

Birchwood Clipboard

The Lion's Roar

ACHIEVEMENT AND PARENTING

It has been long understood that parenting efforts have the greatest impact on student achievement. Jeanne Chall, emeritus professor of education at Harvard, until her death in 1999, cites research in *The Academic Achievement Challenge: What Really Works in the Classroom*, “the home process variables that have been found to be the best predictors of school learning were:”

1. *Work habits of the family*: priority given to schoolwork over other pleasurable activities.
2. *Academic guidance and support*: availability and quality of help and encouragement parents give their children in their schoolwork.
3. *Stimulation to explore and discuss ideas and events*: opportunities provided by the home to explore ideas, events and the larger environment.

4. *Language environment*: opportunities in the home for the development of the correct and effective use of language.

5. *Academic aspirations and expectations*: parents’ aspirations for children, standards they set for children’s school achievement, and their interest in and knowledge of children’s school experiences.

Concerning the school/home relationship she further notes: “When home and school have divergent approaches to life and learning, children are likely to suffer in their school learning. Conversely, when home and school have similar emphasis on motivation and learning, children are likely to do well ... process variables in the home predict scholastic ability and achievement better than do measures of social class, family structure, or parental characteristics.”

UNDER THE CANOPY NEWS FROM BIRCHWOOD

Growth & Sustainability *Maintaining the Mission*

In meeting the challenges of sustainability and succession we have spent hours reflecting on the question, “What makes Birchwood, Birchwood?” We have distilled our thoughts into four pillars, a framework for what we consider our “constitution:”

Pillar #1: *Offer academic opportunities that will challenge all learners, and establish academic expectations that will help all students reach their highest level of achievement.*

Three broad efforts are needed to realize this pillar. First we base our academic programs on time-tested, research-based and benchmarked curriculum and pedagogy. This gives us the confidence that our curriculum is as strong as any in the country and therefore offers the greatest possibility of our students reaching their highest levels of achievement.

Second we emphasize professional develop-



ment based on collaboration between teacher and administration, directing efforts toward heightened expertise in specific content areas and strong, foundational knowledge in the fields of education and child development.

Finally, we endeavor to foster strong teacher-parent relationships whereby we might best assess student needs for top achievement.

Did you Know ...

Each month, Birchwood teachers hold oversight meetings to discuss the needs and challenges of each child. Through these meetings, teachers and administrators determine strategies that will best enable our students to develop their academic potential, build up strong work habits, and mature socially and emotionally.

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UNDER THE CANOPY *continued*

Early Childhood Artists

Watch us grow, from seedlings to sprouts, blossoming into a “kinder-garden” of flowers ...



The early childhood artists were hard at work beautifying the hallway with a new mural. In conjunction with Birchwood’s art teacher, Melissa Nilsen, and visiting artist, Mrs. Sharon Lee, the preschool and kindergarten classes created the mural.

It is a mixed piece using reclaimed wood panels, acrylic paint, oil pastels, watercolors, paint chips, and wallpaper samples. The students created the seeds, leaves and flowers with oil pastel and watercolor. The background and finishing touches were completed by Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Nilsen.

Ohio Celebration of Poets Anthology

Published in the *Fall 2013 Ohio Celebration of Poets Anthology* are nine 7th and ten 8th graders. Birchwood is listed as a “Poetic Achievement Honor School.” See pages 10 and 11 for a list of winners.

Scholastic Writing Awards

Seventh and 8th grade students spent a great deal of time writing and rewriting their narratives for the Scholastic Writing Awards. Nine students are regional gold and silver recipients. They were honored at a ceremony at the Cleveland Institute of Art in January. Gold key pieces will be sent on to the national level.

Gold Key Winners

Topstone – *24 Levels of Life* is one man’s flashback to his childhood and life that coincides with levels on an elevator as he rides to the top where a new job opportunity awaits.

Kevin – In *Dear Emily* a college student finds two letters in the attic addressed to her from a father she never knew existed.

Caroline – *Thirty-two Years* is a story about an old man who finds atonement for his deep seated guilt about the death of his wife after a self-inflicted seclusion of 32 years.

Silver Key Winners

Maya – As the main character struggles to find a way to save her horse from destruction, she is inadvertently rescued from her own character flaw in this piece entitled *Pride and Joy*.

Amir – *In a Prisoner of War* a young southerner is caught up in the Civil War to fight his own people after he enlisted with his Harvard friends up north.

Vinayak – *The Rising Sun* incorporates the lyrics of the song “House of the Rising Sun” to depict the story of a father who travels back with his son to face his old roots in New Orleans fraught with painful childhood memories.

William – Creates a prequel to citizens condemned in the Salem Witch trials via the journey of a teen whose ability to revive “bugs” seem inconsequential but causes his ostracism in *Take Me Home*.

