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## Washington School Students Unite to Write 'Wrath of the Rat'

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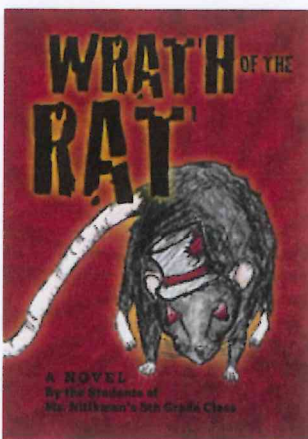
By Jim Buckley



The authors of *Wrath of the Rat* and their advisers pose for a class photo at Washington School. (Washington School photo)

32-chapter novel turns into much more than a class project, will be featured at Saturday's Santa Barbara StoryFaire

What has 64 hands, weighs more than 2,500 pounds, and writes really well? A pack of novel-writing fifth-graders!



A new novel by this unique set of authors will make its debut Saturday at [StoryFaire 2011](#), the annual celebration of books at Santa Barbara's [De la Guerra Plaza](#) that benefits [\(CALM\) Child Abuse Listening & Mediation](#) and [Storyteller Children's Center](#).

*Wrath of the Rat* was written by Barry Nitikman's fifth-grade students at [Washington School](#). The novel tracks the adventures of a brother and sister (and their talking pets!) who are trapped inside a video game by an evil rat. The quartet faces perils galore, from flying piranha to sword-wielding cloud people to sharp-toothed "minions."

Each of the 32 kids in the class contributed a chapter and artwork for the 164-page book. Nitikman created the project to show his students all the steps needed to create a good story.

"While I was amazed at their imagination and creativity, perhaps the biggest thing they all got out of it came in the editing process," said Nitikman, who described how each student's chapter was read aloud to the class, which then acted as a "group editor," critiquing and praising the work.



"The fact that they discussed each chapter taught them not only how to rewrite, but how to be consistent and how to think things through," he added. "How do you grab the reader? What can you write that will be logical but not too silly? How do you create a story arc? Having gone through this exercise, they now know more about how stories are created than they did before."

Along the way, the class had help from parents Barbara Scharf and Patty Kelley, who coordinated the artwork, and from Jim Buckley, a local children's author who helped the students understand the writing process.

"It's all their work," Buckley said. "We were just along to make sure they stayed on task and didn't wander too far from the basic plot they had devised. I was really impressed with some of the writing. I think kids who read this will really have a lot of fun."

The authors will be on hand at StoryFaire at 11 a.m. Saturday to sell and autograph copies of their work. Proceeds of the book beyond printing expenses will go to reading and literacy charities. [Click here for more information](#) on StoryFaire.

— *Jim Buckley is a Santa Barbara-based children's author and publisher of [Beach Ball Books](#). As a parent of one of the authors of *Wrath of the Rat*, he helped with this class project.*

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