



Birchwood Clipboard

The Lion's Roar

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MAY 2013 Vol 19, Issue 9

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Parent Committee
Meeting, May 9 @ 2 PM

Parent Night & Awards
Display May 15 @ 7 PM

Parent Meeting for
incoming 7th & 8th
grade students
"high school choice"
May 18 @ 6:30 PM at
the Debelak's home

Food for Thought

HEDONIC ADAPTATION AND THE NEED FOR GRATITUDE by Charles Debelak

In her recent book *The Myths of Happiness*, psychologist and professor at University of California Riverside, Sonja Lyubomirsky introduced me to the phrase "hedonic adaptation" and explained why it is a problem. Hedonic is the adjective form of hedonism, "the doctrine that pleasure is the chief good in life," and adaptation, "the sensory adjustment to the intensity or quality of stimulation." The phrase describes a universal human experience. We find pleasure. We are happy. Soon, however, we adapt to that pleasure and it no longer gives us the level of satisfaction we once had. We lose perspective. We are unsatisfied. We want more. We want something new and better. No matter how many pleasures we have in life, no matter how much money we have, no matter how comfortable our life has become, hedonic adaptation sets in. The ugly impulse of selfishness rears its head, "I want more!" If you don't see this phenomenon in yourself, perhaps you can see it in your children. From a worldwide context it is accurate to conclude that our children, raised in America, have a blessed life. Safety, security, food, shelter, clothing, and toys, toys, toys. Yet what is the result – hedonic adaptation. It is not enough. They want more. Don't be surprised. It is just how they are wired. Lyubomirsky suggests the best antidote to hedonic adaptation and the ugly selfishness it fosters, is to cultivate a life of gratitude. We should not be surprised when our children whine, complain and throw tantrums whenever they don't get what they want. After all, they are just human. Don't expect them to act any different from any other human being. But they do need to be reminded again and again and again of what they do have and how blessed they are. At any given moment, they may not appreciate your forced lessons on gratitude, but they need to hear it repeatedly. A habitual sense of gratitude gives life-long perspective about true happiness and mitigates the power and effects of hedonic adaptation.

Food For Thought Applied

Eighth Grade Students Community Service Week

Mrs. Tzeng and the eighth grade students spent a week in the community volunteering at various sites allowing them to see the needs in our neighborhood, awaken their gratitude for what they have, and inspire habits of "giving back." During the week the students assisted at the St. Augustine Hunger Center, the Bountiful Basement, the Cleveland Food Bank, Puritas HeadStart, and Rocky River Nature Center. Each student also composed an essay of reflection based on their experience. A heartfelt thanks to all the parents who helped make this week possible by volunteering! The students are still collecting donations to benefit MedWish International. If you would like to participate visit the Parents/Notes Home page on our website to get a complete list of items for donation.

Awards Preview

This month has proven to be one full of accomplishment and noteworthy success for the Birchwood students. **Alex M** won first prize in the State of Ohio in the Zaner-Bloser handwriting competition. The third grade class was notified that all their essays would be published in the upcoming *Creative Communication* publication along with 50% of the 5th and 6th grade students. **Dharma** was the first place winner in a *Cricket* magazine story-writing contest. **Asim, Tejal** and **Marta** were all awarded Honorable Mention in the same contest. **Abby, Christopher** and **Rae** were all winners in the national Letters about Literature contest, placing first, third and receiving Honorable Mention. The Latin I students, **Anika** and **William L**, were awarded with a blue ribbon and a certificate of achievement. **Pheby** and **Prathna** won summa, **Dhweeja, Vinayak** and **Michael T** were awarded maxima and **Ammar** won magna. Twenty-six students traveled to the Future Problem Solving State Bowl and an amazing seven students qualified to the international competition in June. The students traveling to Bloomington, Indiana are **Anika, John H, Vinayak, Maya, Julia F, Abby,** and **Farah**. Another 15 students attended the state level of the National History Day competition and Birchwood School had nine national finalists and one national alternate. The students who will be traveling to Washington, D.C. for this prestigious competition are **Ammar, John, Michael T, Adam I, Dhweeja, Maryum, Maya, Pheby,** and **Megan P**. See complete details inside.

Visits and Speakers

Dr. Mark Stewart, Birchwood parent and NASA employee, visited the school and worked with the 4th-8th grade science students with rocket designs and launches as part of a grant Birchwood received from NASA-Batelle. **Alison Garrigan**, who directed *The Tinderbox* produced by Talespinner Children's Theatre also made a visit after the 3rd and 4th grade students saw the adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's play. **Mrs. Elsady** visited to the kindergarten to speak and share about the Egyptian culture.