Oliva – *Life in the Shadows* is a futuristic science fiction narrative of how two sisters who have escaped society’s gene transformations evade capture, even as they find hope in the story of Jewish hideaways centuries ago that parallels their own misfortune.

Crystal – After discovering her wayward daughter’s outrageous *Bucket List*, a prominent matron in high society discovers something about herself and her rebellious daughter in this humorous tale.

Crystal – *Sisterhood of the Spoons* captures the author’s personal relationship with her older sister as they navigate through harmonious and acrimonious stages of their childhood and adolescence.

Honorable Mention

Aliaa T. - Recalls the day her great-grandmother passed away in *The Dark Day*.

American Chemical Society Contest Winners

During National Chemistry Week, the Cleveland Chapter of the American Chemical Society sponsors two contests. The 2013 theme was “Energy: Now and Forever!” Of 11 local winners, seven were Birchwood students.

Chemistry Contest

The chemistry contest is differentiated for three age groups, K-5, 6-8 and 9-12. Each requires students to perform an experiment, record observations, and organize their thoughts to answer questions.

Ryan (1st grade), Paul (4th grade), and Alex M. (5th grade) were winners of the the K-5 “Ice: How Long Can It Last?” contest. Favian was chosen as the 7th grade winner.

Illustrated Poem Contest

Serena won the K-2 division, and both Bridget and Dalila came out on top for 3rd-5th grade.

Hour of Code

In December, students from grades 1-8 participated in the *Hour of Code*. This international event to get kids learning to program was introduced by Omar Diab, a Birchwood alum and software engineer in Palo Alto, California.

A total of 121 students participated in this online event. Students used Tynker, Java and Python programming environments, and it was wonderful to see how excited and challenged they were. Mrs. Waldal was also thrilled to see a boost in confidence in some of the girls who thought programming was too hard for them.

THE LANGUAGE OF HABIT BUILDING

Sometimes language builds habits incrementally, little-by-little, like when we teach children to say “good morning” or “please and thank you.” We repeat the admonition countless times despite our doubts of its effectiveness.

Other times an event occurs that brings to life the language a child has heard many times before. But it is only at a particular point in time, under just the right circumstances, that the language takes on meaning. Upon this experience, the language becomes real to the hearer and sets the stage for deliberate practice that forms habits.

Here is an amusing story that illustrates the point. It is about my eldest daughter who gave her permission to relay it ...

After completing her Ph.D. in English while raising four children, she reminded me of an experience she had in the eighth grade that confirmed and solidified a lesson my wife and I had been teaching her for a few years. That experience of connecting language to real life became the basis for her to practice two attributes of *thriving* – hard work and persistence – which enabled her to reach her goal.

Actually, I did not remember the incident, but it was indelibly inscribed in her young heart. Like all good, often obsessive parents, my wife and I frequently admonished our children with cultural and moral proverbs. One favorite was, “If you start something, you should finish it; and finish it well.”

Unfortunately our children, like most, regularly ignored us. My wife and I, undaunted, persisted hoping for a pay-off one day.

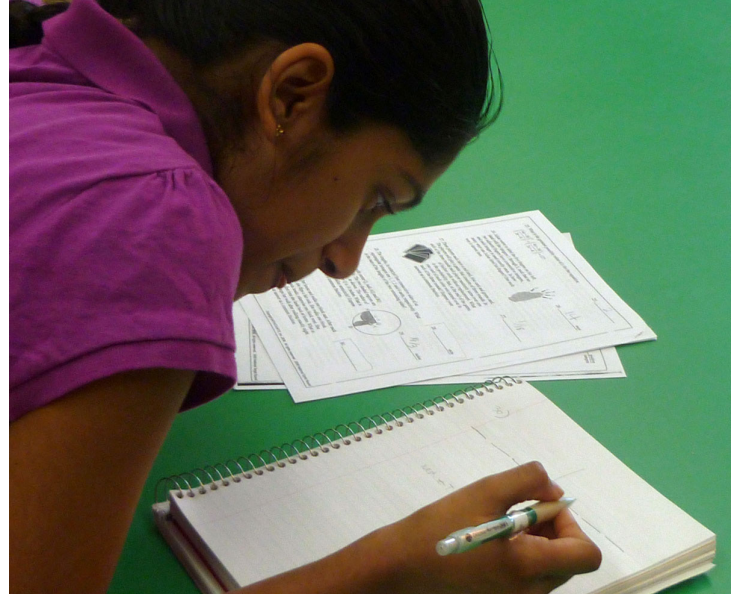
During the spring of my daughter’s eighth grade year she decided to join the middle school track team. She discovered to her chagrin that she did not like track and looked forward to the end of the season. One afternoon in mid-May she was home from school at 4 p.m. My wife asked, “Why are you home so early? Don’t you have track practice?”

“Season’s over,” she smiled.

