



Around the Northwest with the dragons. We've been to Portland and Spokane and the Cherry Blossom Festival! Spent three wonderful days with elementary school kids from all over the world, met dragons who are school mascots and helped kids create haiku and paintings.

[Northwest Beaches: Gray Whales Dinner](#)

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Northwest Beaches: Gray Whales Dinner

Last month we wrote about the great gray whales that feed on the beaches near Langley on Whidbey Island every March-May. Don't forget that this **Saturday, April 24th** is **WELCOME THE WHALES DAY!** [Read more.....](#)

Now for the whale's dinner.....The gray whales are feeding on [ghost shrimp](#) that live in the muddy sand of the Langley beaches. If you walk on the beaches at low tide you can see lots of little volcanoes of sand with a hole in the middle. These are ghost shrimp burrows, U-shaped tubes that can be up to 2 feet deep!

Why are they called ghost shrimp? Because of their ghostly pink and orange coloring and their one large ghostly white claw. I remember the first time I held one in my hand I was struck by its beautiful colors in such a contrast to the dark muddy sand.

Ghost shrimp are harvested commercially by the tons primarily for fishing bait. The gray whales harvest them by lying on their sides and making circles with their bodies to stir up the muddy sand and then sift out the shrimp with their baleen.



Yvonne Palka

Yvonne is the award-winning sumi-e artist who wrote and illustrated *Dragon Fire, Ocean Mist*. A retired college professor, grandmother, biologist and naturalist, she is passionate about introducing children and adults to the wonders of the natural world.

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"A year later (we bought the book a year ago). Dragon Fire, Ocean Mist is still one of my daughters top three favorite books. It's right up there with the Harry Potter series and Marley and Me."

Molly M., parent, Langley, WA



Dragons: Dragons as School Mascots!

Last week I met the Findley dragons. Findley Elementary School in Beaverton, Oregon has a dragon for a mascot! He's quite a friendly fellow who inspires students with the motto "Dream, Believe, Achieve - Findley Dragons!" Findley is a very international school with over 30 languages so I had a wonderful time presenting and signing books to children of many different nationalities. The Northwest dragons are getting around!

In doing some web research on schools with dragon mascots I came across quite a few elementary, middle and high schools and even a few colleges with dragons to inspire them. The University of Alabama at Birmingham has a 16 foot dragon statue in front of their stadium that belches smoke at all the home games!

Asian Art: Cherry Blossom Festival

Last Sunday I had the good fortune to participate in Seattle's [Cherry Blossom and Japanese Cultural Festival](#) by demonstrating and teaching sumi painting to children and adults as part of the Puget Sound Sumi Artists Association. All of the arts and crafts of Japan were there - origami, bonsai, ikebana, kimono dress-up, and, of course, calligraphy and sumi-e.

The festival celebrates Japanese culture and the gift of 1000 cherry trees to the city of Seattle in 1976 by the Prime Minister of Japan. The trees are now planted throughout Seattle. It honors the lasting friendship between Japan and the Pacific Northwest.

And on Saturday, April 24th, I'll be in Spokane at [Auntie's Bookstore](#) reading about dragons and demonstrating sumi-e as part of Japan week - a week long celebration of Japanese traditions organized by the Japanese American community there.

Dragon Fire, Ocean Mist

Written & Illustrated by
Yvonne Palka

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Pale orange and pink colors and a ghostly white claw give the Ghost Shrimp its name.



Presentation at Findley Elem School - with the Findley dragons!



Painting with children at Seattle's Cherry Blossom Festival



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