



# Birchwood Clipboard

**The Lion's Roar**  
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## Special Program Highlights

### ***The Third Annual Grandfriends' Day***

On Thursday, October 22, Birchwood School hosted its third annual Grandfriends' Day for students in grades 1-4. More than 50 grandfriends participated in the event, and a good time was had by all. The day started at 11:30 a.m. when grandfriends arrived and were greeted by eighth grade students who escorted them to the library for a reception with Mr. and Mrs. Debelak. They then joined their grandchildren for a special pizza lunch followed by singing with Mr. Debelak. The rest of the afternoon allowed students and grandfriends to participate in various activities together. (continued on page 2.)

### ***Field Trips***

On October 22 and 23, Birchwood students were treated to NASA Day at Lake Ridge Academy. Students, teachers and chaperones boarded the bus in the morning and then rotated through numerous NASA exhibits and the Journey to Tomorrow activity truck. At the end of the day, the 1-4 graders had the opportunity to hear astronaut **Gregory Johnson** speak about his time aboard the International Space Station while 5-8 graders enjoyed a presentation of the solar system and recent Mars exploration by Dr. David Ellis, Senior Research Engineer at NASA Glenn. Birchwood alums, Sachi and Zaeem came to say "hi" and spent time with the Birchwood group.

The preschool class went on a field trip to Mapleside Farms and that was a huge success. We explored the barn which had a machine that washed and sorted the apples. We also enjoyed a hayride where we pointed out the marvellous colors of fall. A highlight of our trip was the chance to bounce on a huge trampoline; even the teachers and mummies and daddies participated in the fun!

### ***Visitors and speakers***

**Thad Falkner**, head of the Wilson School in St. Louis, spent two days at Birchwood in October. He will head the ACS team that will conduct a three-day site visit in the spring. He spent time observing classes and meeting with staff, board and the administration.

**Joe Psarto**, Ohio Poet Laureate of the Angels Without Wings Organization and the "Bay Village Poet," will speak to the 8th grade reading class about his poetry and the writing process.

**Janice Vituillo**, Latin and Greek teacher at Laurel School, met with **Mrs. Debelak** and **Ms. Haskins** to discuss instruction in the classics from middle school through high school.

**Michael Matis** and **Joe Villwock** from Perception Multimedia spent three days in October interviewing parents, students and Birchwood staff members as part of a promotional video they are producing for the school. We look forward to the premiere at the IFA in December.

The following alumni visited us and volunteered for a day: **Christine Bashour** and **Jorgen Kerens**.

Alumni parent **LaVerne Parker** paid a surprise visit and had a tour of the new school building.

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

Birchwood has enjoyed another exciting and successful month. Battelle and NASA partnered together to award science grants to select Northeastern Ohio schools. Birchwood's proposal for "Birchwood School: Future Mars Astronauts" was chosen and has been fully funded. Thus, BWS science students will enjoy a unique opportunity to train like astronauts in both mind and body. We were also pleased to welcome Melissa Lelii from the Alcoa Foundation. Board member and parent Bob Spicer made the introductions, and Melissa was very impressed with our school. We look forward to building our relationship even further. Also, remember to join us on Saturday, December 1 from 12:00-4:00 for this year's International Festival and Auction! Not only is it our single largest fundraiser, it is a wonderful event, and we hope you will join us. Finally, year's end is just around the corner. Don't forget to support Birchwood School's Annual Fund. Donate before December 31 to enjoy 2012 tax benefits. As always, feel free to contact Michelle Ehlert, Director of Advancement, at 216.251.2321 or [mehlert@birchwoodschool.org](mailto:mehlert@birchwoodschool.org) with any questions or for more information.

### ***The Birchwood Project Lecture Series***

On Thursday, October 25, Mr. Debelak presented the first lecture of the year in the Birchwood Project Lecture series. Entitled *The Education of Bright and Gifted Children: What Parents Should Know*. The lecture was well-attended and many parents stayed on for the question and answer portion. Mark your calendar for Wednesday, February 6th for the next lecture.

