



# Birchwood Clipboard

## The Lion's Roar

For the unabridged edition of the Clipboard, visit our website [birchwoodschoool.org](http://birchwoodschoool.org)

### Special Program Highlights

#### **Formation of Habits**

Opportunities for young people in our country abound. But opportunities come and go. They must be grasped or they disappear like dreams. Whether young people seize and maximize their opportunities depends greatly upon their habits—habits of attitude, habits of industry, habits of self-discipline, and habits of self-determination. It is not uncommon for young people to meet wonderful opportunities for success in academics, music, sports, arts, or theater. But unless their character has been constituted with productive habits, the opportunities slip away. While some people find extraordinary energy to build habits in adulthood, most productive habits are forged before the age of 15, and the foundation for these habits are laid as early as age five or six.

Early habit building is a time-honored and research-based maxim. In fact, it is part of the cultural heritage consistently found among Eastern and Western traditions. Birchwood has long recognized this history and therefore habit building undergirds nearly all curricular and pedagogical decisions and practices.

The work of habit building is painstaking, tedious, sometimes exhausting. Neither students, parents nor teachers like the process of habit building. Nevertheless, at the end, it is always fulfilling, and at Birchwood we see the results year after year. The phenomenal success of Birchwood graduates has less to do with their intelligence than with their habits. Amidst the collaboration between home and school, our students receive a “head start” toward success in whatever field they aspire. And it works—time and time again. It is part of the Birchwood culture, and it brings students, teachers, and parents into a unified vision—challenging academics are a vehicle to cultivate productive habits. At Birchwood we know it's true. The advantage accumulates. We've watched it happen for 30 years.

#### **Awards Preview**

This month our students did amazing things! The first and second graders read 11,000 minutes causing the Scholastic Book Club to donate 564 books in Birchwood's name. A first grade student won a *Spider Magazine* contest and 4 fourth grade students were winners in a *Cricket Magazine* poetry contest. Birchwood had four American Chemical Society and National Chemistry Week winners and nine Regional Scholastic Award Winners. There were 14 seventh and eighth grade students who will be published in the Midwest edition of *A Celebration of Poets*. Finally, the eighth grade Power of the Pen team took home the district first place trophy. See complete stories within this issue.

#### **Dance and Drama Residency**

The second through eighth grade Birchwood classes enjoyed a dance and drama residency spearheaded by Kayla Matanick, who received her degree from Bowling Green State University in dance and psychology and Bill Morgan who is currently the artistic manager of the Cleveland Hearing & Speech Center. Each grade focused on either dance or drama in a concentrated two week program and will enjoy the other residency next year. (Continued on page 9.)

#### **A Word from our Director of Advancement ...**

We are halfway through the year and halfway to our Annual Fund goal! Thank you to all those who have so generously contributed and for those who have not, please remember that your support is vital! As it has since its founding, Birchwood School maintains the lowest tuition of any of its peer institutions while simultaneously providing education that meets and exceeds that provided by any of those institutions! Your support enables us to continue our work while also increasing the opportunities for students and staff: more art, more music, building improvements, professional development and more. As we celebrate our 30th anniversary in 2013, we look toward a future that is even brighter than our past. We need you to get there! Every gift matters no matter the size. So, go online or drop off a check to the office today.

Finally, for those who have already volunteered this year, we thank you! Your efforts make a huge impact everyday here at Birchwood School, and we are deeply appreciative. For those who have not done so: you have until May to complete the five hour volunteer commitment or to make a \$200 donation in lieu of the hours. Speak with your child's teachers or contact us at 216-251-2321 to find out what opportunities are available.

#### **In This Issue**

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A Word from  
our Director of  
Advancement

Class News

Essay from  
Mr. Debelak

#### **Upcoming**

**February 6**

Birchwood Project  
Lecture by Mr. D

**February 8**

Poetry Show

**February 22**

Science Night



## **Class News**

### **Preschool**

Birchwood's preschool students, families, and staff enjoyed a fun filled winter party which took place before the winter break. The children prepared a few winter songs to perform and sing for their parents. One of their favorites was titled, "Whirling, Twirling Snowflakes". After the performance the students, families, and staff enjoyed a potluck meal which included pizza, fresh hummus, plates of cookies, fruit plates, corn dogs, veggies, a cheese tray, and juice. We thank all of our preschool parents who helped to make our first Birchwood preschool winter party such a success. The preschool students recently attended a production at Playhouse Square based on two storybooks titled, *Guess How Much I Love You*, and *I love my Little Storybook*, which is part of the children's theatre series. The children were fascinated by the rabbits, lion, elephant, butterfly, frog, princess, giant, and bird puppets controlled by expert puppeteers. The children sat entranced for almost the entire show listening to the stories and relaxing music.

