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LITTLE RIVER COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Little River News

Trouble in Paradise

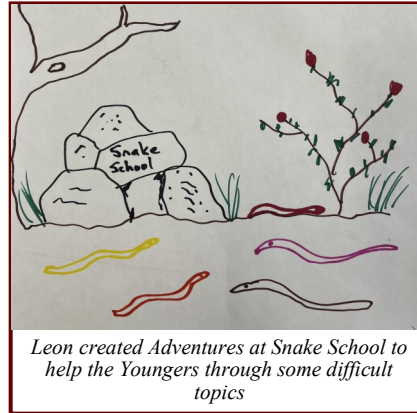
Although our motto is “Have Your Child Come Home Happy,” there are days when things don’t go perfectly. In any group of people conflicts arise, tensions boil over, and tempers flare. What makes Little River unique is how we handle these issues.

Just the other day a game on the playground turned sour and ended with a teacher stepping in to stop one student from kicking another. As this occurred at the end of the day, our response began first thing the next morning. Steve interviewed the two students involved in the physical altercation, and then called a meeting of the kids involved in the game. A meeting is a place where everyone can contribute their observations of the event in question, and then express their feelings, either the feelings from the time

of the incident or the feelings about it in retrospect. They also hear what everyone else was feeling and how the event affected their classmates. As a facilitator, Steve makes sure everyone has a chance to speak, and that everyone is heard and understood. Sometimes these meetings start as a chance to vent, which is what happened in this meeting, but after the venting the kids are ready to think about the situation and what may have triggered it. In this case the students were able to identify some unfulfilled needs on the part of a particular student. In the end, the group brainstormed new tools and strategies to meet those needs and avoid such a conflict in the future. As the first meeting came to a close, they agreed to check in a couple of days later and see how things were going.

Maybe it was the phase of the moon, or

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Leon created Adventures at Snake School to help the Youngers through some difficult topics

Encouraging New Families



Esta and their daughter Ira

My name is Esta Tovstiadi, and my daughter Ira is a student in the Youngers’ classroom. Our family chose Little River because we wanted an educational experience encouraging a balance between both independence and interdependence, and that fostered whole-child learning in an environment that respected children’s natural abilities and limitations.

Little River is more than just a school. It is a village. Parents, teachers and children build community through potlucks and special events such as the end of year camp out and the winter festival. Parents mingle and connect at drop-off and pickup. The three different classes interact during combined activities and morning meetings. In the Youngers’ classroom, each child has a job that changes each week, helping them learn to take ownership of their space and collaborate with their peers - building the village which they envision.

The Youngers’ classroom can be LOUD and exciting, but it can also be quiet and reflective. Children are active participants in their education, and there are times when a groundswell of interest re-routes the course of a lesson. Aubree is not just a teacher - she is a mentor, nurturer and

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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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Also find us on Facebook and Instagram

A Little Place to Explore

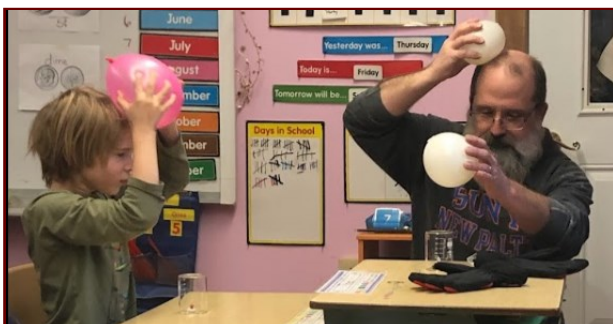
Three times a week I put down my graphing calculator and my notes on electric fields or my problem sets on Newton's Laws and head downstairs to the Youngers' room. There I meet a group of young scholars ready to explore the most fundamental scientific question: how does the world around us work?

A simple container of water is always a good start. With a dishpan of water and a pile of random objects from around the room, I can introduce the scientific method.

