



Birchwood Clipboard

The Lion's Roar

ACHIEVEMENT AND BELIEFS

The conclusions of a 2003 longitudinal study of junior high students reported by Carol Dweck and Daniel Moulton noted that students' beliefs about their intelligence are a better predictor of school achievement than actual intelligence.

Students who held an incremental view of intelligence, that is, if they believed "the harder I work at something, the better I will be at it" saw their math achievement or reading achievement improve.

On the other hand, students who held an entity view of intelligence, that is, if they held static views of their abilities, "I won't do well in math because I am not good in math," or "I won't do well in literature class because I am not a good reader," then math achievement or reading achievement suffered.

This research speaks volumes about how we should talk to our children at home and in the classroom.

Our emphasis should not reinforce their static beliefs about intelligence: "I can't do math. I can't write." Rather our language should consistently encourage effort, industry and persistence: "Johnny, you can get better at math if your work at it!"



UNDER THE CANOPY NEWS FROM BIRCHWOOD

The Birchwood Legacy: Celebrate. Grow. Share.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Birchwood School! Plans are underway to celebrate this landmark the weekend of May 30 - June 1. Soon you will be receiving details. The motto for the anniversary is *The Birchwood Legacy: Celebrate. Grow. Share.*



This year is a turning point. While celebrating the school's achievements, we are taking deliberate steps to grow the school in order to reach more families with a Birchwood education. The growth plan also takes into consideration the school's continuation and sustainability long into the future.

Through The Birchwood Project, we are formalizing The Birchwood Legacy – superior education, education for gifted learners, character education, and the Birchwood ethos. Through literature, video and social media it is our hope that what we have learned at Birchwood during the past 30 years, and what we have given to our students and their families through our educational program, can be documented and shared for the benefit of our alumni, alumni parents, and the broader educational community in Cleveland.

Growth and Sustainability

When you visit the school this year you will immediately notice the changes. We are growing and making arrangements for this growth. The driving force behind the changes you see is to insure the school's continuation and sustainability far into the future.

In 2005, Mr. and Mrs. Debelak, together with members of the Birchwood community, concluded that Birchwood should establish itself as a permanent institution, no longer operating as a founders' run institution, but as a private, independent school overseen by a board of trustees. This decision for continuation and sustainability forced three major questions upon the founders.

The most important question, of course, was "How do we sustain the school's mission and ethos beyond the tenure of the founders?" The second questions asked, "How do we establish the school's finances for sustainability?" And finally, "What kind of administrative structure, including board governance and school administrators is needed for sustainability?"

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UNDER THE CANOPY *continued*

The first question is the most challenging and the most complex. Mr. and Mrs. Debelak have spent countless hours reflecting on “What makes Birchwood, Birchwood?”

Upon identifying the essential features that define the school, they asked, “How do we replicate this? How do we sustain this? How do we pass down this legacy to the next generation of educators at Birchwood?”

Throughout this school year we will explain our thoughts, plans and initiatives related to these questions in the *Clipboard* and at our first Community Update on Tuesday, October 15 at 6:30 p.m. Please join us then.

Birchwood School Community Update Tuesday, October 15 6:30 p.m.

Two years of analysis, and 30 years of history have been melded into a growth and sustainability plan.

Parents and staff are invited to learn how the plan will help envision the future of Birchwood by:

- **Understanding** how we will preserve the school’s mission
- **Maintain** financial sustainability
- **Review** the structure of the administration and board
- **Preserve** the academic integrity and community atmosphere for which Birchwood is known

This is an opportunity to gather and discuss the school’s future.

Your questions, thoughts and ideas are welcome and encouraged.

Childcare will be provided.

Please RSVP by Monday, October 14 to Claudia Bixler or Krystyna Moreno in the school office at 216-251-2321.

Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS) Report

Among the recommendations on the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS) report, was the suggestion that we upgrade our communications especially related to our plans for growth, sustainability and succession. We felt this recommendation was vital.



Although we are very clear about the direction of the school and have spent many hours developing a strategic plan, it is vital that the Birchwood community and our stakeholders know exactly

what will be happening and why. This includes our teaching staff, administrative staff, parents, alumni, alumni parents, and community members who are interested in our progress and development.

