

# Mission Hill School News

## Letter from Child Street

### Talk About Holidays

Dear Mission Hill School Families, Friends, Staff and Students,

When I saw Christmas decorations appear in stores around the time of Halloween, I was concerned. I was disturbed by the increasing push to buy presents. I also wondered what effect this might have on students at school. I felt for you parents and caregivers who must battle questions from your children as they ask for presents. It is a stressful time of year whether you celebrate Christmas or not. It is most stressful if it is already difficult to make ends meet, if you don't want to instill values of consumption and materialism in your child(ren), and/or you don't celebrate Christian holidays.

At our last staff meeting I shared a conversation about the upcoming holidays that I had with a father in our school community. He shared thoughts about the school environment from the perspective of his

Muslim faith. His children experienced a lot of Christmas holiday celebration talk on the playground, in the classroom and in the lunchroom. He requested that staff talk about this together. GERALYN (K0 teacher) suggested that the notes from our conversation be included in a letter to all of you. Below is a summary of that talk.

It's important to talk about holidays in the classroom from an academic standpoint. What traditions, customs and/or beliefs exist and are represented by members of our school community? Encourage talk from students about experiences instead of gifts. This is something to incorporate into the culture of the class. Talking about customs helps to avoid kids focusing on presents. School talk should focus less on holidays and more on what families do. Children who have family customs that are not part of the mainstream are just as happy to share and have their family customs appreciated. Recognizing every child holistically is our responsibility at school.

Staff conversations with students about holidays have three goals:

1. Recognize and learn from the family traditions and customs that are part of student lives.
2. Provide our students with a broad view of how different people

live in their own community and in the world.

3. Help students think about the diversity of people and unintentional exclusion when those differences are ignored or not included. I am thankful to the parent who raised this issue. The discussion helped us clarify things as a staff, therefore making things more clear to the students.

Sincerely,  
*Ayla Gavins*

#### REMINDERS

##### *December*

**Thu. 12/19**, 7 - 8:30 AM: School Preview session

**Thu. 12/19**, 6 - 7 PM: Outside the Lines Meeting

**12/20 - 1/2/14**: Holiday Break

##### *January*

**Fri. 1/3/14**: Students return

## From the Classrooms

### 3 and 4 year-olds

#### Room 108

I have spent most of today (Sunday) writing narrative reports for the children in room 108. I still have more to go, and will continue to write over the next few weeks. Narrative reports are meant to provide a snapshot of who your child is at school. In preparing to write the narrative report, Ms. Donna, Angel and I think carefully about each child. We read through the anecdotes we have been collecting since the first day of school. We look at photo-documentation of work and play; re-read the home visit questionnaires and the listening conference notes; and review the one-on-one interviews we have done. For each child, we go through an extensive list of developmental indicators (The Work Sampling System) to help us make sure we are considering and documenting all areas of your child's development. All of this rich information helps us to reflect deeply on your child and his/her first few months of school – as well as where he/she is heading and how we can best support growth. Ms. Donna, Angel and I spend this time because we know that to do this work, we must know your children well. We hope you enjoy reading the narrative reports when they come home in a few weeks. Please let us know your thoughts.

~Geraldyn Bywater McLaughlin,  
Donna Winder & Angel Nasseh

### Kindergarten

#### Room 106

##### Screen Dilemma

This year I have been having a screen dilemma in my class. I can say with ease that the presence of screens is more alive than ever before. This is the first time in 16 years that screen games, shows, and apps are permeating every area of our classroom. Unfortunately this has not been a good thing. The experiences that children are having with screens are affecting the learning and relationships at school.

One example I have noticed is how it is changing play at recess. Children are reenacting shows and games. Their play has become more physical. Children have always had a version of rough and tumble play, but this is very different. Stuart Brown the author of the book *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*, says, "If children are getting hurt then it isn't playing." Children are getting hurt. They are not fully understanding the consequences of reenacting the sequences of what they are seeing on screens.

This surprises lots of people. They are especially surprised because companies work hard to convince us that these games are educational and fun for children. What I am seeing is the opposite. The more time children have in front of screens the less they are able to connect with children and the work of the classroom.

~Kathy Clunis D'Andrea

#### Room 107

"Ms. Jada, we forgot to do our yoga!"

Although I am not a certified yoga instructor, I certainly learned a lot last year doing research. For example, [www.namastekid.com](http://www.namastekid.com) states that the Triangle Pose stretches and strengthens legs, chest, and spine; Shooting Stars Breathing Exercise calms the body and mind; Ragdoll Pose stretches legs and back; Lion Pose stretches the hips, thighs, and ankles; Rainbow Pose stretches arms, abdominals, spine, and chest; Corpse Pose helps relieve stress, headaches and fatigue; and Bridge Pose stretches chest, neck, and back and improves digestion.

