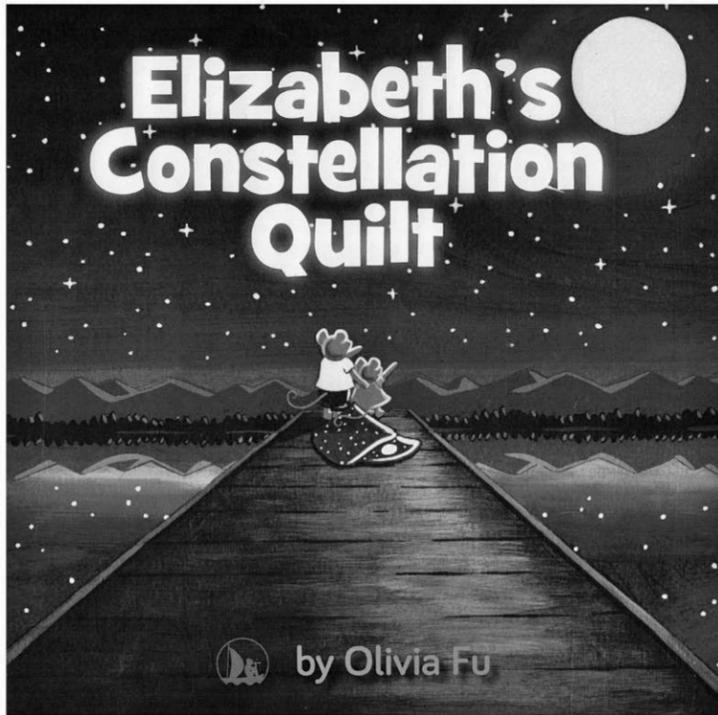


SCHOOLS

Olivia Fu publishes first children's book



Cover art for *Elizabeth's Constellation Quilt* by PHS grad Olivia Fu.

By Alyssa Morrissey

Piedmont High School grad Olivia Fu will launch her first children's book, *Elizabeth's Constellation Quilt*, close to home at A Great Good Place for Books in Montclair on August 23.

The book was published by Tumblehome Learning, a company formed in 2010 by STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) activists encouraging children to become scientists and engineers.

The children's book tells the deep and heartfelt story of a young mouse named Elizabeth who is taught to use the stars to guide her by her father, a sailor. When her father's boat is lost at sea, Elizabeth uses constellations on a quilt to guide her to find him.

"The idea came from the star gazing I did as a child," said Fu. "I would often look at the night sky

plained Fu, who graduated from Piedmont High in 2006.

"The character of Elizabeth came from my oldest sister, Elizabeth. She is a very strong willed and an independent thinker. She's definitely unique and I wanted her same spunk and independence to come through in this character," Fu said.

Aside from being a burgeoning illustrator, Fu is also an accomplished muralist and her artwork can be found across walls throughout New York City. Fu says she has found her home for the last three years with Brooklyn based nonprofit, Groundswell, which brings together youth and artists to create public art to raise awareness of serious topics like drinking and driving, and appreciating diversity.

Fu helps inspire the children, many of whom have had challenging childhoods, and motivate them to channel their experiences through art. She calls her work with Groundswell an escape and a learning experience that has helped shape her as both an author and illustrator.

"I enjoy the way that a children's book has the potential to tell a serious story, but in a hopeful way. That's why I want to write stories for kids, to provide a look into a very complicated world that always has a silver lining," Fu said.

Fu had high praise for her time as a Piedmont High School art student under the guidance of Helen Brainerd, now retired.

"She had high expectations for us and always was so even keeled. She exposed us to very sophisticated art forms and mediums. It wasn't until later that I realized how lucky I was to have had her as an art teacher," Fu added.

After Piedmont, Fu moved on to the University of California, Santa Cruz where she finished her Bachelor of Fine Art. When she is not working with her "family" at Groundswell, she teaches an artistic look at New York's history through the New York Historical Society Museum.



Author, illustrator and muralist Olivia Fu.

and think about nothing and everything. I just remember it feeling both mystifying and daunting. When I brought the story to Tumblehome Learning, Penny (Noyce) introduced the idea that the sky could serve as a sort of guide. I really loved her positive take away and went with it," ex-

PLAY office offers summer jobs for teens

Need a babysitter, someone for pet care, gardening, party assistance or help setting up your computer? Call the P.L.A.Y. office, and let Piedmont teens solve your problems while you perform an important community service at the same time.

The Piedmont Recreation Department is proud to sponsor its 49th year of P.L.A.Y. (Piedmont League Action for Youth).

Piedmont teens are put in contact with Piedmonters who need jobs done during the summer. The office is in the Recreation Department at 358 Hillside Avenue, and is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in July, and from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. for the first two weeks in August.

For more information call 420-3093.

PRAISE

Excellent education includes Special Education in Piedmont

The Piedmont parent group PRAISE (Piedmonters for Resources, Advocacy, and Information in Special Education) raises the question of how the word "special" is perceived. Generally, it implies something that is exceptional, separate, or different, but special education in Piedmont is all about inclusion.

Special Education services support students with learning needs that go beyond what can be provided by general education classrooms. This includes reading help for students with dyslexia, aides and equipment for students with physical disabilities, and social learning for students on the autism spectrum. Approximately 15 percent of students in Piedmont School District use some form of special education services.

Many people are not aware of how much special education benefits the *entire* student body. Many innovative teaching methods and programs – such as differentiated learning, multisensory approaches, and the new social skills curriculum – come from research originally developed to address learning differences. Many students in "gifted" programs, who extend the boundaries of what local schools can offer in math, science and the arts are concurrently enrolled in special education because of their unusual learning profiles.

Most importantly, special education supports neurodiversity, a term that celebrates the variety of ways that people can process information and communicate. Recently, PRAISE teamed up with the Piedmont Appreciating Diversity Committee to collaborate on their common goals. Neurological differences, like cultural differences, bring fresh perspectives, new friendships, and an opportunity for expanded awareness to kids as well as adults. And like cultural diversi-

ty, neurodiversity shows us more about what we have in common than how we are "special."

New logo for PRAISE

This year, PRAISE will be rolling out a new logo. Designed by local artist Daniel Clowes, its bold letters communicate the strength of the special education community. It was created by hand, without the use of computers or fonts, to convey the individuality of the kids and families who participate in and support special education.

In giving it the look of an old-fashioned sports logo, Clowes explained, "I wanted it to convey on sort of an unconscious level that we're all on the same team."

Last year, drawing on donations and a network of knowledgeable parent volunteers, PRAISE funded teacher training and "Word for Word," a summer literacy and drama program. It sponsored several free lectures on neurodiversity and inclusion, as well as a collaboration with the Diversity Film Series on autism awareness.

This year the organization is hoping to offer a wider variety of community lectures, and make grants available to teachers. It will also continue to put parents in touch with local resources and with one another.

"Families with children with special needs can sometimes lack a sense of connectedness and belonging within the school and the broader community," said PRAISE president Liz Fitzgerald. "Our hope is that PRAISE helps bridge that gap."

To learn more about PRAISE, visit the new website at www.piedmontpraise.org. To donate, look for PRAISE volunteers during online registration on August 10. PRAISE is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Matching funds from employers are accepted.

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