

Spring 2013



BIRCHTREE CHARTER SCHOOL

# Spring Newsletter

## Kindergarten News

The pussy willow fairy has brought magic to our kindergarten world. We have learned a song during circle time about pussy willows, we have been collecting them during our nature walk and our current story is about the pussy willows in spring. We are busily working on a

project for our mothers (shh.... it is a surprise). We are striving to keep our rhythm and routine despite spring's effort to draw us outside to the sunshine, puddles and mud. We are gearing up for our spring circle in which we celebrate all the wonders of spring. Our last fairytale

for the year will be *The Queen Bee*. It's a wonderful story that encourages kindness and gentleness. The children have been very energetic and an eagerness is felt throughout the kindergarten classes as summertime quickly approaches.

## Ms. Albina's First Grade

Those amazing First Graders in Ms. Albina's class have learned so much this year! They just completed their third Math Block. The children have been practicing skip counting past 100, multiples of 2, 3, 5, and 10, basic math facts and story problems using the four processes, and also the recognition and continuation of patterns. In Language Arts the focus has been on a holistic and balanced approach to literacy. The children have enjoyed reading and writing the songs and verses they know by heart. As a class of mostly emergent readers, their phonemic awareness is growing, along with their understanding of some basic phonic rules, and mastery of a growing list of sight words. Excitement fills the air as they bravely journey through new text and discover, "I am reading!"

This fourth quarter, the children have also been

learning how to write the lower-case letters. It is a joy to see how much progress they have made. I am also happy to see how much the class enjoys Form Drawing. They have recently explored various spiral designs and through their practice with different semi-finished forms have developed a sense of symmetry and sense of what is whole and complete. Speaking of *movement*, which is what drives Form Drawing, have I mentioned what an accomplished group of jump-ropers these children have all become! Impressive indeed!

As a teacher with a passion for flowers and gardening, a fitting and guiding verse for our class this year has been: *Kind Hearts are the gardens, Kind thoughts are the roots; Kind words are the blossoms; Kind deeds are the fruits*. It has been delightful to witness the children's many kind deeds each

day in our class, and these youngsters truly do have such kind hearts. The class's combined meritorious "green-slips" laid end-to-end reach from our classroom all the way to Mrs. Busbey's office! That's a lot of "fruit".

Grateful for warmer days and in praise of Mother Nature, the children are tackling a challenging flute song called "Spring is Coming." Additionally, our class has been busy practicing and preparing for our second little class play: "The Flowers' Awakening". With all this vibrant energy bursting forth in Grade One, summer will be here before we know it!



Celebrating Birthdays

## Mr. Danz's First Grade

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"A child by the end of 1st grade should be able to write what they wish to express." -Steiner

Following the indications of Rudolph Steiner, I have led my students to become storytellers on paper before they have been given any formal "reading" instruction. Think of it as them being encoders rather than decoders! As they learn phonics, grammar and writing conventions this spring, I have seen an explosion of growth in the arena

of writing. Each child is then asked to be able to read their story to me and some even volunteer to read to the class as a whole.

Our current mathematics block is coming to a close and it has deepened the children's understanding of odd and even numbers, and the four processes of math computations. (Known affectionately to them as Porter Plus, Milo Minus, Tanya Times, and Donna Divide.) We have been working diligently in

circle at skip counting by 2,3,5, and 10 and have been doing pen and pencil math as well as mental math.

Our focus for the last week has been getting our class play "Mother Earth and the Seed Children" ready to go for May 1st at 2:30.

It has been an engaged and focused time with plenty of smiles and laughter throughout.

## Mrs. Johndro's Second Grade

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We are using our last language arts block of the year to put together all of the things that we have learned. Each student will be writing their own story. This way they can provide their own examples of character, setting, conflict and resolution in their stories. This also allows for students to practice their grammar using the proper punctuation, spelling and sentence

structure. And in this block we will introduce editing. We will be having an author's night for the students to present their stories on Mon. May 20<sup>th</sup> (the last week of school). The students are really enjoying their story-writing, I am amazed at what creative students we have!! This should be fun. I will have students in small groups reading their stories for the

parents of that group. We will continue to work on our math during our daily skills block. We are attempting to hatch eggs again, hopefully this time will be more successful. So we may have chicks at the end of the school year!

