

Talking Trees

The newsletter for Norwich Steiner School

14th December 2017

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Friday 15th December – Last day of term

19th, 20th and 21st December, 3rd, 4th and 5th January - Work days at school

Monday 8th January – Spring term starts

Monday 12th February – Half term

Friday 23rd March to Tuesday 17th April – Easter Holiday



KINDERGARTEN: THE AUTUMN AND WINTER FESTIVALS

Debora Walker, Kindergarten Teacher

In Kindergarten, the festivals are largely experienced by the very young child as seasonal high points in the natural cycle of the year. Deeper meaning may be alluded to through allegorical tales and songs but the children are not exposed to explanations or doctrine. Their understanding of the world is through observation and sensing of the natural phenomena of the seasons, and so, for the kindergarten child, their experience of the festivals is very similar to that felt by early humankind – resulting in an all-embracing reverence felt towards the Earth, in its many changing aspects, and towards the Universe (including the Sun, Moon and Stars).

Michaelmas comes at the time of the autumnal equinox when the balance between light and darkness changes in the world around us. The festival is named for the Archangel Michael, conqueror of darkness (the dragon). He challenges us to develop strong and brave free wills, to overcome our anxieties and fears. He also challenges us in this darkening autumn season to carry an inner light of wisdom and courage at a time when the light is diminishing.

In Kindergarten we work with this impulse mainly through engaging the children in "will-filled" activities that contribute to the Michaelmas feast. We make bread, churn butter, bake apple cake, press apple juice and prepare soup. We surround ourselves with the fruits of the harvest and of Nature. We wear clothing, which reflects the colours of the season in autumnal shades and also bring small contributions of fruits, vegetables and hedgerow berries to create a beautiful harvest table.

*Michael, angel bright,
Lead us on with strength and light.
Michael, Michael, with your sword so bright.*

Martinmas is celebrated at a time when the days are drawing in. We light our lanterns as the light grows dim. The mood of Kindergarten becomes more reflective and we draw upon our own inner strength and light (built up over the summer) as the earth begins to sleep and the sun begins to weaken.

The legend of St. Martin comes from France - as a young man, Martin passed under an archway in the city of Amiens and discovered a poor beggar huddled there. The man was nearly naked, shivering with cold, and had received no alms to assist him. On seeing him, the young Martin took his own cape from his shoulders, drew his sword and cut the garment in half and covered the poor man to warm him. He went on to become patron saint of beggars and was known for his gentleness, his unassuming nature and his ability to bring warmth and light to those who were previously in darkness. This compassionate gesture may warm us also and protect us from wintry despair. We carry lanterns as a symbol of the small light we can shine into the dark world.

*The sunlight fast is dwindling,
My little lamp needs kindling.
Its beam shines far through darkest night,
Dear lantern, guide me with your light.*

In Kindergarten we work with this impulse of compassion through our nature stories and songs. We experience Mother Earth weaving an autumn blanket to cover the earth and its creatures, to keep them warm and safe through the long cold winter, and follow the flower fairies, seed babies and small creatures as they make their way into Mother Earth's kingdom to begin their winter sleep. We also help the gnomes gather the seeds and put the seed babies to bed, and look forward to the seemingly distant spring when they will awaken again. Our ring time recognizes the darkening of the light and we incorporate the Martinmas songs, symbolically carrying our lit lanterns as the sunlight fast is dwindling.

As we move towards December and **Advent** we begin to add advent songs to our ring-time and tell the story of "The forgotten garden" (an allegory of the annunciation story).

*In the Advent Garden,
Dark the night below,
Earth is waiting, waiting, waiting,
For the stars to glow.*

The candle lit advent spiral is a very physical and sensory festival, especially for the young child. Each

and every child plays an important part in this festival, not just symbolically but actually physically helping to bring light to the darkness. As a result, the experience lives deeply within them.

*Deep mid-winter drawing near,
Darkness in our Garden here,
One small flame yet bravely burns
To show a path which ever turns.
Earth, please bear us as we go,
Seeking Light to send a-glow;
Branches green and moss and fern,
Mark our path to trace each turn.
Brother animals, teach us too
To serve with patience as you do.*

*We walk with candle towards the Light
While Earth awaits with hope so bright;
In the Light which finds new birth
Love may spread o'er all the Earth.*

*Deep mid-winter drawing near,
May Light arise in our Garden here.*

ROWAN CLASS

Mrs. Mason, Class Teacher

Rowan class have had a busy term. Sun children joined us in September and it has been a pleasure to watch how the class has come together as one.

