

Talking Trees

The newsletter for Norwich Steiner School

11th December 2014

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Friday 12th December – end of term
Friday 2nd January – Cleaning workday
Tuesday 6th January – first day of term
Friday 13th February – break up for half term holiday

Upper School & Street Law

Written by Zoe Bett & Birch class pupils
Zoe is the Upper School Maths teacher

On the 13th November several students from the UEA Law School visited the Upper School (Elder and Birch classes) as part of their "Street Law" scheme which aims to teach young people about their rights and responsibilities under the law and illustrate how the legal process works. The Upper School has a vibrant Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curriculum. As part of this we engaged with the local University in order to provide pupils with a broader understanding of issues that may affect them.

The UEA students delivered an excellent 'Mock Trail' session in the science lab which related to Cyber Bullying. Eight pupils volunteered to take speaking roles in the court:

Victim – Ella (Elder)
Victim's friend – Ollie (Birch)
Defendants (Stan) – Mortimer (Elder)
Defendant's Mother – Leon (Elder)
Defence Barristers – Barnaby (Elder) and Ferdie (Birch)
Prosecution Barristers – Jamie (Elder) and Niko (Elder)

Whilst these pupils prepared their arguments and statements with the UEA students, the other pupils took part in a task in which they had to match crimes and sentences. The activity raised much debate on the appropriateness of each sentence!

Barnaby demonstrated his prowess as a barrister and thoroughly mastered the slow walk across the courtroom during questioning. Leon played Mortimer's mother with an element of humour and renamed her "son" Staniel, much to the enjoyment of the court!

The UEA students commented on how engaged the pupils were with the activity and how creatively they engaged with the material.

We hope that the Upper School enjoyed the session and are hoping to invite students from other UEA schools later in the year to run further outreach sessions on different subject areas. Watch this space!



Oak Class

By Mr Nowell, with a little help from his class

As soon as we settled into our new classroom, our concerns about putting such a large class into the smallest classroom were dispelled - we found that we had a little *too much* space and set about filling it up, with the result that we have expanded a little this term. A warm welcome to our new families!

Having all but missed the deadline for this *Talking Trees* article, I hurried into the class and asked the children what we had done this term - I really couldn't remember anything that happened before last Friday. There follows a brief summary of what was collectively recalled.

It all began with European Geography - the great rivers and mountain ranges, stories of alpine dragons and dangerous river nymphs. The children each drew a country out of a hat and immersed themselves in that country over a number of weeks. The resulting projects were both informative and inspiring, giving a picture of a Europe rich in people, landscape, culture and resources. Our next block was titled *Maths in Nature*. We looked at what rules might lie behind some of nature's patterns, such as the spiral. From galaxies to pine cones, we observed the omnipresence of the numbers that make up the Fibonacci sequence. Dona Olivia then taught the class all about circles and the special relationship that exists between diameter and circumference. Next came the Middle Ages, which allowed us to say farewell to the rigid lawfulness and organisation of Rome and to enter the rich feudal world of barons, villains and serfs. We encountered the Vikings once more and, more excitingly, Alfred the Great; a true beacon for humanity in those dark times. We looked at monastic life and, with Mr Higgins, we walked to the cathedral and learned about the order of St Benedict. For the last week or so we have been focusing on our class play, *Caesar Regit Undis* (Caesar rules the waves), based on a true but little-known episode from the life of Julius Caesar.

The class has contributed flute and vocal music to our festivals this term. We have continued to develop our ensemble playing, with tenor and alto recorder sections providing a pleasing counterpart to the flutes, all supported by the dependable and able playing of our new-found percussionist. We have also worked hard this term to develop our notation and sight-reading skills. Work on *Carol of the Bells* has occupied us since half-term and has taken us onto a whole new level of ensemble playing, both in terms of the complexity and length of the piece.

So - it seems that we have been quite busy this term, after all....

Willow Class

By Ms Scaife, class teacher

There was an old woman from Stiffkey
(STOOKEY)
Who loved all things scary and spooky
A ghost in the house choked on a mouse
Leaving her feeling quite pukey.

(Thanks to Mr. Higgins)

Wymondham, Costessey and Hautbois-how strange some of our local place names sound and look!

Willow Class's second Local Geography block concentrated mostly on our rivers and waterways with their history of trade on board the majestic Wherry boats. Much to our delight, we all saw some fine examples of these beautiful boats from the water whilst aboard the Jeckells' vessels on our great trip to the Broads. Thank you to Andrew and Tor for organising such an enjoyable and interesting outing and to Bev for helping out too.

Following on from this, Fractions were on the menu with bananas, chocolate and pizzas featuring as tempting tasters. In danger of becoming 'top-heavy' ourselves, our investigations took to the playground to design a Fraction game using equivalent Fractions with some intriguing results.

