



## The Lion's Roar

### A VIEW FROM HISTORY AND RESEARCH

#### WILLIAM JAMES ON HABIT AND CHARACTER

The accumulation of habits plays a major part in who we are and how we approach life. Habits define our character and our character is inextricably tied to how our life unfolds. Our destiny is embedded in our character, at least to the extent that we are able to effect outcomes in our life.

In the late 19th century William James, philosopher, psychologist, co-laborer with John Dewey in establishing the philosophical school known as pragmatism, described his observations of the power of habit:

“All our life, so far as it has defined form, is but a mass of habits – practical, emotional and intellectual – systematically organized for our weal or woe, and bearing us irresistibly toward our destiny, whatever the latter may be ... [Habits allow us] to do a thing with difficulty the first time, but soon do it more and more easily, and finally, with sufficient practice, do it semi-mechanically, or with hardly any consciousness at all. [Once we choose who we want to be, people grow] to the way in which they have been exercised, just as a sheet of paper or a coat, once creased or folded, tends to fall forever afterward into the same identical folds.”\*

What are we doing at Birchwood? Building habits, habits of the intellect and habits of character. This is hard, painstaking work – for children, for parents and for teachers. The first time children face intellectual challenges that require work, it is difficult – for everyone! Children complain, whine, make excuses and even become belligerent. The resolve of parents or teachers wilts. “Is this possible?” they lament. Possible?! Most assuredly, yes. These efforts, given time bear fruit. One of my maxims for wilting parents is “Time is on OUR side! This is the side of caring parents and teachers, who with patience and persistence, create environments that forge intellectual and character habits leading to personal happiness and success.

The tale ends well. Intellectual tasks and virtuous behaviors become easier and easier until they are automatic. Once made automatic, virtuous and intellectual habits define a major part of who we are in the world.

\* From “The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America,” a 2001 Pulitzer Prize-winning book by Louis Menand.

### UNDER THE CANOPY NEWS FROM BIRCHWOOD

#### Character Education in Practice: Celebrating Kindness

Throughout the first quarter, and in every hallway, the school is celebrating kindness! A basic truth of human living is embedded in the theme “kindness counts.” A small act of kindness matters. It means the giver has taken a moment away from self-centered preoccupation and noticed how a little word or deed could uplift the well-being of others.



This idea is exemplified in a book called “Have You

Filled a Bucket Today? – A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids” by Carol McCloud. This book was read to each class to kick off the campaign. Beside each classroom door is a large bucket poster that is being filled with smile stickers as acts of kindness are noted. It is not a competition, rather everyone is aiming to fill every bucket in the school by quarter’s end.

In reality, what we are seeing is nothing new. Students who pick up fallen art boxes or notice when a teacher needs some help carrying something, or friends who cheer one another up when they scrape a knee or are feeling lonely – these children are carrying out impulses that are already inside them and are common in the school culture. However, it feels great to

*continued on page 2*

#### CONTENTS

Birchwood Educational Model ....	2
Parent Committee Update .....	2
Reflections by Charles Debelak	
The Moral Virtues: Courage .....	3
Class News.....	4
Upcoming Events	
Poetry Show - Grades 5-8 .....	12

## UNDER THE CANOPY *continued*

### Character Education in Practice: Celebrating Kindness

*continued from page 1*

uplift and celebrate the virtue of kindness we see happening every day at Birchwood.

These quotes are posted throughout the school and may be helpful to support efforts at home as well:

- “No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.” – Aesop
- “Kindness is contagious.” – Anonymous
- “One kind word can change someone’s entire day.” – Anonymous

Have you filled a bucket today?

*Mrs. Helene Debelak*  
*Director of Curriculum*

### The Birchwood Educational Model: An Introduction

*Part one of a continuing series by Mr. Charles Debelak,  
Birchwood Head of School*

The Birchwood Educational Model has been shaped through two efforts. The first is structural. In our aspiration to cultivate habits of the intellect and character, it was essential to create a comprehensive, cohesive and systematic program. This effort harmonized 1) our beliefs about human fulfillment, 2) our mission to develop the skills for reaching fulfillment intellect and character, and 3) the means by which we practice our mission in the classroom environment. Harmonizing these components, we created our *paideia*, a schoolwide environment and cultural ethos able to nurture the development of intellect and character.

This idea of creating an organizational structure to realize an organizational mission is not unique to Birchwood School. Nor is it unique to education, although its importance is often ignored. But for us, making this connection became a passion. This is how we would fulfill our beliefs and realize our mission.

At the founding of the school, my wife and I held particular beliefs about human fulfillment; and we had particular beliefs about the attitudes and skills a young teen needed to reach some level of personal fulfillment in the future. We imagined that our graduates would possess the characteristics that would make them successful not only in high school, but in whatever field of work their passions would lead them. They would start their teen years with goals, hopes and aspirations for becoming everything they could become. They would have the habits of industry, perseverance,

*continued on page 11*

### Parent Committee Update

Why should I volunteer to work with the Birchwood School Parent Committee this fall?

Well, we Birchwood School parents have each already agreed to give our school at least five volunteer hours this year. Parent Committee volunteer time counts, so we may as well start early in the fall, even today, to get in on the ground floor and be part of planning for the rest of the year.

We each want our class to design an attractive item for our International Festival and Auction (IFA) live auction on Saturday, December 3. October is the best month to work on, and even finish, IFA projects. Let’s avoid that last minute end-of-November rush.

Remember that Parent Committee funds go towards Birchwood’s Signature Programs. We help keep our teachers up-to-date academically, send our children to academic competitions and beautify our grounds.