The following weekend we had guests for dinner. They also had a daughter on the middle school track team who was not able to come to dinner. I asked, “Where is Sarah?”

“Track meet,” her father answered, “last week of the season.” The panic at our dinner table was palpable. My daughter stared at her plate. My wife and I stared at her. Acting as calmly as I could I inquired, “So, Sarah has been practicing all week?”

“Sure has,” her father bragged, “she’s not the best on the team, but that girl just doesn’t quit.” More panic. More stares.



Well, it turned out, this agonizing conversation stuck with my daughter for the rest of her educational career. In recent years she told my wife and me, that after the embarrassing dinner conversation, she vowed never to quit.

*“Other times ...
under just the right
circumstances ...
language becomes real
... and sets the stage
for deliberate practice
that forms habits”*

“Don’t quit” became her mantra through high school, college and graduate school. She taught herself hard lessons. When work was difficult, she persevered. She learned the meaning of dedication and commitment.

Over the next 15 years, this language forged habits, and these habits drove her to excel in school and finally to complete her Ph.D. Often she found herself working on her dissertation late into the night, after her four children and husband were fast asleep. The doctoral dissertation took seven years to complete; but she did it, and she did it because she learned how to

“finish something, and finish it well.”

What is important to note, is the particular role that language played. It created a framework for my daughter to interpret her experience of quitting. In addition, it informed her future practice, “I’m not going to quit.” Eventually, it framed her habit – “I don’t quit.”

It may take a long time for language to sink into the heart of a young person, but parents and educators must persist, because language, eventually, will be the springboard for practice, and through practice behaviors become habit.

PARENTS' CORNER

Thank You to the Birchwood Community

Thank you to everyone for making the International Festival and Auction (IFA) a grand success! Nearly 150 families joined in the fun at the festival and others volunteered and solicited donations before the event. It was truly an all school effort and once again the parents showed their dedication and demonstrated the importance of family participation.



We raised about \$30,000, including over \$11,000 to support the visual arts program. The proceeds will be used, as always, to fund student competition fees, staff professional fees (roughly \$15,000 a year), and student activities.

Gail Glamm receives recognition for her years of chairing the IFA. Also recognized were Michelle Hageman, Laura Giust and Judy Wong for their significant contributions in the history of the IFA at Birchwood School.

Upcoming Parent Meeting

Friday, February 21 at 8:30 a.m.
School Library

We will be discussing upcoming projects including:

- Uniform exchange
- School supply ordering program
- Volunteer opportunities for this year and next

Coffee and pastries will be served. Feel free to bring young children. Please RSVP by calling 216-251-2321 or sending an email to Mely Sato at msato@birchwoodschool.org by February 18.

Know of a Great Summer Camp?

The Parent Committee is coordinating a list of summer camps and activities. Please help by completing the informal online poll linked to the weekly Birchwood news email. Or you can drop off camp or other summer program information to Mely Sato, director of external affairs, in the school office. This will be a great way to share information with other families.

Box Tops, Scrips – It's Easy to Raise Funds

Please remember to send in Box Tops, Labels for Education and participate in Scrips. Funds raised help offer travel scholarships for students attending national competitions, props for poetry shows, and special purchases voted on by the Parent Committee. A list of fundraising activities can be found at birchwoodschool.org on the Parent Committee page, under the Community header.

BOARD UPDATE

ISACS Recommendations

Upcoming board tasks are to work on a response to the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS) report recommendations. The board is taking the recommendations seriously, recognizing that addressing details will only enhance the school's future. Tasks include developing a board and head of school review as well as monitoring and assessing our strategic plan.

30th Anniversary Gala Weekend

Remember to mark your calendar for the Anniversary Gala Weekend, May 30 - June 1. The weekend's events are directed by the board as our fundraising activity for this year, but more importantly, it is a celebration of 30 years of excellence in education!

The Poetry Show, Celebration of Academic Excellence Gala Dinner, and Sunday Ice Cream Social will offer a chance for current and past Birchwood families and friends of Birchwood to join together in the festivities.



Help celebrate Birchwood School's 30th Anniversary at the Celebration of Academic Excellence Gala to be held on Saturday, May 31 at the Cleveland Botanical Garden.

Community Meeting Podcast

A podcast of the fall community meeting is on birchwoodschool.org, on the Birchwood Live page, found under the About Us header.

The board is available if you have any questions, please email board@birchwoodschool.org.

CLASS NEWS

Seedlings

This month we have been learning all about dinosaurs. We have been discussing what dinosaurs ate and what the difference is between a carnivore, herbivore and omnivore. We even made a class volcano using homemade salt dough, baking soda and vinegar. It was a huge success. We are continuing to learn and recognize all of our letters and sounds. We are still practicing writing letters in the alphabet. In math we continue to graph. We will be graphing what our favorite dinosaurs are. Seedlings are also working on non-standard forms of measurement by counting how many shoes it takes to fill a 3½ foot T-rex footprint.