There will be a community update on Tuesday, October 15 at 6:30 p.m., at which time we will provide an overview of our plans and distribute a copy of the ISACS general commendations and recommendations. In addition, we will share highlights of the plan throughout the year in the *Clipboard*.

We are also concerned that meetings and the written word do not always answer everyone’s personal questions. Mr. and Mrs. Debelak would be happy to sit down and talk with parents or other members of our community to clarify our plans. We hope this process will be completely transparent.

Birchwood’s September Snapshot

Moon Festival

Kindergarten students experienced the Moon



Festival with the help of Mrs. Chen, and kindergarten parents, Ying Lei, Cheek Yuen Ng and May Thet Hnin. Students enjoyed moon cakes and seeing Mrs. Chen in traditional Chinese dress.

Native American Studies

The fifth grade class visited the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and the Cleveland Museum of Art in conjunction with their study of Native Americans. During their trip to the art museum they enjoyed a gallery tour featuring early American art dating from pre-Columbian times into the 19th century.

Speech Fest

Seventh and eighth grade students have begun to survey great speeches in history in preparation for Birchwood’s Speech Fest on Wednesday, October 16.

Northwestern University’s Midwest Academic Talent Search

Bravo to Vinayak K., who participated in the 2013 Northwestern University’s Midwest Academic Talent Search (NUMATS) and placed second out of 20,000 on the ACT math section. Congratulations on this outstanding achievement Vinny!

Pasta Tales

Although it is early in the school year, a big winner in the national Pasta Tales writing contest sponsored by Olive Garden was announced in September. For just the second time in our school’s history, a Birchwood student, Derzan C., has been chosen from over 10,000 entries across the country as the top fifth grade essay writer. Derzan’s essay, “Lessening the Pain of Hunger” detailed his plans to establish an organization and a website called “Donations to Buy Food for the Poor.” Congratulations to Derzan for this stupendous achievement.

THRIVE – PART II

Educational leaders across the country stress the importance of teaching our children 21st century skills. In order for our children to be competitive in a global economy they will not only need a strong, core curriculum, but also other essential skills like communication, collaboration and creativity. There is an emphasis on connecting classroom learning with the real world.

While I strongly support this effort, I would suggest an even more important skill that our children will need in order to compete and succeed in any 21st century scenario. That is the ability to “thrive.” As I mentioned previously, “thriving” is a verb pointing to energy of life that leads to growth, competency and self-fulfillment. The dictionary defines thrive as “to grow vigorously ... flourish ... prosper ... progress toward a goal.”

If children know how to thrive, if they possess the internal qualities that enable them to thrive, then whether the future turns out as projected, or whether circumstances change dramatically, children will be capable of facing any scenario the future holds and to meet any challenge with confidence, self-assurance and the expectation of success. Being so trained, they will find personal success in any field they choose and they will have a positive impact upon the world.

Children who are thriving are marked by three characteristics. First of all, they are happy. Their happiness is general and dispositional. It is independent of the sort of specific happiness which comes from receiving a birthday gift or going to an amusement park. They are happy because they are growing and achieving. They are happy because they are developing their competencies. They are happy because through their achievements they have a strong sense of self-efficacy and self-worth. For them, life has a smile. They sparkle because they are thriving.

Second, they are marked by engagement and achievement. They invest their time in activities that nurture growth. You will find them cultivating personal interests, or honing skills in music and sports, or they are beginning new hobbies, or even grasping new learning opportunities in order to equip themselves for their future prospects. Take one look at these young people and you know immediately that they going somewhere; they are getting things done.

“... ‘thriving’ is a verb pointing to energy of life that leads to growth, competency and self-fulfillment.”



Finally, thriving children have meaningful relationships with others, and those relationships are mutually beneficial. On the one hand, the thriving child needs love and support in order to prosper. But at the same time he or she is a source of encouragement and

help to others. The thriving child is a team player who builds significant and functional relationships with others. When thriving children are in social groups they look for ways to make the group better or to help someone in the group. They are seeking ways to contribute and be a player.