It feels good to pitch in for a common cause and build relationships with parents, teachers and students.

Also, volunteering sets a good example for our children. It shows them that their school is important to us; that they are important to us.

Research shows that when parents get involved at school their children do better. They:

- Score better on standardized tests
- Have better social skills
- Are less likely to use drugs and alcohol
- Go to better colleges

One middle school study showed that parents attending meetings at school and in the classroom led to improved student achievement when compared to parents just helping with homework.

The next step is to please reach out and take on at least one task on the Parent Committee [volunteer opportunity list](#) to let me know what you would like to help with. Let’s all chip in and make this a great year.

*Greg Gordon*  
*Parent Committee Co-Chair*

# REFLECTIONS BY CHARLES DEBELAK

## PARENTING FOR CHARACTER: THE LEGACY OF GOOD CHARACTER

In this series of articles entitled Parenting for Character, I hope to inspire you while also offering practical guidance on how to nurture good character in your children. It is my opinion, and I think I have a great deal of history and research in my corner, that character is the greatest gift we can give our children. The endowment of good character leads to a child's personal fulfillment and to his or her productive place among family, friends and society. While we cannot predict their future, we can equip our children to face and cope with the challenges life places in front of them.

In nurturing good character in our children, we are helping them become beautiful people, those who are noble in conduct, productive in work, compassionate toward others and responsible toward all the affairs of life. A person of good character is what I like to call a "great" person. Such "greatness" in character reaches far beyond wealth, position, achievement or any kind of material success. Granted good character may include these benefits, but it is so much more. Good character embraces the virtues that make life worth living.

*"It is in my opinion, and I think I have a great deal of history and research in my corner, that character is the greatest gift we can give our children."*

I understand that there are many definitions of character and character education, however, my preference for a comprehensive vision comes from the Aristotelian moral virtues. They embrace almost every aspect of what we call "good" and what we most



admire in others. The seven moral virtues encapsulate the wide spectrum of good character descriptions and provide a framework from which we can discuss and develop good character in ourselves and in our children. They include wisdom, courage, self-control, justice, gratitude, compassion and humility.

The moral virtues define the energy and power to 1) become what we can become as a unique human being possessing unique potentials, 2) achieve what we can achieve by the talent and abilities with which we have been endowed, and 3) contribute to our social circles – family, friends, colleagues or society, according to our capacities.



While we are all born into different circumstances with different genetic endowments, the pathway toward building of character is the same for everyone and everyone can build up and improve their character. With children the prospects are especially hopeful because to a certain extent we are working with a blank slate. Research and cultural histories tell us that 80 percent of our adult character is shaped by the time we are 15 years old. That is because during these years we are not having to undo bad habits before beginning new ones. If we take the time to arrange the environment and training we offer our children, we will give our children a head start toward good character that will influence their whole life. In the educational world this is called the "cumulative advantage." It is an advantage that all parents want to give their children.

As I continue these essays, keep in mind this simple equation for building good character:

1. Sow good ideas, sow good thoughts
2. Inspire, nurture and encourage good actions
3. Create environments that habituate good actions
4. Invest and dedicate yourself to the foregoing process

Good character will result, and good character will impact your child's destiny.

*Mr. Debelak welcomes your communication at [cdebelak@birchwoodschool.org](mailto:cdebelak@birchwoodschool.org).*



# CLASS NEWS

## Seedlings

Mrs. Shumway's and Ms. Becky's Seedlings have been getting to know each other through the book series "Pete the Cat" by Eric Litwin. Through the exposure of simple repetitive poetry and Pete's relaxed "it's all good" philosophy, the transition from home to school has been a bit easier. Some math activities have included counting and gluing buttons on Pete's yellow shirt. Seedlings have also been exposed to patterns and are learning to create a two color pattern using various objects around the classroom. The children made pictures to reflect the many different things Pete stepped in on his journey in the book "Pete the Cat: I Love my White Shoes." Seedlings have taken turns to "read" their favorite book, "Pete the Cat and His Four Groovy Buttons," to their peers. Seedlings have also used pictures of strawberries, blueberries, mud and water to put in the correct order of when Pete encountered each obstacle in the story. Seedlings are also working on strengthening their fine motor skills by creating various real and imaginary shapes at the sensory table using Play-Doh, Bubber and Floam.

## Sprouts

Miss Hallett's and Mrs. Brady's Sprouts have been exploring "All About Me and Family." The children have accomplished activities such as discovering who lives in their house, looking at their unique fingerprints with a magnifying glass, creating family picture frames as well as discussing what they want to be when they grow up, what parents do for them and what makes them smile.

Sprouts are participating in many fun math activities. A few examples of what they have completed are: measuring student height with counting bears, using addition ladybugs (dividing the body of the ladybug and then adding the dots students placed on the body) and graphing the students' emotions for that day.



*Sprouts divide the body and add the dots in a math activity called ladybug addition.*

Sprouts have also been nurturing their curiosity through experiments. Some examples of what they have been doing are: sensory bottles with water and items such as grass, noodles, dandelions and dirt, and writing down our hypothesis to see what would happen if we put a celery stalk with food coloring and water.

## Kindergarten

Mrs. Chen's and Mrs. Hallett's kindergarten students have transitioned well into the school year. They have quickly learned the

school, classroom and recess rules and procedures and are beginning to do these tasks and jobs independently. Mrs. Chen and Mrs. Hallett cannot help but smile after hearing phrases from students such as, "I don't want the school day to be over." and "I wish I could have school on the weekends." Their excitement and love of learning is contagious.