Sprouts

Over the past month we have been exploring a unit on the ocean and ocean animals. The children have found it fascinating to learn about animals that live in the different zones of the ocean such as the sunlight zone, twilight zone, midnight zone, and ocean floor. The angler fish that lives close to the ocean floor is of huge interest since it has its own source of light attached to its head. Our “seafood restaurant” in the dramatic play area has been serving up some very interesting dishes as well.

We have been continuing to work on our math facts of adding and subtracting the numbers between 0-10 and 10-20. We have been exploring a bin of about 30 ocean animals and fish and sorting them according to size. Sprouts have also been measuring and graphing fish according to color.

In our reading groups we continue to become more familiar with various sight words and word families. Over the past weeks we have gone through the “op,” “og,” “un,” “um,” “at,” and “ub” word families. Sprouts continue to become more confident in printing letters and practice these skills in modeling clay, flour, sand, and on paper.

K Math

The kindergarteners are beginning a unit on money. They are learning to identify coins: quarters, dimes, nickels, and pennies, as well as their value.

They are also learning how to exchange coins. For example, how many pennies do you need to exchange for a nickel? And, how many nickels can exchange for a dime? Students are having so much fun learning to identify and use fake money in the classroom. They practice finding change for small items they buy, exchanging money, and using money given to them to buy more items.

“The kindergarteners are beginning a unit on money. They are learning to identify coins.”

K Reading

We continue to see excellent progress in all of the kindergarten readers. We continue to complete activities such as book reports, sight word packets, and word family trees. The class still enjoys reading the sight word book each week and doing the cheer at the end of the week. The students are continuously adding new sight words to their vocabulary.

K Science

In science, the students have started a new unit on animal habitats. We are focusing on winter animals including, bears, penguins, moose, and snow owls. We will examine how the animals’ behavior is related to its environment and how they survive the cold. During our study of bears, Berry the brown teddy bear came to visit our classroom and will be staying with us for awhile. We are all so excited!



K Social Studies

In social studies, kindergarteners have finished their unit on Native Americans. They studied several tribes from different regions of the United States. Along with book studies, they made authentic crafts that corresponded to the tribes studied. They made miniature teepees, created their own picture stories using Native American symbols, and designed their own wampum belts to wear.

We are now traveling to more modern times, learning about our country’s capital, its symbols and pledge, and the presidents and famous people that influenced our country. We started by learning and honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. Students wrote and illustrated their own dreams about how they could make their world a better place.

1st-2nd Computer

First and 2nd graders have been using Microsoft PowerPoint to make slideshows about their favorite animals. They are learning to add pictures, transitions and animations. They are also learning about fonts, colors and sizes, and designing slides to make them easy to read.

1st Language Arts

In December and January, 1st grade focused on expanding their story writing through an array of mediums. Using *One-Dog Canoe* by Mary Casanova, the 1st graders explored writing a cumulative story. They had a blast coming up with animals to join in their canoes. In December, 1st grade also listened to the famous orchestral piece “Toy Soldier Parade/Parade of the Toy Soldier.” Students listened to the piece a few times, identifying parts that were happy, sad, scary, loud, and quiet. Through their interpretation of the music, each student drew a picture of what story the song was telling, then accompanied their illustration with a sentence or two.

1st Math

After returning from winter break, the 1st graders began a unit on money. We began with some review lessons on identifying coins and their values. From there we began working, as a class, in two groups. The first group is working to master counting coins of mixed values, including pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters. The second group uses these coins, plus half-dollars and dollar bills. The secret to success, the children are learning, is being a master of skip counting. It’s not always easy to skip by 25 (quarters) and then, immediately, switch to skipping by tens (dimes) and fives (nickels). We practice each day in class with “pretend” coins; students are then encouraged to practice at home with real ones.

1st Spanish

First graders began a unit on farm animals. They are memorizing the vocabulary and participating in conversations about the subject. They designed a cartoon about animals and drew animals hidden in the farm. They had a good time working on this chapter. They also started working on expressions using the verb tener (to have) and acting out each expression, creating a nice atmosphere in the classroom.

1st-2nd Reading

Each Tuesday and Thursday students look forward to meeting in small groups with a teacher to read together. The groups are differentiated to meet each child’s instructional needs. Examples of recent books include *The Carrot Seed* by Ruth Krauss, *Henry and Mudge* by Cynthia Rylant, *Long Way Westward* by Joan Sandin,

Flat Stanley by Jeff Brown, and *The Chocolate Touch* by Patrick Skene Catling. Students who read *Flat Stanley* designed their own models of the main character and sent him on vacation. Check out the hallway by the 1st and 2nd grade reading room for the latest posters depicting Stanley’s travels!