### ***Fall Conferences***

**Mr. Debelak** will attend the yearly conference of the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS) in Kentucky. He recently joined other heads of school for the Cleveland Council of Independent Schools (CCIS) fall meeting. **Mrs. Neider** attended the fall meeting of the Early Childhood Directors of the CCIS schools.

**Ms. West** attended a workshop at Lawrence School on strategies to assist learners with disabilities.



## School Visits

**Señora Rodriguez** visited Lake Ridge Academy to confer with Spanish and other foreign language teachers for an exchange of ideas about programming.

## Fine Arts News

**Fine Arts Night**-Join us for our 29th annual Fine Arts Night on Friday, November 9th. This year's theme is *Playful Journeys of the Imagination*. Students in grades five through eight have memorized poetry by master poets and will present them with dramatic flair. The string and wind ensemble and the choir will perform pieces based on the same theme and are sure to delight the audience. Each student will also exhibit a piece of visual art. Come join us for a spectacular evening.

**Residency**-This year we will once again host a two-week residency in drama for all even grades. We are also pleased to announce that we will be adding a two-week residency in dance for all odd grades. Details are forthcoming, but note that the dance workshop will be on Tuesdays and Thursdays on the following dates in December: 6, 11, 13, 18 and 20. And the drama workshop will be Monday, Wednesday, Friday, on December 10, 12, 14, 17 and 19. Students will do a final performance on the last day before winter break: December 21. We hope all students can be in attendance for each workshop day.

**Cultural Trips**-The fifth and sixth grades attended The Magical Theater Performance of *The Giver* in Barberton.

The eighth graders went to the Cleveland Museum of Art for a curated tour of medieval and renaissance art.

## The Third Annual Grandfriends' Day (cont'd from page 1)

**Spanish with Senora Rodriguez** - Participants played Spanish Bingo; the children helped the adults with the words (they knew a lot of Spanish). We also talked about the origin of the Mexican Coat of Arms and colored a picture. To end the time together, Señora explained the legend of the traditional Argentinian *dulce de leche* and everyone had the chance to taste and enjoy it.

**Math with Mr. Sprau** - In the math room students and grandfriends participated in an activity called Horse Race, a spin-off of Bingo that incorporated math vocabulary and concepts. Each group was given a list of math terms and assigned a colored horse that was on the blackboard. A clue was then given such as: "This coin is worth 25 cents." The children then looked for the word "quarter" on their list of terms. If it was there, they called out the color of their horse, which was then advanced on the racecourse. The first team to match ten terms and, thus, advance their horse ten spaces, won.

**Science with Ms. Tagliarina** - The children and grandfriends were presented with the following challenge: "Help! Grandma Ruffman is in trouble! Detectives say she baked a cake with a metal file in it so that my notorious brother Scruff Ruffman could use it to break out of jail. But sweet old Grandma would never turn to a life of crime. The cake in question was made with baking soda. Quick! Head to the crime lab to test the powder found on Grandma Ruffman's apron. If it's something other than baking soda, she's innocent!" Groups of grandfriends and children added three liquids (grape juice, vinegar and iodine) to three powders (flour, baking soda and baking powder). After comparing reaction results, they determined that the powder on Grandma Ruffman's apron was baking powder; therefore, she was indeed innocent (pbskids.org).

**L.A. with Mrs. Kufahl** - The children and their grandparents enjoyed a humorous book called *Fortunately*, one of the students' favorites. The text alternates between amusing events, both fortunate and unfortunate, that befall the main character. After a read-aloud, the children made their own shortened four page version of the story with creative text and colorful illustrations.

**Social Studies with Ms. West and Mrs. Sprau** - In the first grade room, students and grandfriends got a taste of what it's like to vote in an election. After learning about the various jobs a president has, students and grandfriends completed a presidential word search and a presidential mad lib. They then learned some interesting facts about three of our presidents including their favorite foods. Ulysses S. Grant's favorite food was rice pudding; Rutherford B. Hayes' favorite beverage was lemonade; and Ronald Reagan's favorite treat was jelly beans. In fact, the blueberry jelly bean was created especially for Reagan's inaugural celebration. Students and grandfriends had the opportunity to sample each of these presidential choice and then vote on their favorite. The winner was ... blue jelly beans.

