

Talking Trees

The newsletter for Norwich Steiner School, Kindergartens & Parent & Child Groups

12th November 2010

Dates for your diary

Saturday 20th November – Morning in the classroom

Sunday 28th November - Advent Spiral

Sunday 5th December – Advent Fayre

Wednesday 15th December – last day of term!

Saturday 5th February 2011 – School Open Day

Oak Class

By Jeremy Nowell, class teacher

*The great wheel groaned and creaked and sighed,
The river stirred its fins,
And all at once the old mill cried:
'See how it all begins!'*

*Asleep upon its axle broad
The pit wheel woke beneath,
And there in the well the cogs large and small
Began to gnash their teeth.*

*The bedstone slept and the running stone ran,
The damsel chattered away,
"Come grain to be ground as quick as you can,
For the miller will grind you today."*

*From out of the stones, by mill bill and crook,
By the river and all of its power,
From out of the stones, through some tiny nook,
Came a trickle of lily-white flour.*

Oscar's Birthday Verse

In September Oak Class went on a class outing to Letheringsett Mill and Holt Country Park. In the days leading up to the trip we had reaped, sheaved, stooked, threshed and winnowed our wheat. At the mill we felt the rush of the water beneath our feet as Mike the Miller opened the sluice, and watched spellbound as the great machinery ground into gear. Up the stairs we went to see the grinding itself, with the great running stone spinning atop the bed stone, and a tiny trickle of flour cascading down into the waiting paper bag. The flour came back with us to be baked into dragon bread for our Michaelmas festival. Oak Class took the role of the dragon this year – and what a dragon it was! Miss Anna produced a veritable monster, with wagging tongue to boot – it was more than some could bear, and throughout the festival little guffaws and hoots of delight rang out from beneath the fabric of the dragon's long tail.

This term, many of the children are keeping a diary, as a way of encouraging their own writing. I have been amazed at the way in which they have embraced this, and have been moved to laughter, tears and sometimes both at once by the accounts of their daily lives.

We interrupted our numeracy main lesson the other day in order to do some outdoor form drawing. Once outside, the wind carried off leaves and children alike, and for some time the play area was just a blur of flying leaves, wheelbarrows, brooms and the odd child. Eventually we had two big piles of leaves, and two groups of children made two lovely forms, before they were scooped up and taken off to the compost area (the leaves that is!)

Our main story this term has been *Farmer Boy* by Laura Ingalls Wilder. The children have delighted in the description of the life of an eight-year-old boy growing up on a farm almost a hundred years ago; his chores, his work on the farm and his first days at school.

A major feature of circle time so far this term has been the movement verse *15 Acres* by James Stephens. I hope parents will have an opportunity to see the children performing the verse sometime this term – it's both great fun and quite challenging for the children, involving an increasingly complex series of forms and movements with a beanbag.

A big welcome to Saskia and her family, who joined us in September. I know that they have been made to feel very welcome by children and parents alike. The real test of any group is its ability to integrate new members, and in this Oak Class has done very well indeed.

The children have grown in all sorts of ways since last Summer. In some ways they are more of a handful this term, in others even more of a delight. This has all the makings of a bumpy, boisterous and beautiful year.

Reflections of the future of Norwich Steiner School

By Jeremy Nowell

What does the school believe itself to be? What are the principles, not on which it was founded, but by which it operates on a daily basis? Anthroposophy is a word, not a thing – it points towards something. It is a

signpost, a direction, an intention. At its core it is an exploration of selfhood; of finding a way to be present with the sacred question, 'Who am I?' As a school community, we must always be conscious of a similar question: 'What is this school?' The label 'Steiner' does not, of itself, mean anything at all. It is an indication, an intention, an opportunity – nothing more. It is up to the parents, teachers and staff to bring this intention into meaningful expression. This requires an ongoing commitment, both in spirit and practice. When a label does not point to something meaningful, it can all too easily become a sticking-plaster; an empty mask behind which we hide.