## Kindergarten - Exploratory Learning

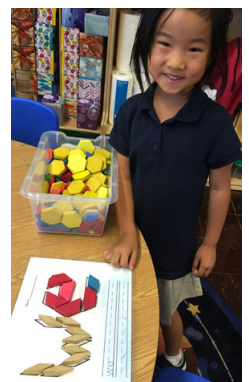
Mrs. Chen's and Mrs. Hallett's kindergarten students explored the unit "All About Me." They created a paper puzzle piece that has information about them such as their favorite books and food, family members and things they like to do. If you visit the Early Childhood wing, check out their completed puzzle because we fit perfectly! The explorers also used blocks, Play-Doh, Floam, puppets and art supplies to represent each of these important aspects in their lives. To end the unit, the kindergarten students created self-portraits that closely resemble their skin tone by combining paint colors. They looked very closely at their faces using mirrors to draw their eyes, noses, ears, lips and freckles. On Sept. 15, they celebrated the Chinese Moon Festival. Mrs. Chen wore her 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, tasted delicious Asian pears and made paper lanterns, all to take part in this important holiday.



*Dressed in traditional clothing, Mrs. Chen shares the traditions of the Chinese Moon Festival.*

## Kindergarten - Math

Mrs. Chen's and Mrs. Hallett's kindergarten mathematicians have been working hard, using a variety of hands-on materials in centers to bring enrichment to their math time. Kindergarteners are learning about number sense. This includes learning to write and recognizing numbers properly, counting objects using a strategic method and being detectives to find the missing number in a given sequence. Students have also been challenged to find patterns of skip counting within a set of numbers up to 100 and beyond. Incorporating online games on the Smart Board, the kindergarten students are engaged in and love practicing the math skills that they have been learning each week.



*Children like the fun of hands-on math.*

# CLASS NEWS

## Kindergarten - Reading

Mrs. Chen's and Mrs. Hallett's kindergarten classes are working hard in writing and reading. They have begun the foundations of handwriting – learning how to sit properly, hold their pencil correctly and place their papers in the position according to their dominant writing hand. They have also been introduced and practiced writing horizontal, vertical and in forward circles. In reading, part of being a successful reader is learning sight words. Kindergarten readers look forward to the silly story that introduces words as well as making their own mini-sight word book to take home and read aloud to their families, playing sight word musical chairs, and engaging in sight word centers throughout the week. Mrs. Chen and Mrs. Hallett are impressed with the stamina that is being built during literacy centers, read alouds and buddy reading. Students have also begun working in five small groups with guided reading instruction and phonics support. Everyone has made excellent progress.



*Buddy reading is fun and it builds "reading stamina."*

## 1st Math

Mr. Sprau's and Mrs. Bontje's first grade mathematicians have been busy tackling numbers and numeration skills. They began the year by identifying number patterns. Using an interactive web activity call "Splat 100" the children observed numbers on a 100 grid and talked about the patterns that can be observed in our base 10 number system. They also listened to a book called "Even Steven and Odd Todd" by Kathryn Cristaldi, and learned that the digit in the units (ones) place is what determines if a larger number is odd or even. Place value was a big topic of discussion as well, since it forms a basis for understanding the concept of regrouping with addition. Currently, the first-graders are in the thick of a unit on 2- and 3-digit addition. Some are even taking on the challenge of regrouping. It has been a great start to the new school year.

## 1st Spanish

First-graders, along with Señora Rodriguez, reviewed colors, numbers and words for greetings using the online Calico Spanish resource. Students practiced how to answer questions like:

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- What city are you from?

They also worked on vocabulary regarding classroom objects. First-graders enjoy singing. "Bartolito" is their favorite song.

## 1st-2nd Computer

The first- and second-graders in Mrs. Mamone's and Mrs. Sprau's computer classes began the school year by practicing their mouse control skills with a virtual sand art program called "Thisissand." First-graders saved their stunning creations as their personal screen wallpaper. Both classes then learned the virtual drawing/painting program "Paint." Second-graders were particularly adept at using the various mediums and colors available in the program and used their masterpieces as their personal screen wallpaper. While the first-graders continued to master Paint, second-graders started to explore the World Wide Web. They learned about web addresses and accessed Mrs. Waldal's Technology Website and used games from ABCya.com to hone their spelling and problem solving skills.

## 1st-2nd Language Arts

Mrs. Mamone's and Mrs. Sprau's first- and second-graders have started their Birchwood journey as authors by learning to model stories written by other authors. The first-graders began by modeling Raffi's "Baby Beluga." They created a class book called "Playful Puppy" which they also illustrated. Next, they practiced on their own in journals by modeling the poem "Mary Had a Little Lamb" by Sarah Josepha Hale. Finally, they wrote their first creative writing story as they modeled "I Am a Bunny" by Ole Risom. They had to tell what the animal they chose likes to do in the different seasons. Second-graders modeled their class book on Raffi's "Down by the Bay" and then wrote some of their own rhyming verses in their journals. For their first creative writing assignment, they modeled Aesop's fable "The Crow and the Pitcher" by writing a story based on the moral "little by little does the trick."

## 1st-2nd Reading

First- and second-graders in Mrs. Mamone's and Mrs. Sprau's reading classes have enjoyed delving into American tall tales. They have become adept at recognizing the characteristics of tall tales in stories such as Paul Bunyan, Pecos Bill and Mike Fink. A highlight was learning facts and exaggerations about Johnny Appleseed then visiting Lake Metroparks Farmpark where students explored his Ohio connection and were introduced to modern apple farming.