History and research teach us that no matter what kind of environment or situation our children might face, if they possess these personal, inner qualities then they will find a way to thrive. If they do not possess these inner qualities, then no matter what kind of environment they are placed in, no matter what kind of economic or social advantages they might begin with, they will flounder and wither. Thriving comes from within, not from without. Although environments might help, when thriving depends solely upon advantageous circumstances, any semblance of thriving lasts only as long as the environment remains. But the thriving child who possesses the inner “tools” of life will flourish in both good times and bad.

Next month, we'll discuss learning to thrive through language and experience.

BOARD UPDATE

Defining Birchwood's Board of Trustees

The Birchwood board of trustees was established in 2005 for the purpose of helping to further the school's mission and support the head of school, Charles Debelak.

It was recognized that if the school philosophies were to remain intact long into the future there would need to be an on-going body charged with making sure that the school remained true to its tenets. The board serves as the fiduciary watchdogs of Birchwood and oversees operations in support of the head of school.

In addition, the board is involved in fundraising activities. Last year the trustees raised funds among themselves for Science Olympiad books and materials and this year they are coordinating the 30th Anniversary Gala to be held on May 31, 2014. The board is not responsible for hiring staff (other than the head of school) or decisions involving the classrooms or curriculum. Currently there are 13 board members and one lifetime trustee.

The board recently reviewed a nine year plan for the school and voted to support it. An overview of this plan will be part of the Community Update to be held on Tuesday, October 15 at 6:30 p.m. at the school (see page 2 for details).

The board can be reached via email at board@birchwoodschool.org.

PARENTS' CORNER

Silent Auction Donations Needed for International Festival and Auction

Planning for the International Festival and Auction (IFA) – Birchwood's major fundraiser – is underway!

Silent auction packages are a big part of our fundraiser. To build these we need donations – lots of them! All our families received a donation solicitation packet with a letter about the IFA and a form. Please help us gather donations by distributing the letter and form to businesses you support.

Or make a donation yourself. No donation is too small. We package items, so even a \$10 gift card can be part of a larger basket. Other wonderful ideas include experiences like:

- **Dinner at your home**, an Indian dinner for six for example
- **A lesson in a hobby you have**, knitting, crocheting, etc.
- **Behind the scenes tour** at a theater or stadium

Additional forms are available at birchwoodschool.org under Community/International Festival and Auction (IFA) or call the office and request some be sent home. Donations can be delivered to the school. Thank you for your support! Questions? Email: parentcommittee@birchwoodschool.org.

CLASS NEWS

KINDERGARTEN

Computer

Kindergarteners are learning to program using MicroWorlds JR. This is a great way to learn basic programming skills, put things in order, and think through a program logically.

Math

Kindergarten mathematicians are hard at work in their Singapore math books learning number bonds and addition up to 10 and 20. Students have enjoyed learning to use bear and connecting counters as manipulatives to help them learn about these concepts. They are also practicing tracing numbers using their own dry erase boards.

“Kindergarten mathematicians are hard at work ... learning number bonds and addition up to 10 and 20.”

Reading & Writing

Kindergarteners are working really hard in writing and reading. They have their own journals that they practice writing in them three times a week.

In reading, the class is continuing to learn sight words. Each week students read a short story that uses each new sight word. Then, they practice writing the sight word, cutting out the letters in each word and gluing them down to spell the word correctly, and enjoy making their own mini sight word book. Students love the entertaining sight word cheer at the end that allows for extra practice spelling the sight words aloud.

Students also work in small groups with Mrs. Sprau for phonics and Sra. Rodriguez, Mrs. Chen and Ms. Ziamba for reading. Some will begin working on book reports once they finish a book. Everyone has made excellent progress in the first month of school.

Science

Kindergarten scientists are learning about the human body and just finished learning about their five senses through books, interactive experiences and art projects. Next they will learn about taking care of their body through exercise, eating healthy, getting proper rest, visiting the dentist and doctor, and practicing cleanliness.

Social Studies

Kindergarteners dove into a unit of “All about Me.” They learned about many similarities and differences in people and themselves through read-aloud books and in-depth discussions.

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They learned and practiced using language to express who they are. They learned and are practicing skills of being good listeners and working as a group cooperatively to accomplish a task. Currently they are creating self portraits that closely resemble their skin tone through combining paint colors.