Class News

Preschool

The Birchwood preschool children have been exploring activities related to units on community, spring and exploring nature. We talked about the people in our neighborhood such as family, mail carriers, construction workers, teachers, fire-fighters, doctors, etc. The children used building materials around the room to build a town/city while working in small groups. We are also planning on exploring our neighborhood by visiting the community garden across Birchwood School's parking lot. In our dramatic play center the children had the opportunity to use the food and bags to "play market."

The preschool children have been exploring our natural playground every day. Searching for worms, slugs, snails, birds, and squirrels have been a huge source of delight. The children have been using their outdoor discovery table to make worm houses using dirt, leaves, grass, and sticks. On sunny days the playground has become the classroom. We used paper and crayons to make rubbing pictures, and used the tree bark, the fence, sand, and grass as surfaces to make designs on paper. We have been bringing our early readers outside to practice reading under the trees. Our math activities have included using bark and rocks to help us solve addition and subtraction problems. We have also taken an alphabet nature walk by pointing out objects in nature and stating their initial letters and sounds. We are looking forward to some more rainy days of splashing in puddles.

Kindergarten

The kindergarten students were hard at work this month. In language arts the students worked with punctuation marks. They learned when to use periods, question marks and exclamation marks at the end of sentences and to use periods after abbreviations. They also learned about the five W questions (who, what, when, where, and why) and how to use them in their writing. Students are reading more difficult books now, and they are writing their own books at home and in class. In math the students were introduced to the concept of multiplication as repeated addition. Some students already know some multiplication facts!

In social studies the class learned all about Egypt from special guest **Mrs. Elsady**. Everyone was very interested to learn about all the photographs and items she brought representing Egyptian culture. Students also read books and talked about different African cultures. They listened to the book *The Children of Mauritania* and compared the children in the book to children in the United States. The class came to the conclusion that all children around the world are happy to play with whatever they have.

Kindergarten cont'd

The kindergarten class celebrated Earth Day on April 22. Students enjoyed listening to environmental themed stories and brainstormed ways to help the earth. The highlight of the day was creating recycled art. Students used materials such as boxes, paper towel rolls, cloth, and plates to create their own original works of art. Special thanks to all the parents who sent in materials for this fun activity! In science the students began a unit on plants. They drew and labeled the parts of plants. They also observed soaked lima beans to look for root growth.

Kindergarten Computer

The kindergarten students have been working on building procedures or "trains" together. We have made simple shapes and then build other procedures that use those shapes. They have used colors, shapes, costumes, and sounds to create some wonderful projects and share them with each other.

1st Math

The first graders are hard at work on their unit on problem solving using addition and subtraction. They are using the *Singapore Math series, Challenging Word Problems* and they are indeed challenging. But all of the children are working hard and putting their skills to use, even solving multiple-step problems. They are becoming great problem solvers. Many are also learning multiplication facts, which is our next chapter in the book.

1st Language Arts

These young writers continued to hone their writing skills by learning about synonyms, antonyms and question writing. They practiced creating characters that match a setting and comparing and contrasting characters by modeling *Blueberries for Sal* by Robert McCloskey. They also wrote an original story based on a prompt about a dog who runs away from home. The students were encouraged to incorporate some of the many writing strategies learned this year. Their works were a delight to read.

1st-2nd Reading

The first and second graders finished class read-aloud books this month. The first graders were captivated by *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* by Beverly Cleary. In conjunction with the book, they learned about motorcycle design and created adventure maps related to the story. The second graders enjoyed listening to *A Llama in the Family* by Johanna Hurwitz and learning about llamas and Vermont. Some of them read other realistic fiction books by the author during independent reading time.



1st-2nd Computer

The first and second graders have been working on writing stories in Microsoft Word. They have written stories and poems in their language arts class. They loved writing and changing their fonts, colors and seeing their printed final results.

1st-2nd Science

Continuing with Earth science, students studied the water cycle and weather. The water cycle song (sung to the tune of "She'll Be Coming 'Round the Mountain") helped students to learn about evaporation, condensation and precipitation, and an experiment demonstrated these words in action. Before spring break, each of three cups was filled with 100 ml of water. One cup was put in the freezer, one was left on a table near the window, and the third was covered and left on the same table. Some students were pleased to see their hypotheses supported; others were somewhat surprised by the results. Next, students learned a few main types of clouds and explored the reasons for seasons. As a class, the first graders came up with motions for a poem called *My Tree, My Tree, All Year Long* and made special pictures of their favorite seasons. Second graders worked in groups to choreograph movements to the same poem, complete with props (poetry show style!).

