



# Birchwood Clipboard

## The Lion's Roar

### ACHIEVEMENT AND REASON

Mortimer Adler, called “a philosopher for everyman” in *Time*, and author of *Reforming Education – The Opening of the American Mind*, writes that “... man’s well-being depends upon the regulation of his emotional life by reason, what the ancients called the discipline and moderation of the passions. This discipline can be accomplished only by the formation of good habits of action and passion ... if democratic citizens must be free men, they must have free minds, and minds cannot be made free except by being disciplined to recognize only one authority, the authority of reason.”

His language is heady for sure, but it speaks to an important aspect of education. It asks, “Upon what principles are our children making decisions about their lives?” They are inundated by marketing messages that appeal to their passions, holding promises of a life

that embraces fun and entertainment as its core hope. While we are grateful our children can enjoy a pleasurable life, we should also be warned. Without guidance toward a reasoned life, our children can become slaves to their passions and settle for a life that leaps from one pleasure to another, without satisfaction or fulfillment.

The struggle is played out in schools daily. There are reasons, why a child should pursue a good education. Many times the pathway to a good education is not pleasurable or entertaining. Persistence toward gaining a good education requires reasoned participation. Sometimes we have to do work we do not like, in the classrooms of teachers we don’t like, amidst lessons that are not interesting. Regardless, we do our best. We have reasoned: “Education is central to my future. My likes or dislikes at any given point in time are secondary to attaining a superior education.”

### UNDER THE CANOPY NEWS FROM BIRCHWOOD

#### Growth & Sustainability Mission and Constitution

To sustain our mission beyond the tenure of the founders and founding teachers, we borrowed a thought process from the American “founding fathers” in establishing the U.S. Constitution. This document is a framework of and for laws and principles that preserve a free, democratic society. Certainly our task is far less complex and impactful than theirs, but the process is informative.

Last spring, we gave careful thought to our mission: What do we do and how do we do it? We landed on four principles or four pillars that encapsulate what makes Birchwood work – in a way, our constitution. These statements define, frame and align Birchwood School’s development into the future. They serve not only



as directives but also as a statement of expectation for teachers and parents; defining core principles upon which discussion, collaboration and cooperation can exist.

The first pillar states: We provide academic opportunities that will challenge all learners and academic expectations that will help all students reach their highest level of achievement. Fulfilling this directive includes many facets, but two are essential:

1. A continual assessment of student needs and conversations about how those needs can be met, and
2. Professional development that points teachers toward becoming top professionals in their field – understanding benchmarked academic expectations, developing materials and pedagogy that enhances our ability to meet the academic needs of all learners, accumulating skills in addressing the needs of the gifted learner, and working closely with families to insure children are appropriately challenged.

*More on this “constitution” in February.*

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## UNDER THE CANOPY *continued*

### Inviting Our City's Culture Inside Birchwood ...

#### Drama and Dance Residencies

One of our underlying commitments to remaining in the City of Cleveland is how proud we are of our city and its rich culture. It has been our tradition for 30 years to use the city as our classroom. It is normal for all classes to go out on field trips to museums, playhouses, concerts, and parks. But we also bring the city into the school with hands-on cultural experiences and vibrant speakers.

In December, Bill Morgan, from the Cleveland Sign Stage Theater will provide a two-week residency in drama for the even grades, including kindergarten. Assisting "The Morgan" will be Robin Pease from Kulture Kids. Tom Evert, from Dancevert will conduct a two-week residency in dance for odd grades, including preschool.

Both residencies culminate with short presentations by each class to the rest of the school and parents who would like to attend on Friday, December 20 at 10 a.m., prior to the noon early dismissal.

#### Community Speakers Welcomed

Dr. Berard, a Birchwood parent and professor at Kent State University made a visit to describe the field of sociology to the 6th through 8th grade classes who are studying social isolation for Future Problem Solving.

It was a delight to welcome two members of the Public Education Unit of the Cleveland Fire Department who came to speak to the preschool classes about fire safety.

We were pleased to have Birchwood parent, Carl Nilson, speak to the upper grade students about his military experiences in honor of Veterans Day. Mr. Nilson, a veteran of Vietnam, provided his perspective on the draft, as well as related some of his experiences in Vietnam and later in Germany, including his realization of the negative effects of communism while briefly in East Germany.

The kindergarten class welcomed an array of Birchwood parents who spoke about their jobs in the community.

#### Birchwood Snapshot

Kindergarten students have shown themselves to be enthusiastic readers as they read over 130 books in October. First and 2nd grade classes took up the charge to lead the Thanksgiving Food Drive and helped collect more than 575 items for area families in need. Other Birchwood students have begun their National History Day and science fair projects. Staff and parent volunteers have been busy with class projects and preparation for the International Auction and Festival to be held December 7. Take a breath, take a bow, nice work this month Birchwood students, staff and families.