Over the past couple of weeks we have been covering a unit on dinosaurs. We have been making fossils using modeling clay and plastic dinosaur figures. The children were shown a demonstration using a yardstick to measure the length of dinosaurs that existed long ago. Some of the favorite dinosaurs measured were the Brachiosaurus - 25 yards, the Tyrannosaurus Rex - 15 yards, the Stegosaurus - 7 yards, and the Compsognathus - ½ yard. The children have also been learning to print the names of some of the dinosaurs using labeled index cards as a guide. We have begun to learn a few dinosaur songs and a lot of stomping and roaring can be heard during our morning circle time.

### **Gym**

During this last quarter the K-8th grade students participated in the push-up challenge. In eight weeks the students recorded 13,000 push-ups! The fourth grade class finished in first place averaging 350 per student with the first grade class fast on their heels with an average of 270. Recently, the kindergarten through fourth grade classes have begun their gymnastic unit and have quickly learned forward rolls, tripods, and headstands. They have also been introduced to two types of springboards and will soon learn how to vault. Additionally, the fourth grade class has begun lessons in conjunction with a NASA grant the school received. The class has used a springboard (purchased with grant money) to imagine what it might be like to be an astronaut dealing with gravity.

### **Kindergarten**

All the kindergartners continue to make excellent progress in reading. Some students are even reading books from the Magic Tree House series. The students complete activities such as book reports and word family trees. The class still enjoys reading a funny new sight word book each week. Each student is constantly adding new sight words to his/her vocabulary.

Working with money was the math highlight for the students this month. Students were introduced to pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, half dollars, and dollars. They practiced exchanging coins (ex. five pennies for one nickel) and used fake money to buy objects around the classroom. Students also continued to work in their Singapore workbooks.

In social studies the students studied presidents including George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. They enjoyed watching videos and reading books about these two presidents especially. Each student made a book showing what he/she learned about Abraham Lincoln. The class also learned about Johnny Appleseed.

The students finished their science unit on animals by assembling their own unique animal books. They also participated in an animal review game that showcased each student's knowledge of topics such as animal habitats, camouflage, and the needs of animals. The students are now acting as amateur meteorologists as they begin a unit on weather.

In art, each student made his/her unique snowman glyph. Glyphs are a pictorial form of data collection. Each student had to answer a series of snow related questions to determine how to put together his/her snowman glyph. The glyphs are on display outside of the kindergarten room. Stop by and see if you can decipher them.

### **1st Math**

This month the first graders were introduced to all kinds of measurement units. The objective of the introduction was to familiarize the children with the vocabulary that is associated with different kinds of measurement. They began with customary units of length—inch, foot, yard, and mile—and identifying the appropriate use of each unit. Next, they learned to read a thermometer, distinguishing Fahrenheit from Celsius temperatures. To see how thermometers change with the temperature, they first identified room temperature using personal thermometers. Then they heated the thermometer by grasping it with their hands. Once the temperature reached almost 90 degrees F., they went outside to watch how quickly the "mercury" dropped. The next lessons covered customary units of capacity—cup, pint, quart, and gallon.



### **1st Language Arts**

The first graders continue to hone their writing skills by modeling well-written stories. This month they focused on telling stories with a specific sequence by modeling *Pancakes, Pancakes* by Eric Carle and on writing stories with a moral by modeling *The Lion and the Mouse* by Aesop.

Congratulations to Sofia B. for publication of her poem about an imaginary animal in the February issue of *Spider* magazine. Sofia took advantage of an elective opportunity to write a poem and submit it for publication and her hard work and creativity paid off!

### **1st Spanish**

The first graders practiced how to ask and answer questions regarding animals. They also learned the correct pronunciation and spelling of new words. The children liked to answer questions about the colors of the animals and their favorite animals. They made their own farm, and they learned a new song called "Mi Tio Tiene Una Granja." The first graders worked hard and enjoyed the challenges.

### **1st-2nd Reading**

Instead of ringing in the New Year, the first and second graders read in the New Year! On December 20th, the children read for 2,013 seconds (33 minutes, 33 seconds). They are avid readers! The two classes also participated in a service project sponsored by Scholastic Book Club. This children's reading initiative was designed to motivate children to read at home (no problem for our students!) and to get books into the hands of children in need. For each 20 minutes that a child read, Scholastic donated a book to charity (Paws for Healing, Reach Out and Read, Save the Children, Lisa Libraries). Birchwood students proved to America that they indeed love to read. They read more than 11,000 minutes and 564 books were donated on their behalf.

### **1st-2nd Computer**

The 1st and 2nd graders have been working on expanding their skills in Microworlds Jr. They have been programming their turtles to respond when they see a traffic signal. This is a great way to create games and turn things on and off in their program. They have learned how a turtle can react to many different things. They can do something when they see a color or touch another turtle. It is a way for the students to be creative and try new things in their projects.

### **1st-2nd Science**

The young astronomers finished studies of space in December and January. They learned many cool facts about each planet (and the dwarf planets, too!). The nonfiction series *Your Mission to...* by Christine Zuchora-Walske and Scott Burroughs guided our journey through the solar system (there's a book for each planet). They're great books - check them out.