## Class News

### Preschool

Our natural playground experiences have been enriching the preschool program in numerous ways. Self-initiated, creative play has "transformed" the wooden logs into a train where every child has a seat, and a fellow student acts as conductor. The wooden stepping circles, "tree cookies," have become plates for elaborate culinary creations. The birch sticks were used to create houses and tents. Some of the students placed long birch sticks on top of two logs to make a car, which needed a lot of "fixing."

Spanish class has been a huge source of enjoyment. Every Friday afternoon **Señora Rodriguez** teaches us numerous Spanish songs and we get a chance to learn all of our colors. Our favorites, so far, are azul (blue), rojo (red), amarillo (yellow), verde (green), anaranjado (orange), morado, and rosado (pink). We also play a grocery shopping game to help us identify a variety of foods in Spanish such as papas fritas (French fries), pollo (chicken), fresas (strawberry), manzana (apple), pan (bread), naranja (orange), and leche (milk). Many times throughout the week, I hear the children using these words as they interact with each other around the classroom and outside.

Over the past few weeks, we have been learning to identify and print the letters D, E, and F. Each week we focus on one letter and then spend the week enjoying activities related to that letter. A favorite is identifying objects throughout the room that begin with our chosen letter.

We have also been learning about the math concepts of more, fewer and equal by counting with bears of different colors and sizes.



## **Art**

The first months of the year have been spent with the young artists study on the elements of art. We began by studying color. The students have mastered warm and cool colors. We have mixed them in paint, used them in collages and created a masterpiece with them. Please explore the halls to enjoy what the children have created. We are now moving onto a unit on line and plan to incorporate it with the changing season.

The older students have been hard at work on their pieces for Fine Arts Night. We are making props and decor for the event. We hope to create pieces for entry into the *Scholastic* Art Contest later this year.

## **Gym**

As the first quarter draws to an end, the Birchwood students put up some impressive numbers for the 10 minute workout challenge. The students completed eight thousand five hundred minutes of running, which is the equivalent of running 40 marathons! The first grade class won the challenge with each child averaging an impressive 180 minutes of running in eight weeks. They decided to celebrate their victory with a gym class filled with their favorite games, favorite stuffed animals, and an ice cream cake.

## **Kindergarten**

The kindergartners continue to make excellent progress in their *Singapore Math* books. We have been fortunate to have several parents volunteer their time during math class. In addition to working in their books, the class was also introduced to adding two-digit, three-digit, and four-digit numbers without regrouping. Several students are further exploring this type of addition at home through the Wood Math program.

We are thrilled to report that all of our kindergarten students are reading. They continue to work in reading groups with Señora Rodriguez and in phonics groups with Mrs. Sprau. They have started reading with a partner. Everyone is very inspired to finish reading stories because we have started the "Read Your Heart Out" program. When a student completes a story on book, (s)he stamps our monthly poster.

In Social Studies, several parents have visited the class to talk about celebrations around the world. Thank you **Mrs. Haufe-Hayder, Mrs. Cui-Wang, Mr. Lutz, and Dr. Pahlajani** for sharing information about celebrations. The students also learned about different careers from **Dr. Vaziri, Dr. Iyer, Mrs. Cai-Wang, and Mr. Neider.**

The kindergarten class enjoyed learning all about the five senses. They used their sense of touch to identify mystery items in a bag; their sense of hearing to identify mystery sounds; and their sense of sight by playing I Spy. Working together in groups, they made posters showing good smells, bad smells, things that have a good taste and things that do not. Next up, they will be learning about healthy foods and MyPlate.

During National Fire Prevention Week, the students read books about firefighters and learned some valuable fire safety tips. They especially enjoyed making fire dog (dalmatian) puppets out of styrofoam cups and paper bag bat puppets. The kindergartners are a creative bunch and love creating works of art.

## **K-Computer**

The Kindergartners have been learning more about programming. They learned how to make simple animations with movement and color. They are excited to show each other what they have made and to teach each other each new skill they learn.

