

Talking Trees

The newsletter for Norwich Steiner School

11 December 2015

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Friday 11th August – last day of autumn term
Wednesday 30 December – workday (9am–1pm)
Monday 4th January – Staff inset day (first aid)
Tuesday 5th January – first day of new term
Tuesday 2nd February - Candlemas

A Midsummer Night's Dream

By Mr Nowell, Class teacher in Oak

A term that began with physics and ended with metaphysics - 'This was lofty,' says Bottom, imagining himself a mighty actor and turning out to be little more than an ass. Sometimes a teacher imagines something lofty, only to make an ass of himself. This particular teacher was saved by the children, who grappled and wrestled with the tortuous text, the ludicrous lines, the relentless rehearsals and the incessant incantations of the director. For some this was a journey through a forest of brambles; for others a stroll through a sun-dappled glade: for all it was an adventure, a mid-winter's, mid-summer's dream that wove itself with Puck-like frivolity into our imaginations and left all of us, I'm sure, feeling mightily enriched by the experience. As I write this, we still have the evening performance to go - so plenty of time, still, for the ass to work his magic....

Willow Class Debating

Sarah Higgins

Spiders are beautiful animals, feet are more useful than hands, the circle is the most perfect shape, all cars should be turned into musical instruments, lego should be a compulsory subject lesson – these are the various topics that Willow class have been discussing in their debating lessons. The children follow the official structure of the debate; they are either on the affirmative or negative team and have ten minutes to come up with their own points before working with

their team mates. They also have to stand at the imaginary rostrum (either reading their notes or speaking from the heart), and each team is judged on who makes the most thoughtful and interesting points, not on who is the most charismatic. Here are a few examples of some of the children's persuasive reasoning and attempts to delve into the subject matter:-

"Spiders are good at catching flies and make amazing webs, they come out all year round and are happy in any country on earth." BELLA

"The moon is more enchanting than the sun because animals howl at it when it is full, and the sun is just a ball of gas, the moon is a rock." ISAAC

"The moon does not exist without the sun!" GRACE

"If you are poor and can't afford an oven, ready meals can save your life, and they come in so many varieties..." ANGEL

"Why have hands when some people can do everything with their feet, and those who can't can have robot slaves to do it for them." JOE

"Lego is a toy that should not be used in work time, it melts children's brains and is a choking hazard, just think of all those lost lives, so sad, so sad." FYNN

"Snow leopards, polar bears, arctic foxes and rabbits all have their life destroyed by a single drive to Tesco's." ERIN

Debating is a great way for the class to listen to each other and to learn to talk in a clear and objective manner, and to only talk when it is their turn to. It has been fun to watch the children learn to analyse a topic that they otherwise wouldn't consider.

Safeguarding Children in the School

Jacqui Armour, lead DSP

'Safeguarding Children', quite simply, means keeping children and young people safe. It is not limited to child protection, to abuse and neglect, but covers the many issues and concerns faced by children and young people, aiming to ensure that they grow up happily, healthily, safely and able to achieve their full adult potential.

The school has embraced its legal duty of care towards the children, and has developed policies and practical procedures to help us to keep the children safe.

All staff attend regular safeguarding and child protection. We have a strong, proactive safeguarding team of two 'DSPs' (Designated Safeguarding Persons) – currently Michael Higgins and Jacqui Armour, and a designated trustee for safeguarding- John Hales.

The DSPs are available to support the children, parents and staff and to deal with any concerns. We also work closely with families and external agencies in order to provide the best support and outcomes for the children and their families. We meet regularly and have a constant open dialogue about safeguarding issues that may affect children across the school- from Kindergarten to Upper School- everything from recruiting staff, or handling concerns about children's welfare, to internet safety or making sure that the children are dressed appropriately for the weather.

Parents may sometimes be worried about the wellbeing or safety of a child, and not be sure what to do, and we are available to discuss any concerns with them and offer advice and support.

Maple Class

By Sarah Higgins, Class teacher

As the days get shorter and darker Maple class listened to colourfully vivid and menacing Russian fairy tales. While all fairy tales provide rich imagery to engage a child's imagination, Russian stories (just like the music and art

from that region of the world), have a particularly deep and passionate quality that is unforgettable for a child. Some of the class were understandably not too comfortable with the bearded Babayaga waiting in her house of bones for children to eat, while black dressed horsemen rode by bringing in the night.