1st-2nd Science

During January and February, the young scientists learned how to keep their bodies healthy. They learned why it’s important to get enough sleep and have good hygiene. They tried different types of exercises in class, including a cardio “dance” video and Cosmic Yoga for Kids (available on YouTube). Of course, another important part of staying healthy is proper nutrition. Students studied the food groups and created their own version of a healthy plate using the government’s Choose My Plate logo and pictures cut from magazines. Most recently, students have become dentists-in-training as they explore the many parts of the magnificent mouth.

1st-2nd Social Studies

First and 2nd graders are studying the history of Native Americans by region. For each region, they are learning how climate, geography and natural resources impacted choices of housing, clothing and food. They capture what they learn by making book pages with facts

and illustrations depicting tribes from that area. Both classes also created “winter counts” using “buffalo skin” and picture writing. They also enjoy using our Native American center, complete with a Native American game, miniature birch bark canoes, real arrowheads from central Ohio, and other fun activities.

In the December *Clipboard*, we shared that students wrote letters of appreciation to current soldiers through an Adopt-a-Soldier program.

After winter break the students were excited to receive a letter from a sergeant that received some of their letters. She said, in part, “Thank you so much for all the wonderful pictures and words of encouragement. It really means a great deal to me. We work very hard here and are so grateful to have the support from each and every one of you.” We are glad our small token of appreciation was able to encourage some of our troops serving overseas.

“First and second graders are studying the history of Native Americans ... They enjoy using our Native American center, complete with a Native American game, miniature birch bark canoes, and real arrowheads from central Ohio ...”

2nd Math

This month 2nd graders began a unit on measurement. We kicked off the unit learning about customary units of length. The children learned to use a ruler to measure small objects in inches. They even did an at-home “measurement scavenger hunt” using a ruler to measure household objects. Next, they learned that larger objects can be measured using feet or yards. In class they worked with a partner, using yardsticks, to measure bookshelves, lockers, desks, and other objects in the room. We also discussed and practiced converting measurements into different units, such as inches into feet, feet into yards, etc.

On January 10, second graders participated in the first of three rounds of the Continental Math League contest. During the contest, students are given 30 minutes to solve six problems of varying levels of difficulty. Certificates of achievement are awarded to those who score four or more correct answers. Congratulations to Carter, Eve, and Leah, who earned silver medals (5/6 correct), and James, who earned bronze (4/6 correct).

2nd Spanish

Second graders had fun learning words about toys. They had a survey and voted for the most popular toys using the verb “gustar.” That verb gave us the opportunity to choose food and specially fruits. They completed activities in the workbook and participated in conversations, sharing their own taste in toys and food.

3rd-4th Computer

Third and 4th graders have been getting into their Google Apps for Education accounts. It has been a challenge to learn about creating and sharing online documents. We also talked about online etiquette and safety. In language arts they are writing stories and then typing in a Google doc that is shared with their teachers. Teachers can give feedback directly in the document. It has been a great way to get stories written and keep track of their progress.

3rd Math

Third graders are working in two groups, applying computation skills to problem solving. The first group continues to work in the book, *Challenging Word Problems*, in addition to practicing advanced multiplication and division algorithms. The second group is learning to identify which operations to apply to word problems. This group is using a workbook from Kumon publishers.

On January 10, 3rd graders participated in the first of three rounds of the Continental Math League contest. Students are given 30 minutes to solve six problems of varying levels of difficulty. Certificates of achievement are awarded to those who score four or more correct answers. Congratulations to: Sean (gold medal); Arman, Ehren, Ben, and Danny (silver medal); and Omar and Leo (bronze medal).

3rd Social Studies

Third graders loved sharing all the hard work they did on the national monuments they studied. They have continued to learn and read about communities in their textbook. They just finished studying a chapter called, “Making Choices” which discussed how people earn, spend and save money, and how businesses provide communities with goods and services. Students had to think like a business owner in a game where they pretended to own a business with a few classmates. They had to consider different aspects of a business such as self, family, property, employees, customers, supplies, and community. Third graders are also learning about the Midwest region of the United States and will have a quiz on the 12 states in this region along with the five Great Lakes.

3rd Spanish

Students worked on positions (entre, en medio de, junto a encima de). They imagined they had pets in the house and they forgot to close the cage doors. The animals were all around the room. They had to use the new vocabulary to explain where each animal was in the bedroom. They had fun studying this chapter.

