

Birchwood Clipboard

The Lion's Roar

ACHIEVEMENT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Conventional wisdom defines achievement as an accomplishment, an endeavor brought to a successful conclusion. It fits well if we lived in a linear world where we can tick off accomplishments like we do tasks on a “to do” list. According to Tony Wagner, however, in his book *The Global Achievement Gap*, achievement in the 21st century must find its definition in a more complex world, one of constant change, built upon a flood of data and an explosion of technological and global advances.

Achievement under these circumstances, whether in work or living, is dynamic; it requires not only hard work, but just as importantly critical thinking and problem solving skills. The world will come at our children rapidly and they will need the habits of mind to meet new challenges under new circumstances. Quoting Peter

Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, Wagner writes, “[in the 21st century economy] employees need to sift through an overwhelming amount of information in order to figure out what’s important and what’s not. To do this you have to think critically.” There will not be simple answers to 21st century challenges and problems. It will require critical thinking, defined by Annemarie Neal as “taking issues and situations and problems and going to root components; understanding how the problem evolved – looking at it from a systemic perspective and not accepting things at face value.”

Twenty-first century achievement will be less linear and our challenge is this, “how do you do things that haven’t been done before, where you have to rethink or think anew, or break set in a fundamental way – it’s not incremental improvement anymore. That just won’t cut it” (Ellen Kumata, managing partner at Cambria Associates).

UNDER THE CANOPY NEWS FROM BIRCHWOOD

Growth & Sustainability *Maintaining the Mission*



In 2005, after we decided to make Birchwood School a permanent institution, we were faced with the problem of sustainability. According to our understanding, most institutions are created by people, whose personality, vision and dedication coalesce into a mission that defines the institution. For sustainability and transition, the founders’ vision and mission must be articulated

into practices, polices and traditions which can be continued and even enhanced by the next generation. These practices, policies and traditions are what we are calling our “constitution” and we have framed this constitution according to four pillars. *Pillar #2* is below:

Pillar #2: Create an experiential framework for achievement that enables children to forge good work habits, productive attitudes and healthy relationships.

Character development requires an environment that deliberately fosters good habits and attitudes toward life and work. It requires a blend of teaching and training. Teaching occurs during daily openings, at which time teachers introduce students to great people in history who demonstrated virtue and character. It continues in each classroom where students learn about good habits during the course of their daily work. Training occurs as students engage in our academic programs designed to provide sufficient challenge and rigor – giving each child countless experiences in self-discipline, self-control, delayed gratification, time management, organization, and many other personal attributes that contribute to the building of good character. Dedicated teachers use real-life classroom situations to nurture personal character that emphasizes achievement and social awareness.

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UNDER THE CANOPY *continued*

Scholastic Writing Awards

In addition to the Scholastic winners announced last month, the following students were awarded honorable mention certificates. Congratulations to:

Jack – 8th, short story, *The Cigarette and the Life Changer*

Michael H. – 7th, flash fiction, *Red Feather*

Jad – 7th, fantasy, *The Great War*

Power of the Pen Achievements

On February 8, representatives from Birchwood's seventh and eighth grades competed against 15 east side middle schools in the 2014 Power of the Pen district tournament.

The seventh grade team took home the 3rd place trophy and eighth grade finished 4th. Seventh grade student Abigail placed 1st overall and was awarded a "best of rounds" and Olivia placed 12th. Eighth grade students Julia M. and Crystal placed 6th and 7th.

The seventh grade team included Favian, Maya, Julia F., Abigail, Olivia, and Farah, while the eighth grade team included Grace, Vinayak, William L., Julia M., Anika, and Crystal. We hope many of them will continue on to the regional competition in April.

Thank you to parents Rozina Sayed, Nina Zwolinski and Rui Huang for their help and volunteering their time. We also appreciate Mrs. Coury for helping us evaluate during the competition.

Neuroscience for Kids Writing Contest

This year, the Neuroscience for Kids Writing Contest required entrants to write a poem about the nervous system. Ehren C. was chosen as a winner for his poem called "The Journey of Sight."

MATHCOUNTS Success

Birchwood's MATHCOUNTS team of Vinayak, Anika, William L., and Topstone won 1st place at the MATHCOUNTS Chapter Round on February 15. This victory marks the fifth consecutive year Birchwood has taken 1st place.

The team also won the Countdown Round. The team will be competing in the State Round in Columbus on March 9. In the individual competition, Vinayak was 1st and Anika was 3rd.

Good luck Birchwood athletes!

Math Olympiad Awards

Congratulations to the winners of Math Olympiad's contest #4:

Gold: Ying-ying, William, Vinayak, Crystal, Farah, Shruthi, Zuha

Silver: Tejal, Steven, Kevin, Stella

Bronze: Topstone, Anika, Grace C., Caroline, Alia B., Avi, Cameron, Michael H., Julia F., Praveen, Rishav, Erhan, Naya, Alex M.

