

Talking Trees

The newsletter for Norwich Steiner School

21st March 2013

Dates for your diary

Thursday 21st March - Last day of term
Friday 22nd March - Inset day
Saturday 6th April - Early Years workshop
Monday 15th April - summer term begins
Saturday 27th April - fundraising jumble sale
Wednesday 1st May - May day festival
Saturday 4th May - Early years workshop
Friday 21st June - St Johns Festival

Workdays - all 11-3pm

Wednesday 3rd April
Friday 12th April

A Place for Books in Kindergarten

Jacqui Armour, Kindergarten Assistant

We have a small basket of beautifully illustrated books in our quiet corner, which may be surprising, and perhaps controversial, considering the myth that Steiner early childhood educators are against the printed word.

As it is our wish that in the future the children will enjoy the pleasures of reading, we do not think that they need to be shielded from books. So although we don't direct their literacy learning, which we feel in the first six years should happen naturally through play, stories and social interaction, there is a place for books and other print in kindergarten, and that place is to fuel the children's imagination and sense of possibility, fill them with a love of language and stories, and to help build sound foundations for their future learning.

Before talking about books I would like to share a couple of 'visual literacy' observations:

In our washroom there is a little china plaque, with a picture of Humpty Dumpty, and the words 'Now wash your hands'. Every day the children line up under this sign when they have washed their hands, and one of them will 'read' the sign, coming up with something new each time, and never so far to do with washing or hands.

There is a notice on the cloakroom door that says 'Kindergarten Cloakroom'. A couple of weeks ago it fell off, some children picked it up and started to read it: "Look, a notice.", "I noticed the notice.", "I noticed you noticing the notice.", "It says...", "I think it says..." etc. They did not ask a teacher what it said, just played with words and used their imaginations, confident in their own capability to decode its meaning. They were also taking turns to speak, listening to each other, developing their vocabulary. They were using their imagination, their will to make sense of their world, which is really I think the very essence of what we do in a Steiner kindergarten. Oh, and they were giggling. Sometimes the children like to sit on their own and look at books, sometimes they like to share them with their friends. This week four of the sun children spent much of one morning snuggled up together on cushions with a pile of books, reading to each other. None of these children can actually read, so what were they doing? Just looking at the pictures? No, as they discussed the stories and pictures and negotiated the plots, they were enjoying each others company, being quiet together, relaxing, sharing their lived experiences, the stories that they have heard, their thoughts, opinions, ideas and love of words, extending their vocabularies, negotiating and constructing a common reality, planning future play, developing a desire to read and spontaneously learning the first steps of reading.

This kind of reading is wonderful to watch: reading without direction, without boundaries without fixed meaning, and without external expectations or judgements, without the thought, fear or possibility of failure. This is literacy at its purest, before it becomes something to be learned, and for me it is literacy at its richest.

Sharing books can be a very social aspect of kindergarten life. Experiencing books and other print in kindergarten, as in the home, also normalises literacy, and helps the children to feel comfortable and confident around books, so that in the Lower School, learning to read will be an enjoyable natural progression from

sharing stories, and not a difficult or strange new thing to do. As educators we need to make visible and celebrate the literacy work that the children do in kindergarten, although, of course, they are only playing.

Steiner inspired Childminding

Nicole Wickenden

Are you a childminder working along Steiner principles or thinking of becoming one or do you know anyone who is? The Steiner birth to three working group would like to hear from childminders interested in supporting each other and being informed about events/training opportunities. To get in touch contact the childminding representative for the 0-3 working group: Nicole Wickenden on 07900 642763 or email: kolleke@hotmail.com. You can also find information on our facebook page: Steiner Inspired Childminders.

If you are interested in the topic of Steiner Inspired Childminding, please join us at the "Respectful Care" birth to three conference in Kings Langley on 20th-21st April 2013.

Sequoia Class, Music & Fundraising

By Mr Higgins, Class & music teacher

This term, Sequoia have been enriching their literacy main lesson in two new ways; firstly, they have been given their own writing practice book. Now, after the class has heard a story, we recall all the main events and characters from the narrative and spell related key words on the board together. The children then try to create their own sentences in their practice books (up until now, we have written sentences together on the blackboard which are then copied into main lesson books.)

The children have been enthused by their own ability to spell or approximate the spelling of difficult words and are taking pride in putting their very own perspective of each story into their books. The second element that we have been working with is acting out each Grimm's tale as we work with it. The class has taken to this with glee; we enjoyed playing with the mysterious story of Allirleirauh (the girl with the mantle of 1000 furs) so much that we shared it with the kindergarten. A class teacher can talk about how to draw a dog, a princess or a hunter and show how to do so on the board, but once a child has played at being any of these characters, then their artwork will show

that involvement more heartily.