## 1-2nd Science

First grade scientists are experiencing science organized around the theme: "I am a scientist!" with Mrs. Syed. Students have and will identify how their own curiosity, questions and human inclinations to understand and discover are the same as scientists.

Second grade scientists are building on the theme: "I am a scientist and I use scientists' tools!" with Dr. Neider and Mrs. Syed. With every exploration and experiment, students use and name conceptual and object tools of scientists. Then, second grade students deposit them into their own scientist toolbox.

During the first quarter, first- and second-graders explored rocks and minerals by making friends with their very own rock and using

## CLASS NEWS *continued*

their own powers of observation to get to know their new friends. Second-graders discovered facets of the conceptual tool of organization as they learned to sort and classify minerals through experiments and collect information through the use of charts and tables.

### 1st-2nd Social Studies

Mrs. Moore's first grade, and Mrs. Moore's and Mr. Parrino's second grade, historians are looking into their family history. Students have been creating pages for their Family History Books. They have been learning interviewing skills: making and keeping eye contact, speaking clearly, using active listening and writing what the interviewee says. Students have also completed their family tree to learn how they are connected with their family members. They have been enjoying learning new things about family members and are excited to put their family history books together. Students will end the family unit with an in-class "Family Game Day."

### 2nd Math

Mr. Sprau's and Mrs. Bontje's second grade mathematicians have been busy tackling numeration and number skills. They jumped into practicing place value to the thousands place, and some even went up to the hundred thousands place! Listening to the book, "How Much Is a Million" by David M. Schwartz, students were impressed by how big a "million" really is. It would take a million of them stacked on top of each other to reach the moon. They discussed the base ten number system and gained a little more understanding about why we use it. After doing a short unit on rounding, second grade students began a brand new problem solving unit on the Singapore unit bars method. Using multi-colored tiles, they created unit bars on their desks in front of them to help them solve problems shown on the Smart Board. Second grade mathematicians have been off to a great start.

### 2nd Spanish

Second grade students had a wonderful time working on *la casa* and (objects of the house) with Señora Rodriguez. They completed workbook activities by placing furniture in different rooms of the house and participating in conversations about their own houses, appliances and furniture. They liked to listen the story of "Pedro el pez azul" using the online Calico Spanish resource.

### 3rd Math

Third-graders dove right into numeration and number skills as the year began. They spent time talking through place value and what it really means for a number to be in a certain unit place. Their confidence and understanding grew the more Mrs. Bontje and Mr. Sprau practiced with them. Moving on to rounding, estimation and writing numbers in expanded and standard form, third grade

mathematicians really made an impression as they showcased their understanding of place value. The following week, they began a brand new problem solving unit focused on using the Singapore unit bars method to help them solve complex problems. They practiced on paper but also with colored tiles on their desk in front of them. Mr. Sprau's math group is also practicing problem solving with unit bars. For their content, they are using the books, "Upper Elementary Challenge Math" and "Primary Mathematics Challenging Word Problems, Levels 3 & 4." So far, the work our third grade mathematicians have done has been impressive.

### 3rd Reading

Third-graders in Mrs. Debelak's and Ms. West's class have enjoyed discussing their summer reading books and creating a literature ladder to portray the change in either Sarah Ida's attitude in "Shoeshine Girl" by Clyde Robert Bulla or Sarah's scared feelings in "The Courage of Sarah Noble" by Alice Dalgliesh. Their hard work will be displayed in the hallway. Students have also been devouring a multitude of mystery books over the last few weeks. They are learning the process of setting a timer to read for 20 minutes and writing down the number of the page where they stop in their calendars. This record keeping will be utilized for goal setting in their next literature unit. It is a pleasure to see so many happy mystery readers in the third grade.

*In social studies, students have opportunities to explore and own the experiential theme: "I am a proud community member and a problem solver!"*

### 3rd Social Studies

In social studies, students have opportunities to explore and own the experiential theme: "I am a proud community member and a problem solver!" Together, with Dr. Neider and Mrs. Moore, students began a yearlong study of communities by considering the classroom as a community. Students brainstormed the problems and opportunities that might be encountered as the third grade Social Studies Community. Through conversation, students articulated their responsibilities accordingly and created a social contract for the class. Students then began the study of this national community, walking alongside the original American problem solvers and discovering the virtues of our land and ideals that make us proud members of our nation. Students engaged as historians learning and practicing research skills throughout this unit.



## CLASS NEWS *continued*

### 3rd Spanish

Students worked with Señora Rodriguez on vocabulary about the house, appliances and furniture. They completed workbook activities and they played the game “Los sonidos de la casa” using vocabulary to guess what object of the house made the noise.

### 3rd-4th Language Arts

Third and fourth grade students learned every culture has traditional stories, or myths, that explain the early history of a people or a natural phenomenon. Mrs. Kufahl’s and Ms. West’s third and fourth grade students took several weeks to develop a myth of their own to submit to the Cricket magazine story contest. Students have also had several spelling quizzes and have been practicing identifying various types of sentences, subjects and predicates in grammar.

### 4th Reading

Fourth-graders in Mrs. Debelak’s and Ms. West’s class have been enjoying discussing the summer reading books, “Owls in the Family” by Farley Mowat and “Ferret in the Bedroom, Lizards in the Fridge” by Bill Wallace. Each student created a literature cube that is displayed in the reading room. Each of the six sides of the cube depicts either an event in the story, main story elements (setting, character, main problem) or a summary or display of the student’s opinion of the book. Students have been gobbling up mysteries as well over the last few weeks. Many have gotten hooked on a series such as “The Hardy Boys” or “Nancy Drew.” Ask your child what their favorite book has been in the mystery unit.

