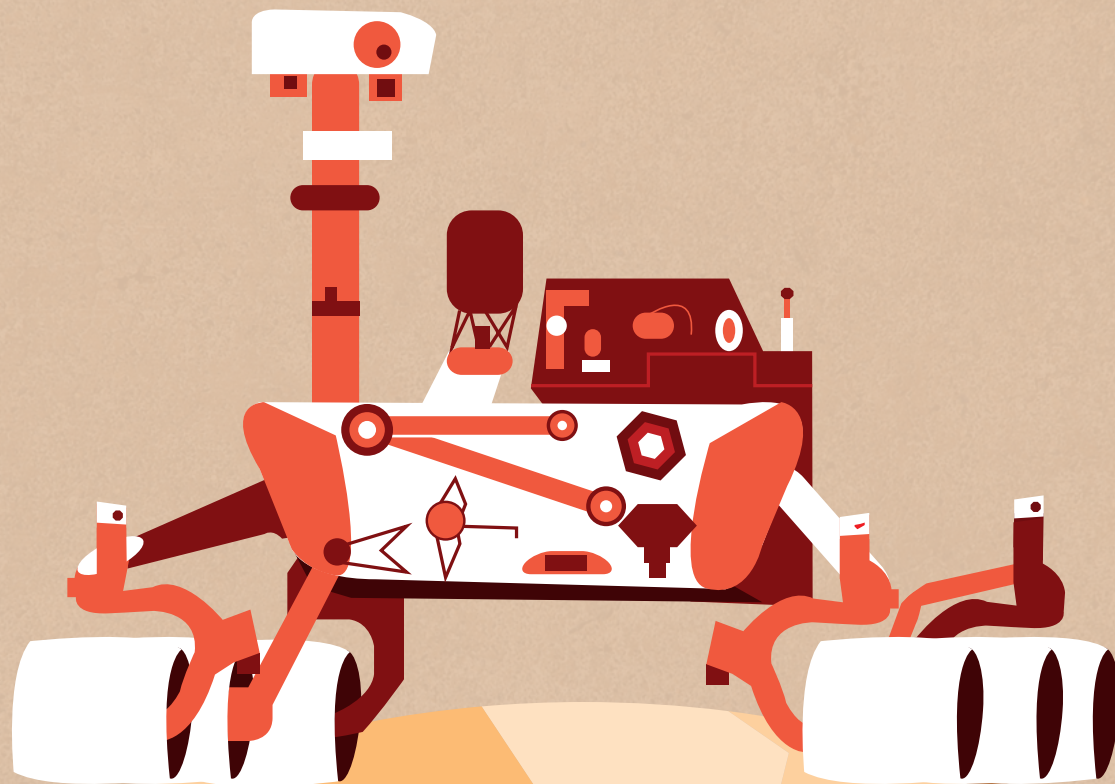


# THE HARBINGER



PG 29 ▶ GIRLS' GOLF TEAM DISCUSSES THEIR ROAD TO LEAGUE AND STATE



# CURIOSITY

EAST SOPHOMORE CLARA MA NAMES MARS ROVER

▶ art by Andrew McKittrick ▶ written by Vanessa Daves

December 2008

She checks back over all her work. Done. Sixth-grade Clara Ma turns in her worksheet to Mrs. Estevez and grabs a Time for Kids magazine from the bookshelf.

Skimming the pages, one by one, she comes across a story that's going to change her life forever. It's about a girl named Sofi Collis, a third grader from Russia who named the twin Mars Rovers Spirit and Opportunity. The article includes directions to enter an essay contest on the Pasadena, Cal. Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) website. The winner gets to name the upcoming Mars rover that would be launched in 2011.

*I have to do this, Clara thinks. I want to do this.*

The rest of the day is a blur. By the time she gets home, she already knows what she's going to write in her essay and what she wants to name the rover

-- Curiosity. So she starts writing.

*"Curiosity is an everlasting flame that burns in everyone's mind..."*

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May 2009

Clara sits on a leather brown chair in the sitting room watching a National Geographic special on mammoths when she hears the phone ring. Too engrossed in the program, she lets it ring until her mom, Lisheng Cao, answers.

Clara hears her mom gushing from the office. She sneaks down the beige-carpeted stairs and listens to the end of the conversation. Vaguely, Clara hears the woman on the other end. And from what her mom's saying, she thinks that just maybe it has to do with the contest.

Her mom hangs up the phone, and Clara looks at her expectantly. Beaming, Lisheng tells her the news.

"You won."

Nine thousand applicants. One winner. Clara can't believe it. She's screaming and running up and down the stairs and smiling with excitement.

After finalists were announced back in March, an international poll was conducted on the JPL website where people had the chance to vote for their favorite name.

"It wasn't a deciding factor of what the name of the Mars Rover would be but it was part of their decision," Clara said. "And I remember whenever we went to the computer lab [my teacher] would make everyone log onto the website and vote for my name."

As the winner, Clara got to take a trip to Washington, D.C. for the press release. She was interviewed and filmed reading her essay. While in D.C., she had the opportunity to see NASA headquarters and take a tour the Air & Space Museum.

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