#### Math Olympiads

Math Olympiads is a series of five contests providing students training in creative problem solving skills. Congratulations:

**Gold Award** – Vinny

**Silver Award** – Crystal, William L., Anika, Shruthi, and Erhan

**Bronze Award** – Ying-Ying, Topstone, Julia M., Farah, Avi, Jane, Tejal, Channin, Asim, Alex M., Rishav, Zuha, Karim, Lilah, Stella, Alex D., Mekenah, Isabella, Mira, Eric, Maide, Sophia, and Praveen

#### Continental Math League

Fifth through 8th grade students compete in five tests over five months. Congratulations:

**Gold Award** – William L., Anika, Vinny, Kevin, Farah, Avi, Jane, Tejal, Derzan, and Lilah

**Silver Award** – Ying-Ying, Julia M., Maryum, Nikhita, Michael H., Abigail, Steven, Rishav, Shruthi, Karim, Erhan, and Stella

**Bronze Award** – Channin, Aasma, Asim, Joyce, Zuha, Alex D., and Terek

#### Young Astronaut Day

Birchwood teams competed in Young Astronaut Day at NASA Glenn Research Center. The day featured engineering problems with an emphasis on teamwork.

The Pilot Team of Erhan A., Alia B., Derzan C., Joyce L., Terek N., Tejal P., Asim S., Shruthi R., Rishav R., and Steven S. competed in four activities including the Aerodynamic Lift Challenge where they added materials to a block of Styrofoam to generate the least amount of drag in the wind tunnel.

The Commander Team of Favian B., Michael H., Julia F., Nikhita K., Abby M., Julia M., Rae R., Olivia S., Kevin S., and Aliaa T. worked on the Asteroid Redirect Mission Competition. They used Lego Mindstorms NXT Kit to build, capture, move, and release as many asteroids (plastic balls) as possible.

The teams were fortunate to have six parents with them: Ayesha Baig, Namrata Kumar, Jayashree Ravichandran, Madinah Samad, Kevin Stark Sr., and Christina Todd.



## THE LANGUAGE OF THRIVING

Last month I explained that in order for children to internalize the attitudes and skills needed for thriving three components are needed – language, experience and unrelenting encouragement and support. For our purposes, we are looking at the language of thriving which describes and reinforces thriving behaviors. Experience provides a playing field where children practice thriving. Language and experience work together to make thriving a matter of habit and character. Little-by-little, over an extended period of time, the language and practice of thriving constitutes thriving children.

Language takes many forms. Sometimes it is a straightforward directive like the example I used last month of teaching children how to be friendly when they meet people in the morning: “Be polite. Say, good morning.” Other times the language can come from cultural mores like “Do unto others as you would have them do to you; honor your father and mother.” Parents who insist on repeating these proverbs, parents who define a child’s experiences through these proverbs, will find that in due time – sometimes over the course of a few months, sometimes many years – habits are built, character is formed. Children under the persistent language of “Do unto others ...” will, in time, learn to be considerate of others. Children under the tutelage of “Honor your father and mother” will, in time, understand what “honoring” means and will rise to fulfill the charge.

Language can also come from biographical sketches, clips from history, or good books. Each story paints a picture inside a child’s heart. These pictures have the power to speak to children not only during their childhood but throughout their lifetime. To this day, whenever I am overcome with work and responsibilities, I remember the story of George Washington at Valley Forge. His army in defeat, soldiers abandoning the cause, congress unable to support his efforts pushed the general into a hopeless situation. Yet he persevered, and gradually found the strength and inner resolve to not only overcome his situation at Valley Forge but also to turn the tide of war. Each time I reflect on this scene I say to myself, “And you think you have problems!” This “language” informs my own experience, not once but dozens of times, and helps me to interpret my own struggles positively and productively; leading to what I hope will be good habits and a trustworthy character.

Recently a mother of a first grade child, Kurt, related a story about her son’s lesson in perseverance. Apparently Kurt was frustrated



while solving addition problems. He was a perfectionist. He did not like to be wrong nor did he like to admit that he was wrong. As mom monitored his work she found two mistakes. She asked him to fix the mistakes. Kurt got mad; he was frustrated. He wanted to quit. When he was on the brink of tears, mom reminded him of the story his first grade teacher read to the class about Louisa May Alcott. Though Louisa was told by a publisher that a woman could never be an author, Louisa persevered toward her dream and

now we have *Little Women*. She didn’t quit. She persevered. Kurt got the connection. He did not like it at first. But he got it. Mom asked him, “Can you try to fix your mistakes?” Kurt bit his lip, “Okay. I guess I have to persevere.” Kurt finished the problem and his mom told him how proud she was of him because he did not quit.

Here we see the interplay between language and experience. Language educates and directs. Experience offers practice. Together they form habits. Granted, this little experience will not change Kurt’s behavior. We wouldn’t expect a six year old boy to demonstrate a great deal of perseverance.

Nevertheless he is not too young to hear the language of perseverance, nor is he too young to practice perseverance at an elementary level. Here is where habits are forged.

Words, proverbs, mottoes, and stories frame and reinforce good behavior. They need to be repeated to children hundreds if not thousands of times. With language, parents and educators lay the foundation for children to thrive.

