



# Birchwood Clipboard

**The Lion's Roar**

APR 2010 Volume 16,7

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## Special Program Highlights

Birchwood students are making their mark! Their accomplishments have landed press articles in the following newspapers: *The Plain Dealer*, *The West Shore Sun News*, and *The Westlake/Bay Village Observer*. To read the stories, see the link "In the News" on the front page of our website. [www.BirchwoodSchool.org](http://www.BirchwoodSchool.org).

The grade level/subject news in this issue has the complete stories of Birchwood students' stellar accomplishments. Highlights are:

- **Mrs. Miller won the History Teacher of Year** for NE Ohio at the district History Day contest at Case. This award from the Ohio Historical Society is so well-deserved! Her students took top awards across most categories. Inside this issue, read a full article from the *Westlake Observer*.
- Western Reserve District 5 Science Day-2 superior rankings and state qualifiers:  
**Dhweeja D, Vinny K.**
- National Chemistry Week poster winners: **Elizabeth P** won the top prize in the K-5 division, **Vinny K** and **Sanjana R** had top honors in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade levels.
- Busy month for **Trevor L**: Due to his first place trophy at the Power of the Pen regionals at Kent State, he will head to Wooster College in May for the state level. He will travel to Columbus for the state level of the National Geographic Bee. Congratulations!
- The Ohio Mathematics League highlights Birchwood mathletes' achievement in a statewide contest! Our math students have had a phenomenal year; see the story names and awards.
- In the Letters about Literature Contest sponsored by the Library of Congress, Birchwood's 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders comprised 1/6 of the total percentage of finalists in the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of judging; and, of the top six semifinalists, half were from Birchwood: **Kavya R** (2<sup>nd</sup>), **KateIn V** (3<sup>rd</sup>) and **Michael T**. Details in the LA section!
- Twenty five 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> graders had a great day at the Science Olympiads. Too many events and rankings to list on the front page!
- Our Future Problem Solving teams received the thrilling news that four junior teams and six intermediate teams were state qualifiers and received an invitation to the State Bowl in Berea.
- For the first time, Mrs. Chu entered some of her wind and string ensemble students in the Greater Cleveland Solo and Ensemble contest. All received a rating of #1. Her piano students entered the Ohio-level contest and the list of awards and ratings are outstanding. Note also the achievements of Birchwood alums: **Shulamite C, Jocelyn L, and Henna T**.

**Alumni and current student accomplishments outside of school** welcome. We post these in the main hall. Alums **Ani D** and **Omar D** were on the U.S. Physics team. Current students: **Brad S**-MVP wrestler, **Michael C** 1<sup>st</sup> place chess. Send your news to Mrs. D

**SAVE THE DATE:** Birchwood School's 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scholarship Event on Sunday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>. A Spring Luncheon at LaCentre Banquet facility featuring Dr. Sylvia Rimm. Dr. Rimm is a nationally renowned columnist, parenting specialist, and gifted children advocate. Two books are award winners: *How to Parent so Children will Learn* and *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades*.

More information to come.



## Class News

### **Gym**

The students just finished the 30 Minute Workout Challenge and they did a great job! These three grades won first, second, and third place respectively: 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The top five students: **Miguel P, Nathan C, Maya D, Avi B, and Clare P.** Honorable Mention: **Sue R, Sarah C, Sachi G, Abigail M, Dhweeja D, Emma P.** The last of the challenges, the ten-minute jog, has begun and will continue through the fourth quarter. Happy Fitness to all!

### **1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> Language Arts**

This year, PBS TV sponsored a writing contest called, *PBS Kids Go!* (Formerly the WVIZ Young Authors and Illustrators Contest.) This contest allows children to create their own story, complete with illustrations. The only guidelines are for word count. This month the children put in a lot of time writing and illustrating their own stories. Some wrote nonfiction, real-life accounts. Others made fictional tales of their own. All of the children should be proud of their hard work—their stories were certainly entertaining.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Math**

This month's unit featured fractions of all sorts. We began by exploring fractions of a whole unit. The children were surprised when they learned that the *larger* the denominator, the *smaller* the piece, whether it is a piece of pizza, pie, or whatever. They then realized that groups of objects can also contain fractions, such as when  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the class is girls and the other half is boys.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Math**

The second graders explored a unit on probability. They enjoyed making predictions of the outcome of different events, such as rolling a die and recording the outcomes of numerous rolls, and pulling color tiles from a bag.

