

Mission Hill School News

Letter from Child Street

***Why Study Greece**

Dear Families, Students, Staff and Friends,

We spend a lot of time at Mission Hill looking at the here and now. Of course, for many youngsters, anything before 1975 is ancient history. But every winter we study *really* old civilizations.

One reason I love studying ancient history is that it reminds me that violence and meanness to others aren't things we moderns invented. In fact, in some important ways we look pretty good compared to some of the old civilizations we study.

It also reminds me of the incredible achievements people are capable of, the discoveries made long ago (that we often think are very modern), and the challenges ancient people overcame with far fewer tools and technologies than we have available to us.

And I love studying history because it is gripping—a great human drama that really happened (sort of).

But why Greece?

One reason is obvious: its relevance. Not a day goes by that the daily newspaper doesn't include something that presumes knowledge of ancient Greece. Many of our words, images and ideas come from the Greeks. This is true in almost every field: visual arts, philosophy (which was intimately connected to science and religion in all ancient cultures), mathematics, theatre, poetry, architecture, and, of course, politics. Studying ancient Greece offers students opportunities to look into a whole range of disciplines, while it also makes the world we are living in make more sense to us.

Second, there are so many resources—materials, stories, books, movies, plays—to engage body and soul. As a result, it is easy to use our five habits of mind, which is harder when there are very few different sources of information. When kids study ancient times, they must stretch to step into other shoes. They must think about the kind of evidence historians—and archeologists—use to uncover the

past. This pushes kids to make connections within and across other cultures (an important basic skill), and raises big questions like "Why?" "What if...?" and "Who cares?"

Third, by studying four different civilizations, each twice over their years with us, kids get a chance to compare ancient cultures that have much in common but also some sharp differences. They can see how we all bring to the table rich and powerful heritages. We've chosed one from each major continent, [Taino], Egypt, China and Greece.

Finally, it's engaging. Some topics are important, but hard to interest kids in. Not ancient Greece. It is usually a winner from day one, and hooks kids in a range of ways. As I [have] said...kids learn best when they are having a good time.

~Deborah Meier

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REMINDERS

January 2013

Sat. 1/12/13, **GET A FLU SHOT!**

Thu. 1/17, Family Council 5:45 - 7pm

Mon. 1/21, No School - MLK Day

February

Wed. 2/7, Camp Night!

2/7-8, Family Conferences

Fri. 2/15 - NO SCHOOL
(staff at conference)

From the Classrooms

3 and 4 year-olds

Room 108

Big news...we welcome Farrah to our class!

As you know, the Mission Hill Way is to "Be kind and work hard". The Rocks of Room 108 are starting off the new year learning more about what that means, by practicing what that looks like and feels like. It has been a good way to ease us back into the routines of the classroom and the school day. Ms. Donna, Angel and I have been keeping our eyes out for Acts of Kindness in our classroom. We write them on index cards, and then read them aloud to the class (just like we do at Friday Share with the entire school).

For example a recent Act of Kindness was: "When Farrah came over to the play dough table, Jariel gave her a big piece of play dough – and she didn't even have to ask." Keep an eye out for Acts of Kindness at home, and let us know what you find! Soon we will be inviting families to come in and tell us each about their own Acts of Kindness.

~Geraldyn Bywater McLaughlin
& Donna Winder

Kindergarten

Room 106

"Kathy did you know that there is a monster truck that was made in 1958 because it is very old and also someone wanted to make a monster trucks?" "He couldn't watch monster trucks on TV." "He made his own place," Adler

says to me as we sit at the writing table. He and Eli are deep in conversation. Eli's eyes open wide. "Adler, in 1976 all the wolves in Yellowstone died." He says. "That's not good." Adler asks, "What is Yellowstone anyway?" "It's a park. It's far from Massachusetts, just so you know Adler," Eli informs.

In Eli's mind there was a strong connection between what Adler shared and what he shared. Something Adler said sparked a connection for Eli. It might have been the fact that Adler used a year and then it helped Eli remember he knew some information with a significant year.

One of the Mission Hill Habits of Mind is *Connection*. From a very young age, children are able to make connections. Sometimes they are more like this: I say, "I visited my Aunt Barbara." Then the hands fly into the air. I hear, "My sister's name is Barbara." Then I hear, "I have a sister." Then I hear, "I have a bird." The connections, while not often clear to adults, are most definitely clear to the children. This is their first venture into connecting with their surroundings.

