

March Meanderings

On March 19, second trimester report cards will become available. In the spirit of all the work, effort and, yes, frenzy that occurred during this reporting period (they don't call it March Madness for nothing), I offer a reprint of a letter I wrote in 2013.

March is a conflicted month. It arrives like a lion and goes out like a lamb (or vice versa). The ancient Britons referred to it as *hyld-monath*—loud and stormy. In ancient Rome, March was called Martius, in honor of the Roman god of war; it was considered a good time of the year to start a battle. Rudyard Kipling referred to the month as *steel grey*. While March welcomes the Spring Equinox in the northern hemisphere, it also commemorates the Great Blizzards of 1888 and 1993.

March is also a lucky month if you trap a leprechaun on St. Patrick's Day, but not so auspicious if you're Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, the victim of Brutus' and Cassius' Ides of March conspiracy.

March delivers perfect kite flying weather. It is also the month that saw the *ascension* to the throne of Kings Frederick II, Albert II, and Henry V. However, it was not such a good month to soar for Patsy Kline, Karl Wallenda, Vinko Bogataj (the *agony of defeat* athlete from Wide World of Sports) and, as witnessed last week, Harrison Ford.

Speaking of **celestial** matters, March is the month in which Led Zeppelin debuted its rock anthem, *Stairway to Heaven* on the BBC. (As for zeppelins, the Hindenburg and Goodyear Blimp both had maiden voyages in March.) Our own anthem, *The Star Spangled Banner*, was officially adopted in March. The rings of Uranus were discovered during a March 1977 telescope viewing. Yet, all does not remain heavenly in March. The Russian Mir space station disintegrated over the southern Pacific Ocean in March, 2001.

March waxes poetic:

It is mild. (Machado)

It is a bright minstrel. (Swindburne)

Its winds are the morning yawn. (Grizzard)

It is the month of expectation. (Dickenson)

But, March is also filled with madness (the NCAA college basketball tournament), and hyperactivity (witness the *Leporidae* that leap and run in circles—commonly known as *March hares*).

O.K., O.K (from *oll korrekt*, a phrase first recorded in a March 1839 edition of the Boston Morning Globe), I have to admit, though somewhat conflicted, March celebrates some of my favorite events. Miles Davis held his first sessions for *Kind of Blue* during March. Astrud and Joao Gilberto recorded *The Girl From Ipanema* in March. The band, Pink Floyd, released *Dark Side of the Moon* in March. (Speaking of bands, the rubber band was invented in March, 1845). The original *King Kong* premiered in March, 1933. Sixty years later, Charlie Brown hit his first home run during a March scrimmage.

Vincent Van Gogh, Dr. Suess, Lois Lowry and Bach were all born in the month (as well as my brother, Paul). And lest we forget, March is Women's History month, American Red Cross month, and National Umbrella month. If this all seems *trivial*, take comfort in knowing that Jeopardy debuted on television in March, 1964.

March is the time of the school year when students often begin to display mastery of new skills. Yet, isn't it ironic that the pencil with an attached eraser was first patented in March, 1858? And, at a time of the year when many students are celebrating the growth reflected in their second report card, others view the arrival of grades with apprehension and anxiety.

Your child's report card will be arriving home later this month. Most likely, March grades will highlight your child's positive growth, both academically and socially. The report will give you reason to voice pride in your son's or daughter's efforts and work.

However, March grades also serve as a reminder that there is still work to be done, challenges to tackle, and goals to be set—for every student. While receiving a teacher's honest assessment of a child's efforts may cause one to be disappointed, bewildered, or assign blame, such emotions make it difficult to create and support "next steps." March, contrary to the ancient Romans, is not a time to start a battle. It is a time to calmly articulate concerns, seek root causes, put rational heads together, and set a course of action that lets a student know that it is never too late grow and succeed.

Here are a few kind suggestions that will make March reporting a productive time of the year:

- Find genuine ways to celebrate your child's efforts. Genuine praise or listening to your son or daughter delight in explaining his or her successes works better than extrinsic rewards—it's authentic and cheaper!
- Choose one or two key areas for improvement and calmly set a course of action. Goals should be realistic and achievable. Write them down and refer to them periodically with your child.
- Consult with your child and his or her teacher when seeking report card clarity. If necessary, arrange a teacher/parent/student meeting. Be sure to support each other. This is a team effort.
- Remember, grades belong to students, not parents. They are a means by which we can teach personal responsibility, natural consequences, and the value of hard work, good study skills and affirmative social skills.
- Resist comparing a child's grades with those of siblings or neighbors. Each child is unique and deserves to have grades kept confidential.
- Stay positive, and don't forget:

March is indeed a conflicted month.

Neither warm nor cold.

Sleeping and stretching awake.

Mad and merry.

It commands—**March** forward—stay optimistic—spring is on the horizon.

It's all relative. Einstein posited a similar theory in March.

Sincerely,

David Hoffman