Meanwhile, at home, students have been busy creating space-themed projects to display at Science Night (Friday, February 22 at 7 pm). Some are also eagerly tackling the optional activities - a Science Fair project (like the 5-8 graders) and/or an entry for the 3 R's Photo Contest sponsored by the Cuyahoga County Solid Waste District, reminding students how important it is to reduce, reuse, and recycle.

### **1st-2nd Social Studies**

The first and second graders recently completed an informative unit on Colonial Williamsburg. They created colonial store signs and horn books and bartered with their classmates for small items that they brought from home. The unit culminated with a colonial party where children had the opportunity to sample colonial food, play tangrams, pluck or drum homemade instruments, and listen to George Washington's favorite songs played on instruments from that time period.

### **2nd Math**

Similar to the first graders, the second graders also went through a unit on measurement. The unit built on the basic facts that were learned in the first grade. The lessons included the units of the customary and metric systems, covering length, weight, and capacity. As an optional challenge, the second graders were given two weeks to memorize all of the units and their related equivalents in both the customary and metric systems. There were nine children who took the challenge. Five of them successfully memorized all of the facts with 100% accuracy.

### **2nd Language Arts**

To celebrate the arrival of winter, the students wrote winter themed acrostic poems. Topics ranged from snow to hockey, with everyone succeeding in composing a descriptive poem that instantly brings winter to mind. Students also wrote stories modeled after the book *White Snow, Bright Snow* by Alvin Tresselt. Each student picked either a weather event or a season to write about. Their stories followed the model stories format and described what happens before, during, and after the event.



### **2nd Spanish**

The second graders enjoyed working on “Vamos a jugar en la casa” or “Let’s go play at home.” They memorized the new words and answered what children say when they go to a toy store. This group is energetic and creative. It is a pleasure to work with them.

### **3rd Spanish**

Students learned vocabulary about “La hora” (time) and daily activities. They were able to read and understand silly sentences and write their own. For example, one child wrote: “I am 9:00 o’clock, and I am a giraffe in the zoo.” They are an imaginative group who had a good time writing and laughing.

### **3rd Social Studies**

After studying for their states and capitals quiz on the Midwestern United States, the third graders worked hard to study for their first Social Studies midterm. They learned how to fill in a study guide, including concise definitions and facts about the most important vocabulary, people, and places in Chapter 7 of their text book. They also reviewed a lot of important map skills, such as using intermediate directions to locate places on a map, labeling hemispheres, and using a scale to measure distances. The third graders also discussed the importance of Martin Luther King Jr. and had fun creating their own memorial for civil rights.

### **3rd Math**

This month the third graders began a geometry unit. They learned that the word “geometry” comes from two Greek words that, when combined, literally mean, “to measure the earth.” One of the most difficult parts of geometry is remembering all of the vocabulary. The children were familiar with many of the terms, having learned them in second grade, so the first lessons were a review of such things as lines, line segments, and rays. Next, they learned how to measure angles using a protractor. This was a new skill and proved somewhat challenging. After becoming adept at it, however, the children were challenged to correctly draw angles of given measurements, again using a protractor. This month the third graders participated in their first Continental Math League contest. This national contest challenges students with non-typical problems. There are six problems and the children are given 30 minutes to complete them. Awards are given for the top scores: Gold Medal (6/6), Silver Medal (5/6), and Bronze Medal (4/6). There were six third graders who qualified for awards: Earning gold was **Praveen K**, earning silver were **Paul A**, **Neige D**, and **Josh S**, and earning bronze were **Abeedah H** and **Nathan S**.

### **3rd-4th Reading**

The third graders have been devouring fairytales and folktales. They learned about the difference between fairytales and folktales and identified the main characters and story line in each. They had to differentiate between “good” and “bad” characters in the story, describe the role of each character, and retell the ending of the story. As the day of the poetry show nears, the third graders have begun to focus on preparing their lines, motions, and props for the show. They are excited to share their hard work with everyone.

Over the last few weeks, the fourth graders have been on a journey with Lewis and Clark! They have made many discoveries on their trip and have recorded their adventures in a journal. Congratulations to **Alex M** who placed third in the poetry contest we entered for *Cricket* magazine. Congratulations to **Isabella I**, **Eric H**, and **Julie** as well who received honorable mention in the same competition. All four of their poems, which are about their goals, can be found hanging in the third and fourth grade wing. All of the fourth graders have been working hard to prepare for the poetry show and are excited to showcase their efforts.

### **3rd-4th Science**

To finish their studies of space, the third and fourth grade students each chose a planet to research, either individually or with a partner. Using nonfiction books and internet sources, they took pages of notes in class in order to become the resident “expert” on a planet. They used this information to create the product of their choice (posters and game boards were the most popular). After a lot of hard work, students presented their planetary findings to classmates, who took notes on what they learned during each presentation.

Many students also chose to research a different topic or make another product at home. Some of these “extra effort” projects included research on black holes, the Milky Way, and Uranus’s rings, along with models, mobiles, and more games. Students enjoyed playing the games they’d created, such as “Mars’O’Monopoly,” “Race to Saturn,” and “Uranus or Not Uranus Darts.” As their mid-term assessment, students were asked to list the planets in order and give facts about each.

