



Birchwood Clipboard

FEB 2012 Vol 18,5

The Lion's Roar

Special Program Highlights

We are pleased let our community know about exciting developments in our technology education. **Mrs. Waldal** has been invited to represent the Virtual Reality Academy developed by the Air Force Research Center in Dayton at the upcoming E-Tech Ohio Conference in Columbus on February 14th. She has been working with a group Birchwood School eighth graders designing, building, and programming in this interactive online virtual world environment since fall of 2011. The creativity, curiosity, and enthusiasm of the students have gained Birchwood School special recognition by the Director of Research at the Air Force Research Lab.

Dharma N has made us proud. She was the *Sun-Post Herald* "Student of the week" in the January 26, 2012 issue. The story highlighted that she was one of the third-grade winners of the American Chemical Society's National Chemistry Week 2011 chemistry contest.

Amir I was the sixth grade winner of the American Chemical Society's (ACS) National Chemistry Week 2011 chemistry contest for the Cleveland area. **Amir's** winning experiment measured the amount of fat released when a hot dog is heated and answered questions about saturated and unsaturated fats and their effects on health.

Seventh and eighth grade students received a host of awards from the 2012 Scholastic Writing Awards in the new regional affiliate at the Cleveland Institute of Art. Our students submitted 55 pieces in all different genres and received 32 awards from honorable mention to silver and gold keys. Winners were recognized at an award ceremony on January 7 at CIA. See the Language Arts section of this issue for a complete list of names and awards.

Birchwood also had a Silver Key (**Pheby L**) and Honorable Mention (**Joan C**) in the Art Division of the 2012 Scholastic Arts Competition. Congratulations!

Michael T earned an honorable mention in *Cricket* magazine's poetry contest. See his poem in the main hallway.

See the Math section for impressive results from the Math Olympiads and Continental Math League competitions!

School Visits

Ms. Brown and Ms. Tagliarina, coaches of our Science Olympiad team, visited the Shaker Heights schools to observe how their program is run and to have collegial conversations with the coaches there on the Science Olympiad program in Northeast Ohio.

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Essay from
Mr. Debelak:
*Expectations and
Education:
Expectations
Achievement, and
Practice*

Upcoming
Open House Week,
Mon-Fri, February 6-10
9:00am-2:30pm

**Harvest for Hunger
(H4H) Drive,**
Mon-Fri, February 13-17

H4H Carnival
Wed, February 15
During the school day
of early dismissal

Friday, March 30
K-4 Fine Arts Night



Class News

Art

Scholastic Art Award winners: **Joan C**- Honorable Mention for Sculpture “Twisted” and **Pheby L**- Silver Key for Drawing “Fantasy”. The Award Ceremony was January 7.

Gym

The second quarter was a busy one for the gym classes. In addition to the weekly gym classes the students took part in a Jump Rope for Heart event to support The American Heart Association and the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. This year the school raised just over five hundred dollars! **Zayd H**, a first grade student, raised \$125.00 making him the top money raiser for Birchwood. Our participation in this program is greatly appreciated and our contributions work to help educated and save lives!

During the second quarter the school also participated in the Push-up Challenge. Week after week, students faithfully practiced and recorded how many push-ups they did. The results are in...the sixth grade class placed first, averaging over 238 push-ups per student. The eighth and third grade classes were right on their heels, averaging 200 and 150 per student respectively. Great work everyone!

K-Computer

Kindergartners have been practicing making shapes that they can put on their turtle. We have made snowflakes and had them fall to the ground. We also made shapes into the letters in our name and then had them move around the screen.

K-Math Center

In math the Kindergartners have continued to progress in their small groups. They learned to add and subtract with two digit numbers. They began learning the concept of time and using their own clocks to show what time we get up, eat lunch, go home from school, etc.

K-Reading and Writing Center

As always the Kindergartners have been continuing to build up their list of sight words. They continue to read them in stories and write their own sentences using the words. We have also been learning about alliteration in Language Arts. We read stories like Miss Spider’s Tea Party and Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs and found alliteration within each story. We then came up with our own alliteration.