The "blue" math group also encountered fractions this month. They took it a step further by exploring mixed numbers, equal fractions, and then adding and subtracting like fractions.

The "purple group" has been doing problem solving of various types. Congratulations to **Chester H**, who earned a **silver** medal in the final contest of the Continental Math League.

### **1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> Reading**

March was a busy month for this group of avid readers. The first and second graders started the month by finishing their portion of the Junior Great Books program. They continued to read great literature and applied critical thinking skills while writing about and discussing the stories. The first graders finished this unit by reading and discussing *Zlateh the Goat*. The second graders finished by reading and discussing *The Apple of Contentment*. The spring poetry show was also introduced to them. They were inspired to perform at a high level by watching the DVD of last year's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary performance. Both classes have had a solid introduction to their poems and stories and are now memorizing their individual parts.

### **1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> Science**

The Maple Sugaring tour at the park in the beginning of March was a wonderful learning experience for the first and second grade students. We got to see how the sap collection methods have changed over the years, and we even got to taste sap straight out of a tree! Our tour guide was extremely impressed with the students' knowledge as well as their behavior during the hike.

We've been having fun learning about the human body. We're in the process of making our Body Books, learning about organs like the heart, stomach, liver, and more. Students' studies have been supplemented with short videos featuring the one and only Slim Goodbody. We'll continue with our health and anatomy studies during the beginning of April.

### **1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> Social Studies**

The first and second graders spent the month of March learning about the eight presidents with an Ohio connection. We enjoyed eating candy buckeyes after learning about William Henry Harrison who had the "log cabin" campaign and made Ohio famous as the "Buckeye State". We sampled homemade lemonade after hearing about Rutherford B. Hayes and his wife, "Lemonade Lucy". We also finished books with facts and illustrations about each president. Thanks to all the moms who provided the curriculum enhancing treats!

### **3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Language Arts**

The third and fourth graders' goal for the third quarter was to produce a keepsake autobiography. Students enjoyed interviewing their parents to obtain colorful details for such chapter titles as "The Mad Dash to the Hospital," The



Terrible Twos,” and “The Day I Almost Drowned.” Having survived their early years, the students were about to begin recording their school-age years when the March *Cricket* contest interrupted their autobiographical pursuits. The prompt was too good to pass up, so all third through fifth graders wrote a story about a rescue. These creative tales were sent in last week, and we are anxiously awaiting the results. The fifth graders learned that several of the LAL essays they had written in November had placed in that contest. (See separate article.) Congratulations to accomplished writers **Vinny K, Prathna K, and Michael T**, whose letters advanced to Round 3 judging and to **Michael**, who then continued on to the next round as a state semifinalist.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Math**

The third graders worked very diligently this quarter on fractions, learning all sorts of operations with both fractions and mixed numbers. This was a big step for them, as the third grade content is quite a challenge. Overall, they did very well.

Special congratulations to the following students who earned a **silver** medal in the final contest of Continental Math League: **Avi B, Maya D, and Abigail M**, and the following students who earned a **bronze** medal: **Sahej B, Sophie C, Michael H, Bianca H, Cam K, and Elizabeth P**.

### **4<sup>th</sup> Math**

The “green” group continued working on advanced computation of fractions and mixed numbers. It was a long and, sometimes, arduous unit, but with hard work and persistence, they did see success and I am proud of their hard work.

The “magenta group” began a unit on geometry and plane figures.

Special congratulations to **Yamenah A and Isabela M**, for earning a **silver** medal, and **William L**, for earning a **bronze** medal in the final contest of the Continental Math League.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Reading**

Our current reading unit is Animal Fiction and we are reading, *Charlotte’s Web*, as a class. While reading this classic book, we have been paying attention to changes in seasons, how Charlotte is a friend to Wilbur, Wilbur’s growth, and big words. There are so many incredible

words in *Charlotte’s Web*, such as *radiant, queasy, and justice*. The third graders have enjoyed picking out words that are fun to say or have interesting definitions. Each day we have class discussions and are able to take a closer look at the theme of friendship that is interwoven throughout the story. At the beginning of the unit, we had an insightful discussion of what it’s like to move to a new city or school and not have any friends. I was amazed with how easily the third graders were able to make a connection between their own experiences and Wilbur’s experience. During the unit we have pinpointed portions of the story that depict the style of the author, including humor, rich vocabulary, and use of similes.

