

Talking Trees

The newsletter for Norwich Steiner School

2nd April 2014

Dates for your diary

Thursday 3rd April - Last day of term
Wednesday 23rd April - Workday (11-3pm)
Monday 28th April - First day of summer term
Monday 28th April - Evening talk on SSC
Thursday 1st May - Mayday festival
Friday 23rd May - Last day of half term
Tuesday 3rd June - first day of term
Friday 20th June - St Johns festival
Friday 18th July - Last day of term, 1pm finish.

“The Steiner School Certificate - an alternative secondary qualification”

On Monday 28th April, we are delighted to be welcoming Karen Brice-Geard to do an evening talk (7.30pm) on the recently developed Steiner qualification, called the Steiner School Certificate (SSC). The SSC is a 3-year course tailored to the Steiner Upper School curriculum and it provides a formal accredited Level 3 qualification (the equivalent of A Levels or the International Baccalaureate) at the end of three years. Karen is normally based in New Zealand and is an inspiring speaker; she will be our key contact and mentor from September when we offer the SSC. All welcome.

Geomorphology: shaping the land - shaping our lives

By Huw Rowlands, visiting teacher for Elder

The geography block covered three of the Earth's geomorphology environments: rivers, glaciers and the coast. We revisited the first geography block to build a link between the geological foundations of the earth's surface and the continuity of processes over geological and geomorphologic time scales. We looked at the contrasting processes of erosion and deposition that create landforms, and explored the notion of high and low energy phases in their creation. We undertook a field trip to visit one depositional glacial feature (the Blakeney Esker) and both depositional (Blakeney Spit) and erosional

(Happisburgh) coastal landforms. The block also included map work, to offer students the opportunity to see how maps can help us understand, predict and respond to changes on the Earth's surface. At the end of the block, the students prepared a short presentation on a chosen aspect of the block, and were able to choose an artistic medium for this if they wished.

Birch Class

By Mrs Higgins

Animal Farm has been a very long project because... One day Mrs Higgins declared that we were going to read the book 'Animal Farm'. We slowly finished reading the book. Then to our horror she said it was going to be Birch's play for the year. We were given scripts to start learning our lines, giving us a few months to learn them. We thought that we would never learn our lines off by heart, but we did.

We soon started practicing in the gym and were provided with two big back drops that Charlie (Alfie's dad) made for us, and we have been rehearsing every day. Although it is still a bit rusty we think we've cracked it. After weeks of awkward silences when people forgot lines, and randomly walked on to the stage, and trying to say difficult sentences while keeping an accent, we have finally got it. It has gone from what originally seemed black and white, to a colourful, yet dark story.

It will be hard on the night because there is only one small break in the play, and we will be well hot because we are wearing masks and black clothing, and will have lights shining on us for two hours! The spotlight will make us sweaty, and there is no time to sit down.

The play relates to some bad things in history, but you need to watch the play to find out!

All in all though we are doing quite well, it has been challenging and stressful, but also rewarding. Hopefully it should be an enjoyable experience for most, even if, at the end, it is just us laughing at ourselves.

Oak Class

By Mr Nowell

What is "Steiner Education"? Our initial movement towards a school like ours may well be based on 'what it is not'. Later, we begin to look more deeply into 'what it might be.' Because it is a holistic education, based on meeting the developmental needs of each child, Steiner education often eludes a simple definition. This term, my own answer to the question is possibly this: Steiner education is about answering the question, "Where am I?" Now, more than ever, I have felt the children's need to explore this fundamental question. As usual, our main lesson topics have given us ample opportunity to do so.

We began with geometry. After many years of form drawing and free-hand renditions of regular forms, our geometry block demanded of us an entirely new level of precision, requiring a range of new tools and techniques. Where am I? In Class 6, we have a need to answer this question more precisely.

I am in the centre of the circle. Now I am dividing the circle using the radius, creating six new centres, six new beginnings, from which to make new circles. The forms grow more elaborate, but each begins in the centre. Within the need for precision and conformity, we find never-ending possibilities for individual expression, particularly through the way in which we colour and finish the form. There is an important social dimension here - exploring the balance between equality and freedom, conformity and individuality. It is vital that we find our place 'in' the world - not 'apart' or 'aloof' from it. Geometry, in Class 6, begins to provide us with the means to enter more consciously into a relationship with the world.