First they predict which items will float, then they test their predictions, and draw conclusions. If one of those items happens to be a ball of modelling clay, the next task is to "change that ball of clay so it will float." Some students will take a tiny bit of clay and see if it floats (nope, but a sensible place to start). Others will try to make a flat sheet of clay, and others will make a boat. Once the boat idea spreads around the group, we add pennies to see if the boat will float when given some cargo. Predict, experiment, conclude, adjust, experiment again. Sounds like science. Maybe even engineering.

The key is exploration. When it is time to study magnets, I hand out magnets and they start looking for objects the magnet will stick to, and objects it will not. Eventually someone discovers that magnets will stick to each other. Sometimes this lesson comes at a cost: good magnets can pinch little fingers if you aren't careful. Someone else will point out that sometimes magnets repel each other. And just like that, the ideas of

magnetic poles, forces of attraction and repulsion, and even how a compass works are topics for consideration. When we give the kids a little space to explore, they can open some interesting doors.



Leon and Weston experimenting with static electricity in Youngers' Science

Nature walks are another way to examine the world around us. We get outside in all kinds of weather, and if everyone is properly dressed, nature walks are very popular. In the fall we go looking for flowers, seeds, and nests. We talk about pine cones (and spruce cones), milkweed pods, and those fat blobs on the stems of the goldenrod. In the winter, we look for signs of animal life. Even on the bleakest days we find tracks near the compost heap and deer poop in the woods. As spring returns, we admire vole trails through the grass, shake pollen from the spruces, taste the ramps near the big maple, and rejoice in the apple and hawthorn blooms near the end of the school year. One year we saw a raccoon napping way up in an ash tree, and a frog or snake is always a source of excitement and chaos.

Another aspect of science is the vast quantity of facts that constitute scientific knowledge. The Youngers often express an interest in a particular kind of animal, or a natural disaster. In response I create a slide show of facts, images and short video clips to give them an overview of the topic. These presentations often produce a lot of excellent questions. The kids think about each other's questions and offer possible answers. This kind of exchange gives them a chance to weigh the merits of various ideas or explanations. They also get to practice disagreeing in polite ways and changing their minds when they hear new ideas.

Science gives the Youngers an opportunity to explore the world around them in a variety of ways. It shows them the scientific method, gives them the opportunity to explore their world, and feeds their innate curiosity about nature. Science with the Youngers is also a treat for the teacher: I get to spend time with curious, enthusiastic, energetic people who are fascinated by just about everything.

Leon Savyko

In What Book....

This year, the Middles have undertaken a massive reading project together. Between December and April, we are reading all 16 books for this year's Battle of the Books competition. The Battle of the Books is a reading competition for students in fourth through sixth grades. The competition involves teams of students reading a predetermined set of books and then answering questions about them in a quiz-style competition. The goal is to promote reading while also fostering teamwork and friendly competition.

Our local Battle of the Books competitions are organized by local librarians. The winning team from each library's Battle goes on to a regional competition to face winning teams from other North Country Library System libraries in St. Lawrence, Lewis, and Jefferson counties. Battle of the Books

did not happen for a number of years locally due to COVID, and so a generation of Little River students missed this rite of passage. This year's competition will take place April 29 at the Canton Free Library, with the winning team moving on to the regional competition in Ogdensburg on May 20th.

Two teams of Little River students will be competing in this year's Battle with one team being coached by an Older who is volunteering her time to prepare the students. To be successful in the competition, students need to have a deep understanding of the books they've read, including characters, settings, themes, and plot details. They should also be able to identify the author and title of each book based on short descriptions or quotes provided in the competition. Students can practice by quizzing each other on the



Gigi and Emilie in their book fort

books or participating in mock competitions.

During the competition, teams are asked trivia questions about the books. The questions are in the form of "In what book ..." and teams must

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In What Book...continued



Barrett enjoying a quick read

answer with the title and author of the correct book. Even though not every Middle chose to compete in the Battle, it has been quite a journey reading the books together.