Early in the term when younger children had recently received their flutes, one child said 'Lads, it's okay. We didn't know how to do this last year. You just got to keep trying.'

As part of our arithmetic main lesson, the children have made an Advent calendar to take home, the pictures representing advent stories from 'the light in the lantern' book.

The stories are told in class of a homeless dispossessed couple who are trying to find a safe home to give birth to and raise their child. They faced many challenges and some unkindness. This has raised interesting conversations around the snack table about poverty and having no home.

This week, families and kindergarten children were invited into class for a sharing of the children's flute playing, singing, a poem and bean bag movement game.

All the children were very excited to have their families come into class.

They shared their work beautifully and stepped up to the big challenge of bringing something to an audience.

MAPLE CLASS

Mrs. Higgins, Class Teacher

The final term of 2017 saw Maple class conclude their lessons on the Old Testament stories. These stories began in January with the seven days of creation and the fall, and ended recently with the prophets, those wise people who reminded the rest of humanity of significant spiritual truths.

But it was the story of all stories (David and Goliath – the story upon which all other stories are based) that really enabled Maple class to explore their own story writing.

The tale of David and Goliath contains everything, the polarities of small and large, good and bad, courage and weakness etc. Here are some examples of how the students in Maple Class worked with it –

I am David. I can see a mountain of flesh above me when I shoot my slingshot. The mountain collapsed. What is the mountain? D.Toor

Goliath was as infuriated as someone who lost their keys, and as bad tempered as an old woman whose next door neighbour's cats ruined her flower bed. I.Angell

As I walked cautiously to the battle field I heard the sounds of swords being withdrawn from their sheaths. The clouds, the sandy floor and even the pond nearby was still, as if watching the oncoming battle. Suddenly an almighty shadow fell on the path in front of the army. Out of the silence came a huge man, at least 12 foot tall. He said, "Not one of you urchins is strong enough to defeat me!" Although people looked defiant, they knew it was true. H.Shawcross.

David was a shepherd. He was as kind as Jeanie. He defeated Goliath the giant, who was as pig faced as a pug and as huge as an oak tree. L.Benzie

And finally, a lovely PSALM -

PSALM FOR THE ACORN

*Acorn, thank you for your prettiness and your colour,
I am happy that squirrels like you,
Your trees wood makes boats, fire and houses. Thank you for this,
I would find you in forests, your shell is what makes you you,
I wish you were always full of trees. J.McAleer*

SEQUOIA CLASS

Mr. Higgins, Class Teacher

This term, as Sequoia gradually make their way towards the study of history, we have been saying our goodbyes to mythology by way of immersion in the transformation myths from Ovid.

We have looked at the fatal vanity of Narcissus and his transformation into a daffodil and how Echo, who loved him so deeply, could only repeat the last fragments of whatever was spoken around her. We have encountered a rare (for Greek myth) happy ending in the story of Philemon and Baucis, who, through their hospitality to the gods, were granted their wish to never be separated as they were changed into an intertwined oak and lime tree.

We have seen how Pygmalion's love for a beautiful statue of a woman that he had made brought her to life! This last myth in particular took the class's imagination to places that were new to us all! Below are some excerpts from the Sequoia children's writing on these tales.

'Although he was not very handsome, Pygmalion had a kind heart, but that was not enough to please girls! So Pygmalion made a sculpture of a beautiful woman called Galatea. But Pygmalion began to fall in love with Galatea. He started bringing her presents. He even married her! And...moving on!' – Caelem

'Jupiter and Mercury knocked at the door, but the people just shut it in their faces. They went to an old, broken down hut. The walls were crumbling, - it could have been blown away by the wind. For the hundredth time a door was opened, and inside was an old couple, Philemon and Baucis, their faces were wrinkled and crimped. They said, "Come in, have some food and drink and rest your heads". – Maebh