A question that gets asked a lot is "why do we tell young children such gruesome stories, Red riding hood is too scary isn't it?" The wonderful thing about scary stories is that when they hear them, children are getting the opportunity to feel a bit of fear, but in a safe environment. They know deep down that the witch isn't real, but are uneasy all the same. When we tell a story we know that one day the children will experience real fear at some point in their lives, so for them to deal with that emotion in a small but healthy and imaginative way is good preparation for when they actually encounter what the giant or witch represents. The alternative would be to censor anything that may be potentially disturbing and create a lovely world where nothing bad ever happens, but that, as we know does not accurately portray real life.

All of the stories are redemptive with the 'bad' characters getting what they deserve. In knowing this the children overcome their own momentary discomfort and they can relax again. In terms of relating to the real world, then like the stories the children will see one day too that goodness always wins over evil. But of course this is only one small part of what fairy tales bring to us. The children, after hearing and recalling such tales then work with them artistically, and by wrestling with the content on a page, have more potential to really conquer their fears.

Growing Through Kindergarten

Jacqui Armour, Kindergarten Assistant

This term we have welcomed several new children into our growing kindergarten family, and have now all settled comfortably into our daily routine.

We have found that kindergarten works most harmoniously and is of the greatest benefit to

all the children when we have a good mixture of ages playing together each day, so that they can really get to know each other, and the group takes on a lovely, sociable, family feeling.

In our mixed-age group all of the children shine. The older ones develop a caring, helpful attitude towards the younger ones, setting good examples and inspiring creative, co-operative play, the younger ones watching at first, imitating and then joining in.

The youngest children have settled into the rhythm, routine and habits of kindergarten through becoming familiar with the teachers, other children and the environment. They are building a firm footing for their kindergarten education, reinforcing good habits, and developing independence and self-confidence. All of this is supported by regular attendance, which is why we prefer the little ones to come on 3 consecutive days.

Our 4 to 5 year old children are particularly imaginative and socially versatile, and when they come on 4 or more days each week it helps them to develop their co-operative and creative play. This is really important for language (and, later, literacy) development, and their increased presence in the kindergarten is of great benefit to the whole group, as they bring such a beautiful balance and harmony-linking the older and younger children in play, caring for the little ones, and looking up to and imitating the older ones. They really are our lynch-pins.

From their 5th birthday onwards the children will have been attending every morning, and so are completely immersed into kindergarten life, contributing to and fully benefiting from the whole kindergarten experience. Our five-year-olds are proud to start to help with the general running of the day (setting the table, helping to put the paints out or washing up) and as their sense of responsibility and capability grows they look forward to the new activities and responsibilities to come. Staying for afternoon kindergarten for one or two afternoons a week at this stage helps them to prepare for the longer days in school later on. Our 6 year-olds will be the leaders of the

kindergarten. Totally familiar with the environment, the rhythm and the routines, they are at home here now, they are in their element. They will have many new privileges, projects and responsibilities. They will serve food, mend toys and help the younger children with their waterproofs. They organise and supervise play, enjoying passing on their knowledge and skills to the younger ones.

During the summer term they will attend an additional afternoon session, the transition group, where they will complete craft projects, practice their graduation circle-time and prepare for the next stage in their journey-upstairs to Class One.

Goodbyes...

We would like to say a big thank you to **Margaret Farrow**, and wish her well as she leaves us at the end of this term. Margaret has been with us since the early days of kindergarten, and many of the school children will have known her as their kindergarten assistant. More recently she has been caring for the children in afternoon kindergarten, and she will be greatly missed.

The mysterious disappearances of **Jess Carey & Helen Fraser**..... not really so mysterious, but this is how it seemed to some at the beginning of the autumn term and so here's the explanation.....

Jess Carey has been learning support assistant (part-time) in the school for about 4 years, but resigned from this post in order to take up new employment in September as a class teacher in a Steiner-inspired initiative in the heart of mid North Norfolk. We didn't announce Jess's leaving at the time because both the school and Jess were open to the possibility of her staying and teaching a couple of subject lessons a week.

Similarly with **Helena Fraser**, who resigned her major role as handwork teacher at the end of the summer term, but was willing to continue teaching other subject lessons. In Helena's case, she and her family bought a very successful and popular restaurant/café in

the centre of Norwich called "House" around Eastertime.

The reason we didn't announce their leaving last July is because we didn't know if they were fully leaving or not or whether they might be coming in still to teach. It was only once the summer holiday was underway and the class teachers had had the time to plan for next year that we could see whether there were gaps in the curriculum and what teaching needs there might be. It was only at this point that it became apparent that it would be more practical for the school to allocate the one or two 'spare' and non-specialist subject lessons to teachers who are regularly in the school for other lessons. It is also possible of course, that we may see either or both of them back in the school again in the future.....