*... “language”  
informs my own  
experience, not  
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times ... leading to  
what I hope will be  
good habits ...”*

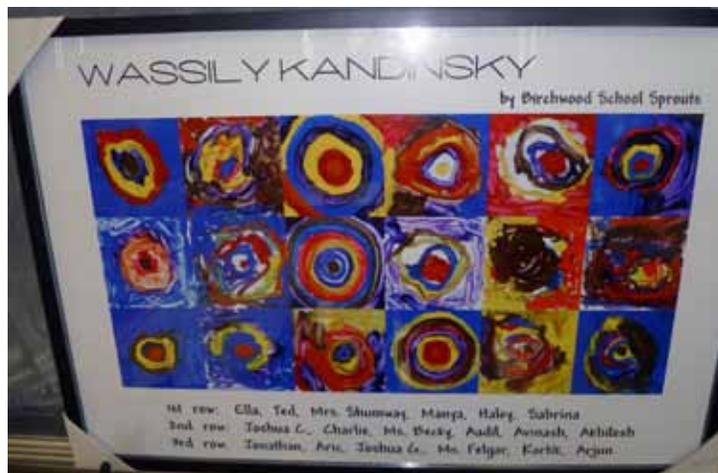
*In the next issue, we’ll continue to discuss the language of thriving.*

## PARENTS' CORNER

### We Have Everything and the Kitchen Sink

The 19th International Festival and Auction (IFA) is just days away. Thanks to the generosity and hard work by our families and friends we have a bevy of wonderful silent auction items. Even a kitchen sink! Restaurant certificates, excursions, items for the home, and more will be available for your high bid.

Our students have raised the bar again this year on the wonderful class projects for the live auction and raffle. Plus, we will have a rousing game of “heads or tails” and other activities.



Up for bid Saturday, December 7 is this wonderful piece created by Birchwood's talented "Sprouts" preschool class.

### And, of Course, There is the Food!

Our multicultural buffet is the centerpiece of the event. Please remember that we ask families to bring a food item to serve at least 12 for our buffet table.

This is our major fundraiser and we hope to make it the biggest and best ever. Proceeds from the IFA fund student competition fees, professional development fees and workshops, equipment, and more. Last year we raised \$25,000 plus an additional \$8,200 from our fund-a-need for the music program. This year we will highlight the art program for the fund-a-need.

We can't do it without you, the families of Birchwood. It is an all-hands-on-deck day as we share the fun and give a little time to the event as volunteers. Thank you for your participation and attendance. It is truly an afternoon of camaraderie and merriment as we celebrate our diversity and raise funds for our school.

### Schedule of Events

**International Buffet:** noon - 2 p.m.

**Silent Auction and Raffles:** noon - 3 p.m. – closes after live auction

**Heads or Tails Game and Live Auction:** 2 p.m.

**Children's Rooms Activities:** noon - 2 p.m. – first floor classrooms

**Kid's Movies:** 2 p.m. – during the live auction

## BOARD UPDATE

### Honing Birchwood's Future

The Board of Trustees continues to hone the future of Birchwood School with an eye to permanence in both philosophies and the physical plant. The board is extremely pleased with the growth that has occurred “behind the scenes.”

The marketing efforts, led by Cindy McNaughton and Brenda Spicer, have increased the exposure and interest in Birchwood, which shows in our enrollment of 180 this year.

Michelle Ehlert, director of advancement, has found many project-based funding sources outside of tuition to help our school expand and improve. Of course, support of the Annual Fund remains vital and the board demonstrates its commitment through 100% participation. The school is financially sound and is following the board approved nine-year plan.

### Community Meeting Highlights

We promised that the highlights of the Community Meeting would be posted to the website. Please bear with us as the audio is edited for sound quality and time.

### 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

The board is also busy arranging the plans for our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Weekend. This is a fundraising project sponsored by the board. Remember to mark your calendars for:

**Friday, May 30**  
**Upper Grades Poetry Show**

**Saturday, May 31**  
**Gala Dinner**

**Sunday, June 1**  
**Homecoming Ice Cream Social**

We hope to see many friends and alumni of Birchwood at these events as well as current families. If you are a Birchwood alum or parent of an alum, please take a moment to update your contact information at [birchwoodschool.org/Alumni](http://birchwoodschool.org/Alumni).

### We Welcome Your Input

As always, if you have any questions about the operations of the school you can email [board@birchwoodschool.org](mailto:board@birchwoodschool.org) or contact Mr. Debelak at [cdebelak@birchwoodschool.org](mailto:cdebelak@birchwoodschool.org).



*Celebrate. Grow. Share ...  
with Birchwood this May.*

# CLASS NEWS

## Seedlings

Seedlings were excited for the arrival of fall. We enjoyed playing in the leaves on the playground, as well as looking at them closely with our magnifying glasses. We decorated the classroom in preparation for our Thankfulness Brunch. The students loved creating their own pinecone turkeys and displaying them. We have learned several new fall songs, including a few about Thanksgiving.

Preschoolers have been working on their measuring skills by making pumpkin pie play dough and cinnamon clay. The Seedlings really have shown their creativity when exploring these sensory activities. For our fine motor development we have been tracing a variety of lines and writing our names.

## Sprouts

Over the past month Sprouts have enjoyed the fall season. Class experiences include comparing and contrasting thermometers placed in cold and hot cups of water. We also made our own clay beads using fall colors to decorate them. The children used them to make patterns and clay number designs. We also used the clay beads to help us complete our addition and subtraction activities.

In our reading activities the Sprouts have started exploring word families such as the words ending in 'at.' They are excited to have entered into the world of emergent readers.