Over the past couple of weeks the third graders have been busy preparing for the IOWA tests, especially reviewing reading comprehension and dictionary skills. Students have also been busy memorizing their lines for the upcoming poetry show in May!

### **4<sup>th</sup> Reading**

The fourth graders have just finished reading all sorts of tall tales, from Paul Bunyan to Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crocket. We have a large bulletin board in the classroom, where students have posted examples of exaggerations that they have come across while reading tall tales. Students have been reading tall tale picture books in class while simultaneously reading an anthology of classic tall tale stories at home called *Tall Tale Americas*. Not only are there many examples of exaggeration used in tall tales, but oxymorons are also used in abundance. Oxymorons are a combination of words that are contradictory. The fourth graders came up with a whole list of oxymorons, such as *a little big* and *cold sweat*. Tall Tales take place all over America, so students kept track of which stories took place where, on a U.S map.

We have just started preparing for the IOWA test of basic skills, which will take place in April. So far, we have been reviewing dictionary skills and reading comprehension in order to prepare for the test. Students have also been busy memorizing their lines for the upcoming poetry show in May!

### **3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> Science**

The third and fourth grade students had the opportunity to go on the Maple Sugaring tour at the park early in March. They hiked through the snow and saw the various sap collection techniques of different people, from Native Americans to Pilgrims to present day sugarers.



As expected, the young scientists are really enjoying our human anatomy studies. The body is a wonderful, amazing machine, and the third and fourth graders have gotten to appreciate it a bit more through our studies of body systems. Many thanks to Nina Zwolinski, Katerine Moner, Ghousia Wajida, Simone Nader and Sanjit Bindra for coming to share their expertise with the students.

In April, the third and fourth graders will finish their anatomy studies and also spend some time reviewing content and test-taking strategies before the IOWA Test of Basic Skills.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Social Studies**

Students have been looking at the progression of technology, seeing how technology has changed things over the years. They have been amazed at what computers, phones, music players, etc. used to look like. We will be looking at economics in the next few weeks, focusing on how to save and spend money wisely. Hopefully they'll be a bit more conscientious in how they spend their money from now on. We can all hope!

### **4<sup>th</sup> Social Studies**

Students continued to learn about the history of Ohio, focusing on the growth of Ohio from the "birth" of Ohio's industry, inventions that furthered its growth, and the downturns and upturns of its economy. With a focus on the inventors and leaders of Ohio, students worked on a research project to further this study. Each student chose a famous Ohioan to research, writing a paper and giving an oral presentation on their findings. The results were magnificent! Nicely done 4<sup>th</sup> graders!

### **5<sup>th</sup> Language Arts**

**SEE 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Language Arts**

### **5<sup>th</sup> Reading**

Students have really enjoyed the animal fiction unit, learning about Billy's quest to earn money for his two beloved coon dogs, Danny's aim to help Red fulfill his destiny as a partridge dog, or Mark's struggle to keep Ben and, more importantly, keep him alive when many want to kill the gentle bear. We studied plot structure and theme and just finished a pop-up book. Parents, I am so proud of your children; it is worth taking a few minutes to come see the students' book displayed in the school library. They have mastered writing introductions that really draw the reader's interest and tell about the setting, mood, main characters and initial action. Following pages include two paragraphs

of significant conflicts and how these problems are solved. In their conclusions, students were able to "wrap up" and weave together the various story threads. Pop-up pictures are delightful, and theme examples of love and loyalty are solidly explained. I am very proud of their hard work!

We are also finishing up a selected poem to submit to a poetry competition. We have enjoyed poetry and used several as possible models of different styles for writing a poem.

### **6<sup>th</sup> Reading**

The class has so enjoyed the writing style of Kenneth Grahame in his classic *Wind in the Willows*. His sensory imagery has allowed us to plunge into the story and "see", "hear", "smell", "touch" and even "taste" along with Toad, Mole, Rat, and Badger. Each student kept his own list of "golden sentences" and chose the top ten to render very attractively with various type styles and borders. These are displayed in the hall outside the reading room; it is well worth your stopping by and sampling Grahame's unique writing style. We also discovered through Toad's hilarious and ridiculous antics how he exposes his silly, arrogant, voluble, deceptive self again and again. Mole and Ratty care for each other throughout their own escapades as the reader learns the importance of home. Badger is a more reclusive fellow, but at times of crisis proves himself a most wise and truly faithful friend.

