

Autumn 2012



BIRCHTREE CHARTER SCHOOL

Autumn Newsletter

Kindergarten News



Working in the Play Yard, practicing hammering skills.

There has been a definite busyness felt in the kindergarten this fall. We began the year with the story of the Little Red Hen and are now wrapping up the story of the Frog King. We will be moving into a new nature story called the Mouse and Spider. We have been exploring water-color paints and the colors of red and yellow, soon they will meet to create orange! We have been drawing in our main lesson books about our stories and

we have discovered the magic of leaf rubbings using our block crayons. We continue to develop our will by creating new shapes with our beeswax each week. Soup day continues to go well learning how to chop and taste all the various vegetables. During handwork we have been learning to finger crochet and sew various projects.

Ms. Albina's First Grade

First Graders in Ms. Albina's class have been busy bees this first quarter of school. The students have been learning many new things including how to help create and be part of a kind, caring, and cooperative class community. We followed our initial Form Drawing Main Lesson block with a Writing block where children came to know and form various letters through imaginative stories (Fairy Tales), verse, and movement. The children know the character and shape of eleven consonants -- so far -- which are the "forming forces" of the alphabet. The students' Main Lesson Books reflect their diligent efforts and are a source of pride for

them and me. Presently we are enjoying our first Math Block with a focus on the *quality* of numbers. King Maximo, Queen Equalene, the noble knights: Sir Owen, Sir Twain, and Sir Trice along with numerous gnomes and fairies bring the quality of numbers through their colorful character and distinct temperament. In our daily circle

time, along with songs, games, and movement, the children are practicing rhythmic activities to reinforce 'skip-counting' by twos, fives, and tens. A favorite counting activity has been jump-roping. These boys and girls are full of bounce and rhythm!



Mr. Danz's First Grade



First graders in Mr. Danz's class have spent the beginning part of the year learning about form drawing and letters. Each form or letter had a unique story attached to it and an accompanying drawing that was put in the Main Lesson Book. The

students are particularly interested in the mineral world of gnomes and how they help the seed children go to bed this time of year. Recently introduced in our math block is the idea of the equal sign, known to the children as the story of Queen Equalus. There was much discussion recently on how this balanced approach could help our class live in fairness and equality. The students in this class love to play with each other in small groups at recess and create forts, running races, and games involving getting really muddy!



Mrs. Johndro's Second Grade

This month, we will begin our math block. We have begun to work on our three times table. I will also introduce the concept of place value through Native American stories. Be sure to ask your child about the adventures of "Fox Boy"! We will continue working with telling time and making it into the digital time. We have also been working on greater/lesser number pairs.



In Language Arts we will continue with reading groups and learning about the bossy r who controls what others sound like. (ar, ir, er, ur, or) In writing we will learn about paragraph structure and will practice our handwriting. Last month we learned the format for letter writing which we will continue to practice.

Mrs. Sharrer's Second Grade

The students of Ms. Sharrer's Second Grade Class have been studying various Legends of Native American beliefs and Fables. They are exploring the world as if an animal themselves, absorbing the stories and living them daily as they interact with their peers. The Fables and Legends teach them morals, values, and so much more for the child at the age of eight. The journey has brought Ms. Sharrer's Tribe to meet a boy named "Fox Boy" who, through stories, is teaching the Mathematics needed to learn in order for him to become a huntsman. The legend

passed down from his ancestors was that the tribe could only catch ten fish a day. Every day he counts how many fish are in the nets and makes sure there are only 10 fish total. He has taught the different sums of 10's. $3+7=10$ or $7+3=10$. Fox Boy often has the Ha Ha's when he cannot count the fish in the net. He will take the Second Graders on a journey throughout the year so they can learn their times tables, place value, and borrowing. We look forward to updating you through the year of their journey.



Mrs. Folsom's and Mrs. Tran's Third Grades

Third grade has been a busy year with numerous hands-on activities. The first month began with form drawing and a farming block that focused on the daily schedules and chores of farm life to teach time, months, and seasons. We had two field trips related to this block. At the Alaska State Fair, the children learned about milking a goat, farm animals, bees, and growing vegetables. At Havemeister Dairy, we learned about the process from start to finish of making milk. We were able to take fresh cream back and made butter. In math, we reviewed our times tables and addition using carrying.

Our second block incorporated the Hebrew Creation Story as inspiration to vivid imagery, vocabulary, and stories. We painted every morning which was a special change to our normal routines. In language arts, we reviewed nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. We have also been learning about Hebrew culture through celebrations of Hebrew Holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. We have heard stories and learned traditions, such as making challah, kuegal, sharing a simple meal during fast time, learning lashing techniques, making miniature sukkots, and a large sukkot

which is on display in our play area near the parking lot!