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

The first and second graders have been learning about shapes and geometry. We have learned how to program the turtle to draw shapes. We have talked about the different angles and shapes. They have also been playing thinking games such as Arcademic Skill Builders. This website lets the students play games in various subjects with each other on-line. The students love to practice their math facts and track their improvement.

## **1st Math**

This month the first graders began a unit on money. They discovered that the trick to successfully counting money is not only naming the coins but becoming adept at skip counting. After learning the names and values of each of the coins, we began putting assortments of coins together and counting to find the totals. This proved to be challenging since it requires the ability to skip count by different amounts. With practice, the children have become quite successful. They also learned to compare different amounts and to identify how much change would be given after making a purchase.

## **1st Language Arts**

The first graders culminated their American tall tales unit by writing their own tall tales. They impressively incorporated heroes with superhuman qualities but ordinary speech and jobs, humorous problem solving, and exaggeration.

## **1st Spanish**

The first graders practiced how to ask and answer questions related to the subject "objects of the classroom." They learned the correct pronunciation and the spelling of the new words. The children liked to play "Yo juego" and named the items along the way to the door. They learned three new songs; "La lluvia," "Vengan ya and Contar 10 by 10." Working on the song, "Vengan Ya," the children learned the meaning of several action words.

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

The children have enjoyed delving into American tall tales this quarter. They are adept at recognizing the characteristics of a tall tale in stories such as *Paul Bunyan, John Henry* and *Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett*. A highlight of the unit was participating in an apple tasting event in honor of Johnny Appleseed's birthday in September. The children examined, smelled and tasted several varieties of apples as well as apple juice and apple cider.



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

This month the students celebrated National Chemistry Week. The theme this year is *Nanotechnology: The Smallest BIG Idea in Science*. Students learned what nano means, which tied into their recent introduction to atoms and molecules. They also discovered some of the many ways in which nanotechnology is helping to improve our lives. The 1-2 graders made their own scratch and sniff stickers and learned how to accurately scratch, sniff and record their results; they have the opportunity to continue recording results and write a conclusion at home if they would like to enter the American Chemical Society's chemistry contest.

During a few of their weekly Science Explorations and Applications classes, the second graders learned about different types of boats. Then, given a limited supply of material choices, they designed and built a boat to hold as many pennies as possible. After discussing what worked and what did not, they had the opportunity to build a second boat. Boats built in round two held many more pennies.

Finally, the 1-4 field trip to Lake Ridge Academy's NASA event on Monday, October 22 kicked off our study of space.

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

This month the students wrapped up their unit on communities by completing their books about communities. They also learned about urban planning and designed and constructed their own three dimensional cities.

Students also spent time preparing for two special days in early November - Election Day and Veteran's Day. The first and second graders have both been learning about presidents and the election process through a special edition workbook. During the October early dismissal day, they learned about the history and significance of Veteran's Day and created cards for veterans to show appreciation for their service to our country.

### **2nd Math**

The second graders are working their way through a unit on telling time. The "red group" spent some time reviewing and improving their skills by telling time to the nearest minute. They are now learning how to calculate elapsed time. The "blue group" practiced their skills with elapsed time on both a clock and a calendar. They also learned to read a schedule involving elapsed time.

Each week the children practice improving their number computation speed. Using the website [www.thatquiz.org](http://www.thatquiz.org), they are working toward the goal of successfully completing 30 addition and subtraction problems in 90 seconds. This practice takes place in the computer lab. A few of the children have already reached that goal and have raised the bar slightly.

### **2nd Language Arts**

The second grade writers worked very hard this month. In addition to journal writing, each student also wrote several modeled stories. First up were stories modeled after the classic book *Harry the Dirty Dog*. Each student's story contained a clear problem and solution like the model story. Students also wrote their own versions of the stories *Stuck* and *Jeremy Draws a Monster*. Writer's block is not a problem with this group of students.