'Echo was devastated with sadness at her rejection by Narcissus for he was only in love with his reflection in a small pond, but the gods did not want to lose such a beautiful, handsome, gorgeous boy so instead they transformed him into Narcissus the daffodil who would forever sit there and love himself.' - Victoria

WILLOW CLASS

Mrs. Fraser, Class Teacher

Willow class have made a great start to the year and I can't quite believe that we approach Christmas already. Well, I can't believe it on the one hand, and on the other, it's very obvious to me just how close the class are to embarking on their continuing journey into upper school. I am reminded of this daily with their burgeoning interest and thirst for knowledge, their slight apprehension and lots of excitement about what lies ahead for them, their thoughtful and sensitive comments and observations in their lessons and in their behaviour towards each other, and of course, most obviously, in the increasing depth and quality of the work they are producing.

Willow have recently been studying the Renaissance, the art and culture, politics and innovation. Followed by the Reformation, from Martin Luther to the court of Henry VIII and his many wives and pastimes (and playing that on the flute!). Their artwork has been beautiful. Hopefully you may have seen some displayed at school.

On Friday I will be announcing the title of the class 8 play to them, so much to look forward to...

Wishing you a peaceful and joy filled Christmas holiday.

OAK CLASS

Sarah Brocklehurst, Upper School Teacher

Oak class have enjoyed a full and fruitful autumn term, brimming with activity. September began with a changing of the guard; Jeff, Eve and Susen moved on, but Sarah B and Chris stepped into their shoes. Oak are now the second oldest class in the school and are really coming together as a group. Main lesson blocks began with a Maths/English sandwich; Roy brought 'Algebra' to the classroom and Sarah the 'History of Drama', each subject balancing the other. A walk across Norwich centre brought the class to the Playhouse for a performance of Sophocles Antigone - a theatrical experience of great value. Subject lessons in music, science, gardening, textiles, woodwork, games and global issues continued at a pace. In textiles Sue and the class used natural ingredients to create dyes to be used with wool; whilst in woodwork Chris helped Oak to design and craft their automata, culminating in an

exhibition held at the School. After a busy start to the academic year Oak were ready for a week's break - fortunately half term was on the horizon!

A restorative break ensured that Oak returned ready for their main lesson science block with Sonja. The class engaged well with 'The Rhythmic System' and the many experiments, gaining a real depth of understanding and producing excellent work. A week of work experience preparation followed with the students identifying possible 'targets', creating cover letters and writing their first CVs. In games the class took part in regular cross country running and orienteering sessions, whatever the weather - unofficial shortcuts were sometimes taken! Festivals have continued to play their part in the changing seasons, marking the passing of the year and bringing the Upper and Lower Schools together. The year is brought to a close by Tony and a geography main lesson block centred around understanding the Earth's atmosphere, weather and an introduction to climate change. Both teachers and students now look forward to the rest that the Christmas holidays will bring and the start of a New Year filled with opportunity.

BIRCH CLASS

Sarah Brocklehurst, Upper School Teacher

The autumn term has brought Birch front and centre; as the most senior class in our school they are now held fully in our focus. Seniority within the school brings more responsibility and obligation to the class. A rolling agenda of learning outcomes and an increased expectation placed on the class to work independently adds gravitas.

Birch have pursued two distinct themes during English lessons this term. Firstly the development of their formal writing skills: producing academic and business letters, objective writing, as well as creating reports. This work culminated in a biographical article written about an inspirational figure chosen by each student. The range of figures chosen, from Mark Laidlaw to Queen Victoria, demonstrated the respective qualities of the individual students, allowing them to explore a character of real interest to them. With three university entrance points on offer the level of accuracy required was extremely high and this challenged the students' structuring and proofreading skills.

After a half term break Birch entered into the second theme - Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales,' 'Creativity and Character.' Whilst switching from formal to creative provided contrast for the students, character and identity remained at the heart of their work. The 'Wife of Bath's Tale' was read and studied in full, introducing the class to her bawdy and outrageous language, and Chaucer's vivid characterisation. Her vivacious yet shameless language provided some shocking moments for the class, but most certainly brought 14th century poetry to life! Chaucer's wonderful and lively depictions provided the spark that led to many fine pieces of work from Birch students. Whilst the creative process was not easy for some, they all gained much from it.