### 3rd-4th Science

Third and fourth grade scientists are developing scientific method skills and exploring the world of rocks and minerals. The experiential theme for third grade is: “Scientists are discoverers and problem-solvers.” The fourth grade experiential theme is “I am a discoverer and problem solver.” In third grade, with Mrs. Syed and Mrs. Gregory, students focus on biographies of scientists throughout the year to give them insight on what made different scientists tick. Fourth grade students, with Mrs. Syed and Miss Bottini, will use an interactive science notebook to expand their reading, writing and reflecting skills. Students have been engaged in exploring properties and characteristics of minerals through inquiry-based labs. Students had the opportunity to be discoverers and problem solvers by identifying and testing minerals based on their streak and hardness. Students will be studying the rock cycle and how sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic rocks are formed. They will complete an in-class project demonstrating their understanding of how each rock is formed.

### 4th Math

Fourth grade math is a big leap for many students. This is because they transition from strictly whole number concepts and operations to fractions and decimals. After a time of review of whole number place value, comparing larger numbers, and estimation and rounding, Mr. Sprau’s group began a unit on decimals. Understanding the underlying concept of decimals can be a hurdle for some, since most of their lives involve whole numbers. So they are going slowly. The unit began with a video demonstrating the difference

*Fourth grade math is a big leap for many students ... they transition from strictly whole number concepts and operations to fractions and decimals.*

between whole numbers and decimals. After watching Usain Bolt’s world record sprint, they discussed the importance of decimals and saw that a “split second” can be the difference between winning and tying in a race. They are now practicing writing decimals in different forms, comparing and ordering decimals and identifying equivalent decimals. One of Mrs. Bontje’s groups has been working on mastering advanced multiplication and will be moving on to tackle long division. Mrs. Bontje’s other group of mathematicians have been working hard at solving advanced word problems from both the “Challenging Word Problems 4” book and Edward Zaccaro’s “Upper Elementary Challenge Math.”

### 4th Social Studies

Mrs. Moore’s and Mrs. Kufahl’s students have begun the adventure of exploring Ohio’s rich history. They have engaged in many areas of sentient learning including taking treks outside to trying their hand at producing landscape drawings in the style of Robert S. Duncanson and becoming “geography detectives,” seeking both renewable and nonrenewable natural resources. Students have engaged in mini-debates and have worked in small groups to explore the main aspects of Ohio’s economy. They all enjoyed viewing a demonstration of Ohio’s divide and participating in a Junior Great Books discussion on whether early pioneers were wise to drain Ohio’s Great Black Swamp to utilize the area for agriculture. Another exciting year has begun.

### 4th Spanish

Students are working on a middle school level with Señora Rodriguez. They reviewed words for greeting and practiced how to answer questions like:

What is your name?

How old are you?

What city are you from?

## CLASS NEWS *continued*

They practiced conversations using the verb “to like” and interviewed Señora Rodriguez. Students liked to play games using big numbers up to 100,000.

### 5th Language Arts

Every culture’s myths provide engaging explanations for natural phenomena. Mr. Kurtz’s and Mrs. Kufahl’s fifth grade students have been considering and writing imaginatively over the past several weeks to develop a myth of their own. These stories were submitted to the national Cricket magazine story contest, after the students worked hard applying the writing process to their pieces to refine and improve their tales. The class has completed its first grammar unit on prepositions, and students are also learning to study for a short time on a daily basis to master spelling and definitions on their weekly word lists. Finally, the class has enjoyed several VLAT lessons, an effective program in which they practice sentence editing while composing their stories and essays.

### 5th Reading

Mrs. Little’s and Mr. Kurtz’s class has recently completed “In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson” by Bette Bao Lord, dealing with a Chinese immigrant girl’s struggle to adapt to a new culture in the U.S. through making new friends and learning the language. Students produced a three paragraph essay dealing with this theme, as well as the idea of baseball providing an analogy for individualism, empowerment and opportunity in America. They have now moved on to a related project treating how some athletes, like Jackie Robinson, have had to overcome social, physical and economic barriers in achieving greatness. Students selected from a choice of biographies in order to make notes and produce another three-prong paragraph dealing with their subject’s childhood, accomplishments and legacy. They will be designing a cover to grace the materials to be included in a booklet. Classes have also seen some lessons on the elements of poetry and dictionary skills.

### 5th Science

Miss Bottini’s and Ms. Brown’s fifth grade scientists are growing by leaps and bounds. They have mastered the process skills necessary for learning science. They are able to make scientific measurements and convert between units using the metric staircase. Although it is a higher level skill, they are using textbook content about waves and energy to learn outlining skills and how to use these skills to write a paragraph and master the material. We are impressed with what they have accomplished in a short time. They are equipped with the skills to begin their science fair projects.

### 5th Social Studies

Students in Mrs. Miller’s and Mr. Parrino’s class have been working in teams to research a Native American group and discover the answers to questions about the group’s culture and how it was affected by its geographic location. While practicing teamwork, students eagerly dove into research books and compiled information into typed notes to construct a poster with illustrations. Following this, each team gave a presentation to the class about their Native American group. Morgan even sewed a wonderful Inuit outfit that she modeled on a doll. Next, is the study of early European explorers and their discovery of America.



*The Inuit outfit that Morgan sewed featured a feather-lined shirt under a hooded fur-lined coat.*

### 5th Spanish

Students reviewed greetings, numbers, time, the calendar, weather, seasons and dates with Señora Rodriguez. The class worked on subject pronouns by practicing conversations. They added question words to make the conversations longer and more interesting.