In the Cathedral this weekend I listened to the Archdeacon of Lynn talking about 'the last word,' in the context of the debates that constantly rock the Anglican Church. It was a gentle sermon which culminated with his suggestion that in the phrase 'I am the word' Jesus suggests that there is only one genuine 'last word,' namely *love*. Anthroposophy is not the last word – it is a beginning, a challenge. Anthroposophy is *not* the way in which we decorate our classrooms or light our candles when we tell a story, although these things may be informed by it. It is alive in the way we greet each other in the morning, in the way we respond to a child's questions, in the way in which we care for our buildings and the school environment. It is a commitment to deepening our understanding of ourselves, our children, our colleagues and our fellow parents. It is a commitment to sometimes allowing others to have 'the last word,' whatever our own convictions may be.

We can never be walking towards fear and love at the same time. Anthroposophy can never mean retreating into the perceived security of that which we find comfortable and familiar, or creating a world within a world. Anthroposophy must always lead towards the nurturing of an inner freedom that allows us to embrace the world in its entirety, without fear. The application to become a Free School will provide us with many opportunities to explore this gesture of inclusiveness; a gesture that sees the school facing outwards with openness and love, rather than closing inwards out of fear.

As we consider the possibility of becoming a Free School, it is more important than ever that we strengthen our foundations and commit ourselves, not simply to the concept of the Norwich Steiner School, but to the journey it represents. There is still a huge amount of school support work that is carried out by a very small number of people. This must change if the school is to have a healthy, balanced and sustainable future. We need fresh input, people who are prepared to step forward and take responsibility for a wide range of school functions. The school may or may not become 'free' in a financial sense, but financial commitment, although important in itself, has only ever been a starting point: the school can never be *free* in terms of the time, energy and spiritual engagement it requires from each one of us in order for it to survive and flourish.

Gardening

By Mark Lord, gardening teacher

Elder class children are progressing well with their gardening. The fenced garden area is currently undergoing a redesign and over the coming months we will be working hard to implement a forest garden on the site.

All of the class are working well together as a team. They are embracing the physical side of gardening with relish despite the fact that we have had to work through extremes of rain and blazing sun over the past few weeks.

The coming winter months will be the hardest ones for the children as the work will be heavy with little to show for their efforts. However, I hope that the promise of those first green shoots in the spring and our bountiful harvest in the summer will help maintain their enthusiasm during these dark and gloomy months.

Job Vacancies

Parent and Child Group Leader (Mondays)

required From January 2011 to be responsible for running Steiner Parent and Child Groups for young children and accompanying adults.

Hours of work will be Friday 9.00-12.30 during term time. Pay will be £7.73 per hour plus statutory holiday pay (currently 12.1%).

Closing date for applications is November 26th 2010
Interviews will be held during the following week

For further details, job descriptions, person specifications and application form please ask at reception or email info@norwichsteinerschool.co.uk

Elder Class (age 11-13)

By Michael Higgins, Class teacher

Class 6 sees the formal introduction of science into the curriculum through an experience of Acoustics and Optics. The children are encouraged to observe, as thoroughly as they are able, the phenomena of colour and sound that are produced in a series of carefully presented experiments.

With the use of the Chladni stand, a metal plate on which is sprinkled fine sand or powder, the children witness, as the plate is bowed (with a violin bow), the visual manifestation of sound and are led to ponder the relation between sound and form. With the spinning top, the children reflect on the nature of complementary colours and the interplay between light and dark.

An attitude to science is thus developed which is based on the fact that it is how we observe and what we

bring to these observations that results in scientific 'truth'.

In Elder, the class were asked the following questions: "What is dark? What is light? What is colour?" Here is a selection of their responses:

"Light is the combination of colours...Dark is a combination of colours...Colour is a combination of light and dark... Light is a source of light... Dark is not dark because you can see when it is dark... When it is very bright you can't see anything... Light and dark is a command... Light is something when a rainbow is out... Light just completes it... What is colour completes your life... Light is a feature where it cannot be without dark... Light and dark is a compliment."

