



Birchwood Clipboard

The Lion's Roar

NOV 2009 Volume 16,3

In This Issue

Special Program
Highlights

Class News

Announcing Official
Opening of Birchwood
School Gallery

Essay from Mr. Debelak:
*Competency and
Motivation - Part 2*

November Events

Saturday, Nov 14
International Festival
and Auction

Thursday, Nov 19
A Birchwood Project
Lecture: *Character
Development: Raising
noble children
in the 21st century*

Special Program Highlights

City as a Classroom

Birchwood is fortunate to be situated in the city of Cleveland. Teachers integrate this great resource in curriculum planning. The city is an extended classroom. In this issue you can note the Metroparks, the Pet Store, The Plain Dealer, and the theater. In November, students will visit the Natural History Museum, the Western Reserve Historical Society, the Beck Center and NASA.

Speakers Program

Birchwood also brings the city to the classroom through our speakers program. Our October speakers:

Mr. Steven Morris and Mr. Warren Morris

On October 14, Mr. Warren Morris and his father Steven Morris, spoke to the fifth-eighth grade students. Mr. Warren Morris is the president and CEO of Colliers Ostendorf-Morris, a commercial real estate company. His father Steven Morris retired from the business 30 years ago. They shared their knowledge about the real estate business in Cleveland and worldwide, and then described their wonderful philanthropic ventures. Mr. Steven Morris has played an important role in land conservation in the United States and has set up a program to place 150 reading books in every first through third grade classroom in the Cleveland Public Schools.

The Merriwethers

On Monday, October 19, the fifth-eighth graders were treated to a very special music presentation. Marion and James Merriwether, who are good friends of Mrs. Chu, spoke to the students about African American folk music. Mrs. Merriwether, whose great-grandfather was born into slavery, presented an overview of the history of the slave experience in this country and the music that flowed out of that experience. Mrs. Merriwether's sister, Sharon Daniels, and niece, Carmen, also joined us, and the four visitors sang some traditional slave songs in beautiful harmony. In addition, they brought with them a dozen different African instruments, including a wide variety of djembes. In music classes on Monday and Tuesday, they continued teaching the students the songs and allowed them to take a turn playing the instruments. It was a wonderful experience for all.

Open House

On October 25, prospective families toured the school. The new facility showcased the assets of a Birchwood education. A special thank you to the following people for their help: the parent committee for refreshments, Becky Bynum for the display on the diversity of our student body, and Phil Hollweg, Rhonda Franklin and Peter Debelak for the design/display of the big welcome sign.

Service Project

In this issue you can read how some of our 8th graders ran the school's campaign to collect clothes and canned goods for victims of the Philippines typhoon.

Helene Debelak/Dir. Special Programs



1-8 Gym

In an attempt to encourage physical fitness as a part of their lifestyle and not just a class they take at school, the students voluntarily participated in the Sit-up Challenge this quarter. Most students were faithful to record their accomplishments daily and hand them in. As a school, the Birchwood students did over 102,000 sit-ups in seven weeks! The sixth grade class turned in the most sit-ups per student with an average of 1,859 sit-ups. Sachi G, a sixth grade student, soared in this challenge. She averaged over 200 sit-ups a day! Great job to all the participating students! Look for a letter coming home concerning the Pushup Challenge that we will be doing second quarter.

K-8 Music

African American Folksongs

On October 19 and 20 our students had an exciting experience with learning African American folksongs. We used Monday morning for the presentation of The Amazing Insights Behind – African-American Hymns and Negro Spirituals.

Students in all grades were very much inspired by the performing and coaching of the African American folksongs and had a great chance to learn how to play African instruments (especially the drums). They also enjoyed signing songs with instruments, in unison, and in 2 or 3 parts chorus.

We heartily gave many thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Merriweathers and Mrs. and Ms. Daniels who shared the great and inspiring music to students. We gave special thank to Defer Intermediate School and the music director Mrs. Hepburn who generously loaned us fourteen African instruments for our students to use during these two days.

We will incorporate the background presented to us in our 5th-8th grade Poetry and Fine Arts Night coming up on December 4th. The topic will be Folktales and Folksongs in the U.S. and the World.

K - Math

The math part of the morning has included such activities as:

- Working on logical thinking problems
- Number Bonds
- Comparing and measuring objects
- Symmetry

K - Reading/Writing/Language

During the time of working centers, students read books according to their level and learn new words each day. They

take the books home and they re-read the books for pleasure during independent reading time. Some of the students completed book reports and multiple choice questionnaires.

K - Science

They worked on landforms. They picked one of the various landforms to read a book about and then made a display.