K-Science

In Science the Kindergartners have been learning about magnets and magnetic fields. They have also been learning about temperature. They enjoyed visiting the Science lab upstairs to conduct several experiments. In one experiment we filled three containers with hot water. One we covered with cloth, one with foil, and the last with plastic to see which would keep the heat in the best. Of course they discovered that the foil kept the water the hottest. We also did an experiment to see how air expands when it is heated and contracts when it is cooled. We warmed up an empty bottle under hot water, put a balloon over the top and then put the bottle in a bowl of cold water. The air cooled and the balloon was pulled into the bottle. When the same bottle was put in a bowl of hot water the warm air expanded the balloon again.

K-Social Studies

In Social Studies we finished up our work with Native Americans and moved on to learning about the presidents and the United States. The Kindergartners made their own flags and discovered what each color represents. We talked about different national symbols such as the Liberty Bell and the bald eagle and different sites in the United States that honor the presidents such as Mount Rushmore. We also learned about democracy and read about Washington in The Cherry Tree.

K-Spanish

The Kindergartners have been learning to say different body parts in Spanish. They used a Mr. Potato Head to identify parts of the face in Spanish. They identified objects around the classroom in Spanish as well. We have labeled several things in the room to help them to recognize the words.

1st Math

The first graders just finished a unit on problem solving. We used the book, *Challenging Word Problems*, which is part of the Singapore math series. The book covered a multitude of word problems, including addition, subtraction, multiplication, and even division. There were problems that involved money and time, length and weight. This was an excellent introduction to a skill that will be developed throughout their years at Birchwood.

2nd Math

The second graders have been working hard at practicing and mastering their math fact skills. The B group went



through the basic multiplication and division facts from one to ten, while the A group was exposed to more advanced mental math strategies. One thing that is stressed in the lower grades is that, when performing computation, one should always take the “safe” way and work the problem out on paper, showing all work. During these lessons, however, the emphasis was on mental computation. Working problems in this way, the students built up their “mental muscle” and learned that this type of calculation can be both challenging and fun.

1st-2nd Language Arts

The children have been busy mastering proper handwriting. The first graders are learning how to correctly form manuscript letters, while the second graders are being introduced to cursive letters. While some schools have gotten away from the emphasis on good penmanship, at Birchwood we see the value of regular practice. Supporting our position, an article by Kellogg and Whiteford in “Training Advanced Writing Skills: The Case for Deliberate Practice” published by *Educational Psychologist* makes the case for deliberate practice. “For [the writing] skill as a whole to be well controlled, then its component processes must become relatively automatic and effortless through practice.” To this end Birchwood deliberately teaches cursive handwriting through the fourth grade and insists that students use it across the curriculum by mid-third grade.

1st-2nd Reading

Instead of ringing in the New Year, the first and second graders read in the New Year! Before winter break the children read for 2012 seconds (33 minutes, 32 seconds). They are avid readers! In January the students started a unit on books that have won the Randolph Caldecott Medal for illustrations in children’s books. This unit has been enhanced by the recent purchase of the Caldecott books necessary to complete our set of Medal winners from 1938-2011. Funding was provided by the recent library grants that Birchwood has received.

1st-2nd Science

The first and second graders have transitioned from anatomy to botany. After studying various types of seeds, students had the opportunity to dissect a lima bean and find the embryo (baby plant) inside. They used microscopes to get a closer look at the embryo and many different types of seeds. Each child also planted lima bean seeds. The young scientists are excited to observe and record data as

their plants germinate and grow! In the meantime, they’ll be learning about and experimenting with the parts of plants and their functions.

1st-2nd Social Studies

The first and second graders completed a unit on Native Americans. They captured what they learned by making books with facts and illustrations for tribes from each region of the United States. They also created “winter counts” using “buffalo skin” and picture writing. A special thank you goes out to the parents who volunteered their time to help the students assemble their books!

1st Spanish

At the end of December, first graders learned how to say *hello* with different greetings for morning, afternoon, and evening. They learned to ask and respond to the question, “How are you?” and tackled the tricky task of learning when to use *tú* or *usted*, the casual and formal Spanish words for *you*. This month, the first graders worked on the number unit 21 through 29. This was enhanced by an online, touch-sensitive aid that they greatly enjoyed. With these higher numbers in our tool belts, we next learned how to answer the question, “What day is today?” on a calendar. Your first grader learned a song about the days of the week - ask him or her to teach it to you!