Our International Festival and Auction activity was inspired by the Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky. The children were given a very informative lesson on realist and abstract (feeling) art. We then painted using cotton swabs and fabric paint onto squares of glass. Each child was so focused and proud of the art they created. All of the squares put together will be the final project to be auctioned off for the IFA on December 7 (see a photo of the artwork on page 4). A huge thank you to Michelle Felger for all your time and support to make the project happen.

## Kindergarten Thanksgiving Play and Lunch

In November, kindergarteners enjoyed putting on a "history of Thanksgiving" play for their parents. Each student had a part and did an amazing job presenting the history of the first Thanksgiving. After the performance, we all enjoyed a Thanksgiving feast. The table was filled with great Thanksgiving food: apple and pumpkin pies, chicken, turkey, corn, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, and more. Everyone enjoyed the celebration. Thank you to the parents who brought the delicious food, and for setting up and cleaning up. We really appreciate you.

*"Kindergarteners enjoyed putting on a history of Thanksgiving play for their parents."*

## K Math

Kindergartener mathematicians are mastering addition up to 20 and subtraction from 20. They use a variety of ways and manipulatives that help them eventually be able to do mental math. They have also learned about fact families and practiced writing different math fact sentences. Some groups are studying shapes. They are creating pictures using specific shapes, making patterns, and beginning to look at 3-dimensional shapes. All the math groups continues to work hard in their singapore books. Some students are working with Mr. Debelak in solving elaborate word problems. They use all their math skills to figure out the problems.

## K Reading

Everyone continues to work hard in reading. The students add new sight words to their vocabulary each week. The whale group just finished a research project. They created a timeline explaining the history of Thanksgiving, Pilgrims and Native Americans. They will continue to add to their timeline with important dates and information they learn from reading books. The students in the other reading groups read a short story each day. In October we read over 132 books. We have a class of enthusiastic readers.

## K Science

Our kindergarten scientists put on a new learning cap. We have become meteorologists. We have been busy comparing temperatures inside and outside, tracking the direction of the wind, recording the amount of rain that fell from the sky during the month, and even identifying different shapes of the clouds. We also learned about the four seasons.

## K Social Studies

Kindergartners enjoyed learning from a local police officer and firefighters as a culmination of our community helpers unit. They made their own police badges and created fingerprints as clues to help solve cases. They have also made firefighters out of paper. As groups, they created a fire truck with red, yellow, white, and black construction paper. They worked together seamlessly and everyone had something to contribute. Way to go kindergartners. We also learned the history of Pilgrims and how the first Thanksgiving was started. We are beginning to look closer at the Native Americans and how they were community helpers in their time.

## 1st Language Arts

Since the beginning of the second quarter, the 1st grade students have plunged into creative journal writing at home. Their stories, illustrations and writing skills seem to blossom

## CLASS NEWS *continued*

a little more fully with every passing week. In class, we have done a full-class book model of the classic story *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*. We have also worked with *One is a Feast for Mouse*, *Seven Blind Mice* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

In grammar we have been emphasizing the critical parts of a sentence which include a capital letter at the beginning and punctuation at the end. We have also worked on other important words require a capital letter, such as the names of friends, pets, days, months, and specific places like Birchwood School.

In spelling, the word complexity is gradually increasing for all levels. Our word wall is extending to include days of the week, months of the year, and names of common colors.

Our homework spelling schedule and in-class language arts work station approach have been received well and appear to be developing more than classic language arts skills. Our students are becoming strong independent and cooperative learners who exhibit a positive work ethic and focus beyond their years. We are extremely pleased with the considerable improvements in self-confidence that these students are exhibiting. We hope that with continuing oversight and gentle guidance of parents at home and the teaching team in the classroom that each child will continue to reach and extend week by week.

### 1st Math

After a brief introduction to problem solving, the 1st graders began a unit on time telling. This concept was not new to most, as it was introduced in kindergarten. In the 1st grade they are learning to identify time to the nearest five minutes using an analog clock. This is not an easy task, but with plenty of practice, they are catching on quickly. Using the website, [thatquiz.org](http://thatquiz.org), they practice in class and at home.

### 1st Spanish

First graders reviewed colors, shapes and the calendar. They are working diligently on learning big numbers and using these concepts in different activities from the workbook. They enjoyed playing colors and shapes bingo.

### 1st - 2nd Reading

“Who dun it?” This is the mystery the 1st and 2nd graders are solving during their weekly literature class. We read short mysteries aloud and look for components of a mystery such as suspects, alibis, clues, and red herrings. Our junior sleuths have the crimes solved before the period ends.

### 1st - 2nd Science

This month, we have been studying how to stay healthy. The students first learned about germs – what they are, where they hide,

and how they spread. Next we focused on the importance of proper hand washing. An experiment with Vaseline and glitter showed that hand washing heroes who use warm water and soap end up with cleaner hands than those who use only hand sanitizer, cold water, or warm water. The final hand washing test involved the use of glo germs and a fluorescent black light, which highlighted any areas missed in the hand washing process. We’ll continue with studies of health, hygiene and proper nutrition next month.

