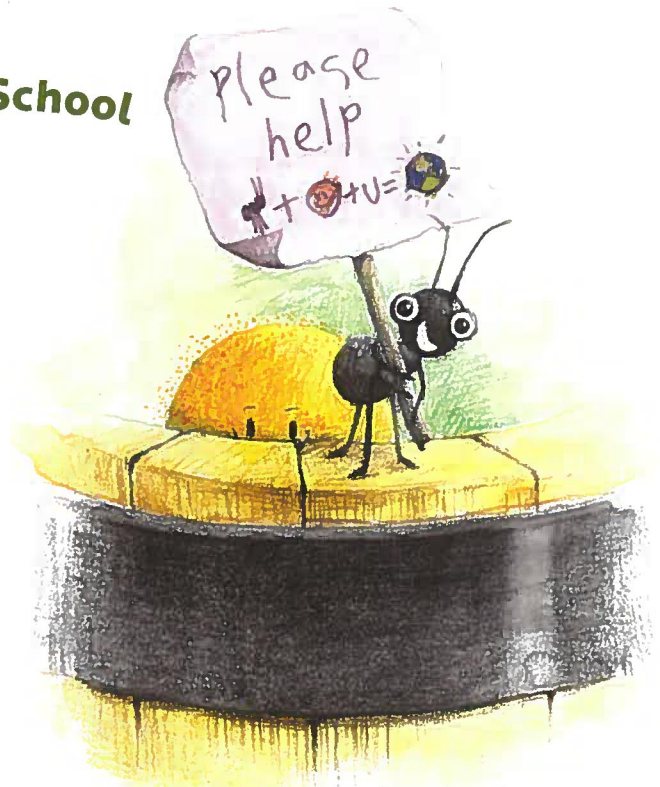


A Tiny Super Hero in the Lower School



There is a new super hero at the Lower School. Every Monday, students rush into the building to find out where he is hiding and what message he has for them. He can be hard to find because he is very tiny. In fact, he is a tiny ant. He may be small but his message is big: he wants to save the environment and encourage children to protect the environment. Aptly, his name is Environmental Ant and he has become a sort of mascot for the Lower School.

Environmental Ant is a character created by Ran LaPolla, Chair of the Visual Arts Department. As part of King's extensive Professional Growth and Development Program, LaPolla was one of four teachers last summer to receive a King Summer Sabbatical Grant. "It was a great opportunity and a dream come true for me," says LaPolla, "I developed this character about ten years ago when my own children were in elementary school and I have always wanted to write and illustrate a children's book about him. Receiving this grant gave me the incentive to finally create it."

The book *Environmental Ant* tells the story of E-Ant who lives in the planter next to the playground at the King Lower School. Along with his friend, P-Yu, a stale cheese puff who fell out of a kid's lunchbox, Environmental Ant sets out to save his friends in the planter from a plastic bag that is blowing around the playground and threatens to land on them. They consult Fran de Lyon, a dandelion who publishes the *Planter*

Post, the planter's own newspaper, and who knows everything. She advises the friends to ask the kids at King to help them take care of the environment. At the end of the book we see a child putting the plastic bag in the recycling bin.

Emily Decker, LS librarian, says, "Reading this beautiful book to the LS students was a delight. The look on the students' faces when they heard King mentioned was priceless. The book appeals to all ages. The younger students connect to the variety of colorful characters and the older students enjoy details from the *Planter Post*. Most importantly, all the students relate to the message that they, as children, have the power to care for and protect their environment."

Frank Barros, Director of Sustainability, had been looking for a way to make sustainability and environmental concerns interesting and understandable for elementary school students. *Environmental Ant* is the perfect fit. Says Barros, "To supplement efforts in the Lower School to teach sustainability topics in nutrition, fitness, and environmental stewardship, a weekly riddle is flashed on the LS monitor every Monday. It leads students to where *Environmental Ant* is hiding. When they find him, he has a message for them to read to their homeroom class. Additionally, a related *Environmental Ant* cartoon drawn by students is shown on the class monitors. The initiative has seen overwhelming success in increasing sustainability awareness." This success Mr. Barros

has experienced sparks an even greater excitement about science and the natural environment.

Karen Raidt, Head of Lower School, adds, "What I have enjoyed about our LS superhero is that students have been very excited to read the riddle for the week and to see the cartoon. The information they read sparks great conversations among the students about being kind to the environment and making healthy choices." Next year, there are plans to have *Environmental Ant* be a component of classroom curriculum across disciplines.

Tom Castonguay, Chair of the Science and Director of STEM Programming, says, "Not only does *Environmental Ant* communicate important messages in a way that young children can understand, but it is also affecting behavior. For example, my daughter, who is in Kindergarten, is now much more conscious of recycling and litter, and she's constantly referencing *Environmental Ant*."

Since *Environmental Ant* is small like them, students can relate to him and feel empowered to use his character to communicate their own thoughts and concerns about environmental issues. Recently, when a real ant was found walking in the entryway of the Lower School, students stood guard around it until Karen Raidt carefully put it outside.