2nd Spanish

Second graders wrapped up December learning days of the week and Spanish words for colors. We practiced coloring garden, butterfly, and toucan pictures labeled in Spanish, and students learned to name the appropriate color to describe an object in real life. This month, we learned Spanish words for objects in the classroom by asking and answering “How do you say...?” in Spanish. Next, we covered the pattern used to make words for numbers 30-59, which our second graders figured out amazingly quickly. After the alphabet, we will wrap up January learning words for months of the year (ask to learn it at home!).

1st-2nd Computer

The students have been using MicroWorlds to create a snowy day scene. We made snowflakes, people, and animals. We have been practicing math facts on the website, <http://www.arcademicskillbuilders.com/>. This site is fun to play math and language arts games with classmates. The students have been practicing typing with a keyboarding game and DanceMat typing; both are on great websites that introduce typing.



3rd-4th Computer

The third and fourth graders have been practicing typing using typingweb.com. They have an account that tracks their progress over the year. They love to see how far they have come since the beginning of the year. We have also been learning to use Microsoft Excel to do simple calculations. The students were excited to see their formulas add up all the numbers.

3rd-5th Language Arts

Some of the third graders and all fourth and fifth grader students entered the *Pasta Tales* essay-writing contest, a national competition sponsored by Olive Garden. The prompt was a challenging one: If you were given \$5000 to further education in your local community, how would you use it and why? Students had to grapple with issues like deciding on a realistic idea, establishing a budget, and laying out their thoughts clearly in a convincing essay of only 250 words. Writing this essay capped a quarter of doing mostly non-fiction writing for the fifth graders whose *Letters About Literature* pieces were submitted earlier this month. The younger students have recently written several story-modeling pieces based on the books *Curious George* and *Parents in the Pigpen, Pigs in the Tub*. All students also prepared entries for the Zaner-Bloser national handwriting competition. Class winners were **Alex M**, **Farah S**, and **Sahej B**.

3rd Math

The third grade A Group has been working on basic fraction concepts, including factors and multiples, finding the greatest common factor and least common multiple. These skills will be invaluable when the group begins operations with fractions such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The B Group has also been exploring the concepts of factors and multiples. They also began identifying and calculating equivalent fractions and fractions in simplest form. Both improper fractions and mixed numbers were also introduced.

4th Math

The fourth graders have been laying a good foundation for our upcoming unit on fractions, which is a major theme in the fourth grade. In order to understand and perform the basic algorithms of fractions, it is important to know some number theory such as factors and multiples.

The third and fourth grade math club completed its tenth week on January 26th. These students worked very hard

to complete dozens of Continental Math League (CML) practice problems. Each week four different types of problems were presented. At the end of the session each week, the students took a "Challenge" that consisted of the same type of problems that were learned. These sessions were good practice for the contests that the children have been participating in. Speaking of the Continental Math League, the third graders recently took their first contest. Three children earned medals--a huge accomplishment for first-time contestants. Congratulations to **Stella C**, who earned a gold medal (6 of 6 correct answers) and **Zuha J** and **Alex M**, who each earned a bronze medal (4 of 6 correct answers.) In the fourth grade contest, **Farah S** earned gold and both **Channin M** and **Jane N** earned bronze. Great job, girls!

3rd-4th Reading

The third and fourth graders started practicing for the Poetry Show coming up in March. They were excited to learn which poems they will be participating in and what their lines will be. In the next couple of months they will practice their poems, memorize them and begin to add simple motions and props as we prepare for the show. We can't wait to see how the show develops!

The third graders began a new unit in reading on Beverly Cleary and Sue MacDonald. The boys began the unit with *Henry Huggins* as their individual book and the girls began with *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*. From there the third graders have many books by Beverly Cleary to pick from. As they read they are filling out a chart indicating the main event within each chapter and how that event made the character feel. As a class we have been enjoying the hysterical book, *Hello, Mrs. Piggie Wiggle*.

Meanwhile, the fourth graders began their unit on Lewis and Clark. We began reading a class book about the journey that Lewis and Clark took as told through the perspective of Private Hugh McNeal. The fourth graders made covers to a journal that they are keeping throughout their journey with Lewis and Clark. The fourth graders creatively thought of ways to make their covers look old and have been adding pages to their journal each night that they read. It will be fun to put the whole journal together at the end of the unit.