### 1st - 2nd Social Studies

First graders would like to thank Birchwood families and staff who helped make the 2013 Thanksgiving Food Drive for the Bountiful Basement Hunger Center a success. As a school, we collected more than 575 items for Thanksgiving dinners for needy families in our area. Volunteers at the Bountiful Basement were appreciative of our generosity. This was truly a community effort with staff helping to collect boxes and bags, 2nd and 3rd graders assisting 1st graders in carrying over food, and the 7th and 8th grade recycling team helping to break down empty boxes after the collection.

First and 2nd graders also wrote letters of appreciation to soldiers through an Adopt-a-Soldier program. During the week of Veteran’s Day they explored the branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, learned about the history of Veterans Day, and tried on a helmet from a Marine who trained for the Gulf War. First graders enjoyed listening to a book about Veterans Day written by our own Miss Simons.

### 2nd Math

Each day 2nd graders begin the class with basic computation practice in addition and subtraction. This, along with regular practice at home, has helped them improve their skills and they are making great progress. The class has also begun a unit on problem solving skills. Using the book, *Challenging Word Problems*, they are learning to identify strategies that employ computational skills that they have already learned. In class, we talk about becoming math detectives, carefully dissecting each problem for clues that will help answer the question that is presented in the problem.

### 2nd Spanish

Second graders had a wonderful time working on la casa and objects of the house. They completed activities in the workbook, placing furniture in different rooms of the house and participating in conversations about their own houses, appliances and furniture.

### 3rd Math

Third graders are working in two groups. The first group is working on mastering the basic facts in addition and subtraction. Each day they practice with timed and untimed drills. Their progress is evident! The second group is practicing problem solving skills using the text *Challenging Word Problems*.

### 3rd Reading

Third graders have begun traveling to all sorts of interesting places around the world during their world historical fiction unit. Each student is required to carry a “passport” where they fill in the places they journey to in their reading. They have also been marking these places on a map. As a class they are reading *The Family Under the Bridge*. Third graders also entered a poetry contest for *Cricket* magazine about a holiday they like to celebrate. This month they read the first couple of stories in Junior Great Books. They were excited to have a chance to discuss and debate interpretive questions related to the stories they read. Junior Great Books encourages the students to think creatively, listen to each other’s ideas, take notes as they read, and more.

### 3rd Social Studies

Third graders began their first research project in social studies. Each student chose a national monument or a memorial in Washington D.C. They are required to use the internet, an encyclopedia and books to research their topic. They are reading about their topic, taking notes, and will build a 3D model of their memorial or monument before presenting all the information they gathered to the class. Meanwhile, they are also studying the Northeast region of the United States.

### 3rd Spanish

Students worked on numbers up to 1,000 and had a good time using big numbers. They used their imagination to figure out how many utensils were in the dining room of the White House and also completed a lesson about pets, and a pet store survey about their favorite animals.

### 3rd - 4th Science

November was an exciting month in the 3rd and 4th grade science classroom. Continuing with the Veggie U program provided by the Parent Committee, students planted trays of red and green lettuce as well as two trays of ten “mystery seeds.” Before planting they examined under microscopes and compared and contrasted the seeds. They also guessed what the seeds might become and have revised their guesses a couple of times since the mystery seeds sprouted.

In addition, the botanists studied all the parts of a flowering plant and dissected snap dragons to view and identify the parts of a flower. They have been observing the growth of pea plants in four soils (compost, field soil, sand, and potting soil).

The peas were planted in root view containers, so students can compare the growth in all directions. Finally, they’ve witnessed the growth of radishes in different conditions (light and wet, light and



*The 3rd and 4th grade science classes are “sprouting” thanks to Veggie U and the Parent Committee for purchasing the kits.*

dry, dark and wet, dark and dry). To wrap up the Veggie U unit, students will learn about proper nutrition and will eventually harvest their veggies.

### 4th Language Arts

The 4th grade has moved through their study of nouns into the study of verbs. The grammar unit on verbs was completed before the Thanksgiving break. Our renewed focus is on creative writing in the classroom. We are completing students’ individual stories modeled after *The Library Lion*. The students are also typing (publishing) their own stories, as we combine efforts and resources between language arts and computer class.

We are working hard on learning to be productive, polite and responsible in the language arts classroom. Many students are progressing well with the quality and effort of their work. One 4th grade student submitted an essay to the *Creative Communications* autumn contest.

We are continuing to work on spelling improvements, with the focus on individualized WORDS TO LEARN (WTL), which are taken from each student’s writing assignments. These are words that have been used in writing, but were spelled incorrectly. These WTL lists will continue throughout the year. Any students who do not have a WTL “collection” in my database will move onto another vocabulary building enrichment assignment to supplement the regular Sitton Spelling program.

### 4th Reading

Fourth graders have been journeying through their imaginations in their fantasy unit. They are reading *The Cricket in Times Square* as a class. As they read they are keeping track of interesting and

## CLASS NEWS *continued*

tricky words on post-its to work on comprehension and aid in discussions. They also entered a poetry writing contest for *Cricket* magazine. They had to write about their favorite holiday in 24 lines or less. This month they read the first couple of stories in Junior Great Books. They were excited to have a chance to discuss and debate interpretive questions related to the stories they read. Junior Great Books encourages the students to think creatively, listen to each other's ideas, take notes as they read, and more.

