

## Ken Park – Fourth Grade

In 2011, fourth graders beat their Trick or Treat for UNICEF fundraising goal and smashed through the \$1,200 mark. They, their teacher Ken Park, and his teaching partner Julie Lippold, are very excited. Fourth graders adopted UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) as their service learning project eight years ago, midway through Mr. Park's fourth grade teaching career. He explains that the effort extends beyond organizing the school bake sale and distributing trick-or-treat collection boxes. There's a strong global education component. "There are lessons about what we take for granted; food, clothing, schools," he says. "We compare that with what kids around the world live with, or without. We talk about where the money goes. It can be for anything from food and clothing to digging water wells in communities, to bringing in medicine and doctors."



Once fourth graders are versed in UNICEF's purpose, they form teams to talk to fellow students from kindergarten through middle school, educating them about the organization's work and trying to get every student in the school involved. Fourth graders set goals, create timelines, schedule events and, this time of year, count the money.

Mr. Park teaches two of his favorite subjects, history and math. Fourth graders' study of American History begins with Native Americans. "We talk about how Indians lived in Kansas," says Mr. Park, "how they made their earthen lodges, how they ate, how they hunted, how they survived the extremes of winter and summer." In the words of one student, "Mr. Park makes boring subjects fun!" How? First, there's humor. Beyond that, he says, "I relate a lot of things to what we do today." In history, that means discussions about what students would do if they had no heat in winter. How would they keep warm? In math, there are practical applications. When students learn how to calculate area, Mr. Park points out that when they're retiling their kitchen someday, they'll have to know the area in order to know how many tiles to buy. Bottom line, he says, "If the kids know I like something and I'm excited about it, they seem to be more excited about it."

As the only male classroom teacher in Lower School, Mr. Park says parents like the idea of their children getting a different perspective from a male role model. Sometimes students are a bit nervous, however. "They think I'm going to be mean or serious all the time," he laughs, "but usually by the end of the first day they think, 'This is going to be O.K.'"