



Kathleen O'Rourke/Staff photos

Tibetan musician Tenzin Choegy assists Ingrid Crumpton, 8, yesterday with a chakpur, a tool used in creating a sand mandala, at Montessori School in Wilton.

## Fleeting beauty

*Tibetans impress students with intricate colored-sand designs*

By Alexandra Fenwick  
Staff Writer

WILTON — Before the arrival of two Tibetan visitors at The Montessori School in Wilton last week, a mysterious package wrapped in brown paper arrived in the mail from India after a five-month trip by boat.

The package contained more than a dozen colored shades of dyed sand, which Buddhist monk Tenzin Samten and traditional Tibetan musician Tenzin Choegy use to create a mandala at the school. A class of first-, second- and third-graders yesterday observed the performance of the ancient art form before attempting the techniques themselves.

The mandala demonstration was part of the pair's 12-day stay to teach students about Tibetan culture, which will culminate with a concert by Choegy on Saturday.

Mandalas are circular-shaped geometric designs within a square that represent the universe in Hindu and Buddhist symbolism. They are created with colored sand according to specific designs drawn from

### Music from afar

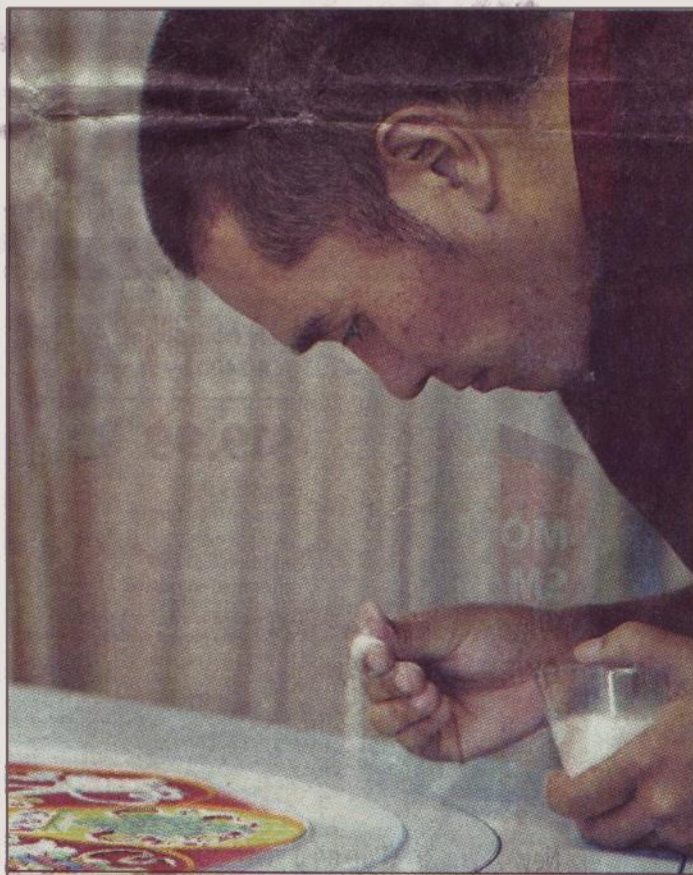
■ The Montessori School will hold a free "Little Things (Big Happiness)" concert and Tibetan culture lecture featuring Tibetan musician Tenzin Choegy from 3 to 5 p.m. Saturday at 34 Whipple Road, Wilton.

■ For information, call 834-0440, Ext. 10, or e-mail [donnam@themontessorischool.com](mailto:donnam@themontessorischool.com).

religious texts and are used as an object to focus attention during meditation.

Samten began creating the mesmerizing circular design Monday and will complete it today or tomorrow, when it will be swept up and dispersed into a body of running water to symbolize impermanence, a central teaching in Buddhism.

The students watched in rapt silence as Samten worked meticulously on the elaborate sand drawing in the center of the room. Tibetan prayer chants played in the background.



Tenzin Samten, a Tibetan monk from India, works on a sand mandala.

The students sat at two low tables and used chakpur, traditional metal tools, to write their names in sand with help from Choegy.

Mariah Baskin, 6, of Norwalk, formed a turtle shape while classmate Matthew Paseltiner, 8, of Stamford, wrote his first name.

Both agreed it wasn't an easy

technique and said Samten's mandala was impressive.

"It's pretty cool," Matthew said.

He dismissed the suggestion he might ever be able to create a mandala of such detail but then reconsidered.

"You might be able to do it with practice," Matthew said.

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# Tibetan

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Samten, who took eight years to memorize the patterns of various mandalas, is creating the eight-paneled Offering mandala at The Montessori School from memory. It is a simple design compared with the painstakingly detailed 722-paneled Kalachakra pattern he said is the most difficult for him to do.

Besides the demonstration, the visitors have led Tibetan singing workshops and taught students to make Buddhist prayer flags, which were hung all over the school yesterday.

"The students are just really excited because they know they have come from a long way off and it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for them to learn about a culture they wouldn't otherwise be exposed to," teacher Elizabeth Zobel said.

The Tibetans were invited by school director Mary Zeman met Choegyal in summer 2005 when he performed at the Association Montessori Internationale conference in Sydney, Australia. Choegyal is a graduate of the Tibetan Children's Village, a Montessori-method school established by the Dalai Lama for orphan refugees of Tibet who followed him and his government to Dharamsala, India, after he and his followers were exiled by China in 1959. The Dalai Lama is the spiritual and political leader of Tibetan Buddhists.

Choegyal, who lives in Australia, brought Samten, who lives in the Namgyal Monastery in Dharamsala with 250 other monks and the Dalai Lama. The two met several years ago when Samten and several other monks created a mandala in Australia.

Samten originally thought he would be visiting with university students but was pleasantly surprised to learn he would be teaching young children.

"I like to teach young kids because their minds and their thoughts are very clear and whatever they do, they do from the heart," Samten said.

The Tibetan visitors have been staying with the family of Skyler Sallick, 7, of Westport, for the past week.

"It's different and fun," Skyler said.

Choegyal, who lived at the Tibetan Children's Village from age 5 to 19, said that though there are many differences between the Wilton school and his school in India, the teachings and values are the same.

At the Tibetan Children's Village, students live with resident teachers and call their instructors "parents" and their classmates "brother" and "sister."

"It's like a big family, you live and eat at the school all year round," Choegyal said. "Here they live with their own parents, but the teachers here are like parents for the day, I get the feeling. And they have a beautiful sense of respect, the children here."