On September 19, they celebrated the Moon Festival. Mrs. Chen was dressed in traditional Chinese dress and shared with the class about this special day that is celebrated in most Asian countries. Students also learned about the significance of eating moon cakes and brought some home to share with their families. Special thanks to Calvin's mother and Su-Kyi's parents for generously bringing in moon cakes to share with the classes.

FIRST & SECOND GRADE

1st - 2nd Computer

First and second graders have had a great start to the year. They are reviewing concepts of programming learned in kindergarten as well as finding some great interactive learning websites. They start at Mrs. Waldal's website, waldal.com, and from there discover sites such as Arcademic Skill Builders and zoopz.com. These sites review concepts they are learning in reading, math and language arts as well help with problem solving and spatial concepts that help the children solve problems and work together.

1st Math

The first graders are off to a flying start in math class. Currently there are three groups of budding mathematicians named after the character models from Birchwood's school song: the lions, the oxen and the eagles. Our focus at the beginning of the year is on building number sense and basic computation skills. After spending some time learning place value, the children have moved onto working with numbers in addition and subtraction. The lions have been introduced to two-digit addition and subtraction that requires regrouping; the oxen are steadily building up their skills with basic fact families, and the eagles are developing fluency with multiplication and division.

2nd Math

In second grade math many of the basic skills that were introduced in first grade are developed and expanded upon. We began the year by discussing numbers with as many as six digits and learning the place value of each of the digits. We also practiced comparing and ordering these larger numbers. That was followed by lessons on rounding numbers and estimation. We are now in the midst of a unit on money, learning coin recognition, counting, making change, and finding equivalent values.

1st - 2nd Reading

The first and second graders are being whisked away by the magic of fairy tales. They are learning about famous authors and compilers of fairy tales such as Hans Christian Anderson and Charles Perrault. They are reading classic versions of European tales such as: *The Princess and the Pea*, and are comparing and contrasting them with modern American versions like: *The Cowboy and the Black-Eyed Pea*. The children are becoming adept at identifying the components of fairy tales such as magic, royal characters, animals that display human characteristics, good and evil, and the pattern of three.

1st Language Arts

The first graders are working diligently on learning the correct way to form their manuscript alphabet letters. This is critical work that requires an investment of time and practice. We appreciate the support of parents who oversee the homework of these young students. We are also sharing stories with the class, and have modeled our first class story after the children's book *Do Unto Otters* by Laurie Keller. Our students have begun working with sentence recognition and other basic language arts.

2nd Language Arts

Second graders have completed their class book modeling project. After the style of *Harry the Dirty Dog* by Gene Zion, this imaginative class has created a fun story about a very curious pet, "Marshmallow the Adventurous Hamster." We had a wonderful time in class creating this story and sharing and building upon one another's ideas.

We hope to have this story on birchwoodschool.org shortly for your enjoyment. We are working on spelling words at two different levels, and are all brushing up on our Zaner-Bloser manuscript skills. Please continue to oversee your child's homework time to ensure it is productive and not frustrating for them.

"Second graders have completed their class book modeling ... this imaginative class has created a fun story about a very curious pet."

1st - 2nd Science

This year, the focus is life science. The young biologists began the year by reviewing the characteristics of living things. Since then, they've specialized in botany. Students dissected a seed and saw the baby plant (embryo) inside, compared seeds from different plants, and counted seeds in a variety of fruits and vegetables –

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the green pepper had the most with nearly 400! They also studied each part of the plant and its functions: observing, measuring and experimenting along the way. Take a look at their “seed travels” stories and the impressive seed collection in the hallway outside the 1-4 science room, and ask your first or second grader to sing the “It is Living” and “Parts of Plants” songs for you.

1st - 2nd Social Studies

Students completed a unit on safety in September. They learned about safety at home, around water, and while traveling by car or bus. They practiced what they learned by participating in class and school fire drills and by conducting a home fire drill. They also created class safety mascots and made puppets bearing safety slogans.

1st Spanish

First graders worked on two subjects: “greetings” and “objects of the classroom.” They learned the correct pronunciation and the spelling of the new words. The children enjoyed playing games to practice their vocabulary. They learned three new songs, “Buenos Dias,” “Chocolate” and “Las Vocales.” We used the last song to write known words using a consonant and a vowel together.