### 4th Math

Recently, the 4th graders participated in the first round of the Continental Math League math contest. This contest challenges their problem solving skills with non-typical word problems. The children have 30 minutes to answer six questions. Children that score 4, 5 or 6 correct answers are awarded "bronze," "silver," or "gold" awards. The results of the contest are as follows:

**Silver Awards:** Neige D., Abeedah H., Praveen K., Dalila P., Josh S., and Nathan S.

**Bronze Awards:** Paul A., Thomas G., Kabir G., and Peter P.

### 4th Spanish

Students reviewed objects of the classroom, numbers, animals, and the calendar. They had many words to memorize and we played games using those words. They took a survey to find out when and with whom children were going to the movie theater.

### 4th Social Studies

Fourth graders have been studying Northeast region of the United States. They are learning about their history as well as memorizing all of the states and capitals in that region. Each student signed a contract stating what else they would memorize for this region (location, spelling, abbreviations). They began their first research project as well. They are studying national parks. Each student chose a national park to write a letter to, requesting information and pictures. They will be required to use the internet, books and encyclopedias to research their topic before choosing a poster, pamphlet or other visual aid to use during their presentation.

### 5th Language Arts

All students eagerly wrote friendly letters to veterans, ranging from those currently serving our country to those in their 90s who served during World War II. Already, some of the veterans have written back to express their gratitude for the students' recognition of their service. This small bit of community service goes far to teach our students that we all owe a great debt of gratitude to those who have suffered to procure the freedoms we enjoy today and that each child's effort to write a short letter truly brightens a veteran's day.

The children are currently polishing their entries for the Letters About Literature contest in which they write to an author of their choice, living or deceased, whose book has had a meaningful effect on their lives. These letters require a deep level of analysis as well as clear written expression. Mrs. Little and Mrs. Kufahl have thoroughly enjoyed the students' insights into their own lives and the creative ways they have chosen to express themselves in their writing. We trust the judges will be wowed even more.

### 5th Reading

Students are currently engaged in reading the survival books of Gary Paulsen, who is a gifted author writing for the intermediate level child. He uses great techniques to bring out the suspense of an event; two examples are sentence fragments and repetition of words or short phrases. Students are selecting exciting passages to read aloud to the class, practicing oral skills. Survival problems and solutions are being examined. The class is also thinking about the difference between physical and psychological pain; at a certain point in the story, the "old" Brian dies and a "new" Brian, who is resourceful, determined, and emotionally strong, is born.

The class really enjoys the weekly magazine, *Time for Kids*. It is important for students to be educated in current science topics and world social concerns. In conjunction with a recent article, students watched a video about children working in gold mines of Africa, and this fueled some thoughtful discussion. Students are also learning to move beyond the general information to using more specific details in answering questions. Writing in complete sentences concisely and to the point is an important skill to be developed.

### 5th Social Studies

Our rich enjoyment of the colonial era continues via careful reading of the text and analysis of primary source documents both in small groups and as a whole class. Students most recently examined the writing of John Smith, who always emerged as the dashing hero in whatever scenario he reported. Because we have only his written account, we are left to wonder about his accuracy, an important lesson to students about writing events down if they want their viewpoints to be known. Students have also viewed the second installment of the Colonial Williamsburg electronic field trips, which examined the checks and balances set up among the three branches of government by the Constitution. In addition, each child has chosen a History Fair topic and is well into the research phase. Alex M. will do an exhibit on John Muir, while Rishav's exhibit will study Thurgood Marshall. Sophia has accepted the challenge of doing an individual performance on the Freedom Riders, and group performers include Lilah and Dharma studying the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, Shruthi and Zuha learning about child factory labor, and Naya and Isabella researching Clara Bar-

## CLASS NEWS *continued*

ton. In addition, Stella, Maide, Mira, and Sousou are hard at work on a performance about the Salem Witchcraft Trials. Groups of students who will be putting together an exhibit are Makenah and Marta, who are studying Ruby Bridges, Terek and Erhan, who are also exploring the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, and Karim, Eric, and Alex D. who are immersed in research on the Boston Massacre.

### 5th Spanish

Students are learning adjectives and making comparisons. They have completed activities from their workbooks about colors and types of hair. They had a wonderful time describing their friend's hair. They also enjoyed writing a letter to a friend in South America and telling all about their classes at school.

### 5th - 6th Mathematics

We have readjusted our use of WoodMath in the classroom, giving students more teacher-led focus on three important computational issues. First is memorization of facts. While some students are drilling to improve fluency in basic operations of whole numbers, fractions and decimals, others have moved forward to memorizing topics like the squares of numbers one through 25, all of the powers of two and three through the tenth power, conversions between percents, fractions and decimals, and geometry formulas and theorems.

The second area of improvement is building fluency on skills that students understand but still work inefficiently. Without improvement, their math advancement will be limited. Finally, we are using the WoodMath series to advance students skills in preparation for algebra studies. We call WoodMath study days “grunt” days emphasizing the tedious but necessary role of drill in order to develop automaticity. Joking about the grueling work of the day “helps the medicine go down.”