### **2nd Spanish**

The second graders continued working on "nuestra casa," our house, and began learning the names of rooms. They memorized the new words and answered questions about The Gazon Family and identified the location of each family member in the house. Another activity the children liked was placing objects in each room. They played "Marcos the Dog" chasing "Negrito the Cat" and travelled throughout the house.

### **3rd Math**

The third graders continue to improve their computation skills. Each week they practice advanced multiplication and division. They have also been practicing their skills of non-typical problem solving. One of the strategies that they practice involves representational model drawing. This skill was introduced in the second grade and serves as a visual aid which helps conceptualize more complicated, multi-step word problems. As one tool at their disposal, it is a valuable skill to learn.

### **3rd Spanish**

The students worked on the vocabulary about the food and combined with the verb Gustar (to like). They wrote meal plans for the children at Camp Palo Pinto. One was using foods children liked to eat and the other using foods children did not like. They learned verbs in the first person Yo (I) and used these verbs on different activities during the day.

### **3rd-4th Social Studies**

Both the third and fourth graders have been studying the Northeast United States. They set goals for memorizing states, capitals, abbreviations, and the locations of the states in this region. The third and fourth graders practiced taking notes as they watched an educational video on the Northeast which gave them interesting facts about each of the 11 states in this region. The third and fourth graders have also been discussing the branches of government and the impending election. They are learning about each of the candidates and how voting works in the United States.

The third graders created a class book about the Northeast states. They had fun sharing information with each other and creatively decorating each of the 11 states of this region. They have also continued their study of communities, learning that people move to communities for different reasons like to be close to resources or to be in a certain environment. The third graders practiced reading and creating different graphs such as line graphs. They have also continued to practice map skills like reading map keys to extract important information.

The fourth graders have been learning about the changes that have occurred over time in the Northeast United States. They are practicing using various formats to display the information they learn such as creating outlines and timelines.

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

The third and fourth graders have been working on learning programming in Microworlds. They have developed many skills in earlier grades but now they are learning to write out their code and to find and fix their "bugs." We are working using geometry and math to draw different shapes such as a 5, 6, 7, and 8 pointed stars. They also love to work with various colors to make some beautiful designs.



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

The third and fourth graders are wrapping up their second units in reading. The third graders are completing a historical fiction unit while the fourth graders are finishing up an author study on Laura Ingalls Wilder. The third graders have been reading, discussing, and answering comprehension questions on their class book *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. They are practicing answering questions thoroughly by using complete sentences and including evidence from the book within their answers. They have also been keeping track of “sea” words and “prairie” words in the book and will compare the two settings using a Venn diagram. The fourth graders have also been answering comprehension questions as they read their class book, *Little House in the Big Woods*. They have been keeping track of tricky words as they read and are learning to use context clues to understand difficult words as they read. They also practiced using dictionaries to look up words that remain confusing even after studying the surrounding sentence or paragraph. Both the third and fourth graders tried their hand at writing triplets and came up with some thoughtful and creative poetry.

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

This month the students celebrated National Chemistry Week. The theme this year is Nanotechnology: The Smallest BIG Idea in Science. Students learned what nano means and discovered some of the many ways in which nanotechnology is helping to improve our lives. Using this knowledge, they created a poem about nanotechnology for the Illustrated Poem Contest sponsored by the American Chemical Society. They also entered the chemistry contest, which required students to make their own scratch and sniff stickers. Over a period of seven days, the young scientists compared the strength of the scents of their homemade stickers with that of store-bought ones. They recorded observations each day then wrote a conclusion about their findings.

The 1-4 field trip to Lake Ridge Academy’s NASA event on Monday, October 22 kicked off our next science exploration ... the study of space.

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

While learning about different organizational patterns for story-writing, all classes managed to enter contests this month. Each student wrote a short essay in response to the prompt: “Tell how you demonstrate the virtues of courage, heart, strength, and wisdom in your everyday life.” Students’ responses ranged from confronting their fear of animals to trying a new and difficult athletic feat. **Annessa W**, however, discussed the challenges of going forward positively with her life while seeing her dad only on a limited basis. Her sincere voice and compelling prose garnered her first place among all fifth grade essays and won both she and her teacher a pair of tickets to the Ringling Brothers/Barnum and Bailey Circus. At the same time, fourth and fifth graders wrote an additional essay for the fall Creative Communication contest, and one brave fifth grader, **Farah**, took the challenge to enter the October *Cricket* contest in addition to the other two. It is a joy to see these students growing in their written expression.