Astronomy was our next main lesson. The children had been asked, over the Christmas holidays, to observe the movement of the stars to North, South, East and West. When we placed our sketches together on the wall of

the classroom, we began to see patterns emerging - stars rising in the East and setting in the West, for example. We noticed how the Plough didn't set, but seemed to rotate around a fixed point in the northern sky - the Pole Star. We learnt how explorers had used the Pole Star to work out their latitude. The children had also been asked to observe the moon over a number of weeks. We compared notes and sketches and found that the waxing moon always looks West, towards the setting sun, and that the waning moon faces East, towards the rising sun. By observing the moon, we know where we are, temporally. Finally, we looked at the relationship between earth, moon and sun - their relative distances and movements, and how it is that the tiny moon is able to hide the giant sun during an eclipse. By the end of the two weeks we had a better understanding of where we were, both on Earth and in relation to the wider cosmos. More importantly, we had used our own eyes to help us to locate ourselves, to bring us nearer to the stars. A telescope, ironically, would only have served to distance us.

After half term, we plunged headlong into the history of Ancient Rome. Why do we study ancient history and mythology? In order to know where we are. It began in Class One, with the archetypal stories or 'fairy tales,' that pre-date and pervade history. Without such stories, history remains aloof, with no anchor left trailing in the human soul. We don't want to tell the child where he or she is. This is the curse of modern education - that everything is 'known' and the child's own experience has no value. History needs to be an ongoing 'story' if the child is to have her own feeling connection to it, to gain a sense of her own part in that story: to feel, ultimately, that her own place in the history of the world is intensely meaningful.

Towards the end of term we immersed ourselves in woodwork for a week. I am still at a loss for words to describe how wonderfully rewarding this experience was.

How do we help the children to become more than simply 'consumers' of the world around them? We take them to the source - to the standing tree. We identify the exact tree we need for our work. We discuss how we can use every part of the tree, including the

trimmings. We learn to fell the tree, to cut it into lengths, to hoist it onto our shoulders and carry it back to our base in the woods. We learn very quickly that the person holding the log has just as important a job as the person wielding the saw. Thus we learn to work together, to work safely, to concentrate on what we are doing. In this way we fashioned a crude mallet, which was then lovingly whittled, sanded and oiled. We harvested more wood from which we made walking sticks and staffs – which we carved and whittled to our heart's content. Finally, we saw how a small log could be split to create two spoon blanks. These too were chopped with the axe and whittled with the knife until they were ready to have the bowl of the spoon hollowed out. But what could we use to hit the gouge with? Aha! That's why Mr Nowell wouldn't let us take our mallets home!

I'm not sure I've managed to answer the question, "What is Steiner education?" But I'm pretty sure that the answer to the question "Where am I?" lies somewhere in a damp woodland, on a sunny March morning, where birdsong mingles with the chatter of happy children engaged in some serious whittling....

Oak Class is very grateful to Sandie and Trevor for making their lovely woodland available to us. Many thanks to Charlie (Finn's Dad) for joining us in the woods and so patiently and ably supporting the children in their work. To Janice (Oonagh's mum), go our heartfelt thanks for many mugs of hot chocolate and for generally looking after us all so wonderfully during our woodland adventure. Finally, many thanks to Rob Sim, a wonderful teacher and colleague, who led us so thoughtfully through our woodland tasks and inspired all of us with his warmth and generosity of spirit.

Willow Class

By Ms Scaife, class teacher

Love, passion, beauty and ugliness, greed, gore, revenge, lies, deceit, cunning, hot and cold, light versus dark, past, present and future, the perfect mixture of comedy and tragedy; the Norse Myths had everything! These tales enlivened the class' literacy and numeracy work alike and a new playfulness and joy entered the class which also really

showed hugely in the courage and commitment to the class play 'Thor and the Giants'. Through these powerful gods and amazing mythical beings, the children were given a 'licence' to burst out of themselves and fling forth their imaginations and expressive voices! It has been a real privilege and joy to see how enriching this experience has been for them.

From myth to 'reality':-following on from the Norse Myths, we learnt about local Geography and History. I wanted to give the children an experience of the city from the ground level, by foot, and from above, by viewing Norwich from the Roman Catholic Cathedral tower (the highest point in the city) and finally to experience Norfolk from the water. These three aspects helped to give an overview and introduction to where we live; who and what helped to shape it and therefore why it looks like it does. Julian of Norwich's words helped us to conquer our fear of heights and small, dark places in the Cathedral visit: 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well'!