Continental Math Awards

Congratulations to the winners of Continental Math's contest #4:

Gold: Anika, Vinayak, Topstone, Ying-ying

Silver: Crystal, William, Maryum, Jane

Bronze: Grace C., Kevin, Nikhita, Avi, Cameron, Derzan, Alia B., Shruthi, Zuha, Lilah, Erhan, Eric, Maide

Cricket Awards

Students from several classes received honors from *Cricket* magazine. In the ages 11 and under category, congratulations to Sophia who received 1st place, Lilah for her 2nd place entry, and Dharma who received 3rd place; and also to Alex, Karim, Isabella, Zuha, Alia, Channin, and Asim who received honorable mention.

In the ages over 11 category, three students received honorable mention for their poem honoring American veterans submitted to the *Cricket* holiday poem contest. Congratulations to: Grace, Farah and Ying Ying.

Science Olympiad Results

On March 1, the 25-member Birchwood Science Olympiad team traveled to Case Western Reserve University to compete against 14 other Greater Cleveland area teams.

Each team is comprised of fourth, fifth and sixth grade students. Birchwood had its strongest showing yet, placing in six events and taking 8th place. Many thanks to parents who helped prepare students. Your help made a difference.

Congratulations to Joshua S. and Tejal (4th place, Circuit Wizardry), Alia B. and Tejal (5th place, Disease Detectives), Abeedah H. and Siham (5th place, Don't Bug Me), Rishav and Joyce (5th place, Simple Machines), Steven S. and Derzan (3rd place, Water Quality), and Stella and Alia B. (4th place, What Went By).

Other team members included: Paul A., Neige, Thomas, Kabir, Praveen, Dalila, Peter, Erhan, Naya, Makenah, Eric H., Isabella I., Zuha, Terek, and Shruthi.

Thanks to parents: Christopher Connelly and Kaiser Mohammed who judged the bridge building event. Thanks to helpers who walked children to events: Antoinette Abou Haidar, Muhammad Raza, Adib Michael Alsouss, Ayesha Baig, Nancy Wu, Paul & Monique Farrington, Jeffrey & Stephane Gorenc, Reema Gulati, Sobia Hassan, Paula Hendryx, Phillip Hollweg, Manjusha Kumar, Haiat Mahli, Mr. Nukta, Rita Baca DeLancey, Jayashree Ravichandran, and Somnath Roy.

TEACHING CHILDREN TO THRIVE

In teaching children to *thrive* we need to understand the interplay between language, experience and habit formation. Language lays the foundation for understanding and guides experiences. The *language of thriving*, when internalized, helps children practice behaviors that promote and support thriving. Practice through experience, and under the guidance of language, results in habits. The accumulation of habits constitutes character.

The relationship between language and experience works in different ways. Sometimes language affects behaviors directly and immediately. Here the impact is incremental, shaping habits little-by-little, like when we teach children to say “please” and “thank you.”

Other times the language of thriving is like a seed sown into a child’s heart. We do not see the fruit immediately but the potential is percolating within the seed. At the right time, under the right experience, the seed blossoms and language impacts behavior.

In this behavioral scenario, parents and educators cannot be disappointed if they see their lessons go unheeded. Parents often lament, “What’s the use? He doesn’t listen to me. My words go in one ear and out the other!” Parents become discouraged in their efforts. It seems their words have no effect and even elicit negative reactions from their children.

What is to be done? Ignore their reactions. The language you give your children is much more powerful than their childish moods. The language you speak will function like a seed in their hearts and will have the power to speak to their hearts long after they walk away from you.

I have a good example from close friends of mine; let’s call them Bob and Gina. They admonished their children year after year about setting goals. “Responsible people have goals,” they would insist. “What are your goals, children? What are your goals at school? What are your goals for soccer?” But like all children, they would shrug their shoulders, roll their eyes, and mumble, “I don’t know.”

One day their teenage son, Billy, came home from school ecstatic, and at the dinner table, gushing with enthusiasm, he explained, “Dad. Mom. Mr. Jones my English teacher talked to us today about setting goals. Do you realize that productive people are goal-setters? Mr. Jones told us that we need to set goals for every aspect of our life. That is how we grow. Isn’t that fantastic! What



an idea! I am going right upstairs after dinner, write out my goals, and post them on my bulletin board. Gosh, that Mr. Jones is really a smart guy.”

Bob and Gina, stunned, feeling belittled and unappreciated, wondered why their son did not listen and respond to their goal-setting admonitions. Later, when their petty feelings of personal offense subsided, they gained perspective. In order for their son to be able to respond to Mr. Jones’ goal-setting admonition, Billy needed years of language from Bob and Gina. That language, apparently unheeded, was incubating in Billy’s heart. Its practical effect upon Billy’s life required maturity, the right timing, and the right set of circumstances. Bob and Gina’s consistent and persistent language set the stage for the right moment of awakening or awareness – a kind of enlightenment for Billy. Billy was empowered at that moment of time to begin the practice of goal-setting, driven no longer by mom and dad hovering over Billy, but by his own desire to be a goal-setter.

What is important to note is that if there had not been language, neither would there have been the awakening. Without language, Billy would have been unaffected by Mr. Jones admonition. But having language from his parents incubating in his heart, when the time was ripe, Billy realized the importance of the goal-setting – a critical feature of thriving.