On a different note, after Easter on the first and every subsequent Wednesday after school, we shall be beginning an after school music ensemble for children, parents and teachers. To begin with, the session will last 40 minutes or so (running from 3:40 until about 4:20) until we can gauge the dynamics and viability of the group. The aim of this ensemble is to explore music from around the globe and through the ages in such a way that anyone with a love of music will feel able to enjoy being part of it. So, if you and/or your child likes singing or playing any instrument, please let Mr Higgins know so we can know what instruments and voices to be planning for.

Finally, as a fundraising event to raise money for more musical resources, Mr Nowell and I, accompanied by a percussionist and double bassist, will be putting on a little concert at the King of Hearts on Thursday 23rd May at 7:30 p.m. The music will encompass mediaeval dances, the Romanian dances of Bartok, piano music by Bach, Mendelssohn and Satie, various pieces for Saxophone and piano and some rarely performed pieces for prepared piano by John Cage which are absolutely unmissable! The tickets will be available from reception after Easter and shall cost £8.

Experiential Learning in Willow Class-Measurement and Building

Ms. Scaife, Class teacher

A perfect link after learning about the Old Testament stories was made through Noah's Ark and the Cubit measurement. This kick-started our explorations of the physical world through our own individual cubits, feet, inches and yards. We found that when we measured the Ark in the playground it was surprisingly long and narrow in shape and only half the length fitted into the playground, showing a truly impressive size (30 'Fred's' 15 'Joe's' and 15 'Adam's' to be precise!) Next, we measured our heights and all sorts of weird and wonderful things in the school and classroom. Sandie's skipping ropes came in handy when we wanted to calculate the length of the upstairs corridor (153 yards). We learnt about the necessity to standardise measurement in order to have fairness in trade for both customers and traders. In our Building block, Willow class then went on to learn about how peoples' first shelters

were dictated by their environments and what hunter gatherers survived on until the first farmers settled into more permanent buildings using sun-baked bricks.

We spent a delightful hour in the field building a shelter from hazel poles and greenery and were even inspired to make a fire to 'ward off predators' and cook our snacks! The children were completely in their element and worked really harmoniously.

Once we learnt about more modern methods of building, we then began work on our final project which is excitingly emerging in the field - a brick and oak bench for all to enjoy. I'd like to say a big thank you to the Wildings, Baxters and a Berry for all their advice, help and materials towards this project.

I have found these blocks so rewarding to teach and a real privilege to witness how perfectly matched the curriculum is to the developmental needs of the children.

Oak Class

By Jeremy Nowell

"Ooo...oo...oo....oooooh!

Ooo...oo...oo....oooooh!" The flared croonings and slick moves of Boney M have found their way into our circle time this term, with the girls providing the rhythm, flowing gestures and melody for "The Rivers of Babylon" and the boys delivering some pretty growly backing vocals. The result has been a lot of fun and further proof, if proof were needed, that girls and boys are really quite different...

Our Ancient History block began so long ago that it almost feels like.... ancient history! We immersed ourselves in the hermit-infested waters of Ancient India and learnt, with Arjuna's help, what true concentration entails: the ability to shut out every distraction, every peripheral detail, until we are able to see only the eyes of the bird we intend to shoot. Only mobile phone companies, with their fiendishly clever games software, can claim the ability to hold the focused attention of children in this way nowadays. Teachers must compete armed only with blackboard and storybook. As our recent parents' evening revealed, Oak Class is not immune to the influences of iPhone and iPad, which will increasingly have a bearing on the way in which the children are able to focus and learn. We have also seen how the possession of technology confers status and has

the capacity to generate a good deal of peer pressure.

Krishna, through the words of the Bhagavad Gita, gave us a picture of transience and death.

The idea of reincarnation resurfaced quite unexpectedly in our geography block. We were looking at the River Severn and the never ending water cycle, from mountaintop to river, to sea and back to the mountaintop again. The highlight of this block has undoubtedly been the wonderful project work the children have done. Whatever the challenges may have been (and I gather there were one or two...), the result has been an enriching and informative sharing of work that has often been of an exceptional standard. From the highlands of Scotlands to the fossils of Lyme Regis, the children themselves have taken us on an exploration of our homelands and brought them to life in a way no textbook or atlas could ever do.

We look forward now to the great mystery of Easter, with its promise of new life and eternal hope, and to a Summer term that promises one or two new faces, sunshine (possibly) and our first exploration of the plant kingdom. All will be welcome in Oak Class.