In addition to our blocks, we have learned to sing and dance in Hebrew, crochet, care for chickens, and utilize our new kitchen to the fullest. Throughout the year, third grade in Waldorf will continue to emphasize practical skills for living on earth. As always, we are grateful for the support of our 3rd grade families who help to make all our projects come to fruition.

Mrs. Hill's Fourth Grade

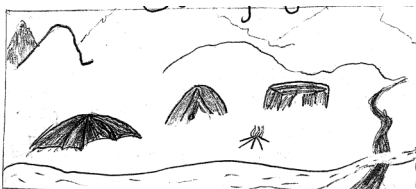
Mrs. Hill's update has been submitted by two fourth grade student reporters.

Our Last Two Blocks

By Charlotte Brown, 4th grade student reporter, Mrs. Hill's class, 9 years old

Our Geography Block

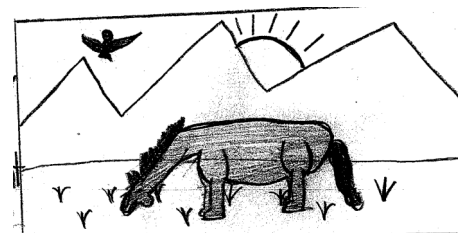
We, Mrs. Hill's Class, only a few more hours and we would be off camping on the Hatcher's Pass tundra. We very much enjoyed the backpack trip— spaghetti for dinner, hot chocolate for dessert, and warm oatmeal for breakfast. Then a long night's sleep. And for the scenery, it was beautiful! Watching the sun set— and rise—then there were the mountains! You may be wondering why we did this—Mrs. Hill decided we needed some experience with hiking and traveling with everything on our backs. We also studied local history— Independence Mine, Native Alaskans, Ice Age and colonists. If you ever have any questions about the valley's local history, just ask Mrs. Hill's class.



Math Block

By Charlotte Brown

5, 10, 15, 20...During our math block, we often started our circle with jump rope. "Mrs. Odd-toddy-baldy" and "Mr. Even-Steven" visit us. We improved our sevens and eights and other numbers we had trouble multiplying. We learned our math rules and studied long division and multiplication. We even had Mr. Brainy Brian and Slow Poke Joe visit us in our stories encouraging us to learn our multiplication facts. It was quite fun!



Animal Block

By Ava Straub, 4th grade student

We are now studying all about animals this block. We are learning about how the animal kingdom is different from the human kingdom. For instance, animals have a shorter life span than humans. So far, we have learned all about eagles, owls, hawks and other different types of birds. I've also brought in my pet goldfish. He's lived to about 7 to 8 years old. That's pretty old for a goldfish. Soon, we will know ALL about the animal kingdom.

Mrs. Levesque's Fourth Grade

Fourth graders in Ms. Levesque's class reenacted the life of a prospector in the Hatcher Pass area during their study of local history and geography at the start of the year. With all that we needed strapped to our backs, we sojourned beyond Archangel Trail, passing both abandoned and active gold mines. We slept beneath a canopy of stars, awakening to sunny but frosty weather.

Back at school, we learned to weave Celtic knots in form drawing and continued our studies in Alaska history. Several

guest speakers gave us firsthand accounts of earlier times in the Valley: Native Alaskans, prospectors, and farmers.

Currently, we are in a zoology block studying the bull, eagle, and lion. Each of these is examined not only for its notable characteristics, but also for its relation to human beings. During this block, we learn of the special adaptations within the animal kingdom that are found in varying degrees within human beings. In this way, we come to view animals as specialists and ourselves as generalists.



Mrs. Basner's Fifth Grade

The fifth graders started out the year with a Botany Main Lesson Block. In addition to learning about plants, we enjoyed making spore prints with numerous kinds of mushrooms and ferns, making sushi, and researching plants that were along the new nature trails at Birchtree. Thanks to the help we received from the Leingang and Ferguson families, you will be noticing new student-made identification signs along part of the nature trail soon. We

participated in a short Geometry block, and enjoyed studying, drawing, and painting geometric shapes. We are presently immersed in a main lesson block of Ancient Civilizations. Our China study involved hearing great Chinese myths and legends, learning how to eat with chopsticks and do Chinese jumpropping, learning about the Silk Road and Marco Polo, and learning basic calligraphy. We also enjoyed numerous myths and leg-

ends from India, made hummus, and learned much about ancient India. Next, we are traveling to Persia and are looking forward to more adventurous tales! The students have also worked hard to learn numerous new songs on the flute, playing some in 3-part harmony! Their book reports were beautifully written and quite thorough, and the students skillfully shared the main literary elements with their classmates.