### **4th Math**

This month the fourth graders completed a unit on whole number expressions and equations including working with variables. These lessons were a simplified introduction to concepts that are common in algebra. Additionally, the children have been learning or, in some cases, reviewing advanced computation skills, particularly multiplication and division with remainders. Another small group of fourth graders is working through a unit involving finding average, rate, base and percent.

### **4th Spanish**

The students worked with “Objects of the Classroom” in connection with math measuring in centimeters. They learned the Spanish alphabet using the correct pronunciation of each letter and started reading short stories in Spanish. They like to read.

### **5th Science**

The fifth grade class has completed their study of waves, light and the interaction of light with lenses and mirrors. They experimented with lenses to see how they focus light and modeled a telescope and a microscope and used diffraction grating to explore the differences between different lights. They used simple lens microscopes like the ones used by Leeuwenhoek and broke light into its spectrum with prisms. They experimented with homemade stickers and analyzed the differences between them and store bought stickers. They sent their charts and information to the American Chemical Society in Cleveland for their Chemistry Week contest.

### **5th Reading**

We are concluding our reading of *Hatchet* and additional Gary Paulsen titles. After discussing the need for food, shelter and weapons, students are writing a paragraph that states the survival problem for the additional book they read, followed by three solutions and detailed descriptions explaining these solutions. Our final discussion will be about how Brian’s mental strength is also needed for him to survive. Students are very excited to receive their costumes for the Poetry Show, and we have begun the last step of acting to put all the poems together as a cohesive story. We all are looking forward to the performance.

### **5th Spanish**

The fifth graders are very interested in reading. Thus, I prepared some stories with fun endings. We did individual and group reading. They also listened to my reading without looking at the words and practiced listening and comprehension. We used some idioms, and they had to write the meaning and the equivalent expression in English.

### **5th-6th Computer**

The fifth and sixth grades have been learning new web applications. They have been working hard on creating a Prezi. They will make a practice slideshow presentation in computer class and then in social studies they will use the presentation application as well.

### **6th Reading**

As we wind up our Great Books unit, students are completing three brief writing assignments: a plot timeline, a character or theme paragraph, and an opinion piece explaining why they would recommend a particular book as a Newbery winner. This year’s Poetry Show is quite elaborate with costuming and acting, but students are excited and up for the challenge; several have been an enormous help making props. Also, I am very pleased with the growth many have shown with their performance skills, particularly articulation, voice quality to set mood, and expression.

### **6th Science**

Sixth graders completed a rock unit that stretched from plate tectonics to the rock cycle. Along the way, they investigated how crystal size relates to the length of time crystals are forming. They completed large graphic organizers to organize information for each of the three classes of rocks. One group of students looked at the geology of other planets. They also completed two “smart” paper experiments and analyzed results for the American Chemical Society Chemistry Week competition.



## **6th Spanish**

They talked about their favorite sports and hobbies. We combined these words with the verb “jugar” (to play) and the students wrote sentences using all the subject pronouns. They worked on the present tense of the verb “ser” (to be) and were able to complete sentences as well as reading a paragraph and answered questions related to the verb.

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

One aspect of creative thinking that we have been honing is the ability to think in original ways. We learned that the first 99 ideas that we come up with are common ones that others will think of too. This means that we have to be fluent and flush out lots of ideas in order to arrive at fresh ones. It also means we have to do lots of research in order to understand the topic at hand: collect facts and data, examples, ideas, real situations, and the research being done in multiple fields, and what the experts say. If we have lots of information then we have more options to play with, more ideas to rearrange into new ones, fresh understanding of the issues. Our conclusion is that creative thinking is not shallow sudden flashes of brilliance; rather, creative thinking arises out of the fruits of hard work--just like everything else of value.