Based on last years' successful implementation, we decided to incorporate yoga into our meetings this year and gauge our students' responses. So far they have really enjoyed it and as the above quote suggests, they miss it when we have skipped it. Now, most mornings, as part of our meeting routine we practice several yoga poses together. During this time we are not only working on strengthening our balancing skills, but our counting as well. We hold most of our poses for 10 seconds and others for 20 seconds. As we count out loud together, this is just one way that we connect a necessary skill to something meaningful and better yet... fun!

~Jada Brown  
& JoAnn Hawkesworth

#### Room 109

This week the Original Stars had a chance to tell the rest of the

school about the importance of composting at Friday Share. We made “compost jars”, which are mason jars we filled with dirt, and added different materials to see if they were compostable. The items included leaves, a rubber band, an apple core, aluminum foil, bread, and paper. We have been observing the jars, and recording what we see. Our classroom is also lucky enough to have a large worm bin, thanks to Zora and her family! The children were excited to share their findings with Mission Hill.

**Zora-** “Worms are very useful because they help the earth. If you drop food, they take it to their homes and turn it into dirt. Each day they build a new city by making new soil. We have a worm bin and the worms are doing their best job to help the earth.”

**Kenneth-** “When leaves go into the compost bin, they don’t help the trees like they used to, but they help them from underneath”.

**Theo-** “Soil and bread are in this compost jar. The blue stuff is mold and it means it will turn into dirt.”

**Evan-** Apples are good for compost. Not garbage!

~Liz Borson

## Grades One & Two

### Room 204

*No news this week*

### Room 205

As we begin to wrap up our study of trees, we all shared some of our favorite memories or things we learned. Here is what the All Stars had to say. **Justin:**

“Trees grow; they drink water; leaves make food.” **Chrisvely:**

“They can be so tall!” **Sara:**

“Maple trees give syrup. Some trees give things you can eat.”

**Braxton:** “If you give them sunlight and no soil it won’t grow.” **Olivia:** “The roots suck up water.” **Destiny:** “I liked going to the Arboretum and seeing big big leaves. We collected seeds.”

**Shawnmathew:** “When seeds fall off a tree it grows a new tree.”

**Miles:** “I liked making paper. You can put yarn on it. I liked how it looked when it was done.”

**Hamse:** “I liked playing the life cycle tag game with Andrew.”

**Lukas:** “Trees help everything on the planet live.” More to come next week!

~Ashleigh L'Heureux

### Room 217

Recently our afternoon read aloud was *What Do You Do With a Tail Like This?* by Steve Jenkins. Each page introduced us to a body part (nose, ears, tails, etc.) and helped us learn how animals use these parts in very different ways. We would guess whose nose was poking on a page (we couldn’t see the entire body) or whose tail was thin and curved across the page. Students took turns sharing their ideas.

Sometimes they turned to a partner and shared what animal they thought belonged to the large mouth on the page. I would ask students to share what their partner said. I want students to continue working on their listening skills – we can listen to learn from our friends. Sometimes I would call on a student; and other students would make the

silent “me too” sign to show that they had the same idea. It is one of my favorite non-fiction read alouds because it invites all children to share their knowledge about animals, synthesize information, ask questions, and engage with the text.

~Emma Fialka-Feldman

## Grades Three & Four

### Room 216

Dear Family Members,

This past Friday I witnessed my first Coffee House! It was amazing to see six students from the Clever Cats class perform courageously. Many students performed different acts, such as a karate demonstration, singing a capella, dancing, hula hooping, violin and trumpet playing, a lip syncing performance, and a video created by a student portraying movie spoofs. The wonderful part of Coffee House is being able to see students’ talents outside of the classroom and recognizing strengths. Shout outs to Nelson, Emelia, Dimitra, Enaisja, Blossom, and Nora for incredible performances!