Finally, the young astronomers last tasks were to 1) calculate then create scale models of the planets and 2) calculate then measure the planets’ scaled distances from the sun. The students were amazed by what they saw! (To give you an idea... Mercury’s scaled diameter is 1 cm while Jupiter’s is 28.6 cm (1 cm: 5,000 km). Likewise, Earth’s scaled distance from the sun is 16.6 cm while Neptune’s is 499.8 cm (1 cm: 9,000,000 km.))

### **3rd-4th Computer**

The third and fourth graders have been working on typing skills. The third graders are working on reaching a goal of 15 words per minute and the fourth graders have a goal of 20 words per minute. Many have exceeded this goal and use their skills when typing stories. We have been practicing using proper technique, finger placement, and accuracy.



### **3rd-5th Language Arts**

In preparation for their midterm exams as well as the expository writing that they will engage in during the second semester for the Pasta Tales and Creative Communication contests, all students spent several weeks organizing and writing one-paragraph (third graders) and two-paragraph essays (fourth and fifth graders). In addition, story-modeling continues with fifth grade students modeling Robert McCloskey's classic *Time of Wonder* and the younger students writing their own creative take-offs on the hilarious tale *Parents in the Pigpen*, *Pigs in the Tub* and the tender story *Amber on the Mountain*. The classroom library continues to expand as more books for story modeling will soon be ordered with the grant money received from Creative Communication in January.

### **4th Math**

As the third quarter approaches, the fourth graders are ready to begin working with fractions, one of the largest units of the year. They began this month by learning some of the basic skills that are required for learning advanced fraction operations. The first of these skills was finding the greatest common factor (GCF) and least common multiple (LCM) of whole numbers. (With fractions, the least common multiple becomes the lowest common denominator of two fractions. The greatest common factor becomes the divisor by which a fraction can be simplified.) It proved challenging to distinguish between GCF and LCM, but after lots of practice, the children are becoming adept at it. A small group of fourth graders have proven to be proficient with fractions and are now completing a unit on rates, ratios, and proportions. They also had a lesson on scale drawings and were shown how ratios are used in scale drawings.

This month the fourth graders participated in the third Continental Math League contest of the year. Earning gold awards were **Alex D**, **Alex M**, and **Shruthi R**. Earning silver was **Lilah N**, and earning bronze, **Zuha J** and **Rishav R**.

### **4th Spanish**

The students studied "Objects of the Classroom" by playing a guessing game that combined activities with the verb "to go" to answer questions in future tense. They also wrote a note about what they and their friends are going to do on Saturday. It was a very interesting activity that required a lot of imagination. This group takes risk and is learning extremely well.

### **4th Social Studies**

The fourth graders have been studying the Midwestern United States. After taking their test on the states and capitals of this region, they learned about the importance of cities such as Chicago, IL, Detroit, MI, and Gary, IN. They honed their study skills as they prepared for their midterm on the key terms, people, and places of this region. The fourth graders also reviewed the important map skills they have learned so far this year such as locating cities on a map using latitude and longitude and using a map legend to read a map. They also had fun hearing part of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and creating a civil rights memorial of their own.

### **5th Science**

Fifth graders learned the scientific method to conduct original inquiry based research. The teacher taught and guided the students through each step of the process. Students decided their hypothesis, variables, materials, and procedure. After deciding on a research question each student used books, encyclopedia, journals, and the web to write a review of the literature. They learned how to organize a notebook, take notes in an outline format, and then to write their paper from the outline. The next big step will be to look at their results, analyze and present them.

### **5th Reading**

As the class is winding up the Betsy Byars unit, all the hard work will be compiled into what we're calling an author scrapbook. Included are the *Blossom Promise* story map, several analysis worksheets and a journal entry for *The Pinballs*, a letter to Betsy, symbolic items...This will be completed in the new year. The next literature unit will be *Amos Fortune, Free Man*. Concurrent with *Amos Fortune*, students will be reading nonfiction pieces on the topic of slavery as they learn about 18th century America. Students are currently reading *Amos Fortune: Free Man*, a true story about a slave who lived in the North at the time of the Revolutionary War. This book traces the journey of a gentle, religious man, who wages his own war at the same time Americans seek their freedom from British tyranny. Amos buys himself free, then buys others slaves' freedom as well, and leaves a lasting legacy to the townspeople of Jaffrey, New Hampshire. Each student is keeping his/her own journal of Amos's life and character.

### **5th Spanish**

The fifth graders liked to express their ideas: they used adjectives to write sentences describing the funny costumes that "The Explorer's Club" wore. They also compared animals using the expressions "más que" (more than) and "menos que" (less than) and had a great time completing a chart about all types of hair after reading a paragraph and translating it. This group loves to read aloud, and they are very intrigued by the language.



