

Mission Hill School News

Letter from Child Street

Looking Back and Ahead

Dear Mission Hill School Staff, Students and Friends,

Each winter Mission Hill staff members spend a weekend together planning for the school's future, at least for the year ahead. We discuss the budget, staffing and a range of other things that need consideration. Some adjustments were needed to plans we created before moving to our new building and adding several classrooms. Our new school neighborhood, the size of the building, our new students, and new staff prompted rich discussion about next year and reflection about the first part of the school year. I'll share a few high lights of our discussion and planning with you.

Now that we have settled in some, our common spaces will get more focused time and attention dedicated to them. Artwork and comfortable seating will be a connecting thread in several spaces throughout the building.

The study of Ancient Egypt has been one of our curriculum themes since Mission Hill School began. We decided to expand this study to include other civilizations along the Nile River. The title of this ancient civilization study is called *Kingdoms of the Nile*, as suggested by Barbara Brown from Boston University's African Studies department. The next time we study this theme will be in two years. Next year's ancient civilization will be the Taino.

We shared ideas about how to maintain close communication among the staff in such a large building and with an increased number of adults. We decided to adjust our meeting structure so there are smaller groups of adults discussing issues in deeper, more meaningful ways. We also added two days to our collective work together in the summer, just before school opens. In some ways our school needs time and attention the way a brand new school does.

How to best meet the academic needs of our students who struggle with reading was the focus of part of our time together. This conversation continued for several hours throughout the week following our retreat. Our work ahead involves looking closely at

student reading performance, our instructional work, and the work of other teachers and schools to improve what we do.

These are just four of the many items discussed, debated, voted on, and decided during our time together. Our next staff retreat happens at the end of the school year. Again, we will reflect, take what we can from lessons learned and begin to think about what's next.

~Ayla Gavins

REMINDERS

February

Fri. 2/15: School Closed - staff at conference

2/18 - 22: Winter vacation

2/27-3/1: Grades 5 & 6 to FarmSchool

March

Mar. 14 & 15: Family Conferences

Thu. 3/14, 5:45: Family Council

Mon. 3/18: No School

Thu. 3/28: Family Breakfast

Ancient Greece

Fri. 3/29 No school

From the Classrooms

3 and 4 year-olds

Room 108

How do three year-olds and four year-olds connect with Ancient Greece? As the whole school delves into this theme, this question has been on my mind. One aspect that makes perfect sense for us to explore is Aesop's Fables. Aesop (EE-sop) lived in Greece over twenty-five hundred years ago. He was a storyteller and his stories have been passed from generation to generation.

We have started with *The Lion and the Mouse*. In this fable a little mouse is able to help a big lion that is captured in a rope trap. The little mouse gnaws at the rope to free the lion, and with that, the lion learns a valuable lesson: *Little friends can be great friends*.

The storyline, the characters and the moral are all things that The Rocks have connected with. So far we have used puppets, picture books and skits to act out this fable. Next week we will try using the felt board to tell the story—with children and grown ups collaborating. Each time we tell the story, it is a little different—and each time it is a learning experience for all of us.

~Geraldyn Bywater McLaughlin
& Donna Winder

Kindergarten

Room 106

One day I stepped in to the block area to find that the agora was in shambles. I pulled Amos aside to ask him what happened.

"It fell," Amos told me. "Why?" I asked. "Because people keep stepping over it," he said with a frustrated expression. "Do you know why they kept stepping over it?" I continued. Amos looked at me. "They were getting blocks." "What do you think we need to do differently next time?" I probed him. "Build it somewhere else?" he ventured.

This interchange became the start of a class conversation about why we had to move and rebuild the agora in our block area. After Amos clearly explained that we moved it because people were knocking into it, students continued to step over and through the new agora.

We gathered back together on the rug. I shared with the children what Amos had said before. I purposefully repeated the message so everyone got a chance to hear it a second time. I then asked, "How do you think the builders feel when you walk over the buildings?" Students responded *bad, sad, angry*. We then asked the builders. They shared that they were frustrated and angry. We came up with a way to move around the block area space in ways that would not knock over student work. This is something that is particularly challenging for four, five, and six year olds. The students decided that they should walk around the building instead of over the blocks.

The children really used their minds to imagine what it was like for the builders and they used their minds to help create a solution. Thinking about how our actions make other people feel is

something we will continue to work on for the rest of the year.

