April is School Library Month and thus the perfect opportunity to take a close look at TCS’ brand new Library Program.

This year, Polly Smith joined the faculty as part-time TCS librarian and has garnered rave reviews from TCS classroom teachers and administrators for her work. [Go to page 4 to see what the faculty has to say about the work Ms. Smith has done so far this year.]

Ms. Smith supports the teachers in and out of the classroom. Outside of class, she continuously evaluates and edits the library collection and purchases new books for the library and the classrooms. One effort Ms. Smith has made this year was to diversify TCS’ collection. “I try to look for books that are about or include different races, cultures, and viewpoints and have been pleased to find that there are good quality books referencing many different experiences,” she explains. She also assists the faculty by researching books and apps on topics of interest in the classrooms.

Ms. Smith maintains the Library Program website at www.tcslibrary.weebly.com and the Library Program’s Facebook page at www.facebook.com/TCSLibrary. At these sites, you can find detailed, up-to-date information on what is happening in the Library Program through Ms. Smith’s blog, book reviews and recommendations, a growing collection of online resources (including links for research and reference questions, and teacher recommended sites), lists of recent library purchases, and assorted, library-related “cool stuff” that might be of interest to teachers, parents and students. If you haven’t checked out the website or Facebook page, you will be amazed by the amount and quality of content found there.

For her work in the classroom, Ms. Smith initially developed a general plan that evolved into very different experiences in each classroom based on student interest and teacher need. Initially, Ms. Smith divided the curriculum according to grades, K/1, 2/3 and 4/5, with the idea that the three groups would be focusing on different topics. “While each grouping made sense originally, each classroom took the material in a different direction or had entirely different interests that I wanted to support,” said Ms. Smith.

“In Kindergarten, the children want stories. They love to be read to, and they are so excited to find out what new books I have brought to read. I try to find books for this age group that are well-written, with diverse characters, and are the newest, best books that have been published this year.” While the first graders are equally as excited when Ms. Smith arrives, they are more engaged with the stories she shares and know more about the world, which contributes to the discussion. “They are more eager to wonder out loud and spend time looking and listening, collectively, with a critical eye and ear,” explained Ms. Smith.

In the second and third grades, the kids are older and start developing sophisticated opinions about literature. “At this point,” explains Ms. Smith “we start looking at different genres. I try to get to know the children to find out what they like, what they are interested in. I want to validate their thoughts and feelings about literature. By doing so, I hope to build trust so they can rely on the recommendations I make to them.” Because of the focus on student interest, the program has grown to be unique in each 2/3 classroom, with each classroom asking for books on different topics that relate to what they have been discussing and learning.
Evidence of the classes’ individuality developed early in the school year. In connection with Banned Books Week in October, the Llamaniyans studied censorship with Ms. Smith and, as part of that study, confiscated “banned books” from all the classrooms. In response, the second and third graders in The Mine spearheaded a sit-in in the fifth grade class. Ms. Smith laughs at the memory. “My second month as librarian and there is a full-fledged protest.”

In the fourth and fifth grades, the classes currently are working on information literacy. Ms. Smith explains, “The kids are learning the terminology associated with using the Internet, how to search for information on the Internet, and how to assess the information that they find,” Ms. Smith explained. “We talk about topics like opinion bias—about the source of information, the difference between commercial and non-commercial sites, what information is more trustworthy and why—and how to develop instincts for identifying a ‘good’ website.”

One of the goals of information literacy is to teach students how to critically evaluate the information they receive. “We as adults make assumptions about what kids know when we see children who appear so comfortable using technology, but in reality, kids don’t intuitively know how to evaluate different sites. What we as adults do subconsciously to evaluate the quality of information sources, kids need to be taught,” stated Ms. Smith.

Ms. Smith has been involved with TCS for seven years now, starting as a parent to 2012 alum, Simon Boyle, and as a member of the Library Committee for the four years prior to formally joining the TCS faculty. It was through the Library Committee that Ms. Smith first created TCS’ library in the cubby room of Room 503. Prior to that, TCS’ library consisted of boxes of books stacked in that room.

Looking ahead to the coming year, Ms. Smith is excited about her involvement in developing the Middle Level program. She is a member of the Technology Committee and is undertaking an evaluation of the best apps to be loaded on the TCS iPads. She also is expanding the library collection to include Young Adult literature for older students.

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The reviews of the Library Program are in and... 

Teachers are united in their support and appreciation of the work that Ms. Smith has contributed to their classrooms this year:

The Sea loves literature and stories of all types. Having Ms. Smith in the room once a week has helped the children develop a sense of independence and empowerment around the selection of books. Each child has a chance to choose a library book to enjoy during school. Ms. Smith has exposed the class to a wide variety of diverse and wonderful books to help us explore the possible varieties of literature available. Ms. Smith has also served as a wonderful teacher support and resource around literature that reflects the children and families in the class. —Ms. Nadine

The time and expertise that Polly gives to our school and classroom book collections are unparalleled. Polly is carefully curating our collections, making room for valuable additions for student research as well as diverse and well-written books for independent reading. There is no way I can plan, organize, and teach plus do what Polly does for our first grade classroom. My students look forward to Polly’s arrival every week—eager to enjoy and discuss the next carefully selected book. —Ms. Cathy

Polly has proven to be a valuable resource in the classroom. When we embarked on our study of science, Polly was able to find books about African-American scientists and inventors that enhanced our collection of science resource books. Her suggestions for research websites save the time it takes to preview websites for appropriate content and accessibility for second and third graders. Her thoughtful selection of books for purchase continues to enrich our collection, and the children have been exposed to wonderful books that provide for lively discussions at Polly’s bi-weekly classroom visits. Hearing second and third graders talking excitedly about the language of William Shakespeare, or learning about Miles Davis and then listening to his music are just a couple of the great moments Polly has brought to our classroom this year. I love having her as a resource. —Mrs. Robinson

Polly is amazing. The kids love library time because she works so hard to get to know their interests and seamlessly weaves literature with discussion. She is in constant communication and really is a progressive librarian. She forms her curriculum around the kids’ questions and asks open-ended “thinking questions” that lead to further discussion. The kids trust her; they ask to go talk to her or get suggestions for books. She is also an amazing resource person for me. I tell her about topics we are studying or I am thinking about exploring and the next day she has an armful of books in a full range of accessibility. We couldn’t cover so many different topics without her and we wouldn’t reach the same depths. She is wonderful! —Ms. Angela

Polly’s work in Atlantis this year has been invaluable! She has been working with the students on how to evaluate Internet sources when it comes to research. Polly is guiding them through questions such as:

- How do I know that the author of this site is knowledgeable on the topic?
- When a get a list of links from a Google search, how do I know which ones are best?
- What are the various parts of a website?

The upper grades spend a great deal of time doing independent research and it is often a challenge for students to find credible sites from which to gather information. Through Polly’s amazing work, the students are becoming much more savvy researchers, which I see first-hand translating to all aspects of our classroom. —Ms. Miller

Ms. Smith has been bringing the real world into Llamania by addressing students’ need to understand how the Internet, and the search engines students use to access the Internet, affect what they see, how they learn, and what they learn. The students in my class are now much more sophisticated users of this resource than they were a few short months ago. As a skill, for people living in our world, this is as important as being able to write: knowing what you are looking at when you are looking at a website, how you got there, and efficiently assessing the website’s purpose and how reliable it is. Multiple times each day, for school and for personal use, students use the skills that Ms. Smith has given them. —Mr. Grajnert