## 5th-8th Math

### Math Olympiads Contest #3:

Gold Award (5 of 5 correct): **Avi, Farah.**

Silver Award (4/5): **Vinny, Pheby, Michael T, Ammar, William L., Anika, Rami, Sean, Julia, Abby, Jane.**

Bronze Award (3/5): **Dhweeja, Anna, John, Jack, Caroline, Kevin, Cameron, Mihir, Michael H, Nikhita, Maya D, Olivia, Steven S, Layla.**

School Leaders after 3 contests: **Farah 15, Vinny 14, Avi, 14, Dhweeja 13, Ammar 13, Anika 13, William 13, Julia 12, Kevin, 13.**

### Continental Math League Contest #3:

Gold Award (6 of 6 correct): **Dhweeja, Anthony, William, Anika, Amir, Avi, Kevin, Farah, Maya D, Jane, Derzan.**

Silver Award (5/6): **Vinny, Prathna, Ammar, Haley, John, Grace, Jack, Caroline, Cameron, Mihir, Nikhita, Julia, Channin.**

Bronze Award (4/6): **Rami, Megan S, Jad, Olivia, Tejal,**

School Leaders after 3 contests: **Dhweeja 18, William 18, Farah 18, Vinny 17, Pheby 17, Ammar 17, Anika 17, Mihir 17, John 16, Anthony 16, Avi 16, Derzan 15, Cameron 15, Maya D, 15,**

## 5th-6th Computer

The fifth and sixth graders have been working on their typing skills. We have been practicing using proper technique, finger placement and increasing speed. The students are working on achieving 25 words per minute for 5th grade and 30 words per minute in 6th grade. Many have already exceeded this goal and have found that typing is an essential skill to have.

### 5th-6th Computer - Logo Programming

The Logo programming students have been working learning programming concepts, such as variables and loops. They have done some programs that create beautiful graphic art and other programs that are simple games.

## 6th Language Arts

In the midst of all things language arts, the sixth graders worked once a week for most of the quarter to finalize their submissions for Letters About Literature, a national competition where students explain how a piece of literature gave them “wings” in some particular way. Each student came up with genuine lessons learned or rich perspectives gained from a wide range of books. For example, students saw the world apart the ho-hum doldrums in *The Phantom Toolbooth*, learned to work harder from *Hunger Games*, enjoyed the spark to read from Gordon Korman’s series, set and articulated goals from *Dreamsleeves*, received consolation from *Everything on a Waffle*, and even learned about warfare and the workings of a soldier in *The Things They Carried*. Every letter is worthwhile reading, so come and browse in the south wing of the second floor.

## 6th Reading

The paragraph writing in which students have been engaged is one important component for the unit *The Door in the Wall*. This has proven to be both an excellent student exercise and an informative evaluative tool. Students have written five paragraphs corresponding to the five sections of the book. The writing is an indicator of student comprehension, and requires analysis and synthesis skills. A final writing piece will explore the symbolism of the book title and how this connects with theme. All this will be put together in a book format which also includes information about castles, a contextual setting picture, and an illumination. I’ll let you ask your children what an illumination is!

The class did a quick read of *The Big Wave by Pearl Buck*. In this story created around the setting of tsunamis, earthquakes, and volcanoes in Japan, students discovered how Jiya matured amidst the tragedy of losing his family to the “big wave”. Kino’s father helps Jiya realize how important it is to treasure and enjoy life even more when living with danger, and Jiya grows to become a responsible, courageous man. Currently, students are reading *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. They are enjoying Twain’s humorous style that is also filled with great imagery. In addition, paragraph summaries are being written for each assignment, which is several chapters long. At the conclusion of the unit, each student will contribute a “letter to the editor” and the class will put together its own edition of the *St. Petersburg Chronicle*. Finally, poems will be written and dedicated to Tom, as “hymns” to his boyhood.

## 6th Science

The sixth graders learned the scientific method last year, and, for the most part, remembered the steps. In fact, they could not wait to get started on their science fair projects. They have completed the literature search and each “expert” has written a review of the literature to educate others. Several students decided to take their projects to the Akron District Science Day in March. They also learned about the three domains of living things and how cells are organized.

## 6th Spanish

Students are learning how to order food at a restaurant. As part of this lesson, students will go to a Mexican restaurant to order food and interview the waiters. They are working very hard memorizing the name of the food and preparing specific questions to ask the people at the restaurant. They show a very positive attitude.

## 7th Science

After the NASA presentation the seventh grade class used the next days to brainstorm and research what it would take to travel to Mars and live there. They showcased their research by creating a Mars website. In December they studied motion and re-examined Newton’s three laws. What they learned in the textbook will be applied later this spring as they build and test water rockets.



### **7th Reading**

Examining point of view in the novel, *The Light in the Forest*, students engaged in lively discussions as to why True Son's "head and heart are Indian but his blood is white." Furthermore, they debated how the book's title depicts the plot or theme of the book. Based on these discussions, students crafted paragraphs that could articulate their positions. Following this, each student chose a different book from this era and held small group discussions on point of view, conflict, and character relationships. In addition, the class has begun Junior Great Books and utilizes some reading class time to read and discuss journal articles on Future Problem Solving topics and to take notes from their research resources for their History Day projects.