1st-2nd Social Studies

After concluding their unit on pioneers, it was back to the present for the first and second graders. Using *The Armadillo from Amarillo* by Lynne Cherry as a guide, the students made booklets showing their place in the universe. They spent the rest of the month exploring our neighbor to the north, Canada. They learned about Canadian symbols and made Canadian flags. They created Mountie puppets and paraded them around the room to the beat of Canadian marches. As a concluding project, the students made dioramas and three dimensional pictures showing wildlife of Canada in their native habitats.

2nd Math

The second graders have begun a unit on identifying and naming fractions and mixed numbers. The unit began with an introduction using everyone's favorite fraction food, the pizza. Well no, not a real pizza, but at least a real-looking one. This pizza was used to show how the number of pieces determines the denominator and the designated parts, the numerator. After the concept of "fraction of a whole" was demonstrated, the children started working in two groups. The "beginners" group is learning to compare fractions and mixed numbers as well as performing simple addition of fractions, while the "advanced" group has begun learning how decimals and fractions are related.

2nd Language Arts

This month the second graders focused on writing descriptive paragraphs. Each student wrote a paragraph describing his/her favorite person or favorite place. They also enjoyed taking class outside one sunny day to write about something they observed. Students were encouraged to use their five senses to make their paragraphs as descriptive as possible. In addition, students wrote stories modeled after *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* by William Steig.

3rd Social Studies

The third graders have landed in the New World. They continue to experience the hardships Pilgrims experienced in the New World. Most recently, the students learned about the Pilgrims suffered from hunger and malnutrition. The Pilgrims were often unwilling to try new foods, even when they were hungry, because they were so used to English foods. The third graders participated in a survival activity where their survival depended on their willingness to try new foods. The third grade Pilgrims created a list of 21 unusual foods (that each member of the team would be willing to try). Each team had to cross off the foods that other teams had listed, and received an acre of food for every three unique food items they were able to list. Each team earned three acres of land or more.

3rd Math

The third graders recently began a unit on decimals. After a brief introduction that compared decimals to fractions, the "beginners" group learned decimal place value. They are now learning to compare and order decimals based on the value of the decimal. The "advanced" group is doing problem solving with decimals that involves identifying and comparing decimals as well as mixed operations, adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing.

3rd-8th Computer

Students have been learning a new programming tool called Tynker. It has similar instructions to Microworlds and helps the students. We are still learning the basics but it has been a challenging new tool for them to explore programming concepts. We are learning about loops, operators, sensors, reactions, and geometry.

3rd-4th Reading

The third and fourth graders had a great time on their field trip to the Talespinner Children's Theatre. They enjoyed watching an adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Tinderbox*. The costumes and props were colorful and creative, and the actors really made the book come alive. The director and co-director of the show, along with one of the actresses, came to Birchwood to talk to the students about some of the things that went into making the show. The third and fourth graders learned some tricks the actors used to "clown around" in the show, the reasons behind their music choices, and how some of the props and masks were created.



4th Math

The fourth graders are currently in the middle of a unit on geometry. This unit is something of a review to them, since many of the terms and concepts were introduced in younger grades. But it also builds upon the foundational concepts that were already learned. For example, in the third grade the children learned to identify different types of triangles, based on the length of their sides. This year they are learning to find the inside measures of the angles of a triangle. The current lesson introduces the children to pi, the mathematical number that is used for finding the circumference of a circle in relation to its diameter.

3rd-4th Science

Students wrapped up the geology unit as they studied weathering and erosion and the factors that cause each, including volcanoes and earthquakes. They learned about the process of fossilization and took a trip to the Cleveland Museum of Natural History for their World of Fossils program, during which students explored an assortment of fossils. For each group of fossils, the third and fourth graders were asked to 1) deduce if they came from a continental or oceanic environment, and 2) identify the time period for each group using the resources on display in the gallery. After lunch, students had more time to explore the museum. Thank you to all parent drivers.

This month students also learned about simple machines. An experiment's results were surprising - though an inclined plane reduces the force needed to move an object, it increases the distance covered, therefore not really making the "work" easier.