3rd & 4th Reading

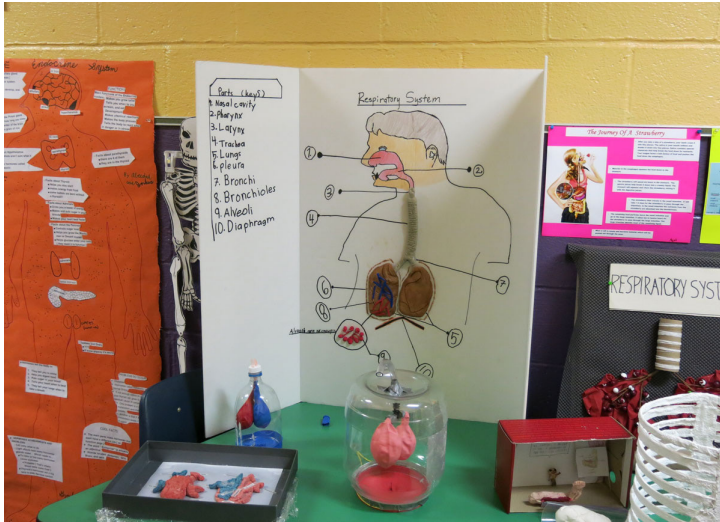
Third and 4th graders took their first midterm in reading shortly after returning from break. They were given a story to read the night before the exam. They were able to use the story during the exam to answer comprehension questions. There was also a section on some of the phonics they reviewed this year, and a self evaluation. Fourth graders also had a section which required them to use context clues to guess the definitions of particular words in a sentence before using a dictionary to look them up.

Both grades have also had several Junior Great Books discussions over the last couple of months. Students are asked to look for specific things in each story as they read and take notes. They have shared inquiry discussions on each story in which they answer interpretive questions as a group.

Third graders are reading *Mr. Popper's Penguins* as their class book during their fantasy unit while 4th graders are reading and studying about Lewis and Clark. Since we are practicing for the poetry show simultaneously a lot of the work students do in this unit will be done for homework. Both classes have been working hard on memorizing their lines for the poetry show and are now learning to speak with enunciation and expression.

“Third graders are reading Mr. Popper’s Penguins ... while 4th graders are studying about Lewis and Clark.”

CLASS NEWS *continued*



3rd-4th Science

The blossoming botanists took a break from plants recently to learn about the most marvelous machine on earth – the human body, of course. For their first big research project of the year, students each chose a body system. After taking notes from multiple sources on three or four research questions, students typed the information so it could be displayed. The visual aid consisted of a traced outline of the child, with system parts glued on and facts arranged logically on the display. The final step was to present their findings to the class. Once students finished human body studies, they learned a bit about the foods that provide the best fuel for “the human machine” during a short nutrition unit.

4th Math

After completing their unit on fraction computation, 4th graders began the study of geometry. The first secret to success in geometry is learning to “talk geometry.” That is, learning the vocabulary that is involved and using it correctly. To start the unit we reviewed many of the terms that were introduced in previous years, such as line, line segment, plane, and point. Each term also has a specific symbol which represents the term. Those were also reviewed. In the coming weeks, the children will delve more deeply into angles, circles and plane, and solid figures.

On January 10, 4th graders participated in the third of five rounds of the Continental Math League contest. Certificates of achievement are awarded to those who score four or more correct answers out of six. Congratulations to: Neige, Praveen, Josh, and Nathan (gold medals); Paul and Peter (silver medals); and Sal, Abedah and Bridget (bronze medals).

4th Spanish

Students worked on the infinitives of several verbs and learned how to conjugate them according to the subject pronoun. Then we added the verb “gustar” (like). Using the pronouns, they interviewed a friend in Spanish. They asked questions and wrote the answers using the third person pronoun. They liked the interview so much that we repeated it. The children enjoyed asking questions in fluent Spanish. This is a good way to be comfortable using a new language.

4th Social Studies

Fourth graders enjoyed sharing all they learned about the national parks they studied. They pretended to be tourists, tour guides and news reporters as they talked about the park they studied. They have been reading about the Midwest region of the United States in their textbooks. They read about the history of this region and why people originally began to move to this area of the United States. They are expected to memorize the 12 states and capitals in this region along with the five Great Lakes.

5th Language Arts

Each student thoughtfully composed a letter for the nationwide Letters About Literature contest. Students worked on this project for more than a month, doing careful critical thinking along with many revisions as they strove to express their chosen author’s impact on their lives. In addition, everyone has begun writing a story based on *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*, a picture book of mysterious ideas with captions designed to inspire young writers. This story will kick off our mystery unit during the third quarter. Finally, we heard from the Creative Communication essay-writing contest that we entered this fall, and 80% of the students were accepted for publication in a competition that normally accepts only 40% of the entries. The soon-to-be-published authors include Erhan, Naya, Stella, Alex D., Makenah, Isabella, Zuha, Mira, Karim, Marta, Alex M., Lilah, Terek, Shruthi, Rishav, and Maide. Congratulations to these hard-working and creative writers.