### **7th Spanish**

This month's theme was "School Life in Spain and Latin America." Thus, students learned what children do in school and after school, and they discovered what they have in common with the children from other countries. They also read two more stories from the book *Mayan Safari* and completed writing assignments on those readings.

### **7th-8th Social Studies**

Students have wrapped up their final units of study for second quarter in preparation for the midterm exams. The seventh graders covered an in-depth unit on the Constitution. The students learned the basic structure of the document, along with some of its finer points. The class delved into the first ten amendments and discussed their application to our lives today. The 8th graders finished an overview of WWI, looking at the events leading up to it as well as the consequences of the war. They examined a variety of effective propaganda techniques used by the government during the war to generate support for the war effort among Americans. They learned that many of those techniques are in use today in modern propaganda/advertisements.

As we start the 3rd quarter the focus in both classes turns to History Day. Students have been doing research for the past few months on their chosen topics. Each student will go through the process of outlining their notes in preparation for writing a research paper. Following that, work will begin on their final projects: websites, documentaries, papers, exhibits, or performances.

### **8th Science**

During the second quarter, students studied genetics. They used the text and several programs by Mr. Andersen to learn the basics. They were able to solidify and apply their knowledge through many simulations. They attacked one chapter by writing an outline of the material and then used those outlines to write about the material. Lastly, they studied a genetic disease, wrote a short paper, and presented the material through a PowerPoint, Prezi, or poster presentation.

### **8th Reading**

Students spent time in small group discussions over a few days in order to probe the deeper meanings in their books by Madeleine L'Engle. They came up with perceptive theme statements that dealt with issues such as individual identity and how "naming" humanizes people or how small choices have great impact. It is impressive to read how these students portrayed their logic in short essays, so these will be posted outside the reading room. Currently, the class is reading two short novels by John Steinbeck (*The Pearl* and *The Red Pony*) and are fascinated by the writer's use of symbolism, allegory, and vivid description. This unit will culminate in student-produced visual drawings that coincide with written imagery. As with the 7th graders, class sessions also include Junior Great Books discussions and nonfiction readings/discussions related to Future Problem Solving and History Day content.

### **8th Spanish**

Students studied parts of the body and talked about daily routines using reflexive verbs. They also prepared to "go camping" and enjoy fun outdoor activities in Spain and Latin America, developing a spirit of adventure. This group has great potential to become fluent Spanish speakers.

### **7th-8th Latin**

The seventh grade Latin students have been working hard on noun-adjective agreement as well as adding new verb forms to their repertoire. Their Latin vocabularies are growing as well. The eighth grade students recently completed a taxing study of how the Latin verb system works. We temporarily set vocabulary aside so that they could understand and apply their new knowledge of verb construction and principal parts. Their midterm exams demonstrated that they had mastered this material; now we will launch into a period of vigorous reading and vocab. Come see the mini-stories in Latin and Greek in the upper hallway!

### **7th-8th Computer**

The seventh and eighth graders have been working through self-paced tutorials on learning to program in JavaScript. This has been a challenge for the students and they have been excited to learn such advanced concepts. Coming up the students will be laying out and designing the school yearbook.

### **6th-8th Future Problem Solving**

Students are currently studying the topic of "Megacities" for the State Bowl Qualifying Problem. Please ask your child to tell you about the issues. They are doing a lot of reading, but the ideas will solidify in their heads much more, the more they discuss. You will no doubt have some insights that will help them too. They are encouraged to have car and dinner conversations. Teams will sit down to do this packet on February 28.



## **Specials/Awards/Contests:**

### **2013 Regional Scholastic Award Winners**

Ten entries from Birchwood middle grade students received recognition from the 2013 Regional Scholastic Writing Awards. Selected from a total 292 pieces from local participants in seventh through twelfth grade, Birchwood received ten of the twelve awards presented to seventh and eighth graders. In its 90th year, the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers tracked students with creativity and talent through the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards.

Birchwood students submitted 27 narrative pieces in various categories like memoir/personal essay, short story, science fiction, fantasy, or flash fiction (shorter than 1400 words). The winning entries were chosen by the panelists for creativity, technical skill, and emerging voice. Students whose work was recognized were invited to attend the award ceremony and reception at the Cleveland Institute of Art on January 12 where the winning pieces from the Cleveland region were on display with many of the art entries.

Congratulations to these students for their incredible achievement:

**Maya F**, Silver Award, "Hope," Short Story - A historical fiction piece portraying the life of a homeless adolescent around the Cleveland area before and after she encountered Jane Edna Hunter and the Settlement House.

**Adam I**, Silver Award, "Sleeper Agent," Science Fiction - A futuristic scenario of a military agent who uncovered treachery only to be surprised by the gravity of his own actions.