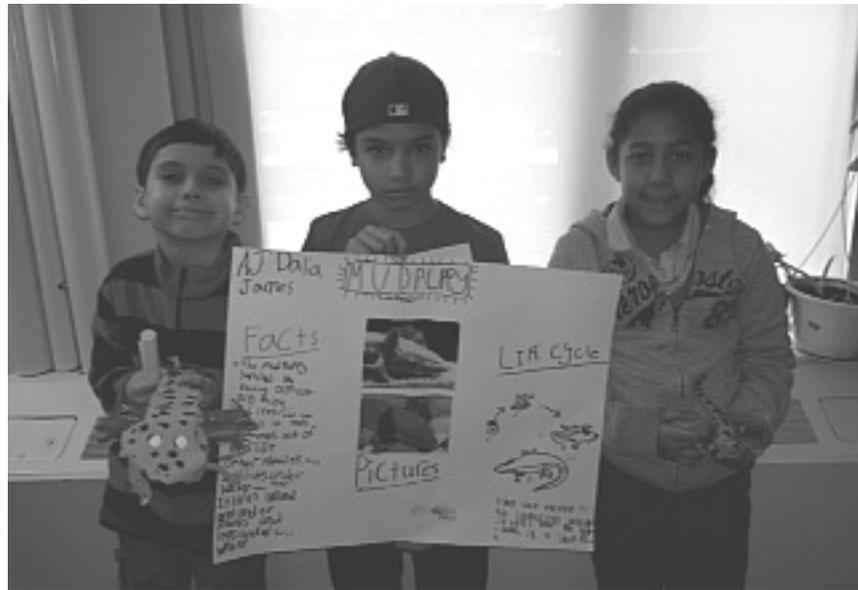
Clearly, lots of rigor and multiple drafts were needed to complete the final products. If there were one take away I’d love to see students learn, it’s the idea that producing a quality product requires teamwork, forethought, drafts, and plenty of feedback. It was great to see the students apply this type of thinking outside of the classroom. Can’t wait for the next one!

~Josh Kraus, Melanie Centeno  
Selina Ruiz & Elsa Batista

**Room 207**

The Role Model Hawks would like to share some pictures to showcase a snapshot of their animal life cycle projects. Students were required to work in groups of two or three to study an animal that they could find in our local schoolyard or park in the Boston area. In our pictures our 3-D animal models are showcased. The students enjoyed using painting materials and various recyclable items to construct these models. I hope you enjoy our pictures!

~Robert Baez, Ms. Shaina  
& Ms. Amanda

**Grades Five & Six****Room 210**

Here is our latest installment of End of the Week Reflections. Enjoy.

“Something that went well this week was Wellness. It was the last week so we did fun stuff. We had to throw a bean bag in a hula hoop, and we would get an animal for the winter to eat. Every time you got it in the hula

hoop you got another animal. (the animals were not real.) We did a lot of fun things in Wellness. It was really fun too. The bad thing was that we had to learn something before we played the games.”

“Anyway, on Thursday we used our math skills to add the tax, the tip, and the total price together. This rewarded us with a trip for lunch to Purple Cactus. This week was a long week.”

“I missed Nakia when he went to the Farm School and I like that we had snack this week. Nakia let

me try chick peas and I didn't like it.”

“This week went well for me. Everybody was nice to me instead of being mean. I did not do anything to anyone, so they were nice to me.”

“We read 100 books. So we went down to play basketball. Eli's team wins by five points. It was more fun but I wanted to eat more food.”

“Something that went really well this week is definitely going to Purple Cactus. It was just a really original way for that community to spend time

together, do math, and connect.”

“Something I learned this week is that I’m good at drawing with dots. I was in Art Drop-in decided to draw dots to form other things. My drawings came out nice. (if you want to see it ask me).

“One great suggestion I have for the class I think we should do a before and after book or paper so we bring in a baby picture and a picture of you now. I saw that Jenny’s class did that and I really like how they made a book and it said “who’s that baby” then when you flip the page it said who the baby was, and how they look now.”

~*Nakia Keizer, June Meyers  
& Katy Laguzza*

### Room 215

Last Friday our class went to 826 Boston and as Keyshawn said, “It was off the hook!” The White Lions created characters, a setting, and a story line by brainstorming ideas with a member of 826 Boston. We watched two characters come to life as an artist drew the descriptions the class shared with him. “I really got to be creative and give my opinion on stuff,” said James. “And I like that we worked together to make a script, and be creative. We had never done anything like that as a class before. “In the past, working together hasn't always worked as well and this time it did!” said Asmani. All of the students wrote Scene One together and had time to begin other scenes on their own. They each came away with their own

scripts that they had written with the class along with their own additions. It was so much fun to see everyone have a space to share their imagination, ideas, and creativity. They shared and bounced off each others' ideas, creating a story filled with imagery and details. I would agree with Keyshawn, I thought it was “off the hook” too!

~*Katie Shepardson*

## Grades Seven & Eight

### Room 213

“It was overwhelming. I was glad I was there with people I knew. But I got nervous again when I went up the stairs and saw all the people,” reported one 8<sup>th</sup> grader.