## Mrs. Sharrer's Second Grade

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Ms. Sharrer's Second Graders are in their final Language Arts Block. Daily, the students are hearing moral lessons taught through Aesop's Animal Fables. Through these lessons, the students are asked to develop their own understanding of the moral. As a whole, we create the written work to place into the

Main Lesson Books. Just a few weeks ago, our year-long Arithmetic Fox Boy story ended. He taught us our place values, times tables, and many learning experiences on his journey from his village to the ocean and back. Finally, our paintings about Spring have been delightful. We are glad to paint with our new friend. He is very calm, reflective, and he takes his time to take everything in. A few of our class members have finished knitting their dolls as the rest of us are working hard to complete their task before the end of the year.



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



Third grade continues to be immersed with Practical Skills and nurturing the "I can do it" spirit of the third graders. After spring break, the students read their way down the Iditaroad trail, with most third graders making it to Nome and some all the way back! Our Shelters Presentation was a success with the children displaying their shelter models ranging from teepees, adobe huts, log houses, grass tree houses, to castles. The children eagerly answered questions and shared their research with each other and to the entire school.

The Old Testament story of Moses provided vivid imagery for summary writing, drawings, and paintings. While the children began the process of practicing for their first SBA's, the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt kept them inspired. After getting familiar with the SBA's and taking three days of SBA tests, our chil-

dren demonstrated their will and developed a sense of accomplishment.

Our third grade parents continue to amaze us with their support. They provided our classes with excellent nourishing breakfasts each day of SBA's;

worked together to sew and felt items for our craft fair; are currently assisting with building projects; and continue with the weekly and daily volunteer time in the classroom. Our parents too are showing their "I can do it" spirit as our class finishes making rain sticks, toolboxes, and play houses for our main and kindergarten yard.

As we approach the end of the year, we continue working on independent writing, reading for fluency and comprehension. In math, we are working more with multiplication facts and long multiplication and will end the year with an introduction to long division. Farming and gardening stories will end the year and build the imagination for the math concepts of perimeter, area, long multiplication, and long division.



Third Grade Shelter Showcase

## Mrs. Hill's Fourth Grade

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Skiing Fun!

Springtime has given us many thrills from watching our baby chicks hatch to late spring skiing and one last ice fish session. Our last Norse Myths block enriched our storytelling time and captured our imagination. We laughed at all of Loki's trickster ways and marveled at Thor's battles with the giant Jotuns. So many rich stories left us pondering which one we would choose as our play this year.

Finally, all the eager young actors' roles were cast for our end of the year play, "Loki and Sif's Golden Hair". We have relished in rehearsing our lines and laughed at brainstorming our prop ideas and special effects. Please join us in our final performance on Thursday, May 9<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 in our classroom.

This last month of school we are fascinated with our last animal block. We have welcomed and studied some new visitors to our room: a tarantula, a leopard gecko, clams, oysters, and snails. Since February, we have been working diligently on our animal reports. Students have undertaken their first big research project. Please stop by our room on Monday, May 13<sup>th</sup> during school from 9:30-10:30 or after school from 3:30-4:30 to admire our dioramas, posters, and books. We may even have some freshly hatched baby quail to

show our visitors. Our enthusiasm grows as May 15<sup>th</sup> approaches; for we are very much looking forward to our field trip to Seward to stay the night at the Sea Life Center. Along the way we will visit the Alaska Native Heritage Center, the Alaska Wildlife Center, the Seward Museum, boat on a whale watching tour and ride the train back to Anchorage. With a little luck and care the great goose eggs in our incubator will hatch before school dismisses for summer break.



Fourth Grade Art

## Mrs. Levesque's Fourth Grade

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If the fourth grade year could be distilled into one word, perhaps it would be parts. Throughout the curriculum, students delve much further into the components of each subject. In mathematics, these parts are fractions; in geography, a study of Alaska's regions; in language arts, the parts of speech as well as individual parts in the class play; and in science, the basic body parts of various animals.

The last few blocks have touched upon each of these areas. Fourth graders have learned to solve problems involving fractions in all four operations. As much as possible, these problems were derived from everyday life, including calculating the price of fabrics used in our class play.