One of the most exciting changes of this term has been the introduction of the long-awaited fountain pens! The children have taken to them like ducks to water and their handwriting is looking great in their first independent projects.

The children could choose any animal that lives or used to live in the UK and it is so interesting to see who chooses what!

They have done all the research themselves and planned carefully what information they wanted to present and how to do this most clearly. I have been so impressed with their energy and enthusiasm and the high standards that they have set themselves. Well done Willows!

Sequoia class

By Mr Higgins, class teacher

This term, Sequoia class have been preparing a short sequence of little Advent Plays based on stories taken from 'The Light in The Lantern'. Before each play is presented, the class will be taking turns to mime the story that is about to be enacted, using finger puppets.

While using the finger puppets, we have noticed how much of a particular story can be told without speaking! Strangely, this has also helped us in rehearsing our lines. We have become aware that if we are attentive to expressing every nuance of the story with our gestures, then not only do we remember our lines more effectively, but we find we enliven our storytelling.

What has also been interesting is the ability of the children to move swiftly between the serious and the comical. Whether it is in navigating the mood change between Titus the Innkeeper being nagged by his wife to feed the ox to the angel descending from the higher realms to dwell in the lantern or it is in moving from depicting Joseph hogging all of the blanket to the lofty anticipation of the arrival of the Jesus child, we have been learning how quickly life and its many events change rapidly from one set of emotions and responses to another.

Below, for those of you who will not be able to attend, is one of the little plays that Sequoia will be presenting at the end of term.

The Spider

*When Joseph and Mary were almost at journey's end,
No coins for a comfortable inn had they left to spend.
But just when they thought they'd sleep under the stars that night,
A cave they spied which was, seemingly, warm and bright.*

*They ventured in and made themselves two beds,
Where soon they hoped to rest their weary heads,
When scuttling out from underneath a rock,
A spider ran, giving Joseph an awful shock.*

Though brave when dealing with Romans and all their might,

This carpenter, on seeing arachnids, would freeze with fright!

Finding courage within, he chased the poor mite with his staff,

Till Mary, the sight so amused her, began to laugh.

'O Joseph, never mind her, she surely shall share our new home,

There are no inns for spiders, now leave her alone!'

Soon they were settled, and drifted off to sleep,

While the spider continued around the cave to creep.

Now Joseph was fine, he'd most of the blanket for sure,

And not only that, he'd also begun to snore.

Poor Mary, wide awake, was freezing, and started to shiver,

While around and unknown to her, the spider began to quiver,

She was weaving her web to warm this mother and babe,

That when he was born, our poor hearts in his web, he would save,

*Now Mary, all cosy, could dream of warmer times,
And hear, in her dreams, the sound of Christmas chimes (and snoring).*

Maple Class

By Mrs Higgins, class teacher

The new group of school children came up confidently from kindergarten in September really ready to learn, and their enthusiasm for everything has not waned, despite the exhausting nature of learning itself. Thank goodness that everything is so exciting when you start losing your baby teeth. Learning about the quality and rules of numbers by playing cards, writing small words in the condensation on the window, finding form in painting and stumbling through skipping ropes - everything has received a cheer of anticipation and pride in achievement. Steiner said that all symbols (numbers and letters) are like magic to those who haven't learnt them... "The kind of magical signs of the printed letters of the present day no longer tell us what the picture was like." Magic loses its mystery if the secret rules are explained immediately, but retaining the playfulness and fantasy, or what Steiner refers to as 'soul milk' in magic makes learning fun, and what I see

every morning in Maple class is that the world is mysterious and tiring but so fun when you are seven years old!

Good Habits & Creative Discipline

Jacqui Armour, Kindergarten Assistant

As I watched the new sun children start to step into their role, helping the younger ones with their work and the new children to settle in, I have been reflecting on how we all manage to work together, every day- how we manage to *be* together, be happy together, all quite new but feeling like the same old kindergarten family. We come to each other afresh each morning, as different people, having lived our 'other lives' at home, with our families and other friends, had different experiences, faced different challenges, dreamed different dreams. Yet we still manage to work together, every day- songs get sung together, food prepared and eaten, work is done and play is played, and then suddenly another term is almost over, another Advent spiral has been walked, another Christmas almost here. And we have all managed. Together.

I believe that it is rhythm and repetition that form the foundations for such a settled and happy kindergarten life- the rhythm of the year, the season, the week, the day, the rhythm of song, of story and of play. This rhythm also supports the development of good habits. This familiarity of place, of people and of activities, enables the children to relax into their kindergarten day. This rhythm and repetition, alongside the imitation of the work and good behavior of the teachers and other children, holds the them within the boundaries that they need, without us teachers needing to constantly intervene to direct them, to disrupt them.