Also, in a totally different vein, we have been looking at the great mediaeval alliterative English poem 'Gawain and the green Knight'. Here is an example of some alliterative writing from a child of Elder:

"On stumpy Sweetbriar Road, to the left, leisure wholesalers; to the right, revive your car retailers; the petrol place, when passed, is an eating-place, made by a man named Macdonalds. For Wonga I work there all hours, giving quarter-pounders with cheese for quids. In the morn, men make mates, swigging down throat soothing Sprite then belching it back from their bellies, while humoured urchins ask for happy-meals. But chubby matriarchs call for full-bean coffees and funny fourteen year olds want large fries, while bald builders beseech for Big-macs and nude nippers nag their nans for chicken nuggets. And I'm only paid £2.87 a day!"

News from Kindergarten

By the Kindergarten team

What a busy time we have had in the kindergarten this autumn term!

We returned refreshed after our long summer holiday, with its sun-soaked days and warm lazy evenings, to celebrate the bounty of the land; the harvest. Our Kindergarten rooms were decorated with sheaves of wheat and oats, the dragon of summer sitting in his place. We shook the ears of corn to free the grains, so we could grind them into flour and use it to make our bread rolls for snack time.

We sang songs about the farmers work, the cutting of wheat; the miller ground the grain in his mill and the baker who turned it into bread. Our circle and stories reflected harvests elsewhere and the enjoyment of it all.

At this time new children were welcomed into the groups and personalities took on new mantles as the older children grow into their new roles.

After a few weeks, we said goodbye to the harvest and welcomed the gathering of the apples and the ripeness of the fruits in the orchard. The apple press was washed

and readied for use, so that the smell of the freshly pressed apples filled the air.

The festival of Michaelmas is always celebrated quietly in the kindergarten. We bake dragon rolls and bread for our snacks, drink apple juice in the garden and decorate our rooms with red ribbons and rosehips. The children's play reflects these last few days of summer. Indian summer, followed by cool winds, giving the children time to collect themselves and prepare to welcome in the autumn. The story of the Princess and the dragon is told on Michaelmas day.

Our circle changes gradually to include the glory of the apple and the planting of those hidden treasures that can be found in the star within. Games with hidden and falling apples are enjoyed before our half term break, with its Halloween festival and we leave our rooms guarded by a giant pumpkin lantern and the aroma of pumpkin soup.

We returned from our break to find that the gnomes have emerged from their caverns to help Mother Earth gather in the seed babies. The leaf elf watches us from above while he helps down those leaves that have got stuck in the tops of the trees. We gather leaves from our gardens and fields to make leaf-rubbing pictures and decorate our lanterns for the Martinmas festival. The days are growing shorter and we light our lanterns and carry them with us to give light and brightness through the coming season. Our circle reflects this time; we sing about the gnomes' work, our lanterns and the autumn.

With our hearts filled with light, we move on to find that the gnomes are still busy, gathering seeds and nuts for Mother Earth, playing with the squirrels in the trees and helping the hedgehogs find somewhere to sleep the winter through. We play games that reflect the fun the gnomes have when they have finished their work.

The end of November brings the Advent Spiral, a time for reflection and reverence when we light our candles in the evergreen trail to mark the start of the journey towards the Christmas festival.

Within the Kindergarten, Mary and Joseph with their faithful donkey will begin their journey towards Bethlehem and stars will decorate our windows, leaving a trail for them to follow.

We will prepare decorations for our trees and gifts for our loved ones. St Nicholas will visit, leaving gifts of fruit for the children. Our circle will reflect the journey of the Holy Family and we will sing our favourite carols.

Finally this term, we will hang stockings in the rooms and leave gifts of food for Father Christmas and the reindeer, then we will go home to our families to celebrate Christmas, the end of one year, and the birth of another.