3rd-4th Science

February will be an exciting month in the science room. Students will have the opportunity to plant a variety of



vegetables during their Veggie U unit. Veggie U is a “hands-on seed-to-planting-to-harvest experience” provided by the Chef’s Garden. The Chef’s Garden is located in Huron, Ohio. They produce specialty and heirloom vegetables, herbs, micro-greens, and edible flowers without the use of pesticides or chemicals. Students had the opportunity to taste a variety of products from the Chef’s Garden in November, including popcorn shoots, micro-anise, candy-striped beets, purple potatoes, and more! They each tried a few new items and also noted a taste difference in the familiar ones like carrots, which they attributed to the natural growing conditions and freshness of the foods.

In the upcoming weeks, the junior botanists will plant multiple vegetables in class seed flats, including squash, lettuce, radishes, and more. Along the way, they’ll practice utilizing the scientific method as they compare and contrast results of plants grown in different conditions. In addition, each child will learn about plant structures and functions at their own pace. Congratulations to **Dharma N**; after being selected as a third grade winner for the National Chemistry Week contest, she was chosen as *The Sun-Post Herald* Student of the Week.

3rd Social Studies

The students have continued to amaze me with their abilities. The research papers that I received were wonderful! From the feedback I received, the students seemed to enjoy learning about their chosen city and the overall experience immensely. They also enjoyed having the “Traveling Trunk” come from the WRHS. They have a wonderful program on Immigration where the students can look through a “trunk” full of primary sources (diaries, letters, pictures, maps, etc.) to figure out the mystery of why the family it represents came to America.

As you probably noticed, we have finished up the Cleveland unit and started back in the Communities textbook. The students loved having the break from the regular book and will get to do it again this month. Coming up in February the students will be enjoying the “Pilgrim Simulation”, a program we do every year with the 3rd graders. The purpose of this Simulation is to give students a closer look at the struggle that was part of everyday life in Plymouth Colony. Hopefully, by the end of the simulation, they will have a deeper and richer understanding of what the Pilgrims went through in the “New World”.

4th Social Studies

The past month or so we have been studying the history of Ohio, moving away from the regional study of the country to take a closer look at the state we live in. Students enjoyed making salt and flour maps of Ohio to go along with the unit. They are in the process of creating their own Ohio book as we study our state (Please do not remove any papers from the social studies folder, as some are storing their book pages there). I look forward to seeing the finished product when we complete our study of Ohio. We will continue to work from the Ohio book throughout the 3rd quarter, enjoying more hands-on activities as we go.

Ask your son or daughter to sing the “50 nifty United States” song to you to see how many states they can say in alphabetical order. We’ll keep working on it here and there as the year continues.

3rd Spanish

Leading up to winter break, third grade students learned names of shapes and colors, which they enjoyed practicing and have continued to use in other units. More recently, our class learned the rooms and furniture of a home. We drew and labeled pictures of real and ideal homes, digging into translation dictionaries for the Spanish words for “video games,” “bowling alley,” and “swimming pool” to add to our list of home vocabulary. We wrapped up this unit learning to give a “tour” of our home drawings in front of the class. We’ve moved on to a nature unit now, using our shape and color expertise to describe the appearance of objects in nature.

4th Spanish

In Spanish class, fourth graders practiced numbers 16-31 before using them practically in a unit on days of the week and month. They learned to say which season is their favorite and we read verses of poetry on each season. Our class covered commands, playing “Diego Dice,” an adaptation of “Simon Says.” Fourth graders have been curious about how Spanish articles work, so our most recent classes responded to that curiosity, investigating the gender of nouns and how to use the appropriate definite articles. They’re showing a quick mastery over this material!

5th-6th Computer

The fifth and sixth graders have been working hard at learning to type correctly. We are emphasizing using correct hand placement and keeping your eyes on the



screen. We have also been learning how to use Microsoft Excel to do calculations and use formulas. The students are working with a sample budget to calculate totals, averages, minimums, and maximums.

5th-6th Computer - Logo Programming

This class has recently started so we are excited to learn some of the advanced techniques of programming. The students are learning about variables, loops, procedures and commands. They are working on drawing a character, with different dance moves, and then programming him to move around the screen.

6th Language Arts

Students grappled to compose a letter to the author of a book for Letters about Literature. Analyzing how the book enlarged their world or helped them in some way was a real exercise in “digging deep.” Whether students talked about understanding death or fears, finding friendship, or being inspired to be brave and virtuous, everyone came away with something that gave relevance to their experiences.