Birch Class update

By Jeff van Zyl, upper school guardian

It's 7.00pm on a Friday evening at the Garage Theatre. A quartet of Birch boys have arrived and are enjoying a drink at a table in the restaurant. They look relaxed and comfortable and they are clearly enjoying each others company. A few of the Birch girls arrive. Seats are shuffled and the group gets larger. Soon there are 10 Birches in the house. The theatre doors open and the students rush in to make sure that they get the best seats. What is being presented? The Women of Troy, by Euripides. A Greek Tragedy that was first performed in 415 BC and that deals with themes and a message that are still as relevant today as they were when it was first performed. What are the themes and what message? Talk to Birch... .

This visit, as well as the visit to the Cathedral and the attendance of A Midsummer Nights Dream, helped shape Birch's History of Drama Main Lesson.

Birch has had good term. Academically, the Main Lessons have been building foundations in the visual arts, maths, science and English that will support students when they register for the SSC next year. But this is far from all of what the class has achieved. There has been

movement in a number of other areas... most noteworthy of which is soil! A class vision of a pond next to its vegetable patch and scent garden is busy materialising. Barrowloads of soil have been added to the mound in the kindergarten garden, but more importantly, the hollow needed for the pond has been created. It won't be long before Birch students are studying ecosystems in their own school garden.

Christmas is a real turning point. As we look forward into the New Year, Birch students will be expanding into the world. The class has been working with one of our upper school science teachers, Sonja, on creating CV's and developing interview skills. Many of the students have already secured their work placements. The trip to Spain and the olive tree pruning is no longer on the horizon, but is getting much closer. And the class, under the direction of our very own and inimitable Mr Higgins, will be performing a play!

Birch students are evidencing the wisdom of the Steiner curriculum. This consolidation during adolescence will support them as they move into the rigour and demands of the SSC.

Watch the space for more announcements.

Sequoia Class

By Mr Higgins, class teacher

This term, as part of our immersion in the stories of the Bible, Sequoia have been learning about the construction of Solomon's Temple, understanding, as part of their maths block, how to find the perimeter and area of a given space.

We have looked at the extensive measurements, mostly in cubits, that are given in the Bible for its construction, and have also studied different forms of temple from around the world. This gave us a basis to make our own temples, in card, which we then arranged in a circle to make an extensive complex of temple buildings. The ziggurat turned out to be a popular form, as did the fairy tale conical tower!

It was wonderful to see how all of the children, in some way, managed to represent themselves in temple form.

An important part of our study has been learning about the Holy of Holies, an extremely special space, veiled from the rest of the temple interior. To reflect this sense of otherness at the heart of the temple, and to bring our temple study to a close, the younger of the two Bens of Sequoia kindly brought in his Dad's menorah, a beautiful 9-fold candelabra which we placed in the middle and lit.

This seemed a fitting gesture to make as we move toward midwinter and the return of the sun.

Elder Class

If the EU referendum was held tomorrow, one of our Elder Class students would be entitled to vote. Other students have already registered as voters, but have not yet crossed the 18 years old threshold.

What we are observing with the students is that their age reflects the increasing application of good thinking. When looking at an issue, be it in English or Chemistry, students are demonstrating that they are more able to recognise their own sympathies and antipathies, put these aside and then engage with the reasoning behind the task or activity.

And Elder has had plenty of opportunity to practice this emergent skill!

The term began gently with a class trip to Germany (see the blog on our website) followed by a Foundation Science Main Lesson. And then the pace increased. Elder students have now consolidated their German trip with a History of Art Main Lesson, explored Chaucer, chosen and examined a global trend, written a Chemistry test and designed/made their own unique piece of clothing.

Elder's new found maturity is a pleasure to observe. The students will enjoy a well deserved break and then return to a Modern History Main Lesson, where they will apply their thinking skills to some of the challenges, which

we all face today.

Willow Class trip to Holkham

By Susen Schaefer, Learning support

On a rather grey looking day, the Willow children set off for Holkham to have a special last day out with their class teacher Miss Scaife.

On arrival we had a rather blustery and windswept snack, followed by a lovely walk through the woods and to the beach Café at Wells, where we all enjoyed a hot drink.

Then it was off to the beach for a game of deer & wolves, and for the brave Willows (which was almost all of them), dipping their feet into the sea!

Only then did the rain start, at which point it was time to leave anyway. After a lovely goodbye and exchanging of presents with Miss Scaife, we headed back to school, covered in sand.