“Sometimes language affects behaviors directly ... other times the language of thriving is like a seed sown into a child’s heart.”

PARENTS' CORNER

Parent Meeting a Success

The Parent Committee held a morning meeting in February with a fabulous turnout. Discussions centered on how we will spend the money that has been raised through our many fundraising efforts, the fall back-to-school picnic – tentatively scheduled for Friday, September 5, volunteer opportunities, and camp surveys.

Traditionally, we have given the school \$13,000 to \$15,000 toward school competitions and staff development and plan to continue that. Are you curious about our competitions and the associated fees? Mr. and Mrs. Debelak will be holding a coffee chat on Wednesday, March 12 from 8:30 - 9 a.m. to discuss why we enter competitions, what they are, and how much they cost.

Coffee With Mr. & Mrs. Debelak

Wednesday, March 12
8:30 - 9 a.m.
Library

Learn why Birchwood School enters competitions; what competitions Birchwood students enter; 2012-13 results; and the cost of entering.

Call 216-251-2321 or email msato@birchwoodschoo.org to RSVP.

Collect Boxtops / Purchase SCRIPS Gift Cards



Our Boxtops/Labels for Education and SCRIPS gift card fundraisers continue! Please remember to send in your labels and purchase gift cards through our program. Details can be

found on the Parent Committee page, under the Community header at birchwoodschoo.org.

School Supply Kits



It is time to think about the next school year. Stay tuned for information on our school supply program from SchoolKidz. Order forms and a complete explanation should be available in April for this easy service. Delivery will be in August before school starts.

More Parent Updates

Watch the weekly *Birchwood News* email for minutes from the February parent meeting and the date for the April meeting.

BOARD UPDATE

30th Anniversary Gala Weekend

Birchwood School is 30! And we have a weekend of festivities planned to celebrate. Join us for some or, better yet, all the fun:

Poetry Show With a Twist

Friday, May 30 at 7:30 p.m.
Birchwood School Fogarty Hall

Our annual Poetry Show takes a twist. Travel through time as current students perform the works of Dr. Seuss and other great poets while alumni “join” them via archival footage from past shows.

30th Anniversary Gala

Saturday, May 31 at 6:30 p.m.
Cleveland Botanical Garden

Birchwood School will host a gala (black tie optional) at the Cleveland Botanical Garden. Join us as we celebrate our first three decades while looking forward to our next three. Tickets include dinner, parking and a tax-deductible contribution in support of the school. Tickets are available for purchase online at birchwoodschoo.org.



Ice Cream Social

Sunday, June 1 from 2:30 - 4:30 p.m.
Birchwood School

Our Ice Cream Social closes out the weekend as Birchwood School opens its doors for current and alumni families. Enjoy an afternoon of tours, field day activities, and a build-your-own sundae bar!

CLASS NEWS

Seedlings

This month the Seedlings have been focusing on friendship. We have been talking about what it means to be a good friend and what we can do in our classroom to promote friendship. In our classroom we have a “Fantastic Friend” board. Every time we see a Seedling being a good friend they get to put a star on the board explaining what they did to promote friendship in our classroom. We are continuing to work on learning the letters and letter sounds in the alphabet. The Seedlings are becoming very good at thinking of words that start with the letter of the week. We display all of the words we think of around our classroom. In math we are working on simple addition using manipulatives. The students are very interested in adding things together. The Seedlings find many ways to incorporate this skill in our daily activities.

Sprouts

Over the past few weeks the Sprouts have been learning about friendship. We have been reading books about children being a nice friend and children who need help learning how to care for each other. The children also make a link for the kindness chain whenever they help a friend. Sprouts have also been working as a team to construct incredible block structures such as football stadiums and fields, London Bridge, the Sydney Opera House, princess castles, rocket ships, etc.

We have begun a unit on nursery rhymes and have been incorporating this theme in all areas of the classroom. We are memorizing familiar rhymes such as “Little Boy Blue,” “Little Miss Muffet,” “Jack and Jill” and more. We are also using “Jack Be Nimble” to solve math problems such as $4+5=9$, by jumping over a cardboard candlestick. We are also looking at nursery rhymes and circling simple sight words we have been learning throughout the year.

Kindergarten

February was an exciting month for the kindergarteners. We began practicing for the Sharing Show and are working hard memorizing songs and poems as well as hand motions. Kindergarten students celebrated the 100th day of school by reading books about the 100th day, decorating cupcakes, making sand art crafts, and discovering what they could do in 100 seconds. Thanks to Dr. Gordon, Mrs. Musson, Mrs. Del Rio, Mrs. Myieras, Mrs. Fleming, Ms. Cliffel, Mrs. Sgro, and Mrs. D’Souza for organizing and leading this special event.

“Kindergarteners celebrated 100 days of school by discovering what they could do in 100 seconds.”

K Math

The kindergarten students continue to be great mathematicians. They are mastering addition and subtraction up to 20 and using mental math to do arithmetic problems. They really enjoy their Wood Math books. Kindergartners have also learned about length and measurement. They had fun measuring items around the classroom and in the hallway. They are currently starting a unit on time and telling time to the hour, and half hour. Students enjoy using their own clocks to move the hour and minute hand to tell time. They really do love math and look forward to the class everyday.