K - Social Studies

Students learned about animals and classification according to different characteristics: vertebrates or invertebrates, cold or warm blooded, mammals or not, carnivores and herbivores. We visited a pet store and made two displays at school. One related to fish and the other was about reptiles.

K - Spanish

The children have learned two Spanish songs and games. They worked with days of the week and months of the year. They counted in Spanish to the number 29 and heard bilingual stories.

1-2 Language Arts

First graders are learning to write sentences with proper capitalization and punctuation. They have learned how to model stories written by others to give their own creations good form. We have enjoyed listening to their versions of *The Lion and the Mouse* and *Bunny's Noisy Book*.

The second graders have just begun to learn cursive handwriting. They are excited to "try their hand" at it. The children also love to write in their journals and often do so in their extra time. It is very encouraging to see how zealous they are for writing and storytelling.

1st Math

In the first grade math class we do a lot of activities that strengthen numeration skills. One of these is on a math website. We call the game "Dogbone." In this activity, a blank 100-chart is shown. When the game begins, a clock starts counting down from one minute and a random number is shown. The player has to determine where that number would be found on the 100-chart. The player then clicks on that square. If he is correct, the dog barks and a new number is shown. If not, he tries again. The object of the game is to find 10 numbers in less than one minute. This activity builds number sense as well as teaching the children to recognize number patterns.



2nd Math

The second graders just completed a money unit. Remembering the coin values and then putting them together can be quite a challenge, but the children did very well and were up to the task. Making change also proved to be a challenge but, in the end, most picked it up quite well. A fun activity that we did was called Candy Store. Using a classroom cash register, each of the children was given the opportunity to “buy” a piece of candy by counting the correct change from a “dollar” of classroom cash. Thanks to Ms. Landrum for her help with the store.

1-2 Reading

The students continued their foray into the land of fairy tales, reading traditional European stories and modern retellings. They practiced finding the main idea and retelling events in proper sequence. They concluded the unit by writing their own fairy tales. They came up with creative ideas, some of which have potential as stories for the Young Authors and Illustrators Contest next spring.

1-2 Social Studies

This month we learned about scientists and inventors and their impacts on society. We read about Galileo and made three dimensional stars highlighting facts from his life. We also learned about Benjamin Franklin, watched a video clip of his invention, the glass harmonica, being played, and invented our own musical instruments. We studied the history of the hot air balloon and created our own models of them.

1st Spanish

The first graders worked on colors. They learned the pronunciation and completed exercises in the Spanish book. The students memorized new words and played riddles. They played the game “Veó Veó un color - Que color? - Color Rojo.”

2nd Spanish

The second graders learned colors. They memorized number words up to 30 and completed different activities like filling in the blanks, a word search, and a crossword puzzle in the activity book.

3-5 Language Arts

All students’ *Cricket* magazine story-writing entries were mailed to the contest this week. The prompt was one that captured the children’s imagination—composing a creative tale about someone who has a magical or unusual talent. Genres the students chose ranged from realistic narratives

about inspiring, talented people in their lives to science fiction heroes dealing with space monsters. In addition, the 5th graders especially enjoyed writing stories modeled after *The Stinky Cheese Man*, while the 3rd and 4th grader students are writing intriguing stories based on *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse*.

3rd Math

Recently, the third graders completed a unit on time. They did a great job on telling time to the nearest minute. They then moved onto calculating elapsed time and calendar time. Now they are learning about different ways of displaying data using graphs. One recent activity involved taking a survey of all of the classes at Birchwood. The name of the survey was, “Fruit or Veggies?” The simple question was “which do *you* prefer?” Each homeroom completed the survey and then the third graders compiled the data and made double bar graphs to display the results. By an overwhelming number, more chose fruit over veggies! The very well-done graphs are on display outside the 1-4 math room for those who happen to come by.

4th Math

The fourth graders recently completed a unit on decimals, in which they learned that a decimal is another way of expressing a fraction. They explored decimal place value and how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide with decimals. They realized that, by changing the location of the decimal point, the entire value of the number is changed. This can be problematic when dealing with money or time, so it is important to place the decimal point properly. Some of the fourth graders have moved onto decimals and percentages. Others are being introduced to equations and variables.

3-4 Social Studies

October has turned out to be quite productive. The students have been working on their study skills, practicing taking notes, studying from study guides, using/ creating graphic organizers, using note cards, illustrating notes, and so on. Thank you for all of your help in this endeavor. I know it can be painful at times, but it will pay off in the years to come!

For some of our more musically inclined, we’ve been learning a song that will allow students to learn all 50 U.S. states, in alphabetical order no less!