3rd-5th Language Arts

It has been an exciting month as results of the hard work students did during third quarter competitions poured in. **Alex M** achieved something no other Birchwood student had accomplished by winning first prize for the State of Ohio in the Zaner-Bloser handwriting competition. Wow! His win included a medallion for himself and a \$200 gift certificate for the school to purchase supplies to enhance Birchwood's handwriting program. The third graders were also thrilled to learn that Creative Communication, an essay-writing contest that usually accepts just over 40 percent of the student entries they receive, had accepted the work of the entire class for publication. Another wow! Their accomplishment opens the way for Birchwood to receive a free book containing the works of all our newly published authors and to apply for a \$250 grant to be used for the writing program. In February the fourth and fifth grade students entered the *Cricket* magazine story-writing contest, which had a Valentine's Day theme. **Dharma** emerged as the first place winner in this national competition for her story entitled "My Aunt Dagmar," a true account of visiting a dying relative as her family's last token of love. **Asim, Tejal** and **Marta** were awarded Honorable Mention awards for their stories about tokens of affection shared between locker mates, a Civil War couple, and a parent and child.

3rd-5th Language Arts Cont'd

Congratulations to these young authors whose work or names will be published in the May/June edition of the magazine. Last but certainly not least, fifth grader **Christopher** was chosen as the third place winner in the national Letters about Literature contest sponsored by the Center for the Book at the Cleveland Public Library. **Christopher** wrote a compelling letter to Bette Bao Lord, author of *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*. His touching missive about his father's struggle to succeed in America and his family's challenge to blend two cultures was honored on April 20 at the main branch of the library downtown along with the work of fellow Birchwood winners, **Abby** who won first place and **Rae**, who received Honorable Mention. Impressive work, young authors!

4th Social Studies

The fourth graders have begun a Transcontinental Railroad simulation. The classes are split into three teams (two teams in Clark, one in Lewis) and each student has been assigned an area of the development of transportation to study in-depth. The topics include roads, trails, railroads, canals, steamboats, the telegraph, and horses. The fourth graders have been reading articles, studying encyclopedias and books, answering various questions, and creating items to present to the class. In the next week, each team member will be required to present information to the entire class, teaching others about the topics he/she studied.

5th Science

Students worked part way through the chapter entitled "Earth, Moon and Sun." They practiced finding the main points and then, using those main points, they wrote about them. They began a review of the reason for the seasons and were totally surprised to find that many Harvard grads on a video clip they watched thought that the earth went around the sun in a large ellipse. The grads thought that in the summer the sun was closer to Earth and in the winter it was farther away. (Actually in the initial 5th grade survey, they held the same concept.)

5th Social Studies

Students have been learning the story of our country's beginning as well as the fascinating people that made it happen. They've enjoyed reading about the founding fathers along with the rugged men and women who spread out to settle the western edges of the country. The students have been writing numerous biographical sketches which they will then form into a Heroes Quilt, which will be displayed on parent night.



5th Reading

The class has begun reading *Big Red* by Jim Kjelgaard. In this animal fiction unit, we are studying plot with its rising action, climax, falling action, and conclusion. Students will complete a chart writing sub-problems as a series of questions and then analyzing which event is most critical and should be identified as the climax. Students are also exploring the theme of love and loyalty. We will conclude by writing a two to three paragraph essay. The class received a letter from Creative Communication stating that more than 50 percent of 5th and 6th graders have been accepted for publication, so we are eagerly awaiting further results!

5th-6th Computer - Logo Programming

Students have been using a game programming application developed by Microsoft called Kodu Game Lab. They have been thinking through how to program games, obstacles and the terrain. It has been exciting and challenging to make a great game. They have been working together to test their game and help each other work out their problems.

6th Reading

The class is reading *The Rats of NIMH*, which tells the story of Mrs. Frisby and then uses the flashback technique to tell the story of the rats. This makes the story very engaging as the two plots and two problems intersect and are solved. Students are working in small groups with guided discussion and will make a story map at the end of the unit. The class received a letter from Creative Communication stating that more than 50% of 5th and 6th graders have been accepted for publication, so we are eagerly awaiting further results!

6th Science

This past month students studied plants. They journaled and recorded the growth of peas and corn in the lab portion of their class and used microscopes to observe and identify the parts of seeds, embryos and flowers. Another thrust involved analyzing the reason for the seasons by graphing the monthly distance of earth from the sun, the number of daylight hours of cities in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, and the position of the sun in those cities. Graphing the data allowed them to see that it is really the directness of the sun's rays and the tilt of Earth's axis produced the seasons.

6th Social Studies

We've reached the Middle Ages with our look at long ago cultures. With this period of time comes many interesting topics to study, from castles and knights to the great artists of the Renaissance. Students have chosen one topic they really like on which to do more in-depth research and will write a five to seven page paper laying out their research findings. It's a long learning process which will help prepare them for the History Day competition in 7th grade.

6th-8th Language Arts

For a couple of weeks students have shifted their focus from expository writing to non-fiction narratives, specifically memoirs. Taking time to recall past experiences, students are writing about their own escapades after exposure to models from other writers. They are learning in different degrees in the various grades to describe the incidents, find critical moments to elaborate, discover something about themselves, and make meaning of the experiences.