~Kathy Clunis D'Andrea

Room 107

"I like his mask." "There's Perseus!" "That's Hercules!" "Where is Hera?" "We should make the Olympics". "I'll swim." "I can ride horses."

As our curiosity builds about Ancient Greece and the Olympics (an event students hope to replicate) through books, pictures and artifacts, we are realizing just how much the Silver Star Patriots (our new class name) already know about many of the mythical characters. However, it would be negligent to not share the learning that we have experienced from our family presentations. Here is a synopsis of our first few: Lucas's family spoke to us about Wales, Ireland and Poland. We found out that his great grandfather was a carpenter who started a tradition of passing down a wooden level to different generations. Recently, Lucas was given that same level. Games are important in his family and so they shared two favorites; *Chicken Cha Cha Cha* and *Max*. As a group, we played the cooperative game called *Max*. Students became excited when we seemed to be eluding the tricky cat and enjoyed distracting him by saying, "Max...treat!"

Alma's family spoke about Germany (where they are moving in a few days). We saw family pictures of their vacation in Berlin and learned that she has two German grandfathers with

the same name. Her great grandfather was from Louisiana and he laid pipelines for oil. Their grandmother made great biscuits, a skill that seems to have been passed down. We finished our time together with playing instruments and learning a song about the rain called “Es Regnet” which can be found at the following site:

(<http://www.wirkindervomkleistpark.de/cd1.html>).

~Jada Brown
& JoAnn Hawkesworth

Room 109

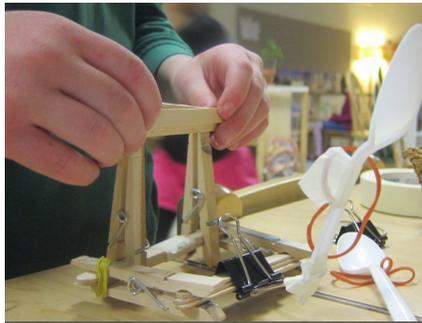
Last week, James and I were looking through a book about life in Ancient Greece. “Did ships in Ancient Greece have cannons?” James wondered out loud. We looked at more pictures and I read some captions. We found out that catapults came before cannons, and were invented in Ancient Greece!

James describes, “We made the simplest catapult with two blocks, a plank and a small block. We put the plank on top of the small block, in the middle. We put a soft, knitted ball on end of the plank and then stamped on the other side with our foot. The ball went really, really, really high!”



“And then we built a smaller one with different materials from our classroom. You pull the rubber band back with the spoon, and when you let go it the rubber band pulls the spoon really fast. You can catapult things like

pompoms because they are soft and won’t hurt anybody.”



If you have any experience building catapults, or would like work together to build a catapult, come visit us in 109!

~Jenny Goldstein

Grades One & Two

Room 204

Last week, two seemingly unrelated events happened. First, the first of ten video clips on Mission Hill launched on 40 nationwide websites. As I saw responses to the video, I wondered what our current students would say about them. What did they really think about our school? Second, as fate would have it, time would allow me to finally read the essay I received from my 8th grade advisee over that same weekend. The words of that student rang loud and clear, the answer to my questions. I share some of them with you now:

“I think what makes a good school is a place where a kid feels comfortable enough to be themselves...A good school is a place that will help a kid if they say they need some help...What I mean is that a good school is a place where a kid feels OK enough to be able to ask for help. Also, I think a good school tells

kids that they are smart...just smart on your own. A good school would be a fun place to be... A good student is someone who is prepared for their day. They come to school to learn and they like learning.”

With these words in mind...back to work I go.

~Jenerra Williams

Room 205

Over the past couple of weeks, the Wonderful Wonderers have started a new unit of study on nature science. We began talking about wildlife in the city. We brainstormed a list of wild animals we see in the city; squirrels, bats, turkeys, raccoons, and snakes, etc. We talked about their different habitats and the kinds of foods they eat. The Wonderful Wonderers learned about the differences among herbivores, carnivores, omnivores, and scavengers through the song *Wild Things!* Andrew brought in his guitar and the children had fun singing and dancing to the catchy tune while learning about wild animals.