Birch Class

By Sarah Higgins, class teacher

After our trip to Hadrian's Wall at the end of last year, Birch class moved swiftly through Roman history and have since begun to look at historical events of the post imperial era. They began their studies questioning whether the Dark Ages really were dark. The class are hearing stories that show how people at that time were stuck between having moral ideals with a developing awareness of freedom on one hand, and a love for power, wealth and material gain on the other. It is a human predicament that is still relevant, and it begins to dawn on the class more as they are changing so rapidly themselves, and beginning to wake up to the world. One of the things that comes across when studying the Dark Ages is the slow exchange of unquestioning belief in the truth of the divine for an increasing belief in the evidence of the senses. For the class, who are growing up in a cultural environment that is saturated with praise of the material and of the image, the only way they can really comprehend the spiritual content is through reproducing artistic imagery of the period.

As well as this, for the last couple of weeks Birch class have looked downwards and inwards starting their first BIOLOGY block on soil, nutrition and digestion. In the Dark Ages everyone, from peasant to king, would have understood the importance of both soil and the spiritual. In our times the relationship between these two elements has become fractured. By working artistically with the science of the soil, and practically by planting potatoes, it is hoped the children will kindle a healthy relationship with the earth and the human spirit.

Elder Class Bake Sale

By Mortimer Fraser, Elder pupil

On Friday 15th March, Elder class held a bake sale outside school in aid of Comic Relief and Red Nose Day. We, Elder Class, are pleased to say that it was a tremendous success, raising £157.96 for Comic Relief! We would like to say a massive THANK YOU to everyone who donated or sampled the fantastic baking of everyone who made the cakes.

Your Beautiful Feet

By Sandie Tolhurst, Games teacher

Do you ever take time to look at your feet and consider what lies hidden within their covering of skin? The following quote by Gerard Hartmann, an Irish physical therapist who serves many of the worlds great long-distance runners including Paula Radcliffe and Haile Gebrselassie distils the essence of barefoot running in his description of the structure of the foot:

*“Blueprint your feet and you’ll find a marvel that engineers have been trying to match for centuries. Your foot’s centrepiece is the arch, the greatest weight-bearing design ever created. The beauty of any arch is the way it gets stronger under stress; the harder you push down, the tighter it’s parts mesh. No stonemason worth his trowel would ever stick a support **under** an arch; push up from underneath and you weaken the whole structure. Buttressing the foot’s arch from all sides is a high-tensile web of twenty-six bones, thirty-three joints, twelve rubbery tendons, and eighteen muscles, all stretching and flexing like an earthquake-resistant suspension bridge. Putting your feet in shoes is similar to putting them in a plaster cast. If I put your leg in plaster, we’ll find 40-60% atrophy of the musculature within six weeks. Something similar happens to your feet when they are encased in shoes”.*

All children are born naturally flat-footed, but at around 3 or 4 years of age, the main period of arch development starts and continues until around 9 or 10 years of age. After this it slows down considerably, although, even in adults it is possible to go from being flat-footed to having developed arches by exercising the foot without shoes.

Good arch development allows the foot to absorb shock in a way which allows harmonious movement for the body. As Hartmann describes above, putting feet in [training] shoes, especially if they have arch supports in them or inflexible soles, prevents the foot from working properly. It becomes almost impossible with such shoes to strike the ground with the front of the foot first, but instead forces the foot to strike the ground with the heel first. Not only can the arch not perform it’s role of shock absorption, but also allows shock waves to pass straight up the limbs and into the body in a way that causes trauma and injury.

At school, many children ask to go barefooted in games lessons, especially those in the younger classes. In general and depending upon what games or activities we are doing (and what the weather is like) this is something we usually both allow and encourage. Aside from the benefits to strengthening their feet, running around on the grass with bare feet can actually make you feel really happy. Try it!

Elder Class

By Mortimer Fraser, Elder pupil

Reflecting back on the past few main-lessons it has indeed been an eventful term. From Modern History to Organic Chemistry, there has been really something for everyone. In Power and Technology we got down and dirty disassembling engines and assembling them again. In Organic Chemistry we did a number of experiments, including the extracting of some rather nice smelling essential oils from an orange. In Modern History we saw a clash of Titans between America and Russia in The Cuban Missile Crisis.

Throughout these main-lessons there has been a crucial key factor: our class guardian, Jeff. Helping us through everything, anything. So on behalf of the rest of Elder Class I would like to say how wonderful it is to have Jeff and how much light he brings us.