Seventh graders will soon begin their Explore Project to research and educate one another about a topic of choice, while the eighth graders will embark on a week-long community service to various organizations in the neighborhood. In addition their in-house service project involves collecting medical supplies for MedWish; please see how you can help them.

7th-8th Latin I

On March 15, the seventh and eighth grade Latin students all took the National Latin Exam (NLE), given by the American Classical League, and each Birchwood student placed in the contest. The NLE tests not only grammar and reading comprehension but also etymology and Roman culture. At the Intro to Latin level, which the seventh graders took, **Anika** earned a blue ribbon and an outstanding achievement certificate and **William L** received an achievement certificate. The Latin I level, taken by the eighth graders, has a different set of awards with traditional Latin names: summa cum laude (with highest honor), maxima cum laude (with very great honor), magna cum laude (with great honor), and cum laude (with honor). **Pheby** and **Prathna** won summa; **Dhweeja**, **Vinayak** and **Michael T** won maxima; **Ammar** won magna. Congratulations to all of them!

7th Reading

After reading *The Call of the Wild*, students are branching off to books of choice on the theme of survival. The choices range across genres, challenging students to identify survival themes that are less evident than just surviving the elements. Surviving what? Was the challenge of an outward or an inward nature? What resources and strategies were employed to survive? They are preparing one-minute talks in which they pose as a character in the book and provide a character reference for the main character based upon salient survival characteristics. The class is viewing the musical *Oliver!* and discussing the survival theme as it is conveyed via award-winning cinematography, music, dance, and drama. The final two units of the year will be 1) *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*, a Newbery historical fiction book set in the 20th century South which portrays the inspiring story of an African American family overcoming prejudice through strength and virtue. 2) Highly esteemed fantasy author, Lloyd Alexander, and his hero who also overcomes obstacles through the learning of virtue. In the midst of all this, students will prepare speeches to present at the Speech Fest on May 22! Aren't these readers awesome!



7th Science

After research and design students built paper rockets and bottle rockets. Next they built stomp rocket launchers and water bottle launchers to test their rockets. The stomp rockets (powered by a burst of air from a quick “stomp” on a pop bottle at the end of a PVC pipe) flew almost three stories high. The bottle rockets, spewing water as they rose, stayed in the air for 2 to 6 seconds after only five pumps of air from a bicycle pump. Later **Mr. Petropouleas** loaned them launchers to try. They worked well; the rockets flew, probably, 300 feet in the air.

7th Social Studies

Following the district History Day competition in March, the seventh graders continued their American journey with a look at the forces that shaped the Industrial Revolution in the early 1800s and the rise of the factory system. Coming up, they'll be learning about some of the reformers that arose in the mid-1800s, and after some biographical research, they will write a short “autobiography” about a reformer’s life. The year will finish up with a unit on the Civil War.

7th Spanish

Sports are very popular in the world but the popularity varies from one country to another. The seventh graders worked on “deportes” conversing about sports, describing uniforms and identifying colors. They compared team sports in the U.S. and Spanish speaking countries. The theme invited students to relate personally to the material and encouraged them to perceive their own experience from a global perspective. During grammar class they worked on the present tense of stem-changing verbs such as *interesar*, *aburrir*, and *gustar*.

8th Science

The focus of this unit was skin, muscle, and bone. It is a unit that focuses on the anatomy, physiology and health of each organ. Students observed the tendons, ligaments, muscles, and bones from a chicken leg. They cut the femur in half to observe the different kind of bone and the marrow. Soon they will dissect a chicken wing to observe how the muscles work together with tendons and ligaments in moving the wing.

8th Social Studies

The eighth graders returned to the 1900s following the district History Day competition in March with a unit on the Great Depression. Along with looking at that pivotal decade students spent some time looking at the rise of jazz. Students first spent a class learning about the history of jazz in America and listening to music from Jazz at Lincoln Center. After spending time on their own to listen to a variety of artists, students shared some of the songs they listened to with the class. Students have now begun a final unit on the remaining decades of the 20th century. Broken into decade groups, students will construct substantial group timelines, gather facts from their decades, collect pictures of important events, and do brief biographical sketches of people of note. Best of all, students will listen to music from their decades while they work. The unit will culminate with each student giving an “autobiographical” presentation to the class on an important person from their decade.