Alaska was then divided into six regions to facilitate our study of the distinct geographic and cultural aspects of our vast and diverse state. These included Southcentral,

Southeast, Interior, Northwest and Arctic, Southwest, and the Aleutians. One commonality that wove a thread throughout these regions was Raven.

The three norns residing at the roots of Ygdrasil, the World Tree in Norse mythology, provide the perfect springboard for grammatical concepts. They each represent a verb tense: the past, present, and future. Throughout this block, the parts of speech are delineated clearly in the myths. As the Norse world was formed, so too, was language and its components, or parts of speech. These are reflected in the students' writing in their main lesson books, a color associated with each part of speech. Norse myths also provide fodder for rich and often comical class play material. Personalities loom large in Norse mythology and, just as the 10 year-old is beginning to establish his or her individuality,

each student assumes an individual speaking part in the class play in addition to reciting in chorus.

Lastly, the animal kingdom is studied in relation to the human being in a threefold way. Although we all have the same basic body parts--head, torso, and limbs--the degree to which we use them distinguishes each being. Via comparisons and contrasts, fourth grade students come to see animals as specialists and humans as generalists. Currently, students are researching a chosen animal, gathering information into report form, and will culminate the school year by presenting their findings to their parents next month.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the parents of these fourth graders for supporting their children's learning throughout this school year.

## Mrs. Basner's Fifth Grade

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Some Ancient Greek Soldiers getting ready to surprise the City of Troy!

Fifth graders concluded their study on Ancient Civilizations with a study on Greece. They

worked really hard on their class play, which was based on the epic Greek poem, "The Iliad." In Language Arts, they are finishing the book The Odyssey. A culminating activity to their study on Greece is the annual upcoming 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Pentathlon, simulating the ancient Greek games. The last Main Lesson Block study of the year is Botany.

The students are looking very forward to their upcoming 3-day class trip to Peterson Field Station on Kachemak Bay. In addition to exploring tide pools and conducting scientific studies, they will also be involved in Botany studies while there. They continue to do a beautiful job playing numerous songs in 2-part harmony on their flutes. In Math, they have become quite proficient in the four operations with fractions and decimal fractions.

## Mrs. Phillips' Sixth Grade

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The Sixth grade studies have focused on Physics, specifically, the physics of sound, light, and heat. The students have been learning through hands-on investigation and experiments through which they are making great and meaningful

discoveries. Additionally, during our Physics block of study, the sixth grade students researched, wrote scripts for, and performed in a recent radio show for Cabbage Patch Radio on Radio Free Palmer. The show has

research on scientists, jokes and riddles, music, physics fun facts, physics poetry, and more. It was exciting listening to our sixth graders on the radio live! The archived podcast can be found on [www.radiofreepalmer.org](http://www.radiofreepalmer.org)

## Mr. Bowen's Seventh Grade

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We are getting close to the end of another school year, whoa. We just finished our class play "Macbeth". Parents and students, thank you all for your hard work and many

supportive roles. We should have DVDs available soon for those wanting a copy for themselves or for relatives. We are currently in a chemistry block working primarily

with combustion as well as acids and bases. And to wrap up the last few weeks, we will be delving into a block on Renaissance.

## Mr. Klauder's Eighth Grade

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The eighth grade has been excitedly rehearsing their class play. This year, they are tackling William Shakespeare's enchanting tale, A Midsummer Night's Dream.

To culminate their study of American history, the eighth grade is traveling to the east coast to visit our national historic sights.

## From Frau Rogers—German Classes

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In the lower grades we are exploring spring themes in songs and poems and ways of transportation. Some of our students have come up with quite entertaining ways to come to school, hang gliders and dog sleds are some of their favorites.

3<sup>rd</sup> grade is working on a fairy tale project and they have a surprise in the works for Mothers Day.

4<sup>th</sup> grade has worked on animals and a small animal report on a Beaver. We now are moving into smaller lesson book entries on things they have mastered such as the days of the weeks, month and seasons.

5<sup>th</sup> grade has worked hard on tales and legends such as "Pipe Piper". We will now move into seasonal spring projects.