Andrew also brought in many different animal specimens for the Wonderful Wonderers to study. The children were ecstatic to see real-life specimens like skins, tails, carapaces, antlers, and skulls. They explored these specimens closely with their vision, smell, and touch. In their science notebooks, they drew detailed pictures and recorded their findings. They were excited to go around the classroom and to share their speculations of what animals they thought the different specimens came from!

~Brenda Lau
& Amina Michel-Lord

Room 217

Wow, those are cool buildings! – a 6th grader passing by
Look at these buildings, they're beautiful! – a teacher

The block area has four buildings in it, all constructed around the idea of columns. They are, indeed, beautiful. The children have paid special attention to how the buildings stand up and to how miniature people might move in and out and around them.

It's Jeanne who first draws the children's attention to columns, as they draw them in the art room, both collaboratively and each on their own. They come back to the classroom with a column vocabulary, which they use when perusing books.

Then we go out on a just-beginning-to-snow afternoon for a column walk around the neighborhood. The first column we find is right on the corner of Carolina and South Streets, at the hair salon. *Ionic!* the children call out. We keep walking and—*Look!*

Look!—find the most surprising Greek-inspired columns, in many sizes and on many houses right here near our school! The children continue to identify the columns they see and note the absence of Corinthian columns. How do you see your neighborhood?

~Melissa Tonachel

Grades Three & Four

Room 207

While watching the first of ten episodes of “A Year at Mission Hill” I thought to myself how rewarding, engaging, and motivating this is or could be for first year teachers around the country. As a first year lead teacher at Mission Hill I have been blessed to see what was on footage in real life. Mission Hill is a unique school, where individualized learning does occur for all students with various backgrounds.

During the first episode I began to reflect on my first six months at Mission Hill. During this time I have enjoyed every second, minute and hour. Here are a few highlights: (1) having the autonomy to create curriculum, which specifically meets the needs of the student body, (2) working for a school in which all staff members have a voice in school-wide decision making, and (3) working in a school that believes each child's social and emotional status are as important as their academic levels/growth.

~Robert Baez

Room 216

With winter illnesses causing absences of both children and adults, the reading world time in room 216 was atypical this week. While students were finding new people to read to one another, there developed a new opportunity to interact with classmates in a different way. Two students, not usually seen working together, found a common interest. One student asked the other, “Hey, do you

read those books that all the girls like?” Quite taken aback by the question, the other student replied, “You mean this book?” while holding up her copy of *The Dork Diaries*. Nodding in affirmation, the two students came together in a common interest. Instead of just acknowledging one another in conversation and going on reading independently, the two students took action within this opportunity and began to read to one another from *The Dork Diaries*. Through their partner reading, they each came across various challenges, such as difficult words to sound out as well as understanding what the author was trying to convey. Rather than give up their venture to read to one another, they successfully helped one another understand the reading together. While watching this interaction, I could not help smiling, for I had witnessed a moment of collaborative learning in a culture of being kind and working hard.

~Erica Switzer
& James McGovern

Grades Five & Six

Room 210

Last week's End of the Week reflections was so robust and choc-full of raw adolescent insight that it wouldn't fit in one column!. Here are the quotes that did not make the initial cut: “Something that would make me feel better is: If we could have Wellness by grade. But this time I really mean it! We were playing capture the flag in P.E.

in our mixed age wellness groups the other day and it was a horrible game. First of all the first graders wouldn't be able to get us out of jail so we would be stuck there the whole game. Second of all all the little kids wanted to be the ones to win the game so when we started the game and were making the plan everybody was like: "Ok you guys distract them and I'll get the flag. I do mean everybody because there is only like four big kids in the class and theres like sixteen little kids in the class. So thats why I think we should separate the wellnesses. I really think we should get together and make a proposal for them to do that."

"This week went well because the 5th grade got to play Sharks and Minnows, i think it was really fun i had a really good time. Thats what made the week go well."

"This week was fun with pj day and playing basketball in the gym. Marvin and Ali are on the basketball team and i came to early math on Thursday and we got to act in Urban Improv."

"This week we went to Urban Improv and there was a lady and she didn't have two legs she had one! She told us that she got judged about with her fake leg and no leg she wouldn't be good at singing or dancing for a show."

"My week was awesome."

