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LITTLE RIVER COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Little River News

Olders Edition

Interdisciplinary Education

There are classes and particular units of study that lend themselves to being taught in an interdisciplinary way to give them more depth and perspective. The students this year express a great interest in racism and the protests organized by Black Lives Matter in response to the killing of George Floyd. We put together a study that crosses over social studies, English, and art examining Black history, current events, and celebrating the accomplishments of Black people. The class dovetails well with our studies from last semester on the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and the election.

On the English side, we started with the book *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. The book depicts a southern urban Black community racked with poverty and gang violence. The community erupts in protest after a policeman racially profiles a Black teen and kills him in a traffic stop. The students

enjoyed the author's style and language, as well as the compelling story, so we went on to read the prequel to the book, *Concrete Rose*. Our new book is *The Help* by Katherine



Artwork by Mary Charleton

Stockett, is about a group of maids working in Jackson, Mississippi in 1962. It describes a small community of women speaking out for justice in the face of oppression.

From the social studies perspective, we have been reading *The 1619 Project* that gets its title from the

year enslaved Africans were first brought to the American colonies. The series of articles show Black contributions to human and civil rights in America. The readings are dense and as a class, we read them orally and break them down for meaning paragraph by paragraph. The students then write about those readings in a journal to create their own history book.

Each student chose a Black person - artists, scientists, and civil rights leaders, to study for a mini-research project. They reported back to class with a person-of-the-week.

Local historian, Bryan Thompson, Zoomed into class and shared his research on Black settlers to St. Lawrence County

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Two Seniors Graduating, One Junior Moving On

Little River will send three students out into the world this spring. Harris Smith and Elwood Warren-Kuelgen are the graduating class of 2021, and Braden Whittaker, the sole member of the class of 2022, will take his senior year at The Clarkson School.

Harris Smith came to Little River at the start of his junior year. He was interested in animals, and Steve helped him land an opportunity to get a science credit by working in a local veterinarian's clinic. His work there led to a paying job at the clinic and fueled

his desire to pursue a career as a vet tech. He plans to enroll at Penn Foster College and pursue an associate's degree as a veterinary assistant. Harris recently won a scholarship that will cover all of his expenses at Penn Foster.

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Interdisciplinary (continued from page one)

from 1749-1950.

Later this semester we will look at the civil rights movement of the 50s and 60s through the PBS video *Eyes on The Prize*.

The Olders are also following news and current events about police shootings of Black people including the facts around those incidents and the community response to the deaths.

In art, students have the opportunity to integrate their readings and discussions into their journals with drawings and illustrations. We continued to explore the importance of the Black narrative in visual art by looking at Black female contemporary artists who delve into topics like racism, identity, blackness,

power, incarceration, and the psychological impact that inequality has on a personal level. At the moment we are working on finishing up posters of inspirational Black figures. This project allows students to focus on specific characteristics of their person, emphasizing them visually, which builds a more personalized connection.

At Little River, we have the space to explore compelling topics in the depth they deserve. Our study of Black lives is in part a response to this moment in history and brings into focus our understanding of racism, the Constitution, and civil and human rights. The interdisciplinary aspect of our studies brings in several perspectives and

allows us the time to dig deep and challenges us to make the connections across disciplines.

Steve Molnar



Artwork by Elwood Warren-Kuelgen

Two...(continued from page one)

Elwood Warren-Kuelgen was with us as a Middle, and one year as an Older, then left to try another school. He returned to Little River during his junior year. He did his senior internship with Claude Aldous, a local electronic musician. This year he took a philosophy class at St. Lawrence University, and applied to SLU for early decision. Elwood was accepted and was offered a full scholarship. Elwood plans a brief, but relaxing, summer of music, art, and meditation before participating in a summer program at SLU. He says that he plans to study philosophy and science and “see what happens from there!”

Braden Whittaker has been at Little River since Kindergarten. He has long had a passion for math and technology, and will take those passions to The Clarkson School, a program for students to simultaneously complete their senior year of high school and their freshman year of college. Of the school’s current population, only Steve has more years at Little River than Braden.

Congratulations and good luck to Harris, Elwood and Braden.

Leon Sawyko

A Word from Our Alumni

When I first came to Little River as an anxious, socially maladjusted 5th grader, I never imagined the profound impact it would have on the course of my life. A few paragraphs could never hold all I’d like to say about this school. While Little River does have “school” in the name, “community” is far more apt. The transition from public school to Little River is a bit rocky, due to their vastly different expectations of students, but it is well worth it.

I’ve always gotten high grades, but I haven’t always been a good student. Little River gave me the scaffolding and feedback I needed to become a truly strong and self-motivated learner. Not only that, but I also became a teacher: the mixed-age, mixed-skill-level classrooms make mentoring other students just a regular part of the school day. The level of freedom and control we have over our own curriculum makes developing time-management and self-pacing skills a must. A happy side effect is this makes the transition to college EASY! No exaggeration, a Little River education gives you the

exact life & interpersonal skills that everyone else struggles to obtain their freshman year.