In the **3rd grade**, the students have enjoyed some of our more hands-on activities, such as making butter, and then eating it with biscuits (Yum!). Our field trip to the Plain Dealer was quite informative. The students were especially thrilled to see the robots that are used on the production floor.



We have started a unit on Cleveland, stepping away from the *Community* textbook for the next month or so. It has been fascinating to learn how Cleveland got started. The students can't wait to hear what happened next.

Coming up in November: Students will be working on a research project, researching a major city of their choice.

In the **4th grade**, the students have enjoyed learning more about the Northeast Region of our country. We have had wonderful discussions on the material covered, including the history of the region, how it developed, etc. I encourage you to ask your child about some of the discussions we've had.

Coming up in November: Students will be working on a research project, researching a national park of their choice. We will also continue with our study of the regions, moving along to the Midwest Region.

3rd Spanish

The third graders worked with days of the week, months of the year, and expressions of time like hoy (today), ayer (yesterday), and mañana (tomorrow). They learned the vocabulary of classroom objects and completed activities in the book.

4th Spanish

The fourth graders worked with objects of the classroom. They memorized vocabulary words and learned their plural formations. They worked with the number words up to fifty.

5th Reading

The fifth graders finished the quarter well with excellent work on our realistic fiction unit. We implemented "official" literature circles in our classroom, and it was successful. The students had some deep discussions in small groups on a Betsy Byers novel, and learned how to conduct and participate in a group discussion. They are perfecting their paragraphs, and are becoming strong writers. We are now engrossed in a historical fiction unit featuring *Sign of the Beaver* by Elizabeth Speare, and are reading about Native American chiefs. Poetry show rehearsals are continuing; we are enjoying bringing our Jack tale to life.

6th Reading

In our last unit, we enjoyed several survival-themed books. We enjoyed a play based on one of our novels, *Number the Stars*, at the Magical Theatre Company in Akron. We also had an exciting "flyswatter review game" on all the novels students' read during this unit before we moved on to our

next unit. The girls were victorious, but the boys gave them a run for their money! On display in the classroom are the completed student timelines illustrating the survival problem of their novel and the steps that led to its solution. Nice work! Like the fifth graders, the sixth graders are currently working on a historical fiction unit, but their unit focuses on world historical fiction, rather than American. We begin with medieval England, reading the Newbery award winning *The Door in the Wall*. We are working hard on our polishing our poetry show performance.

5th Science

The "grow" alligators and fish have almost returned to their original size. After 4 weeks of observing and measuring they have become experts in communicating their findings, using rulers, tape measures, and balances, and charting the information. Next they applied many of the same skills to their rock unit and learned to categorize according to characteristics and how to find the density of rocks using two different methods. Entering the American Chemical Society poster contest gave them an opportunity to learn about some of the elements in the periodic table.

6th Science

Each group of students finished their chromatography experiments and presented their results to the class. It was an excellent opportunity for them to realize the need to follow the same procedures for each test and record the results. Each group had its problems, but, for the most part, learned to work through them. They took some time to review the periodic table and looked at some of the elements before entering the American Chemical Society poster contest.

5th Spanish

The fifth graders learned days of the week and months of the year. They also learned the verb gustar (I like) and other verbs that end in ar. They completed sentences during conversation and in the book.

6th Spanish

The sixth graders worked on the verb gustar (I like). They memorized the conjugation and make sentences. They worked on adjectives and used them conversations to describe people they knew as well as in writing a short composition about themselves.

7-8 Leadership Class

Current accomplishments of our leadership groups: Daffodil bulbs have been planted and the front plot is weeded and weeded. The library books are all stamped and new bulletin boards are up. The school store is up and



running with profits recorded after two weeks. And a hallway bulletin board about character graces the wall outside the office. Meanwhile, the computers are cleaned, Boxtops labels are endlessly snipped, the recycled paper is brought out to the recycling dumpster and new songbooks are rolling out. The opening group has prepared to stories to read to the younger grades about people who have made our lives better.

7th Reading

Seventh graders are great discussers! In depth discussions centered around the reactive and proactive methods of problem solving attempted by the protagonist and on the implications in her life of the quote by John Keats, “Beauty is Truth; Truth, Beauty”. Their insights were sharp; it was impressive to see how engaged they all were and how they are learning to listen and build upon one another’s ideas.

Building upon this class experience, small groups worked together to identify salient character traits in a Newbery title by E.L Konigsberg. Each group selected portions of the text which displayed the characterization and presented them in the form of Reader’s Theater for the class. Each and every student in this class is a very fluent reader!