### 5th - 6th Science

Fifth and 6th grade scientists are going in 30 directions in their science fair investigations. This is an opportunity for students to engage in authentic scientific practices as they tackle investigations in the natural world. This is the time when all students take ownership of their projects and these high-achieving students can go as deeply as they are capable. They have completed their reviews of the literature by reading books and journal articles, taking notes in phrases or writing summaries, and then writing papers explaining their topics. Now they are in the experimental mode. On Fridays, the class reads about science using many of the books purchased with the Brunner Foundation Grant. These books provide a breadth and depth of content beyond what is normally covered in 5th or 6th grade science.

### 6th Language Arts

To get ready for the Letters about Literature entries (see page 8 under 5th Language Arts for details), students have been involved in several prewriting activities. They read past entries to glean good qualities the winners incorporated into their letters. Besides rereading their book of choice, they explored pertinent points that related to them or triggered certain lessons. They used “free-writing” to explore bringing their characters to our world, presenting them with a desirable gift, and even transporting themselves to the book world. Of course, students had to review the format of a letter wherein they used the International Festival and Auction as a venue (to request donations from merchants). Hopefully, they will embark on the letter to their chosen author soon.

### 6th Reading

As we wind up the unit on *A Door in the Wall*, the class has been inundated with medieval culture, from monastic life to castle life and from liturgical Gregorian chant to the entertainment of madrigals and medieval dance music. The main character, Robin, learned to read and write from monks who patiently and laboriously copied manuscripts in the scriptorium. Similarly, the students in room 106 practiced creating illuminations, using a theme quote from the story as their text. This immersion and study of medieval feudalism, culture, geography, the history of the Scottish wars ... all provided a rich context for students to understand Robin's life and experiences. In addition to Robin's wonderful adventures, *A Door in the Wall* is an excellent study in character development and theme.

The class really enjoys the weekly magazine, *Time for Kids*. It is important for students to be educated in current science topics and world social concerns. In conjunction with a recent article, students watched a video about children working in gold mines of Africa, and this fueled some thoughtful discussion. Students are also learning to move beyond the general information to using more specific details in answering questions. Writing in complete sentences concisely and to the point is an important skill to be developed.

### 6th Social Studies

Students recently wrapped up a unit on ancient Egypt. Each student did an extensive research project on one aspect of Egyptian culture and then constructed a Prezi presentation online to display their work. Students enjoyed sharing with one another about hieroglyphics, mummification, pyramids, and daily life in ancient Egypt. Following the presentations, the class had a debate on whether Britain or Egypt should keep the treasures found in King Tut's tomb. The lively arguments laid the groundwork for the students to write paragraphs detailing the points on each side and then drawing conclusions as to who had the most compelling case. Now we're on to memorizing the countries and capitals of Asia.

## CLASS NEWS *continued*

### 6th Spanish

Students are working on learning the vocabulary of professions and places where people work as well as the verb “conocer,” to know, a main verb to use when you work on this subject. They have completed activities in their workbooks and participate in conversations related to their families.

### 7th Reading

The class studied the style element of point of view while reading *The Light in the Forest* by Conrad Richter. This historical fiction novel recreates the return of Native American and white captives according to the treaty after the French and Indian War in 1763. Students took sides and located notes to support the views of either: 1) True Son, a white captive (born John Butler) who was brought up by the Lenni Lenape tribe and who loved the Indian ways or 2) the white ways as seen in the eyes of other characters. Bullets and arrows flew as students debated the virtues and deeds of the two cultures. They also wrote paragraph essays on their interpretations of the title and on an examination of the heart-wrenching quote of Cuylogas at the end of the novel, “Your head and heart are Indian, but your blood is white.” Students also wrote touching poems in honor of America’s veterans. See them posted on the wall of the main hallway.

### 7th Social Studies

As the students have been studying the events leading up to the Revolutionary War, they have also been getting a jump on their History Day research. With the competition’s theme this year being “Rights and Responsibilities,” students have chosen an interesting array of topics. Two groups of girls are planning on doing performances. Abby M., Olivia S., and Nikhita K. are researching how women took on the responsibility to keep the factories running during WWII and then had limited rights to those jobs after the war. Julia F. and Maya D. are researching the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution, focusing on capital punishment and its history. In the individual website category, Farah S. is researching animal rights and Kevin S. is focusing on gangsters and the F.B.I. Favian B. will produce an individual documentary on the Berlin Wall and in the same category, Cameron K. is researching Curt Flood and free agency and Rae R. is focusing on the Hough riots. Examining the events surrounding the Berlin Wall for a group website is Jad K. and Rami M. Competing in the historical paper category will be Aliaa T. with a topic on the Salem witch trials and Michael H. who also is researching the Berlin Wall. The first round of competition will be March 15, 2014.

### 7th Spanish

Students are working on descriptions of people – personality and emotions. They are learning how to explain minor illnesses and talk about a doctor’s appointment. They are reviewing the verbs ser

and estar, two necessary verbs for descriptions. Students are also working on irregular verbs and on indirect object pronouns. They love to share their personal experiences during conversations.

### 7th - 8th Language Arts

After weeks of reading published short stories and other winning entries, in addition to many sessions of plotting out a story board for each of their own narratives, students are in the process of completing their draft for the Scholastic Writing Awards. This is a venerable national writing competition which accepts many different genres while allowing for a longer word count than most other writing competitions. So far students have focused on fantasy, science fiction and historical fiction creations. By using Google docs, it has eased the editing/revision process and the amount of printing and reprinting every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday.