## **7th Science**

The scientists completed a unit that explored how elements and compounds react in each state of matter and began the unit that explores how the periodic table is put together. One highlight that brought the concepts to life was when students watched the Nova video: “Search for the Elements.” Students either created time lines or Prezis to trace the history of the atomic theory. Finally, students experimented with “smart paper” and entered the American Chemistry Contest.

## **7th Spanish**

Students worked on school clothes and school supplies. They talked about what do they do at school and compare school and after school activities in Spanish-speaking countries to these in United States. They worked on the present tense of “-ar” verbs as well as the verbs “ir,” “dar” and “estar.” They also learned the contractions “al” and “del.” They like to read stories from the book *Mayan Safari*, and they completed three more chapters.

## **7th Reading**

The final discussion from *Harriet the Spy* led students to ponder two big ideas embedded in the story: 1) “Beauty is truth: truth, beauty - that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know.” (John Keats). 2) “To thine own self be true and it shall follow as the night the day thou canst not be false to any man.” (Shakespeare). Students began to apprehend that when one is true to oneself (talents or attributes), that virtue shines forth with some concrete reality - this is beautiful - and this helps others. It is a joy to see how this glimmer can shine in this age group.

Each student also chose a literary fiction title written in the form of a diary and then shared it by taking on the persona of the main character and writing his/her own diary entry. Finally, regarding their hard work on choral speaking, all of them have grown up in their ability to project and articulate the poems with a new level of maturity and stage presence.

## **8th Science**

The chapter this month was packed with three major concepts: photosynthesis/respiration, diffusion/osmosis and mitosis. Not only did they do experiments and simulations, but they made use of several Internet sites such as Khan Academy and Mr. Andersen’s biology. Several students created posters that showed the light/dark reactions for photosynthesis and also respiration. They spent more time with the microscopes.

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

The 7th and 8th grade students have been working at designing and building in the virtual world. We have partnered with the Discovery Lab with the Air Force Research Lab in Dayton to give the students a region in the virtual world where they can build, design and learn to program. Mrs. Waldal spent five weeks this past summer in Dayton to design the middle school curriculum. This is the second year of the program, and it has been expanded to the entire 7th and 8th grade classes. They have started with building tables, chairs and houses with windows and doors. Then they worked at learning how to write scripts or programs for what they build. We are very excited to see where this will take us and what else the students will build.

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

7th grade Latin students are reading short passages of connected prose in their textbook. They are improving at determining the meaning of a sentence from word endings rather than from word order as in English. These students are also about to begin their study of Greek. Eighth grade Latin students have been brushing up on their declensions and conjugations with the goal of demonstrating mastery of the required forms. Each student was able to write the forms on demand by the end of the month. They have also worked hard to increase their analytic rigor when confronted with challenging sentences.

## **8th Spanish**

The students worked on the chapter “En avion” and talked about packing for a trip and getting to the airport. Once they were at the airport, they learned what to do at the ticket counter; how to check in the baggage; and how to behave on an airplane.

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

Students visited the Dittrick Medical History Center at Case Western Reserve University to learn about the history of medicine and how it relates to the History Day theme this year: *Turning Points in History*. The one hour presentation was given by one of the curators at the museum and included a look at a variety of medical tools from history. Students had a chance to try and use a stethoscope from the 1800s with its cumbersome design. Although it has been in existence for close to 100 years, this museum is one of the hidden gems in Cleveland.

Currently, students are hard at work narrowing down their History Day topic ideas. They’re looking at some intriguing choices that could prove very interesting for long term research. It’s a challenging process to choose a good topic to work on for the next five or more months. A detailed list of their choices will be in next month’s Clipboard.

## **8th Reading**

In the book, *The Trumpeter of Krakow*, students explored the moral character of the main character through a few very lively debates. They then wrote a five-paragraph essay which defended their interpretations. These essays are posted in the hallway outside of our classroom because they reflect how they have achieved a commendable level of this expository form. Our school’s reading program aims toward this standard of literature essay in leveled increments beginning in the early grades. This is one example of how our curriculum is laid out according to a scope and sequence within every subject at Birchwood. Each student then read another book from the genre of world historical fiction and prepared PowerPoint presentations depicting the context of time-place-culture of their selection. Regarding poetry show preparation, it is amazing how the 8th graders memorize and perform with ease due to the preparation of the past eight years. It makes my job easy! They are now tending to production aspects of the show.