More important than the academics was the social development I experienced at Little River. Little River is a safe space to make mistakes, but is always pushing you forward towards growth. The extremely stable environment was just what I needed to come out of my shell, learn how to make real friends, and generally become a healthy and resilient individual. The confidence to organize, delegate, lead and follow through comes naturally after years of practice and is invaluable no matter what one pursues after graduation.



Galen Oey-Langen

Class of '19

Today I’m a nursing sophomore at University of Massachusetts Amherst - a fairly eventful major these days! I also work in a nursing home as a CNA. I am often complimented by my coworkers, overseeing nurses and residents alike for my proactive work ethic, easy demeanor and ability to work well with anybody - skills I developed at Little River. And this December when COVID came to our facility ravaging staff and residents alike, these skills became essential in saving lives and easing a gentle death for those beyond help. Though there were speed bumps and rough patches, as with anything, I spent five happy years in the Olders (six counting senior year at TCS) and wouldn’t have it any other way ■

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A Word from Our Alumni (continued from page two)

I left Little River to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Artificial Intelligence at Radboud University in the Netherlands. I only spent three years in the Older's room, and only two years full-time. When I look back, I feel that the many small, seemingly insignificant things I was given the space to discover now make up a large part of my personality and identity.

Rereading my writing from those years, many of the free-choice assignments gave me the chance to work on projects which allowed me to express myself. As I've gotten older, I tend to forget what I was thinking about during those years--I am grateful that my writing remains and that I was



*Clara Maine
Class of '19*

given so much trust and freedom to choose its content. I never felt an unjust power dynamic with my teachers. I knew they wanted the best for me, and even though we sometimes disagreed on best practices, Steve's door was always open, and I felt that my feedback and suggestions were truly listened to.

The small environment made class participation a normal experience, and when I took those skills to an elective English class at St. Lawrence University, I was surprised at how disengaged and quiet the older students were. Even though I may not have known as much as they did simply because of my age, my time at Little River taught me to claim my voice in a conversation and placed value on my ideas no matter my age or experience level.

Little River's history classes

were the first time I felt inspired to take ownership of educating myself on the past. After an extensive research project on Amelia Earhart, I started reading biographies and nonfiction books; an interest I would not have discovered otherwise, and which continues long after I was required to read them for a grade.

The most valuable gift my unconventional schooling gave me was the group of people I met. Even two years after officially graduating, I am still learning from the friends and mentors the school brought me together with, and have never met a more unique group of people within the same four walls since.

The most important lessons Little River taught me were not present in a book or lecture, but had to be taught by example: to care deeply for your community, to take responsibility for your future, and to be unafraid of the unknown and untested ■

I came to Little River because I am dyslexic and the public school was not teaching me well, especially taking into account my disability. Little River exceeded expectations, helping me through everyday problems with learning. They gave me the tools, the attention, and most importantly, the time to help me learn and to become the functional college student that I am today.

Little River has prepared me for college by focusing on individual help with papers and projects. I'm currently attending Saint Lawrence University on a pre-med track. I was inspired by our science teacher to look for the scientific questions of everyday life and to exceed expectations on tests. College has you write a lot of papers



*AJ Walter
Class of '20*

for every class that you are in. Little River prepares you for writing long, complex papers. Being dyslexic I had a hard time writing and editing my papers but the teachers were able to help me step by step, especially with one-on-one help with editing papers.

Community is very important to me and I learned how to effectively lead community meetings by attending Little River. I have learned how to conduct group discussions, communicate, and how to properly deal with confrontations between fellow students. I did not realize how strong my skills were until I got into college. I have used these skills almost every single day I have been in college. I'm applying for jobs within my college community and the fact that I've learned these communication skills has prepared me for every type of job that requires leadership and teamwork ■

Although I haven't been a student there in nearly three years, my Little River experience is something I carry with me every day. Having attended Little River since kindergarten, I no doubt have a nostalgic soft spot for its brightly colored walls. However, my fondness for Little River is based as much on the tangible ways in which it prepared me for academic success as it is on the supportive community it provided. Currently, I am in my second year at Queen's University, studying Global Development and Political Science. My interest in global social justice was born at Little River, which inspired and encouraged critical engagement with current events and the

world around us both in and outside the classroom. An internship with North Country Public Radio, which I completed as part of my graduation requirements, led me to discover an interest in journalism and equipped me with the skills to pursue work in radio. I currently work for the campus station at Queen's University and am returning to NCPR this summer to serve as the Assistant Coordinator for the North Country at Work Project.

When I take stock of my time at Little River, the practical and academic skills I learned have nothing on the value of the Little River community. The level of

support and encouragement from teachers and peers alike is truly indescribable, and the school's tight-knit nature bonds you with the community for life. Nearly three years on, old classmates from Little River are still some of my dearest friends, despite the fact that we're now spread over multiple countries and hundreds of miles.



*Ana Williams-Bergen
Class of '19*

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A Word from (cont'd)

While home on break last winter, I was able to visit Little River while in session for the first time since my graduation, and it truly felt like coming home. When you choose to attend Little River, you join a second family full of love and laughter that will equip you with the skills to succeed in life, both academically and socially. If you're looking for a school with caring teachers, engaging academics, and a vibrant community, then congratulations, you found it! ■

Have your child come home happy!

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