When we do need to change a behavior, we use distraction and humour- distracting a younger child with a finger game or story, or directing an older child to some work- 'I need some help in the kitchen.' 'Would you find me a...' We speak firmly, but with a smile.

We are aware of the power of the sound and pace of our voices, of our gestures and of our body language.

We speak clearly and concisely, we get straight to the point- 'Wellies side by side.'

We use positive directions rather than negative comment- 'It's listening time now.'

With younger children we work with the imagination- 'Quiet, like mice.' Older children just need to be told!

We avoid giving the children too many choices- we have learned that choice of food or plates with different patterns can cause arguments.

One of the strengths of a mixed age kindergarten is that our 'Golden Rules' become tradition and are passed down from child to child- 'We use our indoor legs in kindergarten', 'Everybody is welcome in our game' 'Our hands are for work and for play' 'We use our kind words/indoor voices'. We may say or sing these words, or speak firmly, but we do not get angry, or shout.

We might say 'This spade needs to be kept safe until you remember that spades are for digging, come and tell me when you remember.' 'The chair has four feet. They all need to be on the ground.' This avoids drawing attention to the child in a way that would make them feel self-conscious, ashamed or guilty.

We recognize acceptable human behavior, and help the children to develop this distinction- 'Donkeys kick, children walk.' 'Crabs pinch, children don't.'

The children learn to understand the consequences of actions through experiences, gentle reminding- 'The crayons live in this basket.' and the action of the teachers.

We give children the space to become a little bored, allowing them time to find their own activity. We may say to the older child 'You try to work it out and I'll come and see in a few moments'.

We make transitions as smooth as possible- 'Who can stand as tall as an old oak tree?' 'Find a hand'. The children also enjoy being 'As still as statues'- announced in a very solemn voice, which the Sequoia children

made up and has been passed down, sun child to sun child as a way of tricking Debora before circle time (please do not tell her!). And they all know the 'I can wriggle my fingers' game that we use to settle them- worth a try at home- just start off and see what happens.

We delay gratification- snack begins *after* blessing, we go outside *when we have* put out coats and wellingtons on.

We call all of this 'Creative Discipline', and it helps us all to manage.

But Do We Ever Say No?

Yes, we do say 'No.' But we avoid saying "no" in anger or frustration, we aim for a 'Real No'- with calmness and certainty, We smile inside and we think about our gestures.

We may use:

The 'Silent No' (otherwise known as the 'kindergarten eyebrow')- a gesture, nothing said, but all is understood, a shake of the head, lift of the eyebrow, finger to lip. With warmth and understanding. This is not a 'Disapproving look No'.

The 'Real No'- does not rely on volume, or anger, but is clearly not negotiable.

Or, if we need time to think about it, we are honest, and say 'I will think about it and tell you later.' Or 'I have not decided yet.' Or, better still, we give a time to ask again- "Ask me after snack.' Then the child does not nag, and may even forget about all about it.

Christmas Market

By Helen, Cat, Bev and Tor, parents of children in Willow and Sequoia).

Heartfelt thanks to all of you who supported our first Christmas Market. The event was a huge success and we've had some wonderful feedback from people who came along. We raised just over £533.00 for the school, which is fantastic for our first market! So, if you hung a snowflake, baked a mince pie, swept a floor, booked a stall, bought mulled wine, sang a carol, strummed a guitar, sold a raffle ticket, handed out a flyer and all the bits in-between,

thanks go to you.

If you have any feedback to offer on the event please do let us know. We can only grow through our experiences.

New Fortnightly Newsletter

Helen, Mum to Erin in Willow class, has kindly offered to start producing a more regular newsletter, with the key purpose of connecting the community of school parents and relatives. Talking Trees will continue to be the newsletter whereby staff provide updates about the school and Steiner education from the school's perspective, but this more frequent bulletin-style newsletter will be about sharing ideas, for advertising items or services for sale, letting others know about upcoming events that they may be interested in, and so on.

The newsletter/bulletin will be circulated by email, with just a few paper copies printed off each time and available in reception. If you would like to offer Helen any support in this new project, then please do contact her directly: hcmcgrath@hotmail.com / 07941 577216.

To set the ball rolling, Helen would welcome suggestions for a name for this new publication!

Organic Veggie Box Scheme

Although only staff and one parent subscribe to this organic veggie box scheme with Arthur's Organics, the school receives £1 back for every veggie box sold. Amazingly this really mounts up, so that we have just been presented with a cheque for £60.50 for this past term!

If you are interested in having a box of Organic veggies from Arthurs, which get delivered to the school on Wednesdays, please give the shop a ring on 01603 747573 or email arthursdeliveries@btinternet.com and mention the school.