5th Reading

The class is concluding a Jean Little/Betsy Byars unit. *From Anna*, brings students on a journey with, Anna, a German immigrant traveling to Canada. She is a sight-disabled girl who is a misfit in her family. Attending a new school for children with sight problems gives Anna a new beginning, and she begins to “blossom.” A kind, supportive teacher and understanding classmates enable Anna to trust people. She gains confidence and begins to express thoughts and feelings she has always kept hidden. With lots of discussion at certain “stop-to-talk” points, students are making strides in deeper analysis, which they are learning to synthesize in their writing. With author Betsy Byars, students have been reading voraciously, choosing their own titles. They will create their own montage,

CLASS NEWS *continued*

incorporating each book they have read and presenting themselves as a critic with short statements of recommendation for each book.

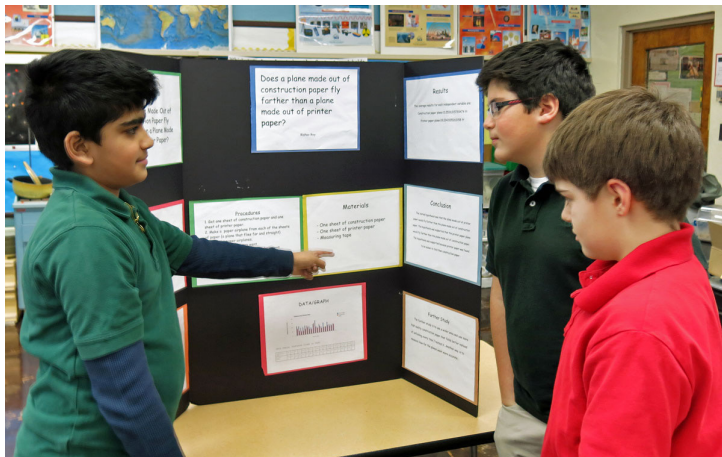
5th Social Studies

We have been enjoying our study of colonial days in America, doing a number of interesting group activities and analytical writing. Now that students' science fair projects are complete, they will be working diligently during social studies and computer class to prepare for the History Fair on February 19. All are welcome to attend from 7 - 8:15 p.m. at the school as some students perform History Day skits while others present their exhibits.

Having finished note taking on both primary and secondary sources, students will be writing a short paper, which tells their topic's "story" from beginning to end and then use this as a base from which to develop an exhibit or a performance.

5th Spanish

Children are learning vocabulary for rooms of a house and answering questions about their own house. They had fun chasing Sultan the dog who ran into the house and tracked mud all over. They wrote sentences following Sultan. They read an article that gave tips about things they need to study in their homes and were impressed with themselves and their knowledge of the Spanish language.



5th Science

After months of preparation the 5th graders proudly displayed their science fair projects. There was a lot of learning going on for each student to put together all the pieces for their own original inquiry. Twenty students shared 20 different areas of exploration and expertise. For the third quarter there will still be inquiry, but in addition, as students study electricity they will also begin learning how to study a book using the SQ3R method – survey, question, read, recite, and review – as well as learning simple outlining, and then writing from their outlines.

6th Language Arts

Sixth graders completed their composition for Letters About Literature at the 11th hour, many having to cut a sizeable number of words to meet the contest maximum requirement of 500 words, even as they added elements of the book that impacted their lives. No matter how early we start, the entire task is simply a lot of hard work. Come enjoy the completed drafts posted on the bulletin board of their language arts room.

6th Reading

Wind in the Willows is a favorite with students at this age. Throughout the story, our Birchwood readers follow the exploits of Toad, Ratty, Mole, and Badger while delving deeply into each character. There are periodic writing assignments that summarize the main plot events and significant details. But the most engaging activity is to match a long list of very descriptive adjectives to each character, choose one character to depict, and draw and color four pertinent scenes from the book. Captions must be thoughtful and concise, using an appropriately selected adjective to describe the action. Thus, students have chosen four adjectives to give a well-rounded interpretation of their selected character. Lots of fun – and practice with very little writing that requires some sophisticated analysis.

6th Science

This was the second major science fair for most of the 6th graders. It was impressive to see their understanding grow. Many took the challenge to delve deeper into content knowledge as well as take creative approaches to their inquiry. Several students will take their projects to the district science fair in March. During the third quarter they are exploring ecological principles as they look at different biomes and ecosystems, starting with the largest biome – the ocean.

5th and 6th Computers

Fifth and 6th graders have been working on using their technology skills to organize and produce things for other classes. We used our Google docs to help with science fair and with History Day projects. Students are making charts and graphs from their data then putting them into their documents.

6th Spanish

Students learned that Spanish, French and Italian have many words in common and how you can often guess the meaning of a cognate in one of the Romance languages. They are working on the present progressive tense of verbs, changing the ending of the verbs, and using them in sentences.

CLASS NEWS *continued*

7th Reading

Just published, the *Fall 2013 Ohio Celebration of Poets Anthology*! Students competed against their peers in age and location. With less than 50% of the poems selected, nine of our 14 seventh graders earned the honor of getting published. Birchwood is listed as a “Poetic Achievement Honor School” in the anthology.

