

Classroom Notes
September 2020

September 9, 2020

Dear Families,

The elementary students had a lovely day, in spite of the larval ticks that found some of them regardless of our best attempts to safeguard the children. For a while it is probably best to have them wear pants and even long socks if possible.

Pouch-making is a major activity the first day. When completed, they will help students to be more organized, i.e., having a pencil and one's work journal to keep track of choices and responsibilities. Some students have completed their pouches, and some are in the midst of the process. All will be completed by Friday.

We spent some time reviewing math facts, dusting the cobwebs out of our brains. Some students brought out some of the materials they have missed since March and even introduced them to our new students. They also helped their new friends with cursive writing. The younger crowd of 1st and 2nd graders were eager to work on the formation of eight cursive letters. This will move quickly so that they will become writing experts in the next few weeks.

After noticing how tired (and in some cases even asleep!), we discussed things that can help them to do their best work at school. They all seemed to know that food, water, and sleep are very important, but of course were surprised to learn how powerful sleep is. Nowadays children get about an hour a night less sleep than just 30 years ago, which can make the difference in success and failure for a child. Below is a link to a chapter in the book "Nurture Shock", about the power of sleep. I hope you will all read it.

<https://www.figur8.net/2009/10/26/nurture-shock-chapter-2-the-lost-hour/>

We all look forward to working with you and your lovely children. They are delightful!

Sincerely,

Mona

September 12, 2020

Dear Families,

It has been a time of learning new systems and revisiting established routines, evaluations to see where students are in their reading, writing, and math skills, as well as a few new academic lessons. We have all had a lot of fun being together, getting our year off to a good start. I always love seeing the children rekindle their established friendships and welcoming opportunities to let others into their hearts.

The younger crew is off to a great start with the first Great Story of "How the Earth Was Made" with all its follow-up lessons on matter and the solar system. They have been busy painting the impressionistic charts which accompany the story and participating in the related science experiments. They have also been learning to form their cursive letters more beautifully and practicing their reading skills daily. With the Wooden Hierarchical Materials they have been introduced to the categories through the millions and pondered the thought of infinity through numbers.

The older students have begun research, reports, and musical creations. They have been involved in reading with their partners, taking turns listening to each other and discussing their books, while the adults listen in to get an idea of their reading abilities. They have revisited multiplication, division, and squaring on the pegboard. Our math facts fluency program has been re-established, and students are eager to make sure they continue progressing to the next level.

During all this exciting work, both the adults and the students have become aware of the "rustiness" of their brains, as well as the growing enchantment with electronics, i.e., video games, phones, I-pads, etc. I shared with the children that since I have taught long enough to have been with students before the age of electronic entertainment, I can tell a difference in how their learning is being affected. I asked them to talk with you and consider experimenting with giving up the video games during school nights to see what might happen. The usual result is that children engage in more creative activities at home and school and find that they enjoy their day more. There were a variety of responses: curiosity to see what might happen, trepidation at the possible loss, questions about how much time is detrimental, and realizations that an intent to spend 15 minutes easily turns into a couple of hours. They were remarkably honest and concerned for their well-being. If you would like to try this experiment with your child, just help them to remember to abstain from video games and surfing from Sunday through Thursday. It usually takes about two weeks to reap the benefits. I would love to hear from you all about how it goes.

Sincerely,

Mona

September 25, 2020

Dear Families,

Learning to use the microscope has been a big hit for all the elementary students these last couple of weeks. They have been bringing in leaves and pond water to see what they can find, sometimes followed up by drawing what they see. Along with this, the younger students have studied the parts of the plant and their functions. Older students have refined their watercoloring skills as they study leaf venation.

All students have learned about the birth of the universe with younger students following up with science experiments and older students becoming familiar with terms such as atoms, molecules, black holes, supernova, etc.

In math the younger crew has been busy with bead chains, which highlight the multiples of the numbers 1-10 through the squares of the number. They have also been working with multiples with the bead bars and learning to write the 10,000s, 100,000s, 1,000,000s. Older students are solidifying multiplying abstractly, with some students multiplying by 10s and 100s. Fractions have been a daily choice as students practice their skills in fraction equivalence and addition of fractions. Many students are also working on division with the stamp game.

Yesterday we started a new tradition of listening to music while drawing and then hearing a story about the particular composer. This week focused on Antonio Vivaldi, the most well-known Italian composer of the seventeenth century. Some students were familiar with his "Four Seasons." Throughout this next week we will all listen to a bit more Vivaldi and then begin listening to Bach.

Every day gets a bit richer as students find more topics to explore. Their eagerness to share what they know with each other helps to create a classroom of caring citizens.

Sincerely,

Mona