~Nakia Keizer,
Kyle Ford-Withrow
& Cady Hrasky

Room 215

Last week in theme studies, students worked in groups to compare daily life in Athens and Sparta. I wanted to do this activity as a whole class, so I knew I needed to offer students multiple entry points around this content. Christine worked with a small group of students to preview the content in the articles we would read and practice using Venn diagrams. We also watched a *Brain Pop* video before we read the articles. Each group compared a different topic: government, economy, or education. I created a model that compared women and slaves so they could refer to it if needed. Each group created Venn diagrams and created posters to reflect their findings. The next day, students presented their findings to the class and I casually asked audience members to ask questions. We have been practicing asking inferential questions in reading groups, but watching them ask questions to their classmates was so rewarding. I was impressed with the depth of their questions and also with the groups' ability to respond thoughtfully and make inferences.

~Sarah DeCruz

Grades Seven & Eight

Room 213

Two mornings a week before school, Room 213 is a busy place. Early Morning Math for middle school students is held on Monday and Wednesday from 8 to 9 am. All are welcome,

and many come!

Most kids arrive knowing what they need to work on. Some work independently or with a peer on homework. These kids often save their homework for this time, knowing they'll have a time and place to get it done. Others come with specific questions, and work with an adult or peer to figure out some puzzling aspect of a classwork or homework problem. This is also a time when kids can get some focused attention on math they are not yet confident with, whether it's figuring out operations with fractions, proportional reasoning, or factoring a polynomial.

Early Morning Math is not just a place for homework though. It is also a time when kids can explore a wonderful collection of math resources, ranging from books on a variety of reading levels about math concepts or history, puzzles and games, models and manipulatives, computer programs, and challenge problems to stretch mathematical thinking. I could spend many entire days absorbed in this collection and still find something new to explore.

The only condition for Early Morning Math is that students know they come to work. Although there are social interactions, there is also a purposeful atmosphere and a minds-on-math focus. Wouldn't this be a good way for your child to start the day?

~Ann Ruggiero

Laura Nixon & Kendal Schwarz

Room 214

In the workshop class, students can pursue a topic of particular interest to them. From the outset, the students are fully aware of the

expectations and responsibility required for them to be successful. The resulting project comprises the student's review encompassing a reflection, report, and critique. This is entirely new for me. The school I previously worked in focused primarily on teaching to pass the MCAS. Allowing students to learn through self-exploration was considered taboo, so I was enthralled to see this taking place at Mission Hill. I truly believe that this student-centered, teacher-guided model bolsters autonomy, and serves to foster independent growth and a zest for learning.

I saw skateboards being made, science experiments, digital architectural designs, foreign language learning, cookbooks, carpentry, and myriad imaginative and cool subject matter. It's refreshing to see students fully engaged and eager to come in and complete their projects, knowing that they are doing something that they like and feel proud about.

Additionally, this type of learning lets students unearth abilities they probably never knew they had, acquire different viewpoints, and develop a deeper appreciation for learning.

I came to the realization that this approach has far-reaching implications that extend beyond "WorkShop". WorkShop class requires being well-prepared, responsible, focused, attentive, persevering, and adaptable. These are qualities that will allow students to flourish down the line, in both their academic

endeavors and in life.

~Chris Barnes & Jacob Wheeler

Hot Topics

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.

FREE February Vacation

Fun:

Rep. Jeff Sanchez's Office and Sociedad Latina are offering a trip to the Museum of Science on February 20th. This trip is for kids ages 6-12 and is FREE but you must sign up ahead of time by contacting Kate Lauretano at (617)722-2130. The group will leave from 43 Smith Street at 12:30 pm and return at 5:00. The trip features an IMAX movie at 2 pm.

Family Day at the MassArt

Galleries: Saturday, February 23, 11-4pm, Bakalar & Paine Galleries, 621 Huntington Ave., Boston. Drop in for a free, fun-filled day of interactive activities and art-making in the current exhibits: Passing Time and Graphic Advocacy. All visitors are welcome; activities are best suited for ages four and up. Visit www.MassArt.edu/galleries or call Katie Loesel directly at (617) 879-7924 for more information. Refreshments, materials, and inspiration will be

provided.

Boston Public Library

branches have activities February 19th-22nd. Check them out at the one closest to your home.

Other February Vacation Programming:

Boston Nature Center offers full day programs (8:30-5:30) with extended day options February 19th-22nd.



Αποστείλετε τα box στην κορυφή!

Mission Hill School

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