

Nonviolent Communication A Language of Peace and Compassion

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LITTLE RIVER COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Little River News

You are preparing to drive your child to school and find they are not ready – again. Some harsh words are exchanged, and both of you start the day unhappy.

Three students are playing a game on the playground, and a fourth asks to join them. They say no. The student is in tears and walks away, feeling sad.

How do you resolve these situations in such a way that everyone’s needs are met?

At Little River, we are working with Nonviolent Communication (NVC), a method developed by Marshall Rosenberg, as a way to express our feelings and needs and hear the feelings and needs of others. Our nature is to

enjoy giving compassionately. What happens to get us off track and disconnect us from our nature, leading to increased tension or even violence? And how can we stay connected even in challenging circumstances?

NVC is a way to reframe how we express ourselves and hear others. With NVC, we show an awareness of what we observe, feel, and want and respectfully and empathetically hear that in others. It brings down the tension and defensiveness that can escalate during a conflict. It allows us to speak from the heart and hear one another.

So, how does this process work? First, we observe what is happening in a situation without judgment or evaluation. Next, we



Visual representation of nonviolent communication

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Life Skills Class



Mina working with the drill press

Over the last several years the Middle's science class has spent a few weeks each spring doing woodworking. I bring in a variety of boards, nails, screws, tools, paint, glue (lots of glue) and the kids build projects. Some come into class with a definite plan, others rummage around until they find materials that speak to them and then go from there. They learn to use various tools, they learn that thinking ahead is a good idea, and they have fun trying something different.

This semester we have set Thursday science aside as “skills” class. Rather than pursuing scientific excitement, we set out to practice everyday activities. We spent the first month or so on a pair of teacher-defined woodworking projects designed to give everyone exposure to the same set of tools and skills. The first project was a “flip car,” a wooden vehicle shaped in such a way that when you push down the rear of the car it does a summersault and lands on its

wheels. This task gave them a chance to use the drill press with one-on-one guidance from me, use the miter box for careful cutting, and to use a limited amount of glue so the wheels didn't get glued to the body of the car. Our second project was a classic open-topped

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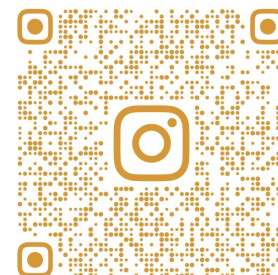
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Have your child come home happy

- Democratic School, K-12
- 8:1 Student/Teacher Ratio
- Individualized Curriculum
- Hands-on Learning

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Middle's Art Class

For as long as I have been the Middles teacher, students have been nearly unanimous in their insatiable desire for art class. This year, we were lucky to add Rachel Tengowski to our school. Rachel came with a background in art history and art education, and experience at MOMA, the Guggenheim, and the Frederick Remington Art Museum.

Under her guidance, the Middles' art class has produced a variety of creative projects since the start of the school year. The class is loosely structured around the elements of art — line, shape, space, value, form, texture, and color— and introduces the students to new art-making techniques and art history.

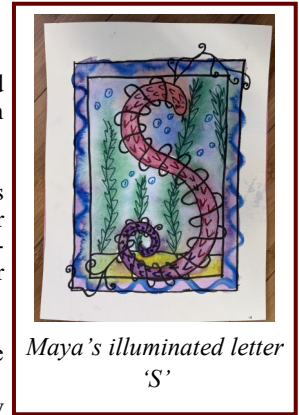
Starting with lessons and projects focused on line, this year the students have made pieces ranging from still lifes, continuous line drawings, a plein air watercolor, to a colorful patterned pumpkin inspired by the work of Yayoi Kusama. Most recently, they have thrown themselves into creating an illuminated letter inspired by the ornate letters found in Medieval manuscripts and featured prominently in our current read aloud book, "The

Beatryce Prophecy" by Kate DiCamillo.

With a wide range of skill levels and interests in the group, one of the main focuses of this class according to Rachel is creative exploration. In addition to larger projects, the students spend a lot of time sketching in their sketchbooks to prepare for larger projects, practice techniques and just for fun.

"I have been really impressed by the Middles students' creativity and excitement about art as well as ability to look closely at works of art and thoughtfully share what they see," said Rachel. "The students continue to surprise me with their attention to detail and willingness to try new things in art class, even when the task seems challenging."

Elena Pignone



Maya's illuminated letter 'S'



Heather's watercolor gourd and Leo's 3-D hand line drawing.



A scene from the Middle's plein air watercolor painting project.

El Día de los Muertos

Every year in the week leading up to November 2nd, students at Little River commandeer a corner of the community room and begin building a colorful *ofrenda* (altar) to celebrate El Día de los Muertos. The students place candles, skeletons, tissue paper flowers, and other colorful decorations on the table. As the day nears, they add pictures and mementos from loved ones who are deceased. Of course, the highlight for the kids is making sugar skulls and decorating them in unique and colorful ways, each one full of creativity and life.

El Día de los Muertos is a vibrant Mexican tradition that honors and celebrates the lives of deceased loved ones. Unlike many other mourning rituals, it is a joyful occasion. The holiday has roots in pre-Hispanic culture and dates back more than 3,000 years. It's not about mourning death but

rather honoring it as a natural part of life.

The holiday has also gained recognition worldwide as a unique cultural celebration of life and death, and it has been designated as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. Students learn about the cultural significance of the holiday in Mexico, and also form personal connections to the celebration.

Through this annual tradition we have learned about each other's



The Middles in front of their ofrenda.

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Día de los Muertos continued

grandparents, pets, family members and friends who have passed away. It has been a welcome opportunity to have light and joyful discussions about a subject that is often taboo in our culture.