I have also heard young children make very clear connections from one year's lessons to the next. I see this most often when we are studying ancient civilizations. They connect with structures built, how people were treated, and significant symbols from the time. I look forward to sharing more connections with you soon.

~Kathy D'Andrea

Room 107

Before the winter break, several of our students had the opportunity to briefly reflect on their presidential experiences.

Here is what they had to say:

Braxton: It felt good to be vice president. It was awesome.

Peter: It felt great to be president. I worked hard on my speech.

Brian: It felt good to be president. I really worked hard on my speech.

Shirley: I was happy because I love being president because if someone was doing bad stuff then I would say "No bad stuff."

Michelle: Yup. It was great because I got to say pretty words in my speech. I said "I like Jada".

Diany: I liked it. I gave a speech.

Miles: It felt good.

Alma: It felt good. I liked being it (president). I got to paint the White House.

Lucas: I liked it because I won the election. It is fun to win things.

Euan: I felt good. I won the election and I was almost in the lead of the line. We a little bit told [people] what to do.

Rui: It was good.

After the break, interest about our theme still brewed. "Who is president today?" several students asked. In the days that followed, one of our students came in dressed as George Washington, complete with a red and blue waistcoat and coat. Given their interest, Jo-Ann and I couldn't wait to see and hear our students' reactions as our plan to have our theme come alive on yet another level finally came to fruition

today with a visit to the exhibits of the John F. Kennedy Museum.

~Jada Brown
& JoAnn Hawkesworth

Room 109

So far this year, the Magic Dragons have studied the life cycle of the Monarch butterfly, learned about ourselves and our community, learned to look and listen closely, told and listened to stories, held a mock election, and discovered how to use our voices to make the world a better place. Our projects have been quite tangible, based on what we can see, touch and do, and immediately relevant to the children's lives.

This week, we embark on a new journey. We will spend time in another time and place, studying Ancient Greece. I wondered about the best way to help the children make connections to Ancient Greece. We began by asking the children what they think people's lives were like more than 2,000 years ago...

Dillon: We didn't have calendars. We didn't know what days or months years.

Olivia: We didn't even know what night or sun is. What those words were.

Sophia: They didn't invent anything yet. Invent means make up, or build something that you made up. Like skis, or clothes.

Maya: They had grass. They build a house.

James: They had huts I think. [Made] out of mud.

Zora: They used their hands. And also their bow and arrow. They had to shoot fish in the water,

which was really hard.

The children continued to share their ideas until Dashawn thought out loud, "This sounds like a story. Everyone is saying crazy stuff." Zora answered him back, "Ancient Greece is a story that happened a long year ago." In a class of storytellers, a first connection was made.

~Jenny Goldstein

Grades One & Two

Room 204

Happy New Year and welcome back! Our first week back has been full of new things. We welcomed our new student teacher, Lexi, to The Fantastic Crew. She has already rolled up her sleeves and gotten to work. She is from Northeastern University and will be with us until May.

We began our new math plan with second and first graders having math separately. Each classroom has established agreements, routines and expectations. We are all off to a good start! Last, we began thinking and talking about our new school-wide theme: Ancient Greece.

So far we have watched a short video, explored LOTS of books, shared what we know about Greece, what we want to know, located Greece on a map and talked about what the word "ancient" means.

We've had a busy and productive week! Stay tuned for more and don't forget to check our classroom website for updates, pictures and upcoming events!

Jenerra Williams

Juan Cortes & Lexi Delyani

Room 205

Welcome back and Happy New Year! The children and I were all very happy to be back at school again after spending a restful and joyful break with our families.

We try our best to maintain as much consistency in our daily routines as possible to ensure everyone feeling comfortable and confident returning to school after such a long time; however, there were some changes to our classroom.

The Wonderful Wonderers said goodbye and gave thanks to our classroom aide, Ms. Rosalind, on Friday. The children were relieved to know that Ms. Rosalind is not leaving the school but is helping out in another classroom. The children and I really appreciated all the time and effort Ms. Rosalind invested in us.

The first and second graders have also begun to have our separate math classes. The children are excited about the new class configuration and are excited about math! We have had a wonderful first full week back to school and we look forward to learning all about our new school-wide theme: Ancient Greece!