### 5th-6th Math

Mr. D, Mr. Debelak and Mrs. Gregory have started the school year with “math toolbox” development. The math toolbox consists of the variety of skills needed to solve complex math problems. In order to develop these skills, students are placed within appropriate skill level groups. Even though the groups range in content from the fifth grade level through algebra, all students have one day per week dedicated to the application of their math toolbox. Another day of the week is used to focus on computation or the review of certain skills. The optimal goal of this weekly plan is to develop a Birchwood graduate with fluent content, problem solving and computational math skills that will prepare them for their future mathematical endeavors.

### 6th Language Arts

Based on the picture book “Grandpa’s Teeth” by Rod Clement, Mrs. Tzeng’s and Mrs. Kurtz’s class devised their own mystery story – plunging immediately into the joy of writing. Students continued with the creation of their own stories about how things came to be for the Cricket writing contest. From ‘how the owl got its hoot’ to ‘how day and night emerged,’ students wrote creatively with new twists to old stories. They incorporated simple revisions like word choices and description even as they edited to check for paragraphing, run-ons and mechanics.

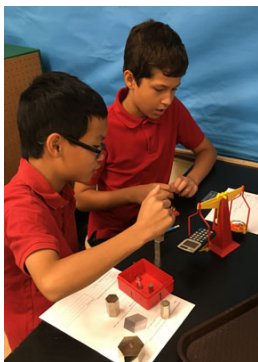


## 6th Reading

Mr. Kurtz and Mrs. Little began the quarter reviewing the summer reading unit “Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH” by Robert C. O’Brien. In-class discussion focused on the themes of courage, sacrifice and cooperation, leading to an essay treating these ideas as they occur both in the story and in each student’s personal experience. A creative story map was also part of the project, demonstrating students’ recognition of key plot points. The class is currently engaged with their coming of age survival unit, “Number the Stars,” by Lois Lowry, which chronicles the maturation of a girl who assists with the Danish rescue of Jews during the Nazi occupation of Denmark, with discussions regarding setting, plot, the theme of physical versus psychological courage, and symbolic analogy. Mr. Kurtz’s group has also been reading and taking notes from book chapters discussing the creation and ideological impact of the Hitler Youth movement upon young Germans. Students wrote essays regarding their chapters and then gave oral presentations to the class. Students have also been given their survival unit back-up books, which include “Treasure Island” by Robert Louis Stevenson, “Abel’s Island” by William Steig, “Island of the Blue Dolphins” by Scott O’Dell (lots of islands it seems), “Julie of the Wolves” by Jean Craighead George, and “Lassie Come-Home” by Eric Knight.

## 6th Science

Science is always changing. Ms. Brown’s and Ms. Bottini’s sixth grade science students have take a step back in time to investigate the theories of continental drift, seafloor spreading and plate tectonics. Students are able to see that scientists created theories using evidence, however with technological advances our theories developed further. We are focusing on reading text to find background information of each scientist and their discovers, pulling out important evidence found from both and charting the evidence. The students are able to write a 2- to 3-paragraph paper contrasting the two theories and how the advancement of technology affected the evidence. During this time we have also picked our science fair questions. We have started the process of researching our topic through scientific reading and note taking. Everyone is eager to see how their projects develop through the semester. (The review of literature for each science fair project is due November 11.)



## 6th Social Studies

Sixth grade social studies is charting its course to the cradle of civilization along with Mrs. Miller and Mr. Parrino. Students will navigate great rivers like the Tigris, Euphrates and the Nile, to learn how these bodies of water with their many geographic advantages act as strong currents to development. The agricultural revolution, the rise of trade centers like Babylon and the empires of the pharaoh all trace their source upstream. The unit culminates in a web-based presentation the students create on an ancient Egypt topic of their choice.

## 6th Spanish

Students are working on the first chapter of the book “¡Así se dice!” with Señora Rodriguez. They are learning how to identify and describe people and things as well as tell where someone is from. They studied the verb *ser*, and adjectives and articles. The class had a good time describing their friends.

## 7th Language Arts

Students eased into the year with several short writing pieces: one-word goal for a yearlong quest, fictional rationale behind a common rule, evaluation of Edison’s DC battle with Tesla. One thrust in Mrs. Tzeng’s class is to boost reading, albeit using short articles, even as students work on writing. The most recent project, after reading an interview, involved the development of interviewing skills as an aspect of research. Students interviewed one another, the teacher and a parent, the latter turned into an essay where they presented anecdotal details and derived some significance from the information gathered. They will try their hand at “top five” lists. (Trivia: known as David Letterman’s domain, but started centuries ago by Shakespeare in Polonius’s advice about life in “Hamlet.”)

## 7th Reading

Mrs. Debelak is enjoying getting acquainted with the seventh grade readers. All students display an active mind to pursue meaning in books and the greater truths about human life. And all enjoy reading and discussion. With the summer reading book, students probed how the main character matured through the events and major turning points in the story. They have written two short essays in which they learned how to craft a character analysis paragraph and how to support their ideas with evidence. In addition, each student has already finished a second book (if not two or three books) and applied the same literary analysis strategies in a creative project. In the nonfiction strand, the class practiced methods to harness the main ideas from the reading of primary sources. All of these skills are part of a two-year thrust to equip them for all types of reading in their future school experience and to make them fearless readers!