K Reading

Kindergarten students continue to improve in reading and writing. We are continuing to “read our hearts out” and read over 300 books last month. We have more students who are beginning to read simple chapter books. In writing, we continue to work on our monthly writing prompts. Last month we wrote about our 100th day of school and what our favorite part of the day was. We are seeing improvements in their writing.

K Science

Kindergarten scientists continued their unit on winter animals. We spent time studying brown bears, polar bears and penguins. Students really enjoyed learning how to waddle around the classroom while protecting their penguin egg. We also studied how animals hibernate, adapt and migrate to survive during the cold winter months. Finally, we did a mini research project on a winter animal. This was a lot of fun and everyone did a fabulous job presenting their projects in front of their classmates.

K Social Studies

Kindergarteners have learned about Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks and Ruby Bridges. Students took part in discussions about how each of these people help changed our country. They were impressed by the courage and perseverance these people had. Kindergarteners also learned about presidents, focusing on George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. They were enriched with books that talked about who these presidents were and what they did during their lifetime. They made their own mini-biographies about each of them. They concluded this unit with sharing what they want to do if they were the president of the United States.

Music-Flute

There are four students in fifth and sixth grade flute class. An advantage to having a class this size is the ability to work one-on-one. Each student gets the opportunity to play her instrument in every class, while I am able to carefully observe things like hand position, embouchure and correct fingerings. I believe it is important for students to practice outside of the classroom, in addition to working diligently in class. However, I also encourage them to have fun playing the flute and to find enjoyment in playing music.

Strings

Fifth and sixth grade string students are working hard to improve their violin and viola playing technique and to expand their repertoire of tunes they are comfortable performing. Just a few short months ago they had never even held the instruments before and now they are performing solos and ensemble pieces.

They are also learning to read music, some for the first time, while others are learning a second or third clef. For example viola players read in alto clef (those with a piano background have already been exposed to the treble and bass clef). Reading skills can be perfected even without the instrument in hand. Students have found that speaking or singing the rhythms, note names, or finger numbers either isolated or in combination makes playing the music much easier and musically more accurate. Violin and viola students look forward to performing for the younger classes who have not yet had a chance to learn about stringed instruments.

1st-2nd Computer

First and second grade students have been working on the basics of learning to type and programming in MicroWorlds Jr. Second graders have been writing short stories using Storybird. This online storybook creation tool features stories with wonderful pictures that students can add words to before sharing or printing as a book.

1st Language Arts

First grade has been working on the elements of a story. They began by finding the beginning, middle and end; writing one or two sentences about each and illustrating those sentences. This process enables them to create clear, concise and short descriptions of a story or a summarization. They will apply these skills as they begin writing their own stories. We introduced “watermelon” and “seed” ideas, whittling down a huge topic or story (watermelon), to write about only a small portion (seed) of the story. This writing process will continue to be used and expanded as students write stories for the PBS contest.

1st Math

This month's focus was working on advanced computation skills. We split into three groups, each with their own set of challenges. The first group practiced 2- and 3-digit addition and subtraction with regrouping, using content from the blue woodmath book. The second group began learning and practicing basic multiplication facts. A few from this group moved on to 2-digit and 1-digit problems. The third group practiced applying computation skills in more complex 2- and 3-step word problems. It was a productive month, with a number of children finishing or nearly finishing the blue woodmath book, which is, typically, a second grade book.

1st Spanish

First graders reviewed terms to describe family members. They talked about their parents' names as well as hair and eye colors. Students played a game where they matched kids to their relatives according to physical traits. They also worked diligently on weather terms and became TV weather reporters by drawing pictures of the weather and sharing descriptions with classmates.

1st-2nd Reading

First and second graders have started a unit on books that have won the Randolph Caldecott Medal for best illustrations in children's books. They enjoyed learning about various mediums illustrators use to create their works. Several students are also participating in the optional “Caldecott Challenge.” Students independently read Caldecott Medal and Honor books and write captivating summaries to entice their classmates to read the book. As a conclusion to this enrichment experience, students create their own masterpiece based on their favorite scene from the books they have read.

1st-2nd Science

Students recently completed a fun oral health unit called “Open Wide and Trek Inside” (available online). Following the steps of the scientific method, they set up investigations to see what happens to apples with and without holes poked in them (the experimental and control apples represented rotten and healthy teeth. Another highlight was acting out what happens inside our mouths and what can be done to prevent cavities. Students played the parts of bacteria, teeth, healthy and unhealthy foods, and toothbrushes. Plaque and acid were represented by sticky notes. Throughout the unit, students learned about the different types and layers of teeth as well as how cavities form. The importance of eating healthy foods, brushing at least twice a day, flossing daily, and going to the dentist regularly were emphasized.