**John**, Honorable Mention, "Changes," Memoir - A reflection of the preparation, turmoil, thrill, and rewards of a first deer hunt.

**Dhweeja**, Honorable Mention, "Trip to Kasi," Memoir - An experience of stark contrast between a religious journey against the backdrop of reality

**Prathna**, Honorable Mention, "Resolve," Short Story - After a decade of self-training, a double agent tried to thwart suspicions about his actions.

**Vinayak K**, Honorable Mention, "Resistance," Flash Fiction - Based on a true account, a historical fiction depicting the psyche and actions of a Jewish Nazi resistance fighter in the Ghetto.

**Pheby**, Honorable Mention, "Breaking Point," Short Story - A young girl inadvertently uncovered certain truths in her sister's journal she had to grapple with.

**Pheby**, Honorable Mention, "Living in Fiction," Fantasy - The adventures of a little rich girl in a fairy-tale world made her temporarily forget her loneliness.

**Megan P**, Honorable Mention, "Superman," Flash Fiction - Amidst family turmoil and abuse, a young boy tried to cope.

**Haley**, Honorable Mention, "Ghosts of Sorrow, Ghosts of People," Short Story - As if the hardships of his mother's cancer and new foster living conditions were not enough, this young adult had to confront a solicitous, philosophy-spouting foster sister.

Celebrate writing. Use the parent lounge to come enjoy the writing of these students and that of the other seventh and that of the other seventh and eighth graders in the south wing of second floor.

### **Power of the Pen**

Students competed at Columbia Middle School on January 19 for the district Power of the Pen against 22 other west side middle schools. Congratulations to the eighth grade team who took the first place trophy: **Anthony C, Prathna, Pheby, Ammar, Megan P, Michael T**. Individually, **Ammar L** received a Best of Rounds award and the second place individual trophy, **Pheby** placed eighth, and **Anika** earned 16th place - among the eighth and seventh grade top 20 placements, respectively. The top 50% of all contestants will go on to the regional competition in March.

A big thank you to **Kim Vlastaris** and **Drs. Mustafa and Magrey** who helped transport the students and provided them with much-needed nourishment.

### **Creative Communications Poetry Awards**

Students in seventh and eighth grades submitted poems to the Fall Poetry Contest sponsored by Creative Communication, a national organization that publishes poetry based upon selective standards. Congratulations to the students who will be published in Ohio edition of *A Celebration of Poets*:

7th graders: **Jack , Grace, Amir, William L, Anika.**

8th graders: **Anthony C, Dhweeja, Anna, Vinayak, Pheby, Ammar, Michael T, Haley, Megan P.**



### **Specials/Awards/Contests:**

#### **National Geographic Geography Bee**

On December 17, Birchwood held the school level bee to determine which student would represent the school in the next round of competition. Prior to this, the fourth to the eighth grade classes held class level bees to determine two competitors from each grade. Winners from the fourth grade were **Lilah** and **Erhan**. At the 5th grade level, the winners were **Jane** and **Alia B**. From the 6th grade, **Olivia** and **Sean V** competed. In the seventh grade, **Caroline** and **William L** were the class winners. In the eighth grade, **Prathna** and **Dhweeja** advanced to the school bee. These ten competitors then faced off in a series of very difficult geography questions. After a close competition, we had a winner! Placing third was **Lilah**. In second place was **Prathna**. In first place and advancing to the next round of competition was **Jane** who then took a very challenging written geography test with 70 multiple choice questions. National Geographic will select the top 100 scores in Ohio to compete in the state bee in April. Congratulations to all!

#### **AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY (ACS) AND NATIONAL CHEMISTRY WEEK**

The Cleveland ACS sponsors three related contests for students in Kindergarten through twelfth grade. Each contest requires that students experiment, record observations, and organize his or her thoughts to answer age-appropriate questions. The theme for October 2012 was Nanotechnology: The Smallest BIG Idea in Science.

**Shruthi** and **Sophia** were the winners of the Kindergarten through fifth grade contest, "Scratch and Sniff." Students made their own scratch-and-sniff stickers and tested to see how they compared with purchased Scratch-and-Sniff stickers. They recorded observations for seven days and answered questions about their findings.

The sixth grade winner was **Cameron** and the seventh grade winner was **Amir** (2nd year in a row!). Both boys experimented to create a "smart paper". They created a pH indicator out of cabbage juice and then used a chemical reaction to create a carbon paper. Lastly, they submitted their observations and analysis of the process to the contest.

### **Fine Arts continuation from front page**

#### **Drama**

As part of the Birchwood School's drama program, each class (2nd, 4th, 6th, and 8th) has been learning a short theatre scene. When teaching a performance art, I believe it's best done through a practical experience and it's important that every student gets their "feet wet" by performing within the skit. Whether their acting part is large or small it's essential that the students understand how the needs of the group are more important than the needs of the individual. Everyone is focused and excited to show off what they've been learning during rehearsals.

Bill Morgan is the Artistic Manager of the Cleveland Hearing & Speech Center. He controls the day to day activities of SignStage, a Theatrical program that focuses on education through performance.

