings, moms, friends, and aunts, to grandmothers and neighbors.

Then, students created their own interview questions and practiced their interviewing skills in class. Next, students conducted their interviews using a range of technologies—voice-to-text, facetime, phone calls, email, voice memos and old-fashioned note-taking! Finally, they will turn these notes into a one page profile (inspired by profiles they have read of Judy Heumann), sharing these important community members’ lives: their education, studies, travels, upbringing, work, challenges, successes, and more. ∞

by Jasmine Kitses

In Middle School Language Arts class, we’ve been doing an all-community read of Judy Heumann’s *Rolling Warrior* and writing profiles on women in our lives through interviews. Reading Heumann’s memoir, I learned more about a community I wasn’t familiar with and its struggles and movements. The interview process greatly encouraged independence and was compelling by coming up with your own questions and

setting the interview up on your own time. Conducting the interview and listening to my interviewee was inspiring and interested me in her life. The projects we’ve been doing are gripping and invite students to sometimes reach outside their comfort zone. ∞

by Nola Evans



Celebrate 50 years of Synergy  
 Saturday, Sept. 23, 2023  
 All School Picnic & Reunion  
 Precita Park in Bernal Hts.





## In Memoriam: Sarah Edwards and Beth Abrams

### *Sarah Edwards*

by Jesse Kisses

With heavy hearts, the Synergy community must inform you that we recently lost an amazing teacher and Alum Parent. Sarah Edwards, age 59, taught at Synergy from 1996-2006 and died on January 9, 2023, in Kingston, New York. She had retired to the Hudson Valley to be closer to her daughter, Sophia Cosmadopoulos, a Synergy alumna of 1996 who is an artist and a co-founder of the Summertime Gallery in Brooklyn. Sarah was a long-time Sun Room teacher, starting back at the Grove Street location and then continuing to the Sun Room on Valencia Street. She was well known for her hands-on projects, unique sense of humor, and connection with students of all ages. Synergy will never forget Sarah's energy, risk-taking as a teacher, and love of creative projects. ∞

### *Beth Abrams*

by Liz McDonald

Alum Parent Beth Abrams, age 73, died on January 14, 2023, while walking in Golden Gate Park, where she was found by a fallen tree branch. The Bernal Heights resident had a passion for dance and social justice. Her son, Dario Abramskien, graduated from Synergy in June 2002. Beth taught dance in the Bay Area for over 40 years as well as feeding San Francisco's immigrant population through her organization Grupo de la Comida. Synergy families donated toys for the Grupo de la Comida's Christmas party over the years. She founded the Beth Abrams Center for Peace, Arts, Justice, and the Environment to combine her work providing food to refugees and immigrant families, improving storm and wastewater treatment in the city, and advocating for better infrastructure for charging electric vehicles. Beth was active in her Bernal neighborhood and is missed by many friends in the

Synergy community and beyond. A celebration of her life with family, friends, and community was held on February 25, 2023. ∞

### **Class of 2023**

This year's eighth grade class was accepted to a wide range of public, parochial, charter, and independent high schools:

- Academy of Thought & Industry
- Archbishop Riordan High School
- Culver Girls Academy
- Drew School
- Lick-Wilmerding High School
- Lowell High School
- Mission High School
- Oakland School of the Arts
- Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts
- Sacred Heart Cathedral Preparatory
- San Francisco University High School
- The Bay School of San Francisco
- Urban School of San Francisco





## Board of Trustees: Strategic Plan

by Shari Dickstein-Staub, Board of Trustees member

On August 23, 2022, the Synergy School Board of Trustees met virtually to begin a new three-year strategic planning cycle. After hearing a brief overview of the year-long planning process, Trustees joined breakout rooms in small groups to reflect on areas of success and opportunity that have presented over the past two to seven years in order to celebrate accomplishments and generate a list of possible areas of focus for the 2023-2026 plan. A mix of staff and parents comprised each focus group to balance out perspectives, voice and institutional memory.

Among the successes identified, several themes emerged. Trustees commended Synergy's commitment to keeping kids safe and learning pre, during, and post COVID and to remaining a compassionate and communicative community, enabling families and staff to thrive. They applauded the school's continued focus on creating an optimal physical

learning environment and ability to maintain financial security, strong administrative management, and a dynamically flat organizational structure amidst challenges.

Trustees have met several times since August to refine the plan's strategic priorities. In the months ahead, they plan to finalize areas of focus and begin to engage various stakeholders. If you have any questions about our planning process or the Board in general, please contact the Steering Committee at [trustees@synergyschool.org](mailto:trustees@synergyschool.org). ∞

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## Synergy School 2021-2022 Annual Report

### Gifts to the Synergy Annual Fund

Thank you for your support.

We are grateful for the generosity of our donors who helped to raise \$554,515 for the Synergy Annual Fund in 2021-2022. Our Board participation in the Annual Fund was 100%, and Synergy families' participation was 95%.

### Ways to Give to Synergy School

Synergy School is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and gifts are tax deductible to the extent allowed by the law. Donations are accepted in the following ways:

Mail your donation to:  
Development Office  
Synergy School  
1387 Valencia St  
San Francisco, CA 94110

Donate online or download a pledge card  
at [www.synergyschool.org/giving](http://www.synergyschool.org/giving)

Gifts of appreciated securities are gladly  
accepted. For more information, please  
contact Liz McDonald at 415 567-6177 or  
[liz@synergyschool.org](mailto:liz@synergyschool.org)

Many employers have a matching gift  
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about their matching gift guidelines.

For more information about including  
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please contact Liz McDonald.

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 Constance Matthiessen in memory of Eli Golvin-Klein  
 Kim McClain in honor of Mahala Bundy  
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We are grateful for the generosity of our donors who helped to raise over \$48,050 for new furniture to create flexible and engaging learning spaces.

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Donors who made gifts to the school between September 1, 2021 and August 31, 2022 are listed in this annual report. We have tried to provide accurate and complete information for this report. Our apologies for any names omitted or listed incorrectly. Please contact the Director of Development, Liz McDonald, to correct any records.

## Thank you for your generous support!



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## Mission Statement

Synergy Times is published twice a year by the Development Office of Synergy School. Feedback and story ideas are welcome.

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Photography: Russ Curtis, Liz McDonald, Barbara Lobb

Our mission is to nurture the intellectual, creative, and emotional potential of every child in a community dedicated to diversity, inclusion, and social justice.

Synergy School was founded in 1973 and is a non-profit educational cooperative, wherein students, parents, staff, and teachers cooperate together to further a rewarding education for each child. We are a vibrant, diverse community with 190 students in transitional kindergarten through eighth grade located in San Francisco's Mission District.

## Synergy Annual Fund



## Every Gift Counts

The Annual Fund helps to bridge the gap between tuition and the actual cost of educating a student at Synergy School for a full year.

The support we receive from our community of parents, friends, alumni and grandparents helps Synergy to maintain the strength of our program while keeping our tuition affordable and offering financial aid to at least a third of our community.

Every gift counts. Donate online at [www.synergyschool.org/giving](http://www.synergyschool.org/giving)

If you have any questions about donations, please contact Liz McDonald, Director of Development, at [liz@synergyschool.org](mailto:liz@synergyschool.org).

Thank you for your support!