1st-2nd Social Studies

First and second graders finished their unit on Native Americans. First graders were treated to a presentation about war bonnets by fellow classmate James P. who modeled a war bonnet made from a real fox. Awesome! Both classes enjoyed a potlatch as a concluding activity. Potlatches are celebrations held by tribes in the Northwest region. We celebrated the end of our studies by tasting traditional food such as Navajo fry bread, berries, pumpkin seeds, and hibiscus tea. Children enjoyed sharing their Native American fact books with each other and teaching their parents how to play a shell game from the Northeast region. Second graders made and modeled hunting hats from the Far North region. Thank you to the parents who helped make this event a success by sending in food, serving refreshments, and interacting with students.

2nd Language Arts

Students have completed their individual stories modeled after *The Mysterious Tadpole* by Steven Kellogg. They had great fun choosing a fairly ordinary looking birthday gift that gradually revealed its more mysterious true identity. These stories really allowed the children to release their imagination and describe the process of revelation in great detail.

Since then, second grade students have been working on more story modeling including *The Stray Dog* by Marc Simont. For this story, we focused on using short, concise words and allowing the illustrations to “do the talking.” We followed a specific 10-page structure that prompted children to guide the reader, step-by-step through finding a stray animal, helping it, bonding with it, adopting it, and finally seeing it relax in its new home.

We have also been reviewing and cementing the spelling of words like the days of the week, weather descriptors, and now, the months of the year. Sitton Spelling lessons and assessments have moved into consonant digraphs. We have also begun a vocabulary building arm of the curriculum, and students are supplementing their Sitton Spelling with new, more complex vocabulary words from Wordly Wise or Spell-it Write.

We are incorporating basic grammar lessons into every writing exercise, and review and practice grammar rules on a regular basis.

Finally, we are well into cursive development and are progressing deliberately (slowly) to ensure that each child learns the proper formation of each cursive letter. This is extremely important in the long run, when the student relies on his or her cursive for rapid note-taking, and idea capturing. If the letters are not formed properly, the whole process slows down, and results in illegible words. Thank you for your support of this deliberate process. Please trust that this time is an investment which will pay off in the long run.

2nd Spanish

Second grade had a wonderful time learning food terms including vocabulary related to setting the table. They also learned the names of fruit and a variety of other foods. They liked to ask each other silly questions about choosing food in a school cafeteria.

3rd-4th Computer

Third and fourth graders have been working on slideshows including putting in images, transitions and animations. Third graders are creating a Google slideshow about their favorite place and fourth graders are preparing presentations outlining their yearly goals.

3rd Language Arts

Third graders have been busy working on short, two-day story modeling exercises as well as longer-term writing for personal enjoyment and submission to *Cricket* and PBS contests. They have recently modeled *Jungle Drums* by Graeme Base, *Rain Romp* by Jane Kurtz, and *June 29, 1999* by David Wiesner. These short exercises help the students improve fluency and follow a prepared structure to quickly build a story.

We have also begun working on listening skills and writing based upon what has been heard. We are primarily using “Beethoven Lives Upstairs” by Classical Kids Audio to learn about the struggles and life of Beethoven as well as to enjoy pieces of his music. The story is narrated by a child whose mother “rents” the upstairs of their home to the composer. This is an on-going exercise in listening for enjoyment while also listening for comprehension.

Third graders have been immersed into stronger word learning (both spelling and vocabulary-building is expected) according to their abilities. Students will be moved into more appropriate levels as their weekly progress is monitored. Our goal is to improve spelling, but also to build students’ vocabulary to allow for more colorful and enjoyable writing experiences.

Finally, we are continuing with “caught ‘ya” exercises for grammar development as well as the incorporation of grammar lessons with weekly writing exercises. Sitton Spelling continues to provide phonics-based spelling patterns that students internalize to develop innate spelling strengths without rote memorization.

2nd-4th Math

Last November second through fourth graders participated in the national Noetic Learning Math Contest. This contest for students in grades 2-6, is held twice a year. Over 18,000 young students representing 944 teams across the country participated in the fall contest. Two levels of achievement are recognized: National Honor Roll and National Honorable Mention. The grade level standards for recognition as well as class results are listed below.

Second Grade: total 2,750 participants

Qualifying Scores: National Honor Roll: 75% or more correct (15/20)

Honorable Mention: 50% correct (10/20)

CLASS NEWS *continued*

National Results: Honor Roll: 11.8% – Birchwood: 25% of class
Honorable Mention: 37.7% – Birchwood: 43.7% of class

Of note for second grade: only .4% (11 students) achieved a perfect score nationwide. At Birchwood, Carter proved himself to be among the best of the best, scoring 20 out of 20. Also achieving National Honor Roll were James M., Eve and Leah.

Third Grade: total 4,161 participants

Qualifying Scores: National Honor Roll: 80% or better (16/20)

Honorable Mention: 50% or better (10/20)

National Results: Honor Roll: 12.8% – Birchwood 18.8% of class

Honorable Mention: 39.7% – Birchwood 62.5% of class

Notable for the third grade: only 2.5% (103 students) earned 95% or better nationwide. At Birchwood, Arman was distinguished as the team winner. Congratulations also to Leo and Jaden for earning National Honor Roll.