#### **Dance**

I wanted to introduce Dance to the kids in a fun and creative manner. We looked at a broad scope of Dance both historically and socially. Each class either focused on a different dance era in history or focused on the process of dance choreography. The first graders learned about dance as a movement just like hopping or skipping. We worked on coordination and using shapes and levels in our dance. The third grade class learned how to create dance. Each student came up with his or her own moves then learned how to collaborate with their peers and create dance together. This class sure is creative! For the fifth graders, I introduced line dancing. We took a look at the history of line dancing; both country line dancing and hip hop line dancing. The class had fun learning the different dances such as: the Cleveland Shuffle, the Electric Slide, the Cupid Shuffle, and the Cha-Cha Slide. To end the time together we created our own line dance. The seventh graders and I took a trip in time to look at social dance in history and culturally. With a broad overview of dance in 19th century European courts, through Ireland all the way to Latin America, the students were introduced to the meaning and importance of social dancing and what it looks like today. It has been a pleasure to dance with these students!

Kayla Matanick began studying dance at the age of 12. Ms. Matanick studied Ballet, Pointe, Jazz, Tap, Irish step dancing, African and African Caribbean, Modern and Contemporary. She earned a degree from Bowling Green State University in Dance, and Psychology in 2010. She has taught in dance studios, schools and youth camps working with a variety of age and experience. Currently she is pursuing a graduate degree in Nursing at Cleveland State University.



## CREATIVITY

### “Mess Finding” – The Convergent Stage

The creative process alternates between divergent thinking and convergent thinking. During the divergent phase of “mess finding” you should have developed long lists of possible areas for engagement (my use of the pronoun “you” includes parent and child). During convergence, we focus on two or three specific problems or opportunities for which you will forge creative solutions. Isaksen and Treffinger write (1983) “Converging during ‘mess finding’ involves evaluating or rating the appropriateness and significance of the variety of mess statements you generated during the divergent phase.” Here are some general guidelines to follow.

First, make sure you determine personal ownership. Ask yourself, “Is this opportunity or problem something for which I have responsibility or decision-making authority?” If not then choose a different challenge to work on. This is the “take charge” question and makes you the determining factor as to whether or not your problem is resolved or challenged achieved. “Taking charge” is a central theme of creativity and leads to innovation.

Assuming you have ownership, now check for the presence of passion or resolve. Do you really want to do this? Are you willing to submit this challenge to systematic efforts to achieve a solution? To what extent are you willing to invest time? Are you willing to make sacrifices? The level of your motivation, coupled with your sense of ownership, will determine the outcome. If you don’t have a high level of motivation, then find something else to focus on. If you are not driven to face this challenge or problem, you will give up quickly. Nothing will happen.

Personal creativity requires ownership and motivation. These two qualities have the power to “make stuff happen.” Tony Wagner notes in *Creating Innovators* that America’s innovation has been powered by people of self-sufficiency and self-determination. Making a similar point, Daniel Pink, author of *Drive*, concludes that innovators have a desire to somehow “make a difference.” The message in creativity literature is consistent. Ownership and motivation drives creativity. Possessing these two driving factors, people from all walks of life are capable of tremendous productivity.

Assume that you have found two or three items from your “mess” for which you have both ownership and motivation. Let us now apply some creative thinking skills to further define your challenge.

Start by assessing your familiarity with the challenge. How much do you know about this area? If you want to get better grades, are you familiar with the skills and characteristics required for excelling in reading, math or writing? If you want to become a better basketball player, are you aware of the skill standards for shooting, dribbling, or passing that are required to make the high school team? What practices or strategies do high achieving students or athletes possess that you need to learn?

Without assessing familiarity, children often have wild, unrealistic ideas about their challenges. I remember when a seventh grade student decided he wanted to play football for one of Cleveland’s high-powered Catholic high school teams. He stood 5’4”, weighed 145 lbs., and was a slow runner. The physical attributes of his mom and dad suggested his physical stature would not change much. Given these circumstances, his chances for success were slim to none. But had he done his “homework” on the subject, he would have discovered that he probably did not have the physical attributes necessary to play on this high school team. He needed to find another challenge.

A few years ago one of my students determined that he wanted to improve his mathematics grade. I asked him, “What will that require?” He gave a very generic answer, “Work harder. Study more. Do better on tests.” I pressed him for specifics, “What does work harder mean? What does ‘study more’ look like? What kind of tests are you having trouble on? What are your weaknesses in math?” He shrugged his shoulders, puzzled. He did not know enough about his challenge to formulate a definitive problem for which he could construct a plan of action. He lacked familiarity with his challenge.

For any problem or challenge, you will need to ask yourself, “What do I know about this subject? What do I need to know? What would I like to know?” You will not be able to frame the definition of your problem or challenge if you do not understand it. On the contrary, the more you learn about your challenge, the more you understand it, the more you will be able conceive of a plan that will help your attain your objective.

Next month: Building knowledge and defining the challenge

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