~Brenda Lau

Room 217

Happy new year! Things that are new in Room 217:

- our class name: the Friendly Monkeys;
- student teachers: Carey Goo and Chloe Carlton, both from

Northeastern;

- a few missing teeth, a child who has turned eight, snow on the ground;

Also new in the classroom is a set of Magna-Tiles, a building material with flat, plastic shapes that hold together magnetically. They are an instant hit and, therefore, an almost-immediate source of conflict. On Friday afternoon, I ask the children how it went to have such an exciting new material in our classroom. They unanimously love the Magna-Tiles, and many children cite frustration and conflict. We consider what to do. One solution, I suggest provocatively, is that I might put them away, since they have caused such upset. This idea is discarded immediately by the children. In its place, they offer these:

Each child could have a few (the same number) of the tiles to work with.

Children could be assigned specific days when they could use them. (But there are only five days in the week and 17 children! There would have to be more than one person using them each day.)

We could use them for a little while and then give someone else a turn. And then they could use them for a little while and then give them to the next person.

We could all agree to build one thing together with all the tiles.

We could say, "Could I use one of yours, since you have more than I do?"

The conversation is infused

with the children's confidence that they can work it out. I'm certain they can.

~Melissa Tonachel

Grades Three & Four

Room 207

Wow, it is 2013! The new year has begun and room 207 is excited about our future. During the winter break students should have received their first report card of the school year. As you read the reports MHS families should reflect with their child on how he/she did. Families should also create a goal for improvement and/or extension. However, all families in room 207 should be proud of the hard work each student showcased throughout the first half of the school year. The new building, new grade configurations, new teachers, and new school year have been challenging but rewarding.

Change is never easy and it can take time to adjust. However, all members of the MHS community have survived. As the second half of the school year begins we will work hard to continue fostering each child's needs and wants. As students become more comfortable in their new surroundings and routines they will continue to show improvements academically, socially, and physically. Happy New Year!

~Robert Baez

Room 216

no news this week

Grades Five & Six

Room 210

I was recently having a conversation with colleague about students assessing themselves as writers. It happened to be during report card madness so I figured I'd give the kids a shot at grading themselves. I handed out blank report cards and told them that they needed to justify their comments and/or numbers with evidence.

Kids are generally very aware of how they are doing in school and (except for a few outliers) they were pretty accurate. In fact, in many cases, my comments were basically the same, just more academic mumbo-jumbo. If I had my druthers, I'd write all of my reports with more of a lens for the kids. They are, after all, the ones who need to synthesize and apply what is said right? Anyway, I digress...

Literacy:

"I think that I have gotten better at writing and I think that now I almost never have to stop and re-read a sentence in a book."

"I think I do a good job at everything but I struggle with fluency."

"I think I have improved how I write because my stories have become more descriptive and less action/blurber. I have been trying to expand the genres that I read, and I think I have been successful in doing that."

"I think I should get a two because I am getting to understand the reading."

Math:

"I think I understand just about everything."

"I put a two because I feel like I know what to do in most of math but if I could pay attention more I could easily get a three."

"I am a two because I am learning new things and it is hard."

"I think there is a lot more room to improve in my class, but as much as I want to give myself a three I feel I could pay attention way more."

Theme:

"I think that my group was ok for me and that we produced a lot of information that was not just from books and that we shared a good part of it. I am also excited about our (next) theme and hope to learn a lot about Ancient Greece."

"Theme is not my strong suit. I get theme and do my theme work I just don't know how to get better at it."

Community Member/Habits of Work/Habits of Mind:

"I feel I mix well with different kids in the class. I gave myself a three because I feel like I could improve my habits of work and mind."

"Two. Because for my speech, I'm bad at it."

"I think I'm a good community member. Well, at least I try to be. I am not very good at thinking about habits of mind and work while I'm doing work."

"I give myself a three because I need help with my homework. I do it, but I don't bring it in on time."

Art:

"I'm not the best artist but I try my hardest which is why I gave myself a three."

"I think I'm very good at Art and I listen to Jeanne."

"Two, I don't have too much artistic skills."

Music:

"I feel like I do better when I'm at my house or something."

~Nakia Kiezer

Room 215

Starting our new theme, Ancient Greece, has been an incredible experience! We launched our unit with a study of the different Greek gods.