## Creativity and Entropy

There is a second reason for addressing creativity. It goes to the core of how we are “wired.” As we discussed last month, one aspect of human nature aspires toward growth, exploration, and personal enrichment. This is the creative yearning and potential within us. Our brains are self-organizing systems, deliberately making sense out of the world, driving us to be self-directed and self-regulated. When this impulse is directed in a positive direction, we do creative things, we make things better, and we help things become new. This capacity does not only belongs to history’s great creators. Every man, woman and child has the capacity to be creative.

Working simultaneously, however, is another basic human impulse. It is more conservative and tends toward self-preservation. It clings to familiar terrain and resists change. Unfortunately this tendency is our default mode.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of *Creativity* and leading scholar in creativity studies, writes, “Each of us is born with two contradictory sets of instructions: a conservative tendency, made up of instincts for self-preservation, self-aggrandizement, and saving energy, and an expansive tendency made up of instincts for exploring, for enjoying novelty and risk – the curiosity that leads to creativity belongs to this set . . . the first tendency requires little encouragement or support from outside to motivate behavior, the second can wilt if it is not cultivated.”

He continues, “we [have] this propensity for enjoying whatever we do, provided we can do it in a new way, provided we can discover or design something new in doing it. This is why creativity, no matter in what domain it takes place, is so enjoyable . . . But this is only part of the story. Another force motivates us, and it is more primitive and more powerful than the urge to create: the force of entropy.” Entropy is a survival mechanism; it encourages the preservation of energy.

Understand that entropy is a necessity. Clearly it is good to survive. Yet at the same time this involuntary impulse can suck the energy out of life. At its worst, it is just plain laziness. We waste both time and energy avoiding responsibilities and then afterwards feel flat, empty, and bored. It is amazing that when these impulses to “conserve” come over us, we don’t even have to try to accommodate them. They just happen. (Note: creative and productive people often require periods of mindless and effortless activity. These periods can even help foster creative thought, but we will discuss this in subsequent essays).

But entropy has its more subtle effect. It quenches the energies we need for newness and growth. It hinders creativity and innovation. It is the impulse that avoids those problems, challenges and opportunities in life, that, if we were to dedicate ourselves to solutions or resolutions, we could make important gains in our own lives, in that of others, and in the institutions and workplaces that we inhabit. When we aspire toward creativity this form of entropy undermines our efforts.

Herein lays the need to talk about creativity – especially with children who are in their formative years. Children are also wired for innovation, exploration and productivity. They are also wired to avoid the expenditure of energy. To develop the former, nurturing is required. To develop the latter, simple neglect will do the job. Without self-awareness, without the cultivation of skills and attitudes that lead to creativity, children will slip into their default mode – do nothing, avoid opportunities for growth, indulge their immediate pleasures, waste their time and energy. A very few will find the willpower to become productive. But too often many give entropy a nod, and squander their time and abilities.

Understanding the human impulse toward creativity and toward entropy is central to crafting an educational program that teaches and trains creativity and innovation. This is our starting point.

E. Paul Torrance, one of the foremost scholars and practitioners in the cultivation of creativity, remarks about the future acceleration of social and technological change, “Genius of the future will be the creative mind adapting itself to the shape of things to come . . . Creative thinking skills must be recognized as mankind’s most important adaptability skills.” He adds, “. . . images of the future held by students will determine what they will be motivated to learn and achieve: their ability to live, cope and grow in a high change society . . . the genius of the future will be the creative mind adapting itself to the shape of things to come.”

I believe this “genius” should be the legacy we parents and teachers leave our children. In this genius, our children will be equipped not only as business and economic innovators, but also as healthy individuals prepared to lead fulfilled personal lives, capable of making meaningful contributions to the people and institutions around them in a rapidly changing world.

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