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Front Page News

EDUCATION

Fifth-Grade Science Paper Doesn't Stand Up To Peer Review

DECATUR, IL—A three-member panel of 10-year-old Michael Nogroski's fellow classmates at Nathaniel Macon Elementary School unanimously agreed Tuesday that his 327-word essay "Otters" did not meet the requirements for peer approval.



Above: Fifth-grade panel members express disapproval of Nogroski's paper (below).

Nogroski presented his results before the entire fifth-grade science community Monday, in partial fulfillment of his seventh-period research project. According to the review panel, which convened in the lunchroom

Tuesday, "Otters" was fundamentally flawed by Nogroski's failure to identify a significant research gap.

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"When Mike said, 'Otters,' I almost puked," said 11-year-old peer examiner Lacey Swain, taking the lettuce out of her sandwich. "Why would you want to spend a whole page talking about otters?"

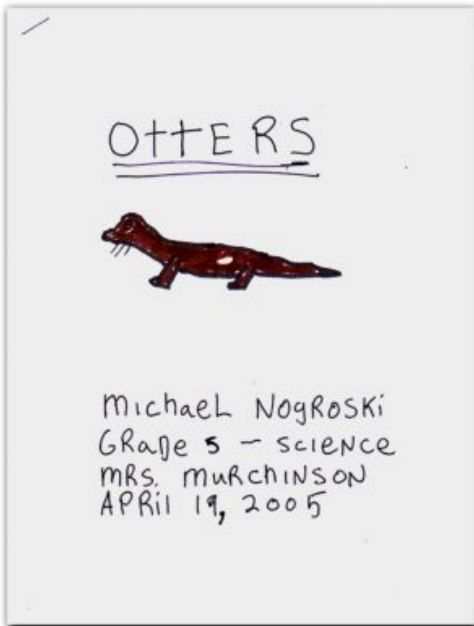
"It's probably only the dumbest topic in the history of the entire world," 10-year-old Duane LaMott added.

Members of the three-person panel had many concerns about Nogroski's work, foremost among them their belief that the fifth-grader did not substantiate his thesis. Two panel members even suggested that Nogroski's thesis was erroneous.

"Otters are *not* interesting!" 10-year-old peer examiner Jonathan Glass said.

"Otters are so boring, I fell asleep for a thousand years and woke up with a long beard covered in ice," LaMott said. "I had to defrost myself."

According to the examiners, Nogroski's second paragraph, which begins "Otters live in water," should have been followed by a description of the sea otter's natural habitat, rather than by a description of the world's largest full-grown otter and speculation as to what an otter that size could do to a sea lion.



"An otter could not kill a sea lion!" LaMott said. "I don't care how big it is—sea lions have gigantic claws."

"Nuh-uh," Swain said.

"Yes, sea lions do have gigantic claws," LaMott said. "If you don't believe me, look it up. Sea lions have very long claws. They would tear an otter to shreds in, like, two seconds. Seriously."

Panel members said Nogroski's work contained an alarming number of invalidated claims and irrelevant findings. They were particularly disconcerted by the figures in Nogroski's third paragraph, which begins "How do otters survive? Here are some facts about that."

"He didn't even say how they survive," Glass said. "He was just like, 'Otters are about one to 1.2 meters long. Otters' whiskers are about three inches long.'"

"I know!" Swain said. "It's like, 'Hey Mike, how do sea otters survive?' 'Dur. I'm Mike. Sea otters survive by being one meter long.'"

"Hey Mike," LaMott added. "What do sea otters eat? 'Dur, I'm Mike. Sea otters have whiskers that are three inches long. Also, I don't bathe and my jacket is acid-washed.'"

"His mom drives a Honda," Glass added.

The paper was criticized for failing to evince adequate literature review, failing to adhere to the pass-around style guidelines, and for being presented in "a chicken voice you could barely even hear because his teeth are so yellow."

"It's like, God, how hard is it?" Swain said. "You say what you are going to say, then you say it, then you say what you said. Mrs. Murchinson only explained it, like, a thousand times!"



Above: Nogroski in the school library, where he will revisit his research.

"His breath was so bad I can still smell it on my clothes," LaMott added.

"All he eats is bread and butter," Swain added. "Hello? That's disgusting."

While a work that does not gain peer approval often goes on to receive wider acceptance in the academic community, "Otters" has little hope of gaining approval from Nogroski's teacher Stella Murchinson.

"Oh, well, he tries," Murchinson said. "Michael comes from a single-parent household. From what I gather, his father is something of a—something of a—I don't exactly know—he drives railroads? He isn't exactly in the picture. I've spoken to his mother several times, and while she is well-meaning, she is busy and often harried, having spent the night before tending bar. She's a cocktail waitress. Well, from what I can gather, Michael isn't coming from the most stable home environment, and his work reflects that, I'm afraid. He isn't exactly reading at his level."

Although Nogroski's student aide, fourth-grader Samir Sriskandiraja, has encouraged him to resubmit a different paper on a peer-friendly topic like football or airplanes, Nogroski said he will revisit his research and present additional otters-related data Thursday.