2nd Spanish

Second graders have been reviewing lessons from last year and answering questions from “How many school supplies they had?” to “Are you afraid of the chickens?” They participated happily in all the activities and loved to watch “El Profesor Perico,” a parrot that played with children in both languages.

THIRD AND FOURTH GRADE

3rd - 4th Computer

Third and fourth graders have been working on learning to open and save a Word document on the computer and on their flash drive. Since computers can be so different we practice this frequently so homework and projects are not lost. We are also starting to program using MicroWorlds Pro. Students are learning basic commands and instructions and how to find “bugs.” They are excited when their program works and they make some wonderful graphic designs.

“Third and fourth graders have been starting to program ... and are excited when their program works ...”

3rd - 4th Language Arts

Third and fourth grade classes are currently reviewing for their first unit test in grammar. We have spent the past three weeks reviewing subjects, predicates, types of sentences, corresponding punctuation marks, and run-on sentences (with fourth grade) and the combinations of similar sentences (with third grade). We have also begun manuscript review with the third graders to be sure that their printed words are clear and concise before we embark upon the challenge of cursive. The fourth graders are reviewing the basics of proper Zaner-Bloser cursive letter formation and linking.

Week by week, we are spending more time on creative writing. About one quarter of our 4th grade class has decided to enter the autumn non-fiction essay competition offered by Creative Communications. These students will be submitting their essays next month for consideration. Details on this contest were sent home. The third grade has begun work on their first story modeling project with *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst.

3rd Math

After beginning the year reviewing place value, third graders have split into two groups in order to facilitate the children’s individual needs. The first group spent the past two weeks learning to calculate elapsed time. They practiced drawing timelines in order to give a visual perspective of the passage of time. They then put their skills to work solving word problems involving elapsed time. The second group has spent the majority of their time practicing their problem solving skills.

4th Math

The 4th graders’ year began with a refresher course on the place value of whole numbers up to nine digits. We then split into two groups. One group worked on decimal place value and operations, while the other built up their skills in advanced multiplication and division of whole numbers. Currently, both groups are developing their problem solving skills.

3rd - 4th Reading

Third and fourth graders have been devouring all kinds of mystery books. We have been working on comprehension, fluency, focus, and accuracy in retelling. They have had a chance to draw their favorite scenes from mystery books, discuss plots, and creatively describe some of the main characters. Third graders have also been enjoying a great read-aloud recommendation from Mrs. Debelak, *The Pink Motel* by Carol Ryrie Brink. Fourth graders have been enjoying a read-aloud full of short stories about Encyclopedia Brown.

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3rd - 4th Science

This year, third and fourth graders are junior biologists. They began their life science studies with some of the basics – cell parts and functions as well as classifying living things. The highlight of September was the creation of an edible cell using pudding and assorted candies. Third and fourth grade ABC books featuring organisms from every kingdom are hanging outside the 1-4 science room. Check them out.

“The highlight ... was the creation of an edible cell using pudding ...”

3rd Social Studies

Third graders have been learning about communities in the U.S. and all over the world. They have been practicing cardinal directions and using various types of maps. They have been learning different methods to prepare for a test or a quiz such as the use of mnemonic devices and making vocabulary flash cards, and have also had a great time singing along to patriotic songs.

4th Social Studies

Fourth graders have been studying the wide variety of regions across the U.S. They are learning about the land, people and activities that make each region unique. They are enjoying creating a song to teach their classmates about a particular region in the U.S. and have also enjoyed singing along with patriotic songs.

3rd Spanish

Students worked on rooms and objects of the house and learned the position words: in, out, far, and near. They placed animals in rooms of the house. This month they are learning the verb gustar (like) in combination with foods and school subjects. They also like to solve crosswords based on the same vocabulary.

4th Spanish

Students worked with objects of the classroom. They memorized the vocabulary and learned the formation of plural. At the same time they learned the question words *que?* and *quien?* (what and who) to answer questions. They also worked on number words in connection with math and completed exercises in their book.

FIFTH AND SIXTH GRADE

5th - 8th Computer

Fifth through eighth graders have started on a new development at Birchwood. We have become a Google Apps for Education school.