We are also finishing up a selected poem to submit to a poetry competition. We have enjoyed poetry and used several as possible models of different styles for writing a poem.

### **5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Science**

**Dhweeja D** and **Vinny K**, both science projects in the botany section, earned "Superior" rankings at the Western Reserve District 5 Science Day on March 20th. The District 5 Science Day is one of 16 statewide science fairs that feeds in the Ohio State Science Fair on May 8th. In the past, our students have received "Superior" rankings, or even placed first, but were not allowed to advance to the State competition. However, because of a rule change, this year, **Vinny K** and **Dhweeja D** advanced to the state competition.

Both classes took a trip to the Cleveland Natural History Museum and to the Planetarium. They said this was "the best" field trip. Mr. Simpson, the astronomer was



impressed with the students because they wanted to learn...and that enabled him to tell them more. Of course we could not have gone without the help of all the parents who drove and accompanied us. Thank you.

Fifth graders are learning about quarks, leptons, gluons, and of course, molecules, elements, and compounds. The sixth graders took a look at Prokaryotes and Eukaryotes.

### **7<sup>th</sup> Reading**

As we read Jack London's book, *The Call of the Wild*, we were awed by the figurative and vivid language that marked the style of his writing. Since the book is set in Alaska's Klondike during the Gold Rush, we mined the gold (examples of his style) and shared the nuggets with one another. The book's title incited discussion about the underlying meaning and whether London was drawing parallels with human nature. Next, in a reading unit centered around *The Diary of Anne Frank*, discussions centered around strategies of survival, sources of strength, and "big ideas" that kept people going in times of suffering and persecution. This theme is currently being applied to the suffering of African Americans in the time of the Jim Crow laws, in our reading of *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*. Students are honing their discussion skills in small group (rather than teacher-led) literature circles.

### **8<sup>th</sup> Reading**

Students read *Night* by Elie Wiesel. After discussion of his experience, we looked at speeches he has given which depict how he won the Nobel Peace Prize for his passion to end hate and poverty across cultures and countries. Students then wrote two poems: one on the theme of "night" and one on the theme of "day". These thoughtful poems were then mounted in an artistic fashion and are on display. The 8<sup>th</sup> graders also felt good about how they mastered the lengthy JGB story, "The Watch", by Russian author Turgenev through close reading and indepth discussion. The 8<sup>th</sup> "split" group finished a unit on mysteries by Dickens, Agatha Christie, and Sir Arthur Conan Dolye. We are on to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and having fun with word play.

### **7<sup>th</sup> Science**

Students studied the theory of plate tectonics and sea floor spreading for most of the quarter. They also continued to research climate change. Many have presented their first round of research via power point presentations and are

in the process of drawing conclusions. The goal is for some of them to take their research to Toledo in April.

### **8<sup>th</sup> Science**

Students finished the protozoan, bacteria, and virus unit. They practiced their dissection skills with a pickle and an earthworm. Someone has the dissection pictures of the earthworm on his cell phone. Currently they are completing a unit on the human skeletal system, muscular system, and the skin and will continue dissection in this unit. One group completed a study on carbon chemistry. Another group was challenged to write a short essay on Intelligent Design and Darwin's Theory of Evolution.

### **Future Problem Solving**

After six months of hard work on three consecutive practice problems, the 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> graders held their breath while they waited for feedback on the 3rd problem: orphaned children. It had been a tough job to apply all six creative problem solving steps in just two hours with no teacher help. The teams had to wait three weeks before the news finally arrived. And arrive it did! Nine teams received an invitation to the State Bowl at Berea High School on April 23-24. They are now busy preparing on the topic of Food Distribution. (We welcome anyone who can speak on any angle of this topic.) The teams are:

#### Intermediate Division

**LuLu, Munim, Ben, Grant, Nathan, Carl, Shawki, Nardine, Zaeem, Deepak, Clare, Mahmoud Susmita, Marla, Sunny, Hannah, Trevor, Alexander, Prithivi, Hassan, Nicholas, Sarah, Abhijeet, Alex**