5th Reading

The class has begun a unit on the tales of *Jack* of Appalachian fame, and of *Brer Rabbit* from the South. In the tales, these two simple yet clever protagonists always manage to come out on top. One purpose of these tales was to provide the Appalachian mountain folk and slaves an experience of vicarious triumph over their lives of endless suffering. The class will perform a play of Jack and the Robbers. In addition, three of Brer Rabbit’s tales will be read aloud by students, allowing them the opportunity of enjoying the rich language and dialect of the stories.

6th Reading

While reading *Tom Sawyer*, students have been learning to summarize the main events of an intertwined dual plot line. The class has also explored Twain’s style that is full of rich imagery, humor, and exaggeration. Culminating the unit, students wrote poems titled “Hymn to Boyhood” to commemorate one of literature’s most well-beloved characters. Included were verses detailing both story events and, especially, some of Tom’s more humorous boyish exploits.

5th Science

Students completed a unit on sound. Each completed a Review of the Literature. **Megan S** is testing paper. **Olivia S** and **Av B** are testing golf balls. **Nikhita K**, **Maya D**, and

Abigail M are doing dental experiments. **Elizabeth P** is testing different ways of composting. **Sahej B** is testing acid’s effect on bones. **Laurie C** has tested how objects of different densities appear in x-rays. **Cameron K** is testing stain removal of different percentages of bleach solutions. **Layth A** is testing solubility rates of Skittles candy in different liquids. **Mihir S** has tested how high a different balls bounce when dropped. **Rami M** has tested how the amount of stretch affects the distance a rubber band travels. **Kevin S** is testing electromagnetic strength.

6th Science

The sixth grade class finished their study of the coral reefs and ecology. They have begun a unit of plants and they are actively testing their science fair projects. **Maryum A**’s hypothesis is that fiberglass insulation will keep things hot longer than other insulation. **Jack B**’s question is which of three types of filters stops the most sand from passing through. **Grace C**’s is experimenting to test which flooring allows a tennis ball to bounce the highest. **Amir I** is testing to see which homemade rocket flies for the longest time. **William L**’s hypothesis is that hot water will lose the least amount of heat with aluminum foil on top. **Sofia R**’s question is which will power a Wii remote the longest amount of time: a solar rechargeable battery or a regular battery? **Anika R** is experimenting to see which cleaning product reduces the most bacteria. **Caroline V** is testing the difference between resting pulse and a pulse after running in place for a minute.

Amir I was chosen as the local 5th-8th grade American Chemical Society winner.

5th Social Studies

Students have been learning about the 13 colonies, taking a look at each colony with a brief research activity. Their results from the overall look on the colonies are hanging in the hallway. They went on to look at a specific colony, becoming historians in their questioning, causing them to search for more information on their colony. We will be looking at how the colonies became a country in the coming weeks.

Congratulations to **Olivia S** for placing first in the school Geography Bee, where she went up against representatives from each class 4th through 8th grade.

6th Social Studies

The class wrapped up a unit on Africa by memorizing the



countries and capitals of the continent. Following that, they began exploring the extraordinary culture of ancient Greece. Each student selected a topic on which to do extended research and following that, they will produce posters on their topic. Look for them to be displayed in the hall in a couple of weeks.

5th Spanish

The students worked on the vocabulary about the family. We combined this new vocabulary with the possessive adjectives. The students elaborated sentences about their own families and had a good time on this activity. They learned the regular verbs ending in AR. They also worked on the irregular verb *estar* (to be) in order to learn the present progressive tense. The children learned directions and prepositions using their hands to facilitate the memorization of the words.

6th Spanish

During the month of January the students worked on their preferences about foods and drinks. They learned how to tell what they do and do not like to eat and drink. They compared and contrasted eating customs in Spanish-speaking countries and in the United States. They learned the plural of the adjectives, and the regular verbs ending in ER. They practiced friendly conversations based on this topic.

7th-8th Computer

The seventh and eighth grade students have been designing, developing, and programming their own games using gamestarmechanic.com. The site takes the students through the process of designing, building, and programming a great game. The students then had time to play each other's games and give feedback to make the game better. Next we have learned some of the basics of Adobe Photoshop. We have worked through basic tutorials so students can grasp what the program can do. Some students will use Photoshop in their National History Day projects later on this quarter. The group of eighth graders participating in the Virtual Reality Academy developed by the Air Force Research Lab have been designing and programming cars and wheelchairs. We have had assistance from teachers from Wright State University and from The Ohio State University to help direct and teach the students to program in Linden Scripting Language.