I loved the excitement in the air last Thursday evening at the BPS High School Showcase at Madison Park. There was such a sense of hopefulness as next year’s newest high school students investigated their choices. Our 8<sup>th</sup> graders, their families, and I were all impressed by the number of schools, the range of choices each represents, and the pride and joy current high schoolers take in their schools.

Finding the right next school is a lengthy process, with outcomes not in our control. A student could complete all the parts of an application on time and beautifully but still not be selected or assigned to that school. That’s why it’s necessary to have a number of schools as choices.

In class, we’ve agreed not to

think in terms of “good” or “bad” schools, but rather to use descriptive language to find the ones that seem to be a good fit for each student. I reminded the kids that we control the kind of experiences we have in life – attitude counts for a lot, and hard work and engaged learning can happen in many places.

This week, we prepared letters to ask for recommendations. Next week we’ll focus on our application essays, and we’re arranging visits to a few schools. Please call me if you have any questions about the high school process.

~*Ann Ruggiero*

### Room 214

Mission Hill School welcomes back a long time community member to room 214. Khury Petersen-Smith has been an intern, a student teacher, a second adult and a good friend at MHS over the past eight years. He has joined us again as we search for a lead teacher in this classroom. In addition to his teaching work in Boston and Cambridge, Khury is a social activist and speaker. He is a doctoral candidate at Clark University.

MHS is glad to have Khury with us, even for a short time. Watch for his upcoming columns in this space.

## 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.

## Family Fun in Boston

### **Candyland Tournament at Faneuil Hall - Boston**

Join the fun! Play Candy Land with your family and enjoy games, children's activities, holiday entertainment, snacks and more.  
Saturday, Dec 14, 2013

### **The Nutcracker: José Mateo Ballet Theatre - Cambridge**

José Mateo Ballet Theatre's The Nutcracker has become a holiday tradition for New England audiences.  
Thu, Fri, Sat, Sun from Nov 29, 2013 - Dec 22, 2013

### **SoWa Holiday Market - Boston**

From the fashionably chic to the hip and cutting edge, shoppers are sure to find an original gift for everyone on their list at the Annual SoWa Holiday Market. Featuring 80 juried artists and designers from around New England.  
Saturday, Dec 14, 2013 - Tuesday, Dec 15, 2013

### **The Snowflake Man by Puppetkabob - Brookline**

The Snowflake Man swings audiences into the historic 1920s through creative storytelling, intricately designed Czech-style marionettes, and a striking pop-up book of water color scenery.  
Thu, Fri, Sat, Sun from Dec 12, 2013 - Dec 15, 2013

### **Boston Children's Chorus Holiday Concert - Boston**

Enjoy a Holiday Concert with lots of Festive favorites performed by Boston Children's Chorus. At the Cathedral Of The Holy Cross, South End.  
Saturday, Dec 14, 2013

### **Black Nativity - Boston**

Don't miss the 2013 season of Black Nativity, the Black community's Christmas gift to the world. It is without a doubt a theatrical wonderment.  
Friday, Dec 13, 2013 - Sunday, Dec 22, 2013

### **It's a Wonderful Life: A live radio play - Boston**

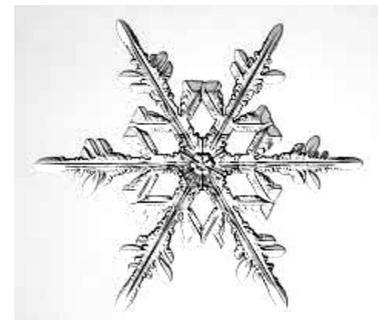
Based on the Frank Capra film, written by Joe Landry. It's a Wonderful Life is based on the 1946 American film produced and directed by Frank Capra, which is itself based on a short story 'The Greatest Gift', by Philip Van Doren Stern.  
Friday, Dec 13, 2013 - Sunday, Dec 22, 2013

### **Annual Kendall Square Holiday on Ice Show - Cambridge**

Join us for our eighth annual Holiday on Ice celebration at Community Ice Skating at Kendall in Cambridge. Free skating show at 2:00pm with former Olympians and international medalists. The rink will be open 11am-9pm with free admission all day.  
Saturday, December 14, 2013 at 2:00pm.

### **Urban Nutcracker**

December 13 - 21 at John Hancock Hall. With music that alternates between the traditional Tchaikovsky score and Duke Ellington's jazz suite, Tony Williams's popular multicultural version of the E.T.A. Hoffmann tale puts a contemporary urban spin on the choreography, blending ballet with elements of tap, hip-hop, swing, flamenco, step, and jazz. The cast includes



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