Each student has a school email account and access to a Google drive and calendar. We are starting to use this and are hoping it will help students stay organized and help teachers with sharing documents, presentations, spreadsheets, and calendars. Students are excited to “turn in homework” and to work on projects together.

5th Language Arts

Students completed their first major grammar unit on prepositions and their first story-modeling assignment based on Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Nightingale*. The focus was on identifying plot elements in the story model and writing a story with a different setting and type of animal while including all the required elements. Students’ choices for both setting and animals that had a special gift were creative, and teachers who read them enjoyed their engaging stories. All students are currently hard at work on essays for the Creative Communication contest. Since fifth grade is also the first year for formal vocabulary study, children are developing the daily study habits that allow them to learn “Red Hot Root Words,” a vocabulary series that focuses on mastering Greek and Latin prefixes, stems and suffixes to dissect complex vocabulary words.

6th Language Arts

Students started with a few short narratives about some true and “made up” experiences, realizing that the amount of details used could lead to more credibility. Practicing the initial steps of prewriting (brainstorming, listing, organizing), students started descriptive essays. First they wrote about their observations of the playground across the street and are currently portraying a room in their house. Simple revisions involve turning questions from peers and teacher into leads to clarify a section in their writing. These weeks will be devoted to descriptive writing of people, places and events.

5th - 6th Mathematics

The greatest challenge for fifth and sixth grade students is to understand mathematics is built upon systems and patterns of thinking. This is an important emphasis during the first few months of school. Children must learn they cannot solve mathematics problems any way they wish. That process might work with rudimentary math concepts, but once students move into higher level mathematics it is important how you do your work and how you study. It is fair to say this process is painful to everyone – student, teacher and parents. Students tenaciously resist showing their math work in a systematic, consistent pattern. The teacher finds himself repeating the same admonition over and over and over: “Show your work. Show your thinking.” And parents lament their high performing fourth grade student has become a “C” student in fifth grade because Mr. Debelak insists math be done the right way. Well, the good news is that this story has a good ending ... but it might take a few years.

CLASS NEWS *continued*

5th Reading

The year has gotten off to a great start. Students reviewed the summer reading book, *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*, learning how Chinese immigrant Shirley Temple Wong and baseball great Jackie Robinson both made a difference in their individual worlds. Then, as the class discovered the challenges of Robinson's life, each student chose their own biography to read. Lives of famous athletes were examined, and each one overcame barriers, whether of gender, race or culture, to make their own mark. Athletes included Jim Thorpe, Babe Didrikson and Jesse Owens in track and field, Gertrude Ederle in swimming, Hank Aaron in baseball, and more. While each student is completing a story map and written report on their athlete of choice, the class has started reading *The Sign of the Beaver*. This colonial-era historical fiction title tells how two boys, one Indian and one white, come to accept and appreciate the other's life and culture. While reading, we will explore contextual setting, types of conflict, and character growth.

6th Reading

The sixth grade summer reading project was to transform an excerpt of the story *Silverwing* into a graphic novel. This is an engaging activity for students, but the analysis and synthesis is quite complex. Students must first select a gripping portion of the story that leads to an important turning point and sequence the key details. Then they must decide how many cartoon panels to draw and most importantly, how to adequately describe the action while being limited to thought bubbles, speaking bubbles and short captions. Along with all of this, several points of view must be represented. The last couple of weeks, the class has been reading *Number the Stars*, a fiction title that commemorates one of history's great victories. During World War II, while German soldiers were arresting so many Jews and sending them to concentration camps, the citizens of occupied Denmark rallied together and safely conveyed nearly all its Jewish citizenry to freedom in Sweden. It is a remarkable and inspiring story. Then, students will go on to read a variety of survival titles, exploring different types of settings and conflicts.

5th Science

The focus of fifth grade science in early September was scientific measurement. Students were taught what instruments to use, how to correctly measure, and how to configure and make sense of the results. They applied their knowledge and skills to document the growth of a polymer "Grow Alligator." The next step was to communicate their results in charts, graphs and written description. This time prepares them to set up charts and to take and record measurements for all their science investigation and engineering projects, not to mention, an upcoming science fair project.