#### Junior Division

**Nate, Naomi, Ammar, Hajira, Sachi, Grace, Alexis, Haley, Dhweeja, Vinny, Michael, Darius, Kavya, Prathna, Pheby, Marco**

### **History Day**

Birchwood students had a wonderful showing at the district level of the National History Day competition held at Case Western Reserve University on Saturday, March 13. With many outstanding projects, 22 students will be moving on to the state competition in Columbus on April 24. In the paper category, **Sam Z** took first place with his paper on the Gatling Gun. **Sam** also received a special award from the Cleveland Grays which recognized outstanding projects on military history. **Amir F** received a second place award



for his paper on Garrett Morgan, a notable Clevelander who invented the gas mask and traffic light. In addition, **Amir** received the Bicentennial Award, along with a generous cash prize, sponsored by Cuyahoga County in honor of the county's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, given to an outstanding entry related to the county's history.

Birchwood students swept the website category. **Kavya R** placed first with her website on the Bill of Rights. She also received an award from the Sons of the American Revolution recognizing an outstanding entry from the Revolutionary War era. **Nathan C** earned second place with his website on Alan Freed, the Cleveland deejay who popularized rock-n-roll. Earning third place was **Lulu S** with her focus on the Northwest Ordinance.

In the performance categories, Birchwood students again put on stellar performances. With her individual performance on Samuel Morse and the invention of the telegraph, **Nardine T** placed first. Placing second with her performance on Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone was **Christine B**. In the group performance category, **Trevor L** and **Sanjana R** placed first with an engaging performance on the topic of Yellow Journalism and **Clare P** and **Zaeem M** placed second with an excellent performance on the Marshall Plan.

In the documentary categories, 11 students will be advancing to the state competition. **Susmita R** placed first for her individual documentary on the discovery of DNA. **Ben W** took second for his documentary on the invention of the printing press. Earning an honorable mention was **Hassan S** for his presentation on the invention of the Apple II. **Prithvi P** earned a special award from the Cleveland Grays for his documentary on Blitzkrieg. In the group documentary category, **Sarah D** and **Hannah Y** placed first with their presentation on the Cleveland Metroparks. Placing second were **Zach I**, **Deepak K** and **Mohammed M** for their project on the discovery of the polio vaccine by Jonas Salk. Earning an honorable mention for their documentary on the Russian Revolution were **Shawki A**, **Grant F**, and **Miguel P**.

Five students received special recognition, along with generous cash awards, from the Early Settlers Association of the Western Reserve. These awards are given for excellent projects on topics related to Western Reserve history. Receiving these awards were **Amir F**, **Lulu S**, **Nathan C**, **Carl F C** for his website on Charles Hall, the

discoverer of an efficient aluminum processing method, and **Alexander I** for his website on Paul Brown, the innovative football coach.

In addition, **Connie Miller** received the Teacher of Merit award from the Ohio Humanities Council and will be recognized at the state competition in April.

Congratulations to everyone and good luck in Columbus!

## **Math Awards**

### **Math Olympiads Test #5**

Gold Award: **Mohammed M, Nathan C, Grant F, Zaeem M, Sunny R, Sue R, Trevor L, Marla B, Nate C, Kareem T**

Silver Award: **Shawki A, Deepak K, LuLu S, Alex P, Prithvi P, Hassan S, Sarah D, Hannah Y, Hajira A, Clive C, Christine B, Cameron S, Kavya R, Vinny K, Michael T, Dhweeja, D**

Bronze Award: **Carl F C, Alexander I, Sarah C, Brad S, Jorgen K, Naomi W, Darius Z, Pheby L, Haley Y**

### **Continental Math League Test #5**

Gold Award: **Zaeem M, Mohammed M, Shawki A, Ben W, LuLu S, Trevor L, Clive C, Dhweeja D, Maya F, Ammar M, Darius Z, Vinayak K, Pheby L, Prathna K, Haley Y, Anna H**

Silver Award: **Nathan C, Carl F C, Clare P, Grant F, Miguel P, Sunny R, Sue R, Alexander I, Marla B, Sean F, Jorgen K, Kareem T, Katelyn V, Jorgen K, Naomi W, Kavy R, Dayla A, Christine B, Nate C, Cameron S, Anthony C, Marco B, Grace X, Michael T**

Bronze Award: **Zach I, Prithvi P, Brad S, Hajira A, Adam I**

### **MathCounts Team At State**

Birchwood was a state finalist in the MathCounts competition in Columbus, Ohio. The school was among the top 32 middle schools in the state – the top 4%. The team came in twelfth place. As individual participants **Kavya** came in 23<sup>rd</sup> place, **Munim** came in 38<sup>th</sup> place, **Nathan** came in 62<sup>nd</sup> place and **Nate C** came in 66<sup>th</sup> place. Good job, team.