6<sup>th</sup> grade is working on a middle age play in German, featuring a German legend.

7<sup>th</sup> grade has made a move to Hamburg Germany and are busy getting to know their neighbors and furnishing their apartments



(on a budget) at this point. We have also cooked and baked a fair amount this semester. We will next take a tour to the city of Mainz to look at the Gutenberg print history and work on making some linoleum print in class.

8<sup>th</sup> grade has enjoyed learning some Russian, French and Spanish. Lucky for us we had Marie-Leure (a parent from France whose family visited Alaska) come and teach French and Spanish language and culture. She even came a third time to teach us the proper way of mak-

ing Crepes and Proliferoles. Twice we had Mr. Nunoiju (Aligato Nunoiju sensei) come and teach us some Japanese and show us slides from his last student trip to Japan. At least we all now know how to order hamburgers and fries in Japanese. The goal was to expose students to languages which are offered in different schools in the district. That way I hope the students will be able to make an informed decision on which language to delve into in High School.

## From Mrs. Keenan—Birchtree Orchestra

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Once again our Birchtree 4th through 8th grade orchestras performed beautifully for their concert! I feel truly blessed to have been a part of their musical growth this year. What a joy it was to watch them strive to achieve such a triumphant group of performances!

The 4th grade has shown strong musicianship in their technique and bowing skills. They advanced to playing rounds in preparation for harmonies next year. They have learned to read notes on the D and A strings, as well as beginning music theory.

The 5th grade really expanded their abilities by moving to a three part harmony on a very complicated piece. They continue to learn music theory both in Mrs. Basner's class and in orchestra.

The 6th and 7th grades increased the difficulty level of their pieces both in the five part arrangements and in the different key signatures. That included reading notes on all four strings and songs with accidentals.

The 8th grade performed a piece with piano accompaniment for the concert and did

a beautiful job! They will be writing music and performing it as part of a Peter And The Wolf styled project in May as a culmination of their music theory work.

Our Birchtree orchestras will soon be the only orchestras in our Valley schools. This is sad, but I am encouraged that these high level instruments are represented at Birchtree. If your middle schooler wants more challenging or more frequent orchestra time, please join the Mat-Su Youth Orchestra in August. Contact Mrs. Keenan for more information.



## From Mrs. Jones—Movement

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To look back on what has transpired in the last five months within the Birchtree Movement Program is quite a formidable task. Since our last newsletter the students have participated in a number of different activities. First, the entire school performed in the German Carnival Parade, displaying skills such as scarf throwing, feather balancing, stunt lifting, stilt walking, plate spinning, and juggling.

The entire school also spent time snow shoeing around the school grounds or on Finger Lake Island this winter, while grades 4 – 8 went skiing in the mountains of Government Peak. For many students, this was their first opportunity to try on a pair of skis. It was a joy to see so many take to the sport immediately, and I hope that next year we will have our own sets of skis to use throughout the winter.

As the spring has arrived, we have turned to archery for grades 6 -8 and brought out the parachute for the primary grades. We also have begun blacktop games as the snow has melted away and revealed a smooth surface. The sun's rays have brought us new-found energy and excitement,

which has carried over into these new activities. My archers are showing marked improvement and utter enjoyment with the sport. I look forward to watching them grow in their skills, work ethic, and joy over these next years. The energies around the parachute have been such that I have to mend it after every use. We enjoyed bouncing bean bags and balls, spinning in circles, making inflated mushrooms, watching the parachute waves come in and out at sea, and playing sharks and lifeguards.

The 5<sup>th</sup> grade class will participate in the annual Pentathlon in Anchorage this May 16<sup>th</sup>.

They have been practicing Pentathlon events throughout the year, and will join Winterberry Charter School in a meeting of integrity, comradery, and sportsmanship. It will be a true honor to watch them display a year's worth of preparation within such an event.

To close, I would just like to say thank you for all the parent support within particular

movement activities this year, including the German Carnival, skiing and snowshoeing, and archery. I look forward to next year and continuing to develop the Birchtree Movement Program.

As we awaken to the spring and the summer months to come, remember that "*Laughter* is the sun that drives winter from the human face" (Victor Hugo). I hope your summer keeps you laughing and smiling.



# Spring Gallery