6th Science

After a brief review of the metric system, students revisited density in the lab. They practiced finding the density of an irregular volume by finding the mass and then dividing by the volume of water that was displaced. They have almost completed their study of the theory of seafloor spreading and plate tectonics in the textbook. We used it as a good reminder of how to study a textbook with lots of modeling of how to read for the important points and how to use different study methods to make the information theirs.

5th Social Studies

As a means of learning about Native Americans prior to the arrival of the European explorers, the class took a field trip to the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, where they enjoyed a gallery tour, and the Cleveland Museum of Art where a docent guided them through early American art dating from pre-Columbian times into the 19th century. Students have also taken their first unit test on early European explorers, engaged in a special Constitution Day activity, and begun doing research on an explorer of their choice.

6th Social Studies

Students began the year by drawing maps of places important to them. They presented their thematic maps to the class and it was fun getting to know a little more about their lives. Following this, the class began a unit on culture, learning what elements make up a culture as well as why it's important to study culture. The class divided into two groups and each selected one country to do a more in-depth cultural study. Students paused in their study for two important anniversaries: the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, and the 12th anniversary of the September 11 attacks. Students watched King's speech in its entirety and read background information on the March. For September 11, students looked at primary sources from that day and week, and watched two videos from the History Channel.

5th Spanish

We reviewed vocabulary about seasons and weather of the season using the expression "Que tiempo hace en" and extended the subject with verbs *gustar* (like) and *tener* (to have). They started on body parts and the irregular verb *doler* (to have aches or pain). This group improved and showed great interest in Spanish. I am proud of them.

6th Spanish

Students worked on the vocabulary of sports and the verb *gustar* (like) memorizing the conjugation and making sentences. They also worked on adjectives, using them in a conversation to describe characteristics of people and practiced number words.

SEVENTH AND EIGHTH

5th - 8th Computer

See page 7 to learn what's new for computer students this year.

7th Language Arts

To get back into the groove of writing, we used the theme of a stranded island where students created different pieces of writing to either describe the island, explain how they got stranded, narrate different sequence of events, and create conflicts that arise. Currently, we are starting descriptive writing of places. Students will be taking one another on a tour of their kitchens, trying to incorporate the purpose of their piece as they paint with words.

8th Language Arts

Often what one sees contributes to the vividness of his writing. Eighth graders were plunged into using observational skills to create nuances and clarity in their composition. They took inspiration from a short article by a noted entomologist, who credited this training in science and writing to his undergrad prof who routinely had him observe a specimen for days on end. Eighth graders used their hands as specimens and noted minute differences in scabs, whirls, moles, ridges, and wrinkles (sans weeks of observation). Students continued this exercise by describing their treasured possessions, learning from Noden's model in his "Dime-Store Teapot," at the same time they are to grapple with the significance of the object.

"Often what one sees contributes to the vividness of his writing."

7th - 8th Latin I

Although students begin the year with a review of parts of speech (adjectives, adverbs, etc.) and functions of nouns in a sentence (direct and indirect objects, etc.), students are on a hunt, in teams, for examples of studying Latin in biographies, examples of Latin used in the fiction they read, and examples of Greek and Latin roots that unlock families of words in English. Returning students are dusting off declensions and conjugations from last year; you might have seen their recent practice with sidewalk chalk in the parking lot.

7th - 8th Mathematics

There is a wide range of abilities in the seventh and eighth grade classes, and coursework ranges from Algebra 1 to Geometry to Algebra 2/trigonometry to precalculus. Nevertheless a few ideas

are constant and I am emphasizing certain practices and understandings throughout. The first is "If you cannot explain it, you don't know it. You might be able to 'do' it, but you don't know it." It is a quote I picked up that identifies an important characteristic students need to excel in mathematics and pursue strong mathematics coursework in high school. It implies that a student possesses the language of mathematics. In having the language of mathematics a student is better able to retain what they have learned and to apply it again at a later date. In case you are wondering how your son or daughter is performing in mathematics this year, just ask him or her to explain one of the homework problems. "If they can't explain it, they don't know it."