7th-8th Language Arts

Seventh and eighth grade students received a host of awards from the 2012 Scholastic Writing Awards in the new regional affiliate at the Cleveland Institute of Art. Our students submitted 55 pieces in all different genres and received 32 awards from honorable mention to silver and gold keys. Winners were recognized at an award ceremony on January 7 at CIA.

Here are the results for the seventh graders:

Maya F – Honorable Mention for My Crowning Glory, a memoir; **John H** – Silver Key Award for Blood, Bullets, and Valor, a short story; **Anna H** – Honorable Mention for The Tale of Two Twins, a short story; **Adam I** – Honorable Mention for The Great Flood, a science fiction story; **Prathna K** – Silver Key Award for Of Friends and Peanuts, a flash fiction story, and a second Silver Key Award for The Store, a memoir; **Vinayak K** – Honorable Mention for The Ultimate Sacrifice, a short story, and second Honorable Mention for The Fight to Survive, a memoir; **Pheby L** – Honorable Mention for The Gray Device, a science fiction story, and a second Honorable Mention for Mixed up, a short story; **Hana L** – Honorable Mention for Amisha: Just Another Story, a short story; **Ammar L** – Honorable Mention for Savage, a flash fiction story, and a Silver Key Award for Curfew Travels, a memoir; **Megan P** – Honorable Mention for The Dreams Between, a short story, and a second Honorable Mention for Sadie, a memoir; **Michael T** – Honorable Mention for Being the New Student, a memoir; **Michael W** – Honorable Mention for Post Election Violence, a short story.

Here are the results for the eighth graders:

Christine B – Honorable Mention for Risotto, a short story; **Clive C** – Silver Key Award for Mathematical Memories, a memoir, and a second Silver Key Award for Next Computer Revolution, a science fiction story; **Joan C** – Honorable Mention for Flying By a short story; **Dhweeja D** – Honorable Mention for Eating Away, a memoir, and a second Honorable Mention for My Brother, a memoir; **Alexander H** – Honorable Mention for Journey to the Dimension of the Bugs, a science fiction story; **Alexander I** – Honorable Mention for An Honest Living, a humorous story; **Jorgen K** – Honorable Mention for Intrepid, a short story; **Kavya R** – Honorable Mention for Tested, a short story, and a Silver Key Award for My Slam Book, a memoir; **Katelyn V** – Gold Key Award for The Flipped Penny, a memoir, and second Gold Key Award for Family Photo, a memoir, and a third Gold Key Award for Pandemic, a



science fiction story, and finally Honorable Mention for Culinary Catastrophe, a memoir; **Naomi W** – Honorable Mention for We're Living in Fiction, a short story, and a Silver Key Award for One Night, a short story.

Katelyn V received three gold keys, and her science fiction piece entitled "Pandemic" was nominated for the American Voices Award.

Including all the high school writing awards, out of the 17 gold keys awarded, we snagged 3. We were also awarded 8 of the 33 silver keys, and 23 of the 78 honorable mentions. We concur with the jurors' statement in the program for the ceremony who stated that the "... chosen works were original, expressed technical skills, and showed imagination. The granting of the awards became difficult because of the quality and scope of the work submitted."

Through the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards program, the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers provides support for emerging artists and writers beginning in the seventh grade. Each year thousands of pieces are submitted to different regionals where the most outstanding works advance to the national level in New York City.

Local exhibitions and catalogs/anthologies are available for viewing at CIA until February. More conveniently, Birchwood students will have their awards and works displayed in the second floor of the south wing. Come and enjoy them.

7th Reading

Johnny Tremain, the Newbery award book by Esther Forbes (who also won the Pulitzer Prize for her biography of Paul Revere), is set in Boston during the turmoil leading up to the American War for Independence. Students examined how the main character grows and changes through personal encounters and historical events. Surrounded by people who live for high ideals such as liberty and rights for all, Johnny's life is deeply affected. We explored the ideals through this realistic historical novel, and the good story brought us into the drama of living during that time. As a culminating exercise for the semester, students articulated their comprehension by crafting a five-paragraph essay with a thesis and conclusion.