8th Reading

After seeing *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Hanna Theater, students read Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. A focus of the unit was to identify the rich language that is particular to this play: word play, oxymoron, imagery (light/dark), foreshadowing, and the famous quotes. After just a couple of acts they got in the groove of the style and displayed remarkable understanding of the plot. Several readers have picked up other Shakespeare plays to read -just for the fun of it. This is an amazing class. Next, the class watched *West Side Story* and made comparisons to Shakespeare’s play while being enthralled by the artistry of Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, Jerome Robbins, and the talented cast — all of whom displayed excellence in every area of the arts in this one show. The final unit, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, will provide another opportunity to compare a Pulitzer Prize book with an Academy Award-winning movie. At the same time, the eighth graders are preparing stellar presentations for the Speech Fest on May 22.

8th Spanish

The theme of the unit was “En el restaurante.” They practiced how to order and pay for the meal, identify more food, eating utensils, and dishes. They participated on several discussions about restaurants in Spain and Latin America. Two of the students, while on vacation, and had the chance to speak Spanish with local waiters. Encouraging! During grammar class, the eighth graders have worked on present and preterite of stem-changing verbs. They conjugated and used these verbs in oral and written sentences.



Specials/Awards/Contests:

FPS Ohio State Bowl

Twenty six Birchwood students in sixth through eighth grade were invited for the Future Problem Solving (FPS) State Bowl. These state finalists were among the 46 teams that qualified for the state competition from the 160 registered in Ohio.

Middle Division Teams: **Adam I, John, Haley, Anthony C Prathna, Pheby, Michael T, Dhweeja, Jack, Amir, Grace, Maryum**

Junior division teams: **Maya D, Julia F, Abby, Farah Nikhita, Rae, Olivia and Sean V**

Middle Individuals: **Ammar, Anika, Vinayak, William L**

Junior Individuals: **Favian, Megan S**

Our students fared well and brought home gleaming trophies and medals.

Middle Division: **Prathna, Pheby, Michael T and Dhweeja** — fourth place team

Jack, Amir, Grace, Maryum — third place in the skit presentation

Anika — first place individual

Vinayak — second place individual

John — first place scenario writing

Vinayak — second place scenario writing

Pheby — fourth place scenario (tied with alumnae Naomi W)

In the junior division: **Maya D, Julia F, Abby and Farah** — first place team

Favian — second place individual

Megan S — third place individual

All first place winners have the opportunity to compete in the international competition in Bloomington, Indiana, from June 6-9. The topic to research concerns the “global status of women.” Any parents who are knowledgeable about the topic or know of experts in this field, please contact **Lorraine Tzeng** or **Helene Debelak**.

The entire weekend would not have gone so seamlessly without the concerted effort of all the parents who donated time and energy and mementoes for the “exchange.” We specially thank the drivers/chaperones: **Nathan Hessler, Jackie Hsiao, Gail Glamm, Heather Foos, Nina Zwolinski and Syahrul Busnawi**; hall monitors/timers/presentation judges: **Jaividhya Dasarathy, Rozina Aamir, Bas and Gretchen VanBesouw and Derek Russell**; and the skit monitors: **Diana Pi, Hassan Sayed (alum), Alan Liu, Gail Glamm, Cindy McNaughton and Kim Russell**. Thank you to **Natassa Priscilla** who organized all the memento bags and the parents who prepared the lunches: **Senthil Kumar, Marina Magrey and Hongli Cao**.

History Day

Birchwood students had an impressive showing at the state level of the National History Day competition on April 27. Held at Ohio State University, the event brought together the top place finishers from nine district-level competitions across Ohio with over 500 students competing, representing 80 different schools in Ohio. Against strong competition, nine Birchwood students received top honors as national finalists and will be advancing to the national competition in June at the University of Maryland.

Birchwood students swept the website categories, with two groups qualifying as national finalists along with two individuals. **Ammar** and **John** were finalists with their website on the battle at Midway in WWII, as well as **Michael T** and **Adam I** with their website on the Battle of Britain. In the individual website category, **Dhweeja** qualified as a finalist with her website on the Camp David Accords along with **Maryum** for her website on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911. In addition, **Vinayak** qualified as a national alternate in the individual website category with his entry on the cracking of the Enigma Code in WWII.

Three other Birchwood students qualified as national finalist: **Maya F** for her performance about two Ohio conductors on the Underground Railroad; **Pheby** for her documentary on the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906; and **Megan P** for her exhibit on the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906. **Prathna** received an honorable mention for her paper on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. **Maya F** also received a special prize from the Ohio Local History Alliance which recognized her research and performance for its significant connection to Ohio as well as her use of historical collections in her research. As an additional note, Birchwood alumni **Katelyn** and **Joan** were national alternates in the senior division for their website on Cleveland Mayor Carl Stokes. They also received a prize from the Ohio Historical Records Advisory Board for their exceptional use of Ohio primary sources.