## 7th Science

Ms. Brown's seventh grade science class was introduced to another study method which will prepare them for high school. The SQ3R study method provides an active interaction with the material as students survey, question, read, recite, review and (to make it SQ4R) write. They studied a chapter on the atmosphere, used the process and took a test. They also practiced statistical tests to analyze central tendencies in their science fair data.

## 7th Social Studies

Mrs. Miller's students recently began to learn about the early colonization of America by western Europeans. Looking at the growth toward self-government, students are realizing that there were many small steps toward individual liberties 150 years before the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, beginning with the Mayflower Compact. They have also begun considering topics that would fit with this year's History Day theme, "Taking a Stand in History." Also, they are gearing up for a close look at the presidential candidates in the run-up to the election in November. It will be a jam-packed quarter of exciting excursions in history.

## 7th-8th Latin I

The seventh grade students beginning Latin this year could be seen on a recent morning with Mrs. Haskins out in the parking spaces, which were bursting with newly-acquired Latin vocabulary words. It is hard to believe how quickly they have taken to Birchwood's new all-online Latin curriculum, which has the ability to check them instantaneously on the accuracy of entire sentences, thus shortening the learning feedback loop. Eighth grade students returning for a second year of Latin have also hit the ground running, and are zooming forward through textbooks chosen individually to suit their high school priorities. An added feature in Latin class this year is Birchwood School's participation in a national "Vocabulary Bowl" hosted by the well-regarded free website Vocabulary.com, as many of their explanations feature Latin and Greek etymology.

## 7th-8th Math

Mr. D, Mr. Debelak and Mrs. Gregory have begun the year with the seventh and eighth graders focused on, "Where would YOU like to be?" In other words, "Take control of your learning this year! How much do you want to achieve?" This is the theme for all seventh and eighth grade students. Plan your day, plan your week, know the resources for instruction and support, develop the habits of a mathematician. As students engage themselves in their own learning and as they take responsibility for their learning, their achievement levels soar. Math is an excellent subject area to learn the skills of self-determination. This is also the secret of learning to enjoy the beauty and elegance of mathematics. Get engaged, get immersed, take responsibility and see the progress!

## 8th Language Arts

Students of Mr. Kurtz and Mrs. Tzeng warmed up by creating their own narratives based on the picture book "Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street" by Roni Schotter, where the protagonist received key writing advice as the story unfolded. In accordance with the first advice, students will devote some time to sharpen observational skills to enhance description. They will engage in activities like observing an orange from its exterior to tasting a slice, studying one's own hand, reading about how an eminent natural scientist learned this skill. Some students wrote a Kipling-like story to submit for this month's Cricket magazine contest. Mr. Kurtz is also working with a group of students in order to hone their editing and revision techniques. Classes involve short paragraphing for various scholastic genres to include informative, comparative, position and opinion essays.

## 7th-8th Spanish

Students memorized vocabulary by playing games with Señora Rodriguez. They enjoyed learning new words at two levels of difficulty. This vocabulary is part of a package they need to complete by February. Students also reviewed chapters 1 and 2: "Amigos, alumnos y parientes" and "La casa." Finally, they worked on regular and irregular verbs *ser* (to be) and *tener* (to have) *ir* (to go) *dar* (to give). They completed activities respecting the rules in the use of nouns, articles and possessive adjectives as they wrote short compositions and conversed in Spanish.

## 8th Reading

Mrs. Debelak and Dr. Neider are infusing the class with the big idea: I am, I read, I become. This concept drives those who are readers to read thoughtfully and reflectively, knowing that the personal benefits of reading to one's own "becoming" are exponential. Under this umbrella comes the drive to become adept at the qualities and skills of an adult reader. Beginning with the summer reading, students examined two themes running through the book: 1) the value of human beings has more to do with their core values than with how much money they have or how educated they are, and 2) prejudice is often a learned behavior, and societies have both good folks and narrow-minded ones. It afforded the class a rich opportunity to review how to read closely to make inferences and how an author incorporates elements of style, such as humor, and dialect, to enhance the main ideas. The class was given an array of optional books to read either on these themes or ones in which authors used a unique style to portray how characters overcame obstacles. (This class reads voraciously!) The students have compared four pieces (fiction, nonfiction, film) that each have the same theme: the power of reading. They were taught reading strategies to extract meaning from the nonfiction pieces and are learning to construct compare/contrast paragraphs.

### 8th Science

Science fair is on the horizon! Ms. Brown's and Ms. Bottini's eighth grade science students have chosen their questions and begun the process of reading scientific materials on their topic, taking notes in phrases and turning their notes into an outline in preparation for writing their review of the literature. Skills we hope the eighth graders will develop through the year to prepare them for high school include being able to master a body of scientific

*Students are investigating the decline of saltwater fish. They are analyzing data to develop a claim on what policies should be implemented to safeguard our fisheries.*

knowledge using several different study methods. When we are not diligently working on science fair, we have been exploring the world of scientific argumentation. Currently, students are investigating the decline of saltwater fish. They are analyzing data to develop a claim on what policies should be implemented to safeguard our fisheries. The claim will be supported and justified using the evidence they found. Students have been actively engaged and referred to the experience as "A mini Future Problem Solving (FPS) topic." We hope to continue their excitement and experience in all the many forms of science. (The review of literature on each science fair project is due on November 11.)

### 8th Social Studies

Eighth grade social studies is "steeling" itself for its upcoming unit on the Second Industrial Revolution, a period of explosive growth and change. Not only did this era put the Midwest front and center as a production giant of steel mills, oil fields and coal mines, it also attracted waves of new immigrants. The newcomers helped transform America into an urban society and the most diverse society seen on Earth. This is also the time of year when eighth-graders choose a History Day topic they are passionate about and start filling their spiral with research. This year's theme is "Taking a Stand in History."