8th Reading

Students delved into themes on a more philosophical level through a study of the science fiction trilogy by gifted author Madeleine L'Engle. In *Wrinkle in Time*, ideas explored included that like and equal are not the same, that reasoning is not always as powerful as love, that love and joy have a power that transcends darkness, that knowing and loving oneself can unleash ability and confidence to help others. It was fascinating to see what came out from the shared inquiry discussion! Students then discussed another of her books in small groups and wrote an essay based on the group's understanding of themes such as the worth of an individual, consequences of choices, and "naming" as a tool to conquer evil.

We just completed *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck, noting the rich symbolism, animal imagery, and allegory in this realistic fable. Did the pearl cause evil? Or does it only cause evil depending on the greed and corruption incited in the hands of its owner? How is Kino's journey in the story an allegory for the dark journey of his soul? After discussion and an essay on this topic, we have moved on to *The Red Pony* by the same author with a focus on his rich description.

7th Science

To add to the unit on force and motion students completed a 7-10 day lab experiment. They began with a teacher directed experiment and then continued their own. They initially tested the speed and acceleration of three kinds of balls rolling down a ramp on two levels. Later one group tested the same experiment using four different golf balls. Other groups experimented with different ramp heights and calculated the acceleration at different places on the ramp. At the end they analyzed their results and completed a lab write up.

8th Science

Students completed the Modern Genetics unit by researching a genetic disease. They presented their findings to the class in a PowerPoint presentation.

7th-8th Social Studies

After final content units for the midterm, both classes began down the challenging road of constructing a History Day entry for the competition in March. Students are currently crafting an outline from their extensive HD notes. This will provide the skeleton for an individual research paper on their topics. After feedback from teachers, students



will begin working on the final (and the most fun) piece, the final product. This year we will have entries in seven different categories: paper, individual documentary, individual website, group website, individual performance, group performance, and individual exhibit. It's invigorating to see the level of concentration and work the students put into their projects. Many will be on view at the open house in the spring.

7th Spanish

During this month, the students worked on the subjects la familia y la casa. In their studies, they talked about and described family members and pets, discussed housing situations, compared houses in USA and houses in Latin America, and described rooms and furnishings. The children discussed the differences between American families and Spanish families. They also worked on the verb tener (to have) plus possessive adjectives, using them in conversations as well as in sentences.

8th Spanish

The students worked on the subject en avion. They talked about packing for a trip and getting to the airport. The students learned the Spanish words that describe being in a plane, flying, and different airport activities from the moment they get at the airport to departure. They are expert travelers and can now board any plane to Latin America and feel very comfortable talking to a flight attendant. They also worked on irregular verbs as well as the present progressive tense which they used on compositions and in conversations.

Specials/Awards/Contests

National Geographic Geography Bee

On Thursday, December 15, Birchwood held the school level bee to determine which student would represent the school in the next round of competition. Prior to this, the 4th to 8th grade classes had held class level bees to determine two competitors from each grade. Winners at the 4th grade level were **Jane N** and **Farah S**. At the 5th grade level, the winners were **Olivia S** and **Cameron K**. From the 6th grade, **William L** and **Grace X** competed. In the 7th grade, **John H** and **Prathna K** were the class winners. In the 8th grade, **Kavya R** and **Clive C** advanced to the school bee. These ten competitors then faced off in a series of very difficult geography questions. After a close competition, we had a winner! Placing third was **Farah S**. In second place was **Kavya R**. In first place, and advancing to the next round of competition was fifth grader **Olivia S**. After her win in the school bee, **Olivia** took a very challenging written geography test with 70 multiple choice questions. Results should be announced in March. Congratulations!

Birchwood Math Team to compete at CSU on Feb 18

The Birchwood MathCounts team consisting of a four student team – **Clive, Kavya, Nate, and Dhweeja** – and six individuals

– **Alexander, Christine, Vinayak, Ammar, Prathna, and Anika** – will represent Birchwood School at the Northeast Ohio Chapter level of MathCounts 2012. The group has been working very hard. We practice on Thursdays from 3:30–5:00 reviewing the types of problems they will see on the contest. On Tuesdays from 3:30–4:30 we study old CML high school contest to learn new strategies. On Saturdays from 9:00–noon we simulate the actual contest and then review problems we do not understand. The effort of these students is extraordinary. They are not only good math students, but more importantly they are hard workers. Good luck team.

