

Telling Tales: The School Project

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When my oldest was in preschool, his teacher sent home a paper feather and directions for the children to decorate it with anything found around the house. According to the steps, it was critical that this should be completed by the child and not the parent. I obliged, and the next day we turned in a feather decorated with dry rice, beans and a few sequins we found.

That afternoon I walked into the classroom to find all the little feathers hung proudly on a wall. I was in shock! Apparently, my little boy was going to school with 4 year old equivalents of Picasso. There were feathers that looked like they belonged on Bob Mackie couture and some were so detailed it was as if they had been plucked right off a turkey. And there in the center was my little boy's feather. It was like a pop up camper surrounded by million dollar homes.

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Six years later, my husband and I had labored over everything from an Earth Day project made out of trash to a miniature display of a Native American city all in the name of elementary education. We were pros. But my feelings were growing ambivalent. It felt odd excitedly asking my child, "What grade did mommy get on the history project?"

This year it was a science project that would become the bane of my existence. The sheet came home as we are knee deep in ballgames, end of year parties and teacher appreciation week (on top of everything else like, homework, bath time and a mean case of PMS). This assignment required the brains of Einstein, the creative resources of Martha Stewart and the child like mind of Betty White. In short, we were screwed! There was a silver lining though, we

had three weeks.

Last week my 5th grader sat at the kitchen table finishing homework. Suddenly he looked up and said,

“Oh! I almost forgot. The project for science is due on Wednesday.”

“This Wednesday, as in two days from today? Why didn’t you tell me about this sooner?”

The question no sooner left my lips than I started to recall the day he brought the notorious directions home. In order to block out the feeling that this teacher was out to get me I decided to do what I did while he was in preschool - I let the student do the work. Why should I be the one to sweat, stress and lose sleep? I’ve been through grade school... and high school... and college. So the decision was made to let my boy figure it out with just a little help of course from his dad.

I could hear them in the garage working on it. Every few minutes one would run into the house frustrated with the other. Wednesday morning I helped my little genius carry in a rocket made out of a soda can, chop sticks and powered with vinegar and baking soda.

When the boys got in the car that afternoon before I could ask how the day went my youngest said, “Jacob’s wocket[SIC] didn’t take off! You should have done it for him mama. Daddy made him get a bad grade!” Maybe for next year’s project we’ll split the atom.

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