*This photo was taken on Sept. 16, the day before Constitution Day. Birchwood's eighth grade students were re-creating a famous painting that hangs in the U.S. Capitol called "Scene of the Signing of the Constitution of the United States."*



### The Birchwood Educational Model: An Introduction

*continued from page 2*

dedication and commitment; and they would understand and embrace the idea that these qualities are necessary no matter where their passions might lead them. Also, we wanted our graduates to harbor a sense of gratitude, humility and compassion so that they would be driven to play their part in making their high school, their college and their world a better place.

We understood intuitively that our vision required an organizational structure that habituated attitudes and virtues over the course of eight years in elementary and middle school. It was absolutely necessary that our hopes would have daily applications in every classroom at every grade level. Our educational structure had to answer to our mission at every turn. If so constructed, we firmly believed that Birchwood School would position its graduates precisely as we hoped and labored.

Although we came to this idea of connecting vision with institutional structure intuitively, it became evident to us that this connection between vision, mission and structure is intrinsic to every thriving society that maintains a vision for its members, whether it is a nation, a race, an ethnicity or a family.

It begins with a common belief or vision about adult behavior individually and collectively. For example, in America we hold dearly to individual freedom coupled with individual responsibility and commitment to the good of society at large. Given this premise, our entire society, at least in intent, is structured and ordered to insure the freedom of every adult and the responsibility of each adult to the greater society.

The structure starts with our Constitution which defines and supports our beliefs. It assumes the collaboration of family, community, individual states and the nation at large, to promote and inculcate habits of freedom and responsibility. The structure contains local, state and national laws. It encourages various practices and traditions that reinforce our beliefs and goals as a nation.

Although there are many defects in the process, and we could legitimately complain about how the country is not living up to its vision and mission, nevertheless, overall America still stands for a country that ensures the freedom of every individual and asks for the active responsibility of each individual for the good of the nation at large.

The importance of connecting mission and structure first hit me as a young man in my early twenties. At that time, I was (and still am) a sports enthusiast who was intrigued by high school or college athletic teams that are successful year in and year out. As I

*continued on page 12*



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Friday, October 21**  
Grandfriends' Day

**Friday, November 18**  
Poetry Show - Grades 5-8

**Tuesday, November 29**  
Picture Retake Day



Join students for a wonderful evening of poetry.

## UNDER THE CANOPY *continued*

### The Birchwood Educational Model: An Introduction

*continued from page 11*

studied this phenomenon, it was evident that the consistent success of a football team, or a wrestling team or a gymnastics team, was grounded in an organizational system and a culture of athletic success that permeated the way athletes think, train and perform. There was a structure leading athletes from the stage of novice to that of champion. Successful institutions created an athletic culture that has deep philosophical roots coupled with daily practices and traditions that preserve the implementation of those roots. Their success is a whole package. It includes how players train, how they treat one another and how they behave outside of the sports world. Often these great athletic programs have a feeder program in which younger children are learning the fundamentals of their athletic culture and that of great athletes so then when the next generation of athletes reach the high school or college level of competition they are prepared to perform at a superior level. Good coaches who have crafted great programs use a system of training that produces results.

About 15 years ago, I discovered a similar perspective in the business world. Great businesses are founded upon the clarity of vision coupled with structural and cultural alignment. Jim Collins, a student and teacher of enduring companies at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, and author of “Good to Great” and coauthor of “Built To Last,” and “Great by Choice,” urges businesses to identify what they really believe and articulate those beliefs into mission. Mission clarity is the rudder for enduring success. Missions, subsequently, are sustained and enriched through systems and practices aligned with the mission. In other words, the organizational design always answers to the mission and explains how the mission is realized in real time.

In “Disney U: How Disney University Develops the World’s Most Engaged, Loyal, and Customer-Centric Employees,” author Doug Lipp recounts how Van France, through educational programming within the Disney community, defined, aligned, maintained and enriched company practices and traditions which assured the continuance of Walt Disney’s original vision.

The examples from the sports world or business world reinforced my gut feelings that the enduring success of Birchwood School would be grounded upon a clear vision articulated by our mission. But the fulfillment of our mission with each child at Birchwood, would depend upon aligning our practices, our behaviors, our relationships, our traditions, and our innovations with simple but demanding questions: “How does this program/curriculum/research align with our mission? How does this workshop, conference or trend in educational scholarship enhance our mission?” Whether or not we adopted new programming or explored educational in-

*... examples from the sports world or business world reinforced my gut feelings that the enduring success of Birchwood School would be grounded upon a clear vision articulated by our mission.*

novations of our own making, we had to ask the same questions: “In what ways will academics improve? What will be the effect on the character of our students? Will this enrich the interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships among our staff, parents and teachers?”

In our quest for clarity of mission and program alignment, we add accountability. We have to assess whether or not our graduating students exemplify the characteristics of a strong intellect and good character. We are not a business where we can measure financial profit. Nor are we a sports team where we can measure the number of wins per season. We are a preK-8 school. We work with children. The intellectual and character quality of our graduates matters greatly to us.

As a school we are driven that our graduating young teens will be productive, hard-working, self-disciplined and goal driven; that they will know how to work with others through being compassionate, considerate and collaborative. We hold ourselves responsible that each child arrive at such a noble starting point at the beginning of their teen years.

*Mr. Debelak welcomes your communication at [cdebelak@birchwoodschool.org](mailto:cdebelak@birchwoodschool.org).*