7th Reading

Summer reading books by Irene Hunt led to discussions about how characters realistically mature through the conflicts they face. In one book the boy reacts against the pressures that the Depression puts upon his family; in the other book the girl must adjust to new circumstances after the death of her mother. Students then wrote their analyses in paragraph essays, practicing elements of expository essay writing. After reading books of choice in this genre of realistic fiction each student then engaged in other types of thinking: 1) an artistic representation of the main events and turning points in the characters life, and 2) journal entry reflections. As they practice the latter they are discovering that books have the ability to bring us near to ourselves. In the writing process they solidify and deepen thoughts that enrich their soul. During times of silent reading and class work music by American composer Aaron Copland plays in the background. They are now beginning to survey great speeches in history in order to select one to prepare for Speech Fest on October 16.

8th Reading

Because the novel *The Education of Little Tree* illustrates major literary elements so well, the class began the year with an in-depth review of plot, theme, dialect, humor, and style via analytical notes and engaging discussions. Students created book advertisements for their independent reading, enticing others to read these quality books. Alongside the fiction unit, they have read or heard an array of nonfiction including magazines, short stories and primary source material. By way of a Junior Great Books selection they analyzed how authors of nonfiction convey facts and opinions and how this opens up opportunities to evaluate and form our own opinions. They did a close reading of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and wrote poems that are displayed in the hallway. They are now beginning to survey great speeches in history in order to select one to prepare for Speech Fest on October 16.

CLASS NEWS *continued*

7th Science

Seventh grade students set up experiments for force and motion units. We tried a different approach this year; they did many of the labs as inquiry before studying them in the book. It turned out the chapter made more sense. After completing the chapter on forces they planned experiments that would provide evidence that change in an object's motion depends on the sum of forces on the object and mass of the object, and then practiced their first lab write-up.

8th Science

Eighth grade students had two key experiences. They learned how to engage in scientific argumentation from evidence, thinking critically, arguing persuasively, and analyzing competing points of view, and they learned how to write a lab report after a four-day experiment with potato osmosis. In round one, students read and analyzed evidence in four journal articles that presented results of multitasking experiments. Next they read a *Science News* article about texting and cell phone use, wrote and defended their claims using evidence. In the last round they developed and justified their arguments about snake coloring by analyzing evidence from charts and then each group presented and defended their claims.

7th Social Studies

In seventh grade, students study early American history up to the Civil War. Students began with a unit on the Maya, Inca and Aztec civilizations and then moved on to build a timeline on European explorers who first came to the Americas. After analyzing causes and effects of European exploration, students constructed brief essays presenting the information. Students also spent class time reading about and discussing the situation in Syria. In addition, they observed the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington by viewing Martin Luther King's speech on his dream and following up with an interesting primary source activity. For the September 11 anniversary, students viewed newspapers from that day and the week following,

and watched a selection of videos regarding the events. Currently, students are learning about the development of self-government in the colonies and events that led to the American Revolution.

8th Social Studies

In eighth grade, students study American history from post-Civil War to the present day. The year began with a look at Reconstruction and its successes and failures which led to an essay to present a point of view. Students moved on to westward settlement and the growth of the railroads, mining, farming, and cattle ranching. Students participated in a simulation as a homesteader going west. With a focus on world events, students read a variety of newspaper articles on the situation in Syria. They also watched the complete newsreel of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and analyzed a well known journalist's assessment of its impact. They also watched a variety of short, gripping videos on the events of September 11. Along with activities for Constitution Day and some brainstorming for the National History Day competition, it's been a busy year so far.

7th Spanish

Students finished working on the Repaso number 1 "Amigos, alumnus y parientes." They learned vocabulary associated with friends, family and home. They worked on the verb ser (to be) and tener (to have) and the uses of both, and on the uses of nouns, articles and possessive adjectives.

8th Spanish

Students worked on the chapter "En avion." They talked about packing for a trip and getting to the airport, and discovered what to say at the airport and on an airplane. They learned irregular verbs that have a "g" in the yo form of the present tense like "venir" (to come) or "poner" (to put). They wrote sentences and practiced conversations using the verbs.

UPCOMING EVENTS



Tuesday, October 15

Community Update

6:30 p.m.

See page 2 for details.

Sunday, October 20

Open House for Prospective Families

2 - 4 p.m.

Invite your friends to attend.

Friday, October 25

No School – Teacher Professional Day