Fourth Grade: total 4,390 participants

Qualifying Scores: National Honor Roll: 80% or better (16/20)

Honorable Mention: 55% or better (11/20)

National results: Honor Roll: 12.1% – Birchwood 50% of class

Honorable Mention: 36.3% – Birchwood 12.5 % of class

Notable in the fourth grade: Neige and Peter were two of 98 fourth graders nationally to score 95% or better on the contest. That puts them in the top 2.5% of fourth graders in the country. Also earning a spot on the National Honor Roll were Paul, Abeerah, Praveen, Josh, Nathan, and Dalila.

3rd Reading

Third graders are loving their fantasy unit. As a class they have read *Mr. Popper's Penguins* which is a cute story about a family that adopts two penguins who end up having ten babies. The family has to find a way to earn more money to keep their penguins fed. The story is creative and fun to read aloud in small groups as the third graders have been doing. Many of the third graders have also seen the movie so we had smaller group discussions to talk about the differences between the book and the movie and decide which they liked best. Third graders also prepared their poetry lines and blocking for the poetry show. They were thrilled to share their hard work with you. Their next unit will be fairy tales and folktales.

3rd-4th Social Studies

Third and fourth graders have begun studying the southwest region of the United States. They are also learning about major landforms and main bodies of water. Third graders will begin a new unit on the history of Cleveland while fourth graders will begin a new unit on the final region of the United States: the west. Both classes have also been reading and discussing articles in *Time for Kids* to keep up with current events and learn about other places in the world.

3rd Spanish

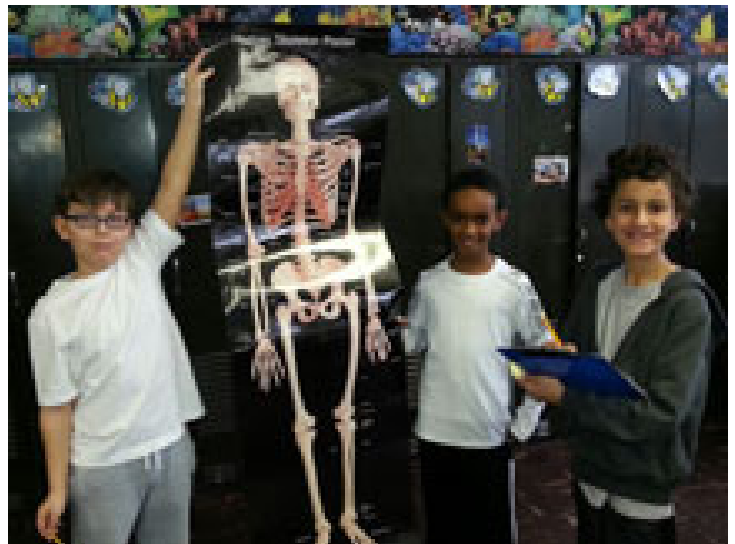
Students enjoyed learning vocabulary related to emergencies by using their imagination to describe situations where they had to call the police or fire department for help. Students looked at pictures and wrote answers to questions according to the scene. I am impressed with the class and their progress in Spanish.

3rd-4th Science

Last month, students had their “harvest party.” As a culmination to the Veggie U unit which focuses on plants and nutrition, students harvested and actually got to try some of the vegetables they had been growing nearly all year. In addition, the identities of the ten mystery plants were revealed! And, as part of the nutrition unit, students brought in healthy snacks to share at the party.

Some of the other recent activities include learning to read nutrition labels and ingredient lists, discussing healthy portion sizes, reviewing the food groups and nutritious choices, and learning how to incorporate exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle. Rather than take a test on healthy living, the unit assessment required students to reflect on and write about their own healthy and not-so-healthy choices and provide ideas for improvement in their own lives.

Most recently students have delved deeper into the musculoskeletal system. They started by trying to count the bones in the human body; after a “blind” count, they did a recount using pictures of different parts of the skeleton. Many thanks to Dr. Sanjay Kumar who came in and gave a special presentation to the third graders. He even brought a poster for each child to take home.



4rd Language Arts

Fourth graders have been busy working on short, two-day story modeling exercises as well as longer-term writing for personal enjoyment and submission to *Cricket* and PBS contests. They have recently modeled *Raising Yoder's Barn* by Jane Yolen, *Frederick* by Leo Lionni, and *Alexander and the Wind-up Mouse* by Leo Lionni. These short exercises help the students improve fluency and follow a prepared structure to quickly build a story.

We have also begun working on listening skills, and writing based upon what has been heard. We are primarily using "Beethoven Lives Upstairs" by Classical Kids Audio to learn about the struggles and life of Beethoven as well as to enjoy pieces of his music. The story is narrated by a child whose mother "rents" the upstairs of their home to the composer. This is an on-going exercise in listening for enjoyment while also listening for comprehension.

Fourth graders have been immersed into stronger word learning (both spelling and vocabulary-building is expected) according to their abilities. We are using Red Hot Root Words, Wordly Wise and a spelling dictionary for various levels of ability. Students will be moved into more appropriate levels as their weekly progress is monitored. Our goal is to improve spelling, but also to build students' vocabulary to allow for more colorful and enjoyable writing.