Math Olympiad Awards, Contest #3

Gold: **Nate, Clive, Dhweeja, Kavya, Kareem, Prathna, Vinayak, Pheby, Ammar, Michael T, William, Anika, Maya D, Michael H, Cameron K, Kevin**
Silver: **Peter, Christine B, Joan, Naomi, John H, Anna, Adam, Grace X, Grace C, Caroline V, Avi, Laurie, Abigail, Mihir, Farah**
Bronze: **Jorgen, Megan P, Amir, Elizabeth**

Continental Math League, Contest #3

Gold: **Nate, Clive, Dhweeja, Kavya, John H, Adam, Vinayak, Pheby, Ammar, Michael T, Grace X, William, Anika, Cameron K, Mihir, Avi**
Silver: **Peter, Christine B, Alexander, Jorgen, Kareem, Prathna, Hana L, Jack, Sahej, Michael H, Kevin, Farah**
Bronze: **Joan, Cameron S, Naomi, Anthony, Maya F, Anna, Megan P, Haley, Maryum, Grace C, Maya D**

Junior Math Team practices will resume in March!!

Wood Math Workbooks Published and Available

We self-published our Wood Math workbooks and will make them available to students beginning the third quarter. Each student in grades 1-5 will receive a workbook according to their achievement level. The workbooks are part of our curriculum and therefore there is no additional charge. Furthermore, we will sell additional workbooks for those parents who would like their children to either review computation skills at home or who would like their children to advance to higher level workbooks. The cost will be \$15 per workbook.

Copies of the Wood Math workbooks will be available for your review at the parent conferences, or you may examine a copy in the Marketing and Development room any time of day.



EXPECTATIONS AND EDUCATION

Expectations, Achievement, and Practice

Appropriate academic expectations should be set at an instructional level. “Instructional level” is education talk meaning that academic expectations are set so that children, through a reasonable amount of effort and hard work, will succeed. If the expectations are set too low, the child succeeds too easily. He gets bored, develops bad work habits, and finds his interests and passions in non-academic pursuits. School, for him, is a waste of time. On the other hand, if the work is consistently too difficult (I emphasize the word “consistently” because appropriate expectations will also be difficult), a student may just quit. And like his friend who found work too easy, locate his pursuits outside of the academic arena.

It is so important for children to learn and understand the connection between success and work. It is the foundation that leads to genuine self-worth and self-esteem. As children experience both work and success they value and identify their achievements: “I’m good at math; I’m a good reader. I’m a good student. I love school.”

When expectations are set at an instructional level, they require work. The student must practice until he or she understands and is competent. Practice means the student does something over and over again until he gets good at it. Unfortunately, practice, if effective, is seldom enjoyable. It is work, often hard work. But it can’t be avoided. Every child dreams about successes, but most shy away from the practice and hard work that are required for achievement. But if children are going to become competent, they just have to do it. The world of sports and music exhort the aspiring athlete or musician: Practice! Practice! Practice! Why would we possibly think that academic achievement can somehow circumvent hard work and practice?

While we talk about the story of hard work and practice, let’s us also connect this story to the love of learning – the love of reading, writing, mathematics, science or history. Children love academics because they are succeeding in academics. They are succeeding in academics because they are practicing. They are practicing because they have parents and teachers who understand that children cannot become good at anything unless they practice, and children will not enjoy anything unless they can become good at it. With this understanding, teachers and parents acknowledge the role of hard work and practice, and they teach their children how to develop the attributes and mindset necessary to persevere.

I have been in education for nearly forty years. Often parents will tell me, “I just want my children to enjoy school.” I understand these sentiments. I felt the same way about my children. Yet without knowing it, these sentiments are often misguided. They suggest a hope that school will become an entertainment or a therapeutic center where teachers are at the beck and call of each child’s individual happiness. Well, that never happens. Even if a school could become an entertainment center and even if every one of a child’s wants (not needs) could be satisfied, I guarantee that you would not find a happy child; you would not find a thriving child who is growing personally and academically. More likely, you would find a self-absorbed, narcissistic student who is seldom happy and is grossly incompetent.

The joy of learning and the sense of personal well-being at school are found in academic success. Academic success is a result of achieving academic expectations, and achievement is grounded in hard work and practice. The bottom line is that if you want your child to love learning and to love school, they must achieve. You would do well to help your child understand this age-old phenomenon.

For more essays, visit Chuck’s blog at:
www.birchwoodschool.org/blog