Congratulations to Favian, Maya, Julia, Jad, Abigail, Rami, Rae, Olivia, and Aliaa.

Students read either *The King’s Fifth* by Scott O’Dell (the prize for best historical fiction in children’s literature each year is the O’Dell prize) or the Newbery winning *Witch of Blackbird Pond* by E. G. Speare. By way of literature circles, each group collaborated on the conflict and characterization and performed readers’ theater presentations for the class.



Members of the 7th grade class were stunning in their dance interpretation of a Langston Hughes poem during December’s residency performance.

7th Spanish

Students worked on the chapter “De vacaciones” and they talked about summer and winter activities. They discussed summer and winter resorts in Spanish-speaking countries.

They started learning the preterit tense of regular verbs ending in “ar” and the irregular verbs “ir” and “ser.” Students learned the direct object pronouns and used this subject in conversation about vacations with their families.

7th-8th Language Arts

See the winners of the regional Scholastic Writing Awards for this year on page 2. Every 7th and 8th grader had an amazing story to tell and grappled with the entire writing process from first draft to publication – with gobs of revisions in-between. Celebrate their accomplishments by reading snippets of their stories up in the second floor of the south wing.

A handful of students also forged ahead to write a 1,500-word scenario for the Future Problem Solving Writing contest involving surveillance society, social isolation, or desertification and challenges inherent in the topic.

7th-8th Latin I

Seventh and 8th graders worked semi-independently this month as they worked through a checklist of tasks to assess whether or not they had mastered a certain chapter. Latin includes not only vocabulary and forms but also the analytic skill of taking these raw materials and deciphering Latin sentences. Most difficult of all, students demonstrated their ability to compose Latin sentences exemplifying various grammatical concepts. In this way, all of the students gained practice in identifying when they truly “knew” what they knew.

7th Science

This was the first year for all 7th grade students to develop a science fair project (and the third year for many of them). The quality of their research was truly impressive. Many will take their projects to the Western Reserve District Science Fair in Akron or the Northeast Ohio Science and Engineering Fair at Case Western Reserve University in March. Third quarter studies began with chemistry. Students looked at the atom, the periodic table, and how atoms bond to form new substances.

7th-8th Computer

We have been working on building our virtual world in collaboration with the Air Force Research Lab in Dayton, Ohio. Students designed, built and programed all kinds of objects, houses and vehicles in our virtual world. It is a challenge to think in 3D and solve problems. They completed a ten lesson course designed especially for middle school students. Once completed they were able to design other objects in our virtual world.

8th Spanish

Students completed the chapter “En el restaurant.” They learned how to identify food, utensils and typical dishes. It was fun for them to practice how to order and pay for a meal at a restaurant and discuss restaurants in Spain and Latin America. In addition to new vocabulary, students learned the adjectives of nationality for people and food, and the passive voice with “se.” They worked on

CLASS NEWS *continued*

stem-changing verbs in the present and preterit tenses. This unit culminates in a field trip to a local Spanish restaurant this month where students can apply what they have learned.

8th Science

The 8th grade students demonstrated high quality scientific thinking in many unique directions in their science fair or engineering projects. In the third quarter, studies meet the needs of different groups. In general, they are finishing a study of human genetics. In addition, however, three students are tackling physical/chemical science, several are preparing for competitions, and several are compacting their studies to work on a genetics project.



January's Science Night was a wonderful opportunity for students to share their science projects with Birchwood families.

8th Reading

Just published, the *Fall 2013 Ohio Celebration of Poets Anthology!* Students competed against their peers in age and location and with less than 50% of the poems selected, ten of our 12 eighth graders earned the honor of getting published. Birchwood is listed as a "Poetic Achievement Honor School" in the anthology.

Congratulations to Maryum, Jack, Grace, Amir, William, Julia, Anika, Caroline, Ying Ying, and Crystal.

Students all read *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle, then wrestled with her philosophical themes woven masterfully through subplots. After articulating their thoughts in writing, they read a second book by L'Engle and worked through the theme via small group discussions independent of teacher guidance. Each student wrote paragraph themes as a final assessment for the quarter. It is not easy to add philosophical understandings to the demands of logic and organization that expository essays entail. Parents may view these on google.docs in the reading dropbox.



The comedic talent of the 8th grade was displayed in their performance of "Deaf Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" in their drama residency just before winter break in December.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monday, February 17

No School - Presidents' Day

Wednesday, February 26

Early Dismissal at noon

Friday, February 28

Poetry Night for Grades 1 - 4

Friday, March 14

Sharing Show for Preschool and Kindergarten

Thursday, April 17

Spanish Show



Drama and dance were showcased in special residencies for Birchwood students.