Finally, we are continuing with caught 'ya exercises for grammar development as well as the incorporation of grammar lessons with weekly writing exercises. Sitton Spelling continues to provide phonics-based spelling patterns that students internalize to develop innate spelling strengths without rote memorization.

4th Reading

Fourth graders just wrapped up a unit on Lewis and Clark in which they followed the explorers on their journey and kept a journal along the way. They practiced labeling a map with different areas they travelled to with Lewis and Clark. Fourth graders are now in the middle of a tall tales unit. They are having a lot of fun reading about the exaggerated lives of Paul Bunyan, Johnny Appleseed, Mike Fink, and others. They are also working hard to prepare for the poetry show. I can see a big difference in their enunciation and performance skills from last year.

4th-5th Spanish

Students are working on verbs and learning the ending of verbs according to subject pronouns and to conjugate regular action words. They enjoyed composing sentences following the grammatical structure and making necessary changes in order to converse.

5th Language Arts

We have spent some of our language arts time working on writing that is required for History Day. Each student developed a creative title, a 300-word paper detailing the process of their research, and an MLA-style works cited page complete with annotations. After endless revisions, all the paperwork was displayed along with student projects at the school History Fair. Revisions are ongoing to bring student work up to the standard required by the contest on April 26. In addition, students have written stories for the February *Cricket* contest, which asked them to compose a historical fiction piece about any period in history they found fascinating. Many chose their History Day topic, while others explored a new subject such as the Titanic or a journey to the moon. Students found it challenging to convert a non-fiction topic into a historical fiction piece. Finally, four students were honored with prizes in the fall *Cricket* contest. These include Sophia, who earned 1st place for her story, "A Trip to Space," Dharma, whose story, "A Place to Hide" placed 3rd, and Alex. and Karim, who wrote stories about sports and garnered honorable mention awards. Their stories or names appear in the February issue of the magazine. Congratulations to these newly published authors.

5th Reading

The class is currently reading *Amos Fortune: Free Man* by Elizabeth Yates, a true story of a slave who lived in the north, bought his freedom, and then in the midst of our own country's fight for freedom waged his own personal war, purchasing freedom for several other black slaves. Amos was a successful tanner who eventually bought his own land and built an extensive farm in the shadow of Mount Monadnock in New Hampshire. Meaning "mountain that stands alone," it was here Amos found solace in a time of personal crisis. After discussing this part of the story, students will write a poem about their "special" place where they can find comfort, strength and wisdom. A theme the class has discussed a few times is "the light and shadow of freedom."

We just received news of three student winners for *Cricket* magazine's fall poetry contest. Lilah received 2nd place for her poem "Winter's Birth." Isabella and Zuha received an honorable mention for "Autumn! Fall! I Love them All" and "Eid." Congratulations!

5th Social Studies

The History Fair on February 19 was a big success. About half of the students performed in a play, for which they had written the script, gathered props, learned actions, and memorized all the lines. The other students presented exhibit boards that they had planned, organized and arranged into a pleasing visual display. Each of them introduced and summarized their project while also noting its adherence to the theme. This culminates months of challenging historical research that students began in late October. I am proud of all of them. In class we are now returning to colonial America where we have studied the many contributions of Ben Franklin.

CLASS NEWS *continued*

Students worked in teams to debate the long-term impact of each aspect of his work and decided that his contribution to the Declaration of Independence was the most important.

5th-6th Mathematics

While students progress in their math skills, we have been paying special attention to the quality of their work. Writing neatly, showing one's work, attacking problems systematically, are all important skills if students hope to do advanced math coursework. It is a time for breaking bad habits and forging new habits, perhaps a little "painful" for everyone, but valuable for the future.

5th Science

The science room was electrified these past three weeks with the study of electricity. The study has jumped from static electricity to current electricity. Part of the emphasis was to learn how to study a science text. The fun part was to actually use the batteries they brought to learn and apply some of the concepts.

6th Language Arts

To introduce expository writing, students began with how-to essays that included standard paragraphs with a beginning, middle, end. Instructions to explain a simple game or craft turned out to be not so simple after all. In addition, students started prewriting and completing a rough draft for the Craig Tufts Scholarship essay, the incentive is a week in California at the Family Nature Summit, a camp affiliated with the National Wildlife Federation.

6th Reading

Students are finishing a world folktale unit by rewriting a tale of their choice and condensing it from 6 to 8 pages to just two pages. Each student will draw and color a picture of a scene from their folktale and we will create a book to donate to the classroom. Students are also producing plot posters for a Newbery book that they have read. Finally, we received news of three student winners for *Cricket* magazine's fall poetry contest. Alia, Channin and Asim all received an honorable mention for their poems: "Bird on the Rooftop," "Winter Wishes," and "Winter World." Congratulations!

6th Science

In science students studied biomes by reading and outlining what was presented in the text. Next they charted the information and practiced comparing and contrasting using transitional expressions.

5th-6th Computers

Fifth graders have been using computer class to work on their history fair projects. We worked on merging multiple documents, advanced formatting for their works cited pages, and sharing their Google docs. Sixth graders have been working on using Google spreadsheets and practicing their typing skills.