8th Reading

Students read books of choice from the genre of World Historical Fiction. Then each one prepared a book talk presentation which highlighted the setting and context of the novel, a succinct summary, and a characterization of the main character. Learning to articulate ideas verbally based on notes or an outline is a skill to perfect, quite different from a written essay. The outstanding aspect from these talks was the poise and eye-contact that has been built up in each of our 8th graders over the years through their practice with various presentations in other subject areas.

Shawki, Grant, Ben, LuLu, and Nathan all read *The Acorn People*, a book about how a college student overcomes his apathy toward handicapped children through his experience as a camp counselor. Through discussion and essay they compared the causes and obstacles to developing a heart of compassion in this book as compared to other titles they had read in this unit. As a culminating project on the theme of charity/compassion this group (with Miguel and Miranda) ran the school’s campaign to collect clothes and canned good for the victims of the typhoon in the Philippines.

7th Science

Students tested the viscosity of different liquids by timing how long it took for different liquids to travel down an incline. Next they studied the gas laws. In the lab they used a vacuum pump with marshmallows, balloons, and were able to make water boil! They balanced books on a syringe to see how the pressure of adding books affected the volume of air in the syringe. The American Chemical Society poster contest about elements coincided with their study of the periodic table!

8th Science

The life science students finished the chapter on cell processes and energy. They were one of the first classes to grasp the concept of cellular respiration! In the genetics unit they created creatures with dominant and recessive traits and are having fun looking at dominant and recessive traits in themselves and their families. They joined the group studying biology through Northwestern University to test the pH of different liquids and liver when vinegar and distilled water was added. Two 8th graders are studying chemistry and have a lab table set up for their daily experiments.

7th Spanish

The seventh graders learned about themes including time, schedules at school, activities they like to do, what is in the classroom, and going shopping. They practiced conversation with their classmates and worked on the activity book.

8th Spanish

They learned more regular and irregular verbs and applied them in conversations. They worked on possessive pronouns. Each week they write two compositions, read two stories, and answer the questioner to practice comprehension.

Announcing Official Opening of Birchwood School Gallery

The Birchwood School Gallery is now open. Search for us at www.galleryofwriting.org. We joined the National Council of Teachers of English, together with 900 writing galleries to celebrate writing. Check to see if your child’s work is posted. There is still time to submit polished materials. (Open to pieces completed last school year.) Use the site to notify relatives, grandparents, and friends to what your child is accomplishing in school. Enjoy the students’ varied talents.



COMPETENCY AND MOTIVATION

Part II

Developing Competency

Research beginning in the 1950's supports what most parents recognize intuitively: children desire competency. They want to become good at something and they want to be recognized for their competencies. The best anecdotal proof of this phenomenon is a child's face just after experiencing success. Not only his or her countenance beams, but the entire body is animated with satisfaction. It feels so good to accomplish things.

But equally important, research notes that children wish to grow in their specific competencies and if given the opportunity they will readily select tasks that "represent an optimal challenge given their capacities" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Deci, 1975). In other words, once children establish some level of task success, they want to get better. They will seek out challenges that are slightly more difficult, ones that suggest probable success and increased competency. As competency grows, the child identifies himself with the activity: "I'm a good reader. I'm a good problem solver. I'm a good athlete." Little-by-little, just like their adult models, children describe themselves by their competencies. It is also important to note, however, that children will be careful not to select challenges that might lead to failure. Hence they may avoid those tasks which would be most helpful to them in the long run.

The drive for competency places each child on a little personal odyssey, a quest for competencies in life. Children are programmed to engage their world, trying to establish who they are and who they will become. Even without parent or teacher input, children will seek competencies in life and growth in those competencies.

But parents and educators should also realize that most children, left to their own devices, will not necessarily seek competence in the more challenging and personally enriching tasks, those that will most benefit their lives. Sometimes the competencies children seek from their own initiative can be productive, but often they are only choices along the path of least resistance. They have little impact on the child's course toward productive adulthood. It is a self-selecting process and the odds of enduring value are low. For many years I have watched, with no small amount of heartache, some young people who become *very good* at activities that do nothing to benefit them in the future and sometimes even lead them down roads that squander their potential. Are they competent? Certainly. But competent at what?

On the other hand, parents and educators can direct the development of competences toward fulfilling the child's highest personal potential. This is more difficult because often the development of these competencies requires more thought, more effort, more time, and they pose the potential for initial failure and discouragement. Children left solely to themselves, e.g. "What would you *like* to do, Honey?" will usually avoid the kind of activities that lead to productive competencies. Intervention is needed. Some adult must exercise time, patience, and perseverance to help children discover competencies in those tasks and activities that will lead not only to a fuller and more productive personal life, but also to greater personal satisfaction.

Let's talk about these activities next month.