### **Math Teams Shine In Ohio Mathematics League**

The Birchwood mathletes continue to excel this spring. The school competed in Ohio Math League competition on the sixth, seventh and eighth grade levels. This competition is composed for 25 difficult word problems that must be completed in a forty minute period.

**In the team competition**, our sixth graders tied for second place in the state; the seventh grade team placed fifth and the eighth grade team also placed fifth.

**In the individual competition** the students excelled. In the sixth grade, **Kavya** tied for first place, **Hajira, Dhweeja, and Clive** tied for the third highest score; **Nate** tied for the fourth highest score, **Christine** tied for the fifth highest score, and **Peter** tied for the sixth highest score. In addition, **Naomi, Katelyn, Jorgen, Stewart, Kareem, Shan,** and **Sachi** earned the Birchwood School honorable mention.

In the seventh grade, **Hassan** tied for the third highest score in the state, while **Alexander** and **Suzie** tied for the seventh highest score. **Trevor, Prithvi, Sunny, Marla** earned the Birchwood School honorable mention.

In the eighth grade, **Shawki** tied for the second highest score in the state, **Deepak** tied for the third highest, **Munim** and **Nathan** tied for the fourth highest, **Zaem** tied for the fifth highest, **Grant** and **Ben** tied for the eighth highest score. **Carlf, LuLu** and **Clare** earned the Birchwood School honorable mention.

On an interesting note, I allowed the fifth graders to participate in the sixth grade contest. If their scores were permitted, they would have had the seventh highest score in the state. Not bad!!!

### **National Chemistry Week Contest**

Way back in October, the 5th-8th grade students experimented with chemical reactions with copper pennies. Congratulations to **Vinny K** (5th grade winner) and **Sanjana R** (7th grade winner), who were chosen out of 550 entries. They and their families were invited to an Education and Awards Night Dinner.

Additionally, the 2nd-4th grade students participated in the National Chemistry Week 2009 poster contest. Students from six counties in the greater Cleveland area submitted

entries relating to the theme "Chemistry - It's Elemental." Third grader **Elizabeth P**'s poster was chosen as the winner for the K-5 category. She and her family will also attend the Awards Dinner on April 21st where she will be honored and awarded her prize.

### **Letters About Literature**

*Letters About Literature* is a national reading and writing promotion contest sponsored by the Library of Congress and Target. This year over 70,000 students from grades 4-12 read a nonfiction book, short story, poem, essay, or speech and then wrote a personal letter to the author. In these 100-400 word letters, the students reflected upon the affect the piece of literature had on their lives. Students from the state of Ohio submitted over 2,400 letters; 913 of these were from fourth to sixth graders. Of these 913 entries, only 36 advanced to state level (Round 3) judging. Birchwood School's fifth and sixth graders made up one-sixth of the total students from Ohio to reach Round 3 judging. These six students include **Prathna K, Vinny K, Michael T, Peter A H, Kavya R,** and **Katelyn V**. In the next round, the 36 entries were whittled down to six semifinalists, and once again, Birchwood students finished very strongly. Of the six top essays chosen, half were those of Birchwood students: **Kavya R, Katelyn V,** and **Michael T**. **Kavya** then went on to win second place in the state of Ohio for her letter to Kathryn Lasky, who wrote *The Night Journey*, while **Katelyn** earned third place for writing to Ann M. Martin, author of *A Dog's Life*. Congratulations to these fine students for their success with clear written expression.

### **National Geographic Bee**

Congratulations to **Trevor L** for qualifying for the state level of the National Geographic Bee! **Trevor** is Birchwood's first two-year qualifier for the state competition. After winning the school level of the Bee, **Trevor** took a challenging written exam to qualify as one of approximately 100 students from across the state for the state level Bee which will be held at The Ohio State University, Mansfield Campus on April 9. Best wishes for **Trevor's** success in the state Bee!