6th Spanish

Students reviewed vocabulary about use of the adjectives, personal pronouns and possessive pronouns. They are completing special work in order to finish all subjects necessary for the next level of Spanish and have demonstrated improvements and the desire to learn more language skills.

7th Reading

Esther Forbes won the Pulitzer Prize for her book about Paul Revere and then went on to win the Newbery Medal for *Johnny Tremain*. Our class often commented on what a good writer she was. Having just finished a study of the Revolutionary War in social studies, they could see how closely the dramatic events leading up to the American Revolution in Boston were interwoven with the life and fate of the fictional character, Johnny. As he wrestles with his own pride and arrogance he is affected by the events and people around him and he comes to realize what it means to live for an ideal larger than himself. It's wonderful to see how the students grasp these ideas. They are articulating the causes for his growth and change via discussion and a five-paragraph essay.

7th Spanish

Students worked on the chapter "De vacaciones" and also read articles, answered questions to develop comprehension skills, and reviewed vocabulary learned in past years in order to use in conversations. They also researched facts about Spanish history and wrote a play for the Music and Spanish Show to be presented on April 17. Come and see the children in action. It will be fantastic.

7th-8th Language Arts

Students are in the middle of several essays. While the seventh graders are reworking their essays for the Craig Tufts Scholarship Fund (see 6th Language Arts), the eighth graders are completing book reviews for *Voices in the Middle*, a professional journal for middle grade English teachers. Everyone started an essay about "surveillance society," the topic for the Future Problem Solving state qualifier. In conjunction with social studies, students are also completing their process papers for History Day. We also found time to write several Power of the Pen-type short stories. Finally, after rereading some O. Henry classics, we attempted to analyze how/why he was such a successful short story writer. With different competition deadlines looming, we hope to complete a few of these pieces soon.

CLASS NEWS *continued*

7th and 8th Social Studies

Students have been working hard to produce their final projects for the National History Day competition. The air was humming with productivity as students built websites, produced documentaries, wrote and rewrote papers, and turned their hands to writing performance scripts. In the process, some remarkable projects have developed. It's so interesting to see the breadth of topics chosen by the students. Competition day is March 15 at Case Western Reserve University and Western Reserve Historical Society. A rehearsal will be held at school on March 14 where students will present their projects and parents are welcome. Best wishes students.

7th-8th Latin I

Seventh graders learned the third declension nouns and adjectives, practicing on familiar words (canis, dog; mater, mother; frater, brother) because these forms are some of the most difficult to get used to. We have to focus on noun-adjective agreement all over again, because in Latin, an adjectives's number, gender and case have to "match" a noun's number, gender and case. However, because we have added the third declension now, the nouns and adjectives don't necessarily have the same endings. Eighth graders are learning a long list of ways to form the perfect tense, depending on the verb stem, because our textbook vigorously emphasizes word-building. This skill will help them acquire vocabulary faster. Both grades are continuing to give oral reports on aspects of Roman life, place names, and famous mottoes, in preparation for the Latin contest in March.

7th Science

Scientists monitor space weather or solar weather because it has the potential to have a major impact on our daily living. Since we live in a technological age geomagnetic storms have the potential to knock out all our electrical gadgets and even power grids. After learning about the characteristics of the sun and the weather it produces students applied their knowledge at the NOVA Sun lab.

7th-8th Computer

Seventh and eighth graders have been using computer class to work on History Day and editing their documentaries, papers and websites. It has been a busy but productive month. Next month we will be designing and publishing the school yearbook.

8th Reading

Ah ... *Romeo and Juliet*! This class derived so much enjoyment from the rich language of Shakespeare as they followed the plot of the star-crossed lovers. They became experts at discovering the word play, metaphor, oxymoron, imagery, famous quotations, and the marvelous rhyme that sings through the tale of woe of Juliet and her Romeo. Students wrote quatrains and even sonnets to practice playing with words. They are currently watching *West Side Story* to compare and contrast the two plays. The movie is a fine arts experience as it reflects the highest standards in musical production: the Stephen Sondheim/Leonard Bernstein score, choreography by Jerome Robbins, and the most academy awards for a musical (10) including best picture, cinematography, art direction, and costumes.

8th Science

Virus, bacteria and protists, that's what eighth graders studied. It was a timely topic because there was so much current research concerning bacteria. After reading articles from *Science News*, *Scientific American*, *Discovery*, and even *National Geographic* students compared and contrasted bacteria, took a position on whether they were good or bad, and used their evidence in a short paper.

8th Spanish

Eighth grade students started preparing for the Spanish National Exam that will help them during high school. The exam includes grammar, reading and comprehension, and communication.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Friday, March 14

Sharing Show / Preschool & Kindergarten at 9:30 a.m.

Friday, March 21

Early Dismissal at noon

Monday, March 24 - Friday, March 28

Spring Break

Thursday, April 17

Spanish Show at 10 a.m.

Thursday, April 17

Early Dismissal at noon



Congratulations to Birchwood School's MATHCOUNTS team for winning 1st place.