Elena Pignone



Two of the many sugar skull creations!

The Adirondack Youth Climate Summit

Last week, five of the Olders attended the annual Adirondack Youth Climate Summit at the Wild Center in Tupper Lake. It was an empowering opportunity that taught me a lot. We spent two days learning about problems we face due to global warming and things we can do to combat the issues.

We began with a keynote speaker, Curt Stager, who taught us about climate science before attending workshops. The first workshop I attended was about composting. Other members of our group learned about upcycling and made use of old fabric.

Later in the day some of us took part in a workshop focused on water, and together we formed a powerful poem about the importance of our waters. Another member of our team attended *Climate and Activism: Documenting a changing climate through the visual arts*. Then we learned about building

climate resilience in a world affected by climate change, and to end the first day we were taught about the importance of UNESCO biospheres.

The second day started out with an address about the nature of change, from Jerome Foster, the youngest advisor to the White House. For the rest of the morning we discussed possible professions that have a hand in preventing climate change through the lens of an expo held at the summit. We also learned about the inspiring things other schools have done to benefit their communities. Then we were tasked in creating an impactful climate action plan for our school or community. Together we decided to monitor the water quality and the natural environment around Little River to keep our natural world healthy.

Attending the Adirondack Youth Climate Summit taught me that everyone is powerful. Since we are powerful enough to



Olders at the climate summit (from right to left) Walden, Max, Lidijia, Mia and Brianna.

change the climate unintentionally, imagine how much we could achieve if we all worked together. These inspiring words motivate me to do more to help mitigate the effects of climate change. I was reminded that it doesn't always have to be "doom and gloom" all the time. This opportunity was empowering and reminded me that it's not too late to take action.

Brianna Dixon

NVC continued

state what we feel - joy, amusement, anger, concern, or any of dozens of other emotions. Third, we identify our needs that connect with those feelings. These three elements clearly and honestly express how we are. Finally, we make a specific request stating what we want so that we can get our needs met.

The other side of this process is to go through those four steps for others - to hear their observations, feelings, needs, and requests. We connect with them to empathetically receive what would make their lives more fulfilling. NVC fosters respect, listening, empathy, and connection.

On the practical level, we are learning the language of feelings and needs to increase

connection, empathy, and compassion with others.

So what might be your feelings and needs when you find yourself late to get your child off to school? What might your child be feeling that contributed to that lateness or when those harsh words were exchanged? Can the two of you express your needs so that it may be possible for both of you to get your needs met and break patterns of thinking that lead to stress?

How about our students on the playground? What was going on for them to act as they did? What were the feelings and needs of each of those parties? What can they say so that each can hear the other compassionately? Stating their feelings

and needs can be an effective starting place to discover common ground.

Situations such as the above examples, where two or more people can feel disconnected, come up daily. NVC is a language of compassion that can help us work through the tension or celebrate our connection.

We are learning and practicing this language at school to bring us together and meet our needs. We are connecting with one another. As we meet our needs and the needs of others, we have the opportunity to make our lives more wonderful.

Steve Molnar

Farm to Table

The Youngers have been taking weekly trips over to Birdsfoot Farm to help Dulli with fall harvesting. They have learned about different veggies, how they grow and how they are harvested.

The kids have cut and sorted delicata squash, dug and pulled carrots, and dug for potatoes. Max shares, "I love it! I like getting dirty and digging stuff up!" In addition to their trips to the farm, the Youngers have taken



Jack with his carrot bounty!

their bounty and brought it into the kitchen back at school.

After learning about kitchen safety the youngers cleaned, chopped, scooped and roasted delicata squash. They also mixed up a maple glaze for their carrot roast. The Youngers shared their kitchen creations with the whole school! Vivian shares, "I like tasting the food that we make."

Nuala Woods



The Youngers creating their maple glaze.

Leon's Life Skills continued...

tool tote with a dowel handle. This project required more effort with the saw, a much larger bit in the drill press (scary!), and careful alignment of the pieces to make it all fit together at the end. The flip cars were a huge success, and the tool boxes turned out pretty well. The students enjoyed the woodworking, but they were also ready for the second unit of the class — cooking.

Way back when this group of Middles were in the Youngers room, we would make pizzas once each winter. It became a cherished tradition, and the kids missed it and asked if they could please make pizza in the Middles. Well, sure! And why stop at pizza? Our cooking started with apple crisp, a Little River fall classic. We made four huge pans of crisp, enough to share with the entire school for lunch on Thursday and then again for snack on Friday morning. The students peeled and chopped, measured and mixed and then did the dishes. (As of this writing, they are better at cooking than they are at doing dishes.) Upcoming classes will include fruit salads, a day of dips for chips, maybe pancakes, and definitely pizza. If a student steps up with a good theme for the day or a good recipe, we will give it a try. And regardless of what we cook, they will improve as dishwashers.

Leon Sawyko

Thank You

Joey Roiger a St. Lawrence CBL student for volunteering; **Jan Rutella**

and **Rebecca Pickens** for staff training and curriculum building surrounding structured language; **Jim Williams and Laurie Cameron** for presenting on Developmental Disabilities Awareness to the Youngers and Middles; **Renewal House** for presenting on consent and sexual abuse prevention to the Youngers, Middles and Olders; **Marsha Clements and Ali Coates** for driving during the Olders camping trip; **Dulli Tengeler** for hosting the Youngers, Middles and Olders at Birdsfoot Farm for harvesting fun and apple cider pressing; and our rotating **towel washers**.

Have your child come home happy!