### **Science Olympiads**

The 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students entered a new science competition this year. On Saturday, March 20th twenty-one teams from schools around the Metropolitan area competed in 31 different events at CSU. Birchwood



students competing were: **Amir I** (1st place Science Bowl), **Jack B** (3rd place Aerodynamics), **Sofia R** (3rd- Aerodynamics), **Caroline V** (1st- Science Bowl), **Isabela M**, **William L**, **Grace C**, **Yamenah A**, **Marco B** (1st- Science Bowl, 2nd- Starry Starry Night), **Alexis H**, **Adam I**, **Prathna K**, **Pheby L**, **Ammar M**, **Grace X**, **Haley Y**, **Hajira A** (2nd- Starry Starry Night), **Christine B**, **Nate C** (1st- Bridge Building), **Clive C** (1st- Bridge Building, 1st-

Circuits), **Jorgen K** (1st- Circuits), **Kavya R** (1st- Science Bowl), **Shan S**, **Katelyn V**, and **Naomi W**.

We owe a big thanks to all the parents who accompanied us. They, literally, ran the students to each event, picked them up, and made sure they made it to the next event! Thank you!

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## COMPETENCY AND MOTIVATION

### Part VI

### Nurturing a Growth Mindset

When we teach children to have a *growth mindset*, we are teaching them to approach life positively, expectantly, and hopefully. To a child with a growth mindset, life poses one opportunity after another. They are confident in what they **can** do. There is no time to blame people or circumstances. There is no time to be a victim. As we discussed last month, the children with a growth mindset have been taught to respond to challenges by rolling up their sleeves and getting to work. Improvement and growth are right around the corner.

Central to this perspective, is teaching children to be problem solvers, not accepting challenging situations passively. Let me illustrate by letting you in on one of my delightful little secrets: I love hearing children's excuses for why their homework is not turned in or why their work is not done very well. Talk about creativity!

My students are typical. They have a fixed mindset and so they do not yet understand that whenever their performance falls below an accepted standard they can adjust themselves and get better. Instead, they either blame their circumstances or complain about their lack of ability. The more I ask for reasons for their performance, the more they squirm and stretch the truth, looking for some excuse that will somehow pacify their unrelenting teacher. I have my favorites, of course, but the scenario is always same. I ask for homework or class work, and like a skilled lawyer, the negligent student pleads his case.

Once, in my language arts class, Joey's litany of excuses almost made me laugh. It's challenging to get little boys to write, but I expect my young students to be able to respond to a classroom writing assignment with an essay of about 300-350 words. When Joey did not do the assignment as I requested he offered his explanations, pausing hopefully after each attempt to gain acceptance: "I didn't know what to write (I can talk incessantly in class but I can't write). I'm not a good writer, but look, I wrote three sentences; isn't that enough? (don't you understand that I carefully calculated how little I could do yet let it get by your merciless eyes?). . . I lost my pencil (my upper middle-class household had no other writing utensil). . . I was out of paper and my Mom (now he lets his Mom share some of the blame) didn't have any gas in the car (now it is also the car's fault) so we couldn't drive to Walgreen's for more paper. I forgot my homework notebook at school. . . I didn't write down the assignment in my homework notebook (as though this was the fault of some mysterious force in the classroom). Jenny (the little girl in class who does everything correctly) wouldn't tell me what the assignment was (as if he actually asked her and it was her responsibility)."

You get the idea.

My response is consistent. I know that mere scolding doesn't do much, so let's problem solve; let's fix this and not make excuses. Let's exercise a **growth mindset**.

First, we untangle the convoluted story and identify the **real** cause. It takes awhile because the last thing Joey wants to do is to assume responsibility. But once we locate the root cause – he did not write down the assignment correctly during class – we are halfway to the solution. We come up with two or three strategies to avoid this same mistake, and set our plan into action.

I have taught too long to believe that this one effort will solve Joey's problem, but it's a start and we will have to run through similar scenarios in the near future. But I do know that this is the only way I can help Joey develop a growth mindset and readily face the little problems in his life. He needs to become a problem solver. Face issues. Then systematically seek viable solutions. It will take time to forge a growth mindset, but it will give children an edge throughout life.