Congratulations to all these students for their hard work and accomplishments! Projects will be on display at Birchwood’s Parent Night on May 15.

Letters About Literature

As was mentioned earlier, **Abby** received the Ohio first place trophy for her letter regarding the book *Call it Courage* by Sperry explaining how she personally overcame difficulties by turning to literary pursuits. In addition to \$100, books and a certificate, **Abby’s** letter was read by her sister **Channin** during the award luncheon at the Cleveland Public Library. Her letter will go on to the national level for judging. **Rae**, another sixth grader, was recognized as a semi-finalist who wrote her letter to Sharon Draper. In *Out of My Mind* Rae identifies with the main character who navigates issues regarding her peers. **Mrs. Tzeng** as the fortunate teacher of these writers also received a monetary award.



Future Mars Astronauts

Due to a grant from NASA-Batelle, **Ms. Brown**, **Ms. Tagliarina**, and **Mrs. McNaughton** had the opportunity to lead fourth and seventh grade students through a program entitled "Birchwood Students: Future Mars Astronauts." The program launched early in the year with a field trip to Lake Ridge Academy for the NASA event and was later followed by a trip to Fogarty Hall where students enjoyed a lesson inside SpaceLab, the Lake Erie Nature & Science Center's portable planetarium. In the classroom, fourth grade students learned all about space, with their studies culminating in a planet research project. Seventh grade students began the unit with a study of Mars, creating a website on Google sites to display their information. Later they reviewed the principles of rocketry and used NASA water rocket simulations to analyze how modifications to the rocket affected flight. Finally, they designed and built the rockets and tested them on the rocket launchers that they constructed. In gym the students experienced the difference between jumping with and with the aid of a spring board to simulate the difference of gravity on earth to mars. The students culminated their practice of jumping with a grade by grade jumping competition.

Once all the "astronaut training" was finished, students had the chance to build and launch stomp rockets and/or water rockets. **Dr. Mark Stewart** of NASA gave students feedback on their rocket designs, which were then launched as part of the Future Mars Astronauts competition. **Dr. Stewart** judged each rocket's stability; this score was combined with the amount of time each rocket was in the air to create a final score for the seventh graders. The fourth grade rocket scores were combined with their Mars Jump scores.

Among all the potential future astronauts of Birchwood School, the top-scoring students were:

7th Grade Stomp Rockets — **Caroline**

7th Grade Water Rockets — **Amir I**

4th Grade Stomp Rockets and Mars Jump — **Dharma**

4th Grade Bottle Rockets and Mars Jump — **Terek**

Visits and Speakers

Many thanks to **Dr. Mark Stewart** of NASA who came in speak about rockets to fourth and seventh graders during two special pizza lunches. **Dr. Stewart** also gave feedback to students about their rocket designs and helped judge the rocket competition, part of Birchwood School's "Future Mars Astronauts" Contest (details in the Specials/Awards/Contests section).

Joe Psarto, author and poet, visited the eighth grade reading class to share his poetry. His talk on writing and purposes of poetry was captivating!

Visits and Speakers cont'd

School Visits

The ten-member visiting team from the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS) visited Birchwood School from April 14-17 to explore every aspect of the school and offer commendations and recommendations. On behalf of the entire team, the visiting team leader will report to the ISACS board, which will meet early this summer. Following this meeting, Birchwood School will learn whether it has achieved full accreditation status from ISACS.

The entire school prepared for the visit for the past three years. Special thanks to the steering committee composed of **Karen Kufahl**, **Shannon Tagliarina** and **Connie Miller** who contributed hundreds of hours to lead the school through the entire detailed process. This committee would like to recognize the work of all staff members, administrators, board members, parents, and students who spent more than a year composing their self-study reports. A special thanks goes to our technology teacher Emily Waldal who advised us on producing a whole-school self-study book that reflects all the good things we do at Birchwood and she also made sure the visiting team was technologically equipped both at the school and at their hotel during the visit. In addition, the wonderful office staff truly was the "hands and feet" for the steering committee as they prepared schedules and guest lists, ordered food, and took care of details which made the entire visit run more smoothly.