Mrs. Phillips' Sixth Grade



The sixth grade recently wrapped up a very interesting and exciting geology block. Students learned about plate tectonics, the forces that cause Earth's tectonic plates to shift, and about the natural phenomena that occur when these plates do shift (i.e., earthquakes and volcanoes). Students also learned about the rock cycle, how to classify rocks as sedimentary, metamorphic, or igneous, and students became familiar with identifica-

tion of given samples of rocks and minerals. One of the highlights of our block was our field trip to tour Independence Mine at Hatcher Pass (photos: <http://www.matsuk12.us/Page/16508>) as well as our trip to the Museum of Natural History in Anchorage (photos: <http://www.matsuk12.us/Page/16509>). Our studies now take us into Ancient Roman History, from its mythological period through the Seven Kings of Rome and onto the Roman Republic.

Mr. Bowen's Seventh Grade

We have had a great start to our school year. The campout that parents planned and executed was a big hit. Thank you to all who participated and made that adventure happen. In class, we have completed a block on perspective drawing and the drawings turned out great. We finished a

block on the late middle ages with a culminating castle battle that left marshmallows all over the room. And now we are beginning a block on Physics; simple machines, electricity, magnetism, sound, and light. We have created a quality routine in both mathematics and language

arts and we are adding to the academic rigor from last year. The discussions have been rich, the art has been beautiful, and the poetry and music improving daily. Thank you for the great start.

Mr. Klaunder's Eighth Grade

Our first block of the year was Anatomy, and students discovered the amazing human body. We focused particularly on the skeleton, muscular system, and nervous system. Students learned about the interconnectedness of form and function by examining the bones of the skeleton. We studied how the static skeletal system and the dynamic muscular system work

together to move the body using the physics of levers. We also delved into the fantastic world of the nervous system and the complexities of the human brain.

We are finishing up our second block, which is our first of three History blocks this year, that covers the coloni-

zation of North America and the long path to the American Revolution. We are discovering the role of geography, culture and politics in history, but are focusing on how individual human beings, through their stories, shape history.

From Frau Rogers—German Classes

A piece about Language and Foreign Language Acquisition

There are many different theories about how we acquire language, but foremost I would like to talk about principles in teaching a foreign language here at BTC in connection to the way we acquire a language. Now let us look at the word acquire and the word learn. Most of you have learned a foreign language in High School or College. It was a conscious process that involved rules, memorization, and technicalities of language. Most of the comments I hear are: I learned some German in High School, but I don't remember any of it. To me that is not surprising, since I don't remember any of the English I have learned in High School. So this is learning a language.

Now let us look at the word acquire. Acquisition is a subconscious process; while it is happening, we are not aware that it is happening. Once we have acquired something we are not aware that we possess

any new knowledge. Both oral and written language can be acquired that way. So I hear from some parents: "I have been to Germany and I loved Bratwurst und Schnitzel und Spaetzle etc....And I picked up some German: vorsicht, anhalten, ein Bier bitte, lecker, etc." Exactly! That is acquisition. These parents have picked up (acquired) more than they ever did in years of formal language learning. They did not worry about rules and grammar, which is called the monitor, and actually prevents you from speaking (Side note: Even Hemingway figured that out in his novel Men without Women (p.46-47)If you happen to have it, look it up, it's quite amusing)

Now that leads us to how we attempt to teach foreign language here at BTC. The question that we need to answer is: How does Language acquisition occur? Evidence in research (Krashen and Chomsky) supports that we acquire language only one way: when we understand the

message! There needs to be some sort of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1998), which means that the information provided to the students makes sense to them and is interesting (not an easy feat in middle school that is).

I will leave you with this thought and continue writing on this subject in the next BTC Newsletter!



Fourth Grade made kites in German

From Mrs. Jones—Movement Classes

The earth is firm beneath my feet and upright I can stand. The sky arches above my head, and my friends are here at either hand. For many-a-class, these sentences are familiar as we recite them each day we meet. It is a gift to literally have the earth beneath our feet and the sky above our head as we exercise, play and learn together outdoors. The Movement curriculum within the Waldorf-inspired school is quite unique in that the developmental stages of the grades, the unique temperament of each child and the socially-relevant extension of play and sport are all considered when preparing to teach.