### 7th - 8th Latin I

Four times a year all the Latin students take a breather and explore the Greek language. Job one: learn the names and shapes of the letters in the Greek alphabet. The students enjoyed training their eyes to decode both familiar letters such as  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ , and  $\omega$  (alpha, beta, and omega) and less familiar ones:  $\eta$ ,  $\xi$ , and  $\zeta$  (eta, xi, and zeta). Learning vocabulary in a foreign alphabet kept them on their toes, but a firm foundation is now laid for their next helping of Greek coming up after winter break.

### 7th - 8th Mathematics

There are a total of eight math course levels in grades seven and eight. We are able to address the needs of all groups primarily based upon student engagement and student responsibility for progress. Learning the skills of an independent learner in mathematics, students recognize when they need help and they know how to find help. Sometimes they will use solutions manuals, sometimes they will re-study examples in the textbook, sometimes they will collaborate with a friend, and always they can ask me for instruction. This makes my time highly efficient. Instead of teaching in front of 15 students, at which time only four or five are listening to me, I can meet the specific need of each student as they conduct on-going assessments of their work. In this way I achieve three important goals. Students advance in mathematics according to their ability and interest. Students develop study skills that will serve them well into the future, and finally, because each student is gaining competency, nearly all of my students enjoy mathematics (at least from my perspective).

### 7th - 8th Science

Students are nearing the end of the experimental stages for their science fair projects. As they wrote their review of the literature they were they were encouraged, not only to use children’s books to learn about their topics, but also scientific journals such as *Scientific American*, *Science News*, or discipline specific journals and

## CLASS NEWS *continued*

to cite other research. This year they also used podcasts or youtube videos similar to Bozeman Science or Kahn Academy. Many will show their projects in the NEOSEF (March 11, 2014), or in one of the State Science Days. (March 15 and 22, 2014)

In December students began two new lines of study. Seventh graders are studying chemistry and they are also taking surface temperature-cloud monitoring for the International Globe Program. (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment). NASA and many scientists depend on observations of scientists at the ground level to help them calibrate and corroborate satellite observations and Birchwood has added at least 10 years of information. One group of 8th graders is using the text to study genetics. Another group has tested out of this unit and is studying a physical science unit to broaden their science education.

### 8th Reading

Students completed the *The Trumpeter of Krakow* by Eric Kelly with an essay on whether the main character, Nicholas Kruetz, had a weak or strong character and ending with an analysis of his final act: was he right in throwing the Great Tarnov Crystal into the Vistula River? Through lively discussion they debated whether his innate goodness held through to the end when he rid the king and the town of the temptations brought about by a valuable gem that held the powers of alchemy; or whether his tragic flaw was to allow himself to be tempted too far and thus, he was under the power of the crystal when he threw it away never to be enjoyed by others. Students also created google-slide presentations of choice historical fiction books. Mrs. Waldal reviewed the technology and the resulting presentations depicting world settings were outstanding displays of this powerful mode of book reporting. Currently, students are constructing specific outlines from notes taken while reading a biography of an historical world figure. They will write an essay and present key qualities and deeds to classmates in a dramatic symposium of world figures. After pondering poetry written for

veterans, the class also wrote touching poems in honor of America's veterans. See them posted on the wall of the main hallway.

### 8th Social Studies

Currently in class the students have been learning about our country's move away from isolationism following the Spanish American War in 1898. Each student role-played a character from that time period and gave a two minute speech either for or against annexation of the Philippine Islands which had been acquired after defeating Spain in the war. The process was to prepare them to write a five paragraph essay defending their point of view as if they were living at that time in history. Concurrently, students are also plowing forward with their research on their History Day topics. Under the theme "Rights and Responsibilities", students have chosen the following categories and topics: Historical Paper: Topstone L., the 2nd Continental Congress and Grace C., Japanese American internment ; Individual Documentary: Amir I., the Outer Space Treaty and Caroline V., Colorado River rights; Group Documentary: Jack B. and William L., the Cuyahoga River fire; Group Website: Maryum A. and Anika R., Uncle Toms Cabin and Crystal Z. and Ying Ying Y., Japanese American internment; Individual Performance: Julia M., children of the Holocaust. The district competition will be held March 15, 2014.

### 8th Spanish

Students have completed the chapter "Aqui y Alli" which discusses backpacking and camping, a traditional way to take a vacation in Latin America. They also learned vocabulary about parts of the body and connected new words with reflexive verbs. Students wrote sentences and shared conversations using the verbs. To improve their comprehension and vocabulary they read short articles in Spanish and completed writing activities. The eighth graders are working hard to reach their goal of skipping one or two years of high school Spanish.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Saturday, December 7

International Festival and Auction (IFA) noon - 4 p.m.  
Book Fair noon - 4 p.m. (closed during live auction)

### Friday, December 20

Drama and Dance Presentation at 10 a.m.  
Early Dismissal at noon

### December 21 - January 5

Winter Break

### Friday, January 10

Science Fair Night



*These inspiring bookends will be part of the International Raffle at the International Festival and Auction on December 7.*