Michelle Hageman, **Melissa Nilsen** and the seventh grade artists deserve special thanks for their work to make the visiting team's gift bags extra special. **Jim Paponetti** cooked a delicious opening night dinner for 60 guests while **Nancy Isherwood** provided mouth-watering desserts for the team members to enjoy. Many thanks to the board members, teachers, parents, and eighth graders who attended special meetings and lunches to help give the visiting team a fuller picture of our work here at Birchwood. The steering committee also appreciates the efforts of **Anna** and **Vinayak** who led the visiting team members on a tour of the school when they arrived. On Sunday evening as well **Abby** acted as a professional server during the dinner. A special thanks to **Maya F** who totally wowed the team with her History Day performance. Finally, we all owe a debt of gratitude to the founders of the school, **Chuck** and **Helene Debelak**, who helped oversee the entire process and, as usual, provided ample guidance and support to the staff in looking critically at each aspect of the school.

Together the Birchwood community has accomplished the huge goal of presenting the school to a team of independent school professionals, led by Thad Falkner of the Wilson School in St. Louis. We have every assurance that their recommendations, most of which closely match our own goals, will take us forward in the process of constantly improving all that we offer at Birchwood School.



CREATIVITY

Defining the problem, locating solutions, developing an action plan

Defining your problem requires a good deal of analysis. Again, if we use the problem statement, “How can I get better grades in math?” we are really not identifying the problem of why you are not getting good grades in math. The problem could be your math ability, it could be that you dislike math and avoid doing your math homework; it could be that you never really learned your computational skills well and so when you attempt algebra you are completely lost. Each scenario suggests a very different problem statement and a very different array of solutions to address your problem.

This leads us to the next step in the creative problem solving process – idea finding. During idea finding we are looking for as many ways as possible to address the problem statement. The more ideas you can generate to address the problem the more options you will have to select a solution statement from which you can construct an action plan.

If your problem statement identifies a poor math foundation then solution ideas might revolve around remedial courses, or getting help from a teacher after school, or finding a tutor who can help you master those math skills that you somehow missed. But if your problem statement identifies your utter dislike of mathematics, then your solution ideas might focus on ways you can get your math work done as efficiently and as effectively as possible. In other words, what methods can I employ to get it done, get it over with, yet still do it well! Or else you can look at joining math study groups or you can give permission to a parent or friend to monitor your work imposing their will upon your will. Idea finding for solutions starts with a clear understanding of your real problem and then it looks at solutions from the widest perspective. You need many ideas from which you can choose the best solution.

Learning from others is a great tool in this exercise. Who has had similar problems? How did they address this problem? How have others used forms of organization or scheduling to help with this problem? Do I have friends who have the same problem and can we work together to address my problem? What materials or media have others used to solve this problem? Are these options available to me?

Once you have listed several ideas for solving your problem you will need to select the best solution. This is the next step in the problem solving process. Self-defined criteria will help. Ask yourself, “Will I actually do this? Do I want to do this? Am I willing to make the sacrifices necessary to follow through with this solution? Am I looking for a short-term solution or am I willing to take a long-term approach? Which solution appears to have the best chance for success? Which solution will require the greatest time investment or the least? Among these solutions, which will provide me the most support for success? Which solution will require the most financial investment or the least? Creative problem solvers often use some kind of grid by which they rank their options according to their criteria.

Once a solution is determined then an action plan can follow. The action plan in the form of a timeline is helpful. What materials do you need and when will you get them? Who will help you? How and when will you contact them? How will you organize your time to achieve your goal? Where will you carry out your plan? What supplies do you need?

Most importantly you have to determine when and how you will assess whether or not you are moving forward toward achieving your goal. Making this determination will guide and pace you in setting up times to reflect on your work. As you move forward on your plan, what adjustments do you need to make? What is working and what is not working? Since beginning your action plan what new challenges have arisen? Based upon your problem solving experience up to the current moment, do you need to rethink your strategy? Should you restate your problem and seek ideas and solutions based upon your new understanding?

I have found this assessment piece to be very valuable. I teach children that whenever you begin a meaningful problem solving effort, the chances of failure are high. I tell them, “Expect to fail! But this first failure is not a real failure. Only quitting is a failure. You have to fail in order to think more deeply about the problem and generate solutions that are more realistic.” Creative problem solving is just that, creative. You look at what went wrong the first time. You think about ways to fix your plans. You take time to reflect, and the deeper you reflect the clearer picture you get of what went right and what went wrong. Self-reflection should lead to a clearer understanding of what the problem is and how you might approach it the second time around.

This is at the heart of “everyman’s” creativity, and in fact it is at the heart of most creativity. Creators have grit. They not only tackle problems, face challenges, or grasp new opportunities, but they reflect on their work while moving forward. They accept setbacks and failure while reviewing their original strategy and new ones. The creative thinker knows that meaningful solutions are elusive, and he or she must expect setbacks from which the creative problem solving process resumes, finds new approaches that might lead to success.

To opt out of this mailing, please email info@birchwoodschoool.org