Within this first quarter classes have been focusing on pedagogically appropriate field and blacktop games. Within grades 1 and 2, play and

learning have come through circle games using song and rhythm while also exercising heart, limbs and head with jump rope and one-directional chasing games. At age 8 and beyond, multidirectional games have been introduced, which pique imagination and encourage awareness in two planes, that of anterior and posterior. At age 9, more pictorial games have been introduced that encourage running and cooperative play as well as observance of three planes: anterior, posterior and superior. Beginning in fifth grade we have focused more on strategy and development of teamwork. For Movement this in an important year in that these students will be participating within the annual Pentathlon, for which we have already begun

practicing. In grades 6 and above, we have also been taking advantage of the grassy field and incredible Playscape with field games requiring cardiovascular stamina and strategy, and within the month of October, grades 6 – 8 have begun ball games, utilizing the blacktop before the snow falls.

I look forward to the pleasures and challenges that the winter snow is yet to bring. It has been a true delight and honor to see the students of Birchtree grow and develop over these three years as a school community. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your children's lives.

From Mrs. Keenan—Birchtree Orchestra

We began orchestra this year with an emphasis on reading music so students can move forward in understanding and exploring their instrument and music more fully. Though it has been tough to get used to easier (boring) music without the help of finger numbers or note names, most students are now happy to be tackling more interesting (fun) music. As in the past, students have a weekly practice sheet to help them remember what to practice and to track their work. They are expected to practice 5 days a week. They are also supposed to have a parent initial the sheet each day so you know they have practiced. So far, I have quite a few students not turning in practice sheets. Learning to play an instrument and the diligence involved in practice to master such an intricate

skill are very useful for a child's growth and learning. Our orchestras are on the cusp of reaching their next level of understanding music and it's the toughest, but most exhilarating time. Please help them remember to practice so they can reach that goal and

emerge knowing how capable they truly are if they put in the effort necessary. What a wonderful life lesson!

Thanks for supporting your child and our school!





Waldorf Music Education: Living the Musical Life (excerpt)

by Jason Child

Each child at a Waldorf School makes beautiful music every day. With their class teacher or in music class, they are gaining not only musical skills and knowledge but also a strong sense of musicality. Naturally, we want the children to be musical, but in Waldorf music education the intention is that their musicality goes beyond melody, harmony, and rhythm. The music instruction is presented in such a way as to encourage musical living.

In grades 1 – 3 music instruction is almost wholly qualitative. They experience the essential qualities of music. This work is really only the vehicle, though. The real goal is to help students become sensitive, active listeners. They discover how much more beautiful their music-making is when the roomful of students is really listening actively and intently, with a will. This is where the musical activity of listening first becomes “transformed music”, when the children can begin to generalize their activity as listeners in the music classroom to their lives in the outside world.

In grades 4 - 5, children learn to read and write music, and fundamental music concepts. They also begin violin, and have their first experience of needing to practice at learning this new, awkward skill. Although the children are enthusiastic when they begin, some begin to experience a real antipathy as they realize how difficult it is to actually read music and make a pleasing sound. This is a critical juncture. Those students who can muster the determination to overcome the difficulties in learning an instrument as challenging as the

violin have learned a critical life-lesson in perseverance. Anything difficult will seem the most impossible and trying just before one makes a breakthrough.

In grades 6 - 8 students branch into orchestra. In addition to lessons in perseverance, the children experience something extremely subtle. They must play and listen at the same time. They learn to be a part of the group and to play their part appropriately and responsibly within in the group. What's more, the experience of playing in harmony offers profound lessons. Whether in the primary or secondary role, doing well is critical to the outcome of the group's overall effort, and one must be constantly aware of the role their effort is playing, whether leading or supporting. Many songs they learn demand that the lead part changes between groups of students. Here the children learn the subtle interplay of passing leadership gracefully between members of a group.

The Waldorf music curriculum is as rich and subtle as every other facet of this approach to education. While it has the ability to produce fine musicians, its true aim is to help produce fine human beings. These students go forth into the world understanding that working in the physical world takes effort, perseverance and a refinement of skills. They have experienced the dynamics of working within a group of peers with differing abilities in order to produce something fine, beautiful and meaningful. As students leave the school, it is our hope that they are able to allow those aspects to blossom in every aspect of their lives so that they may experience the fulfillment of truly living musical lives.

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The mission of Birchtree Charter School is to nurture and promote the development of healthy, responsible,

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ARTICLE**

[waldorfmusic.org/
child2.html](http://waldorfmusic.org/child2.html)

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