



To Whom it May Concern,

When I was first in contact with Lisa Taylor, the Executive Producer of the award winning film, *In the Footsteps of Marco Polo*, I had no idea what a treat our school community was in for. Thank goodness we took a leap of faith and planned an entire day and evening around the film and talk with Denis Belliveau.

The film is remarkable in its presentation of scenery, dilemmas, challenges, and opportunities that two modern day explorers experience first hand. Through the film, students were able to put a cultural and historical context to countries that they only see involved in today's news reports about terrorism. We showed the first portion of the movie to our students prior to Denis' visit and left them at a cliff-hanger point in the movie. Once Denis arrived, we finished the video and he answered their questions. I knew Denis was a filmmaker, author and modern day explorer, but what I didn't know is that he is a gifted teacher.

Denis spent the afternoon with our 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders answering questions. He was prepared to discuss real life choices and dilemmas but was so adept at reading the crowd that he knew that they had great questions that they needed to ask. I have rarely seen 100% engagement by students, but it was certainly apparent during Denis' visit with them. He elicited great questions, responses and showed that he really could thoroughly engage the kids. So at the end of the afternoon, I knew he had done a fabulous job with the kids, but it is a rare person who can do an equally great job with adults so I was a little worried about our nighttime event for adults.

I had no need to worry. Denis showed the movie to the adults who were as engaged as the kids. No one wanted the evening to end and lingered to talk to him, buy books and DVDs.

Having Denis here at Echo Horizon School is like the gift that keeps on giving. Students now are asking why we have Columbus Day and not Marco Polo Day. We love that they are thinking critically about this. When it came time to plant our vegetable garden this year, the 6<sup>th</sup> graders wanted the theme of their garden to be "The Marco Polo Garden: Spices from the Silk Trade Route." The students and adults who were fortunate to attend this, have repeatedly told me that it was the best speaker experience they have had at school. If you want an enlivened conversation, cultural insight and awe inspiring moments this is a must. You will not go wrong booking Denis to speak at your school.

Additionally, Lisa Taylor, the Executive Director, makes planning the event so easy. She is accessible, helpful and a complete support. All in all, this was one of the most positive experiences we have had as a school community.

**Martha Schuur**

Assistant Head of School

**Echo Horizon School**

3430 McManus Avenue, Culver City, CA 90232

T: 310-838-2442 | F: 310-838-0479 | TDD: 310-202-7201

Email: [mschuur@echohorizon.org](mailto:mschuur@echohorizon.org) | [echohorizon.org](http://echohorizon.org)

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