Students are interested in the topic; I have often overheard them having discussions about it outside of theme studies. In literacy, students participate in leveled groups and are either reading *The Adventures of Greek Heros* or *D'auliares' Geek Myths*. Students are learning

how to ask open-ended questions and facilitate their own conversations about the text. We are also making art to accompany our reading. All

students created a pictorial family tree of Greek gods. One group is making a banner that

maps the adventures of Hercules, while another group made a comic strip of the

Hercules and Prometheus myth. I am looking forward to teaching them more about Greek History.

~Sarah DeCruz

Grades Seven & Eight**Room 213**

As the new year starts, leaders in many settings compose and deliver a state of the union/community/school address. This serves a "taking stock" purpose. How are we? Where have we been and where are we going? What goals do we have? What do we need to do to reach them, and how will we know when we have?

Last week, in place of our usual school-week-in-review reflection, we thought about our lives and our community more expansively. We brainstormed ideas: concerns, worries, fears; joy and happiness; anticipation, looking forward; hopes and dreams; goals, connections. Each student wrote her/his own "State of You" reflection.

A few children had a hard time getting started, and a few had a hard time stopping! The writing was beautiful and thoughtful, so honest and hope-filled. My heart was touched by your wonderful children. Do you know how much their families mean to them? Do you know that they worry that they won't always be safe? Do you know what big dreams they have and what they are afraid of? Do you know how much they want the adults in their lives to be there for them?

Please ask your child about this assignment. Perhaps you could brainstorm a "State of the Family" address.

~Ann Ruggiero

Laura Nixon & Kendal Schwarz

Room 214

Room 214 got a slightly early start on the Ancient Greece theme last week. Coming back from break with a two day week seemed like a good time to see what our students

remembered from the last time the theme came around or had learned elsewhere. Apollo, Athena, the Minotaur, Medusa, the Parthenon, stuffed grape leaves, Heracles, the Golden Fleece, Prometheus, Perseus... the list went on. Our students are very excited about this theme and have many ideas about what they would like to revisit or learn about.

We have begun with reading and discussing myths after lunch. We realized that they often explain natural phenomena such as the seasons or fire (we had just read about Persephone and also Prometheus), and often teach important lessons as well. Though the suffering we saw Heracles endure when he chose the path of Virtue over Vice, we made some strong connections about our habits of work.

Our first project is to compose an original myth, inspired by some of those we have read. So far our 7th and 8th graders have some great ideas about lessons that are important to pass on and natural phenomena they could explain, and they have some creative ways in mind to tell these stories. There are even some original gods, goddesses, and heroes that will be born in Room 214.

~ *Jacob Wheeler*
& *Chris Barnes*

Hot Topics

GET YOUR FLU SHOT NOW

Mayor Thomas M. Menino declared a public health

emergency Wednesday morning because of the expanding flu outbreak. Health care centers across the city will be offering free vaccines to anyone who hasn't yet been immunized. The city has 700 confirmed cases of flu so and four flu-related deaths. Last year Boston had only 70 confirmed cases. Massachusetts has had 18 flu-related deaths so far this season, according to the state Department of Public Health. Public health officials emphasized that it's not too late to get a flu vaccine. In addition to local clinics, many pharmacies will provide a free flu shot if you show your Blue Cross, Blue Shield or Harvard Pilgrim health insurance card.

New Book by Former MHS Teacher

Matthew Knoester, former MHS teacher, now assistant professor of education at the University of Evansville, has published a new book, *Democratic Education in Practice: Inside the Mission Hill School*. The book evaluates and describes a high-performing public school in Boston. The book describes the school's successes — such as a high college attendance rate by its graduates and the portfolio process required for graduation — and also the challenges faced by schools like Mission Hill, including pressure to teach to standardized tests. The book is available at the reduced price of \$30 from Dani in the External Affairs office.

Courtney's Corner

Check out Courtney's Corner for information on various programs and resources for you and your family.

Rincón de Courtney

Mira la información que esta fuera en el "Rincón de Courtney" para información sobre varios programas y recursos para ti y tu familia.

Keep Those Box Tops Coming!

Box Top\$ for Education earn us hundreds of dollars each year for new materials, and classroom extras. Check your purchases for the coupons and send them in to Courtney at Mission Hill School. Thank you!

The Mission Hill School

Family Forum is an initiative by school parents and caregivers FOR school parents and caregivers, a place to forge connections in and across classroom communities. Staff is welcome, too.

To join the group:

Request to join by sending an email to MHS Family Forum moderators Naama or Neathery (mizzgee@yahoo.com or neathery99@gmail.com)

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