Some other experiences related to this theme were; mapping the school grounds and our journey to school, familiarising ourselves with the shape of the city and the famous landmarks and how to read a map using the grid system. The children also enjoyed making 'sound maps' by drawing what they heard in different locations (after closing their eyes). As an extension to the idea of mapping or charting the important physical features of a place, they remembered and then modelled a particular place, anywhere that is personally special to them.

Sequoia Class

By Mr Higgins, class teacher

"Inside the wolf's fang, the mountain of heather.

Inside the mountain of heather, the wolf's fur.
Inside the wolf's fur, the ragged forest...'

Back in the Autumn, Sequoia class learned a poem by Ted Hughes, a fragment of which is given above.

More recently, we have been singing the folk song, 'The tree in the wood', which begins:

“On the tree there was a bough,
And on the bough there was a twig,
And on the twig there was a nest... “
And so on.

Over this last week, we have been trying, as part of our literacy main lesson, to create our own piece of writing working with a similar form. First of all, the children were asked to draw an environment or animal and then were helped to derive some writing from their picture. Here are some of their works in progress:

“There was an ibis, and on the ibis, two great wings, and on the two great wings, scales, and on the scales, air, and in the air, an ibis.”

“Once there was a chimera, and on him were three heads, and in the eyes of this beast were drops of blood, and in the blood there was iron, and in the iron there were chemicals and in the chemicals were the chimera’s eyes.”

“In the desert there was a kangaroo, and on the kangaroo, there was a joey, and flying by was an eagle, and by the eagle, a bird, and watching the bird, a snake.”

“There was a tree, and on this tree there was a twig, and on this twig there was a church, and on this church there was a ship, and on this ship there was a rose, and on this rose, pollen, and on the pollen, a bee, and under the bee, there was a tree.”

“Inside the tarsier’s eye, the flaming fire, inside the flaming fire, the ice ring, inside the ice ring, the bug’s wing, inside the bug’s wing, the twinkling stars, inside the twinkling stars, the beautiful heaven, inside the beautiful heaven, the tarsier’s eye.”

Constructing Childhood

Jacqui Armour, Kindergarten Assistant

A museum of curiosities, a helicopter, a ship, a farm, a zoo, an Antarctic shelter, a laboratory, a dinosaur park, a car, a lorry, a rocket, a submarine, a squadron of small planes, a giant crocodile, dens, houses, nests, and a cottage with a roaring fire...

These are just a few examples of the objects and environments that the kindergarten children have constructed this half term. We have enjoyed watching as they planned, selected materials, negotiated tasks and roles,

built, adjusted plans to accommodate other children or animals, re-built when there was a collapse, tweaked, snagged and then moved in, set off on a journey or showed us proudly round. As they became parents, farmers, astronauts, zookeepers, birds, architects, curators and scientists. ‘Come and see my lab. Make sure you have on your x-ray glasses’, ‘The viewing gallery is this way, mind the column’, ‘Put more blocks in the engine, we don’t have enough fuel to get there.’ ‘Sit near the fire, have my blanket.’

Some of the benefits of this sort of collaborative physical play are quite obvious- we see emergent engineering skills, problem solving and organisational skills, team-work and honing of motor skills.

Other benefits are perhaps less immediately obvious- health and wellbeing are linked to increased confidence through participation in physical play, which strengthens the sense of self and the child’s ability to learn. Social and behavioural skills are learned and tried out. Language and verbal communication skills also develop through social play, and are transformed as the children start to express their abstract ideas through language. It is this externalization of internal abstract thoughts that is the basis of the later ability to express oneself through writing. The children further use language and communication in this sort of co-operative play to consolidate and extend their learning: talking through their knowledge, making it explicit, questioning, testing, checking, and negotiating. Construction play is a sort of collaborative storytelling with a built-in audience, and can be linked to later story writing.

In our mixed age kindergarten, as the children grow, their enjoyment and engagement develop through increased participation in play, and they graduate from observer to researcher, to master builder, experimenting in the physical world, having an effect, starting to construct and inhabit their own worlds, alongside their friends. They become social constructivists. The sun children relish being the more knowledgeable peers, the younger ones are secure in their roles as onlookers and apprentices. Together they transform kindergarten, every day, into a new world populated by their imaginations.