The Middles have managed to stay on a rigorous reading schedule even through illnesses, holidays, and snow days. When 'life happens' and students have fallen behind on a book, they've worked hard to make up the reading when they had time. It has also been nice to have the shared experience of reading the same books. As a class we

are able to reference the events in the books when the themes come up in class. After we read each book, we have a brief discussion on the book. Each student takes a turn asking a higher level thinking (i.e. evaluating or analyzing) question about the book which we then discuss. Next year, most of the Middles will likely be outside of the 4th through 6th grade age range for BOTB and so we will likely not repeat this class project. However we will definitely be looking for ways to carry with us this experience of reading so many books all together.

Elena Pignone

Women's History

The Olders are exploring the rights (and lack of rights) of women throughout US history. They started with the Pilgrims, Puritans, witch trials, and then the making of the US Constitution, and found very limited spaces for women to participate in society.

Many strong women with a clear vision of equity and justice came from the abolition movement and started the women's movement with the Seneca Falls declaration in 1848. Their effort finally came to some fruition with the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, establishing the right to vote for women.

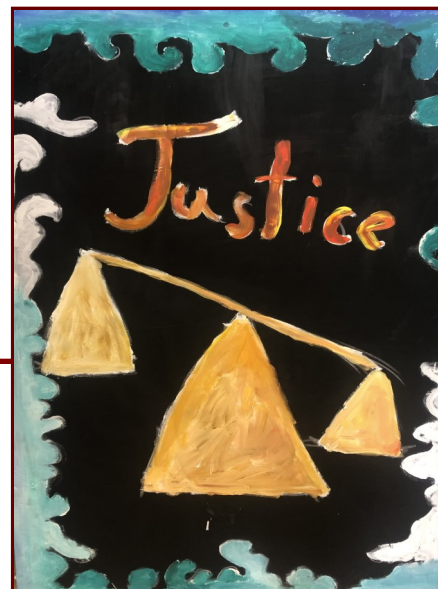
The students discuss and marvel at the state of women's rights throughout history and compare and contrast them with the justice, rights, and politics of today. They each did a short research

project on women leaders of the 19th century and made presentations to the class. Photos of these women line the walls. Maddie studied changes in fashion through this period, connecting them to the politics and events of the day.

Mia asked in class today why there were so many groups fighting for suffrage and if they would not have been more effective had they been one large group. We discussed the different strategies and viewpoints of some suffrage groups and compared that to climate change activism of today and the civil rights movement of the 1960s. They could see there is a long picture in the struggle for rights – it was 72 years from the declarations at Seneca Falls until the right to vote was passed in 1920. The students could imagine that the struggle for climate justice may take a long time even with many groups and strategies working together.

In the struggle to gain rights, justice, and equity, the right to vote is only one point on a large timeline. Upcoming themes for the rest of the semester will include topics like the Equal Rights Amendment, feminism, issues around abortion, the state of women's rights today, and the movement to gain recognition and rights for LGBTQ+ people.

Steve Molnar



*Artwork
Collectively created by the Olders*

Trouble continued

something about the weather, but at the same time Steve was working with the situation described above, Aubree, Nuala, and Leon were working on an issue with the Youngers. The teachers had observed a group of students excluding an individual during several recess periods. Although some of the children had tried to change the situation, they were unsuccessful. While allowing the kids to sort out conflicts on their own is an important part of our process, there comes a time when the teachers need to step in. Aubree called a meeting and we gathered on the rug in the Youngers' room. To help the Youngers express their feelings, Aubree and Nuala spread a pile of "feeling cards" around the rug. These cards either have words that describe feelings ("happy," "confused," "sad," "lonely") or emoji-like images that

express the feelings pictorially. Students listened to a story about a group of friends in a situation similar to theirs, and then chose cards from the rug that matched their feelings about the story. The ensuing discussion brought out more details and gave everyone a chance to describe what it must be like to be excluded from a game. This first meeting was a good start, but more work needed to be done. Later in the day Aubree continued the meeting, and during that session several students had "aha!" moments and found ways to try to resolve the problem.

Problems arise at Little River as they do in any group of people. Here we work collaboratively to find solutions to our problems. We start with observations and feelings and work our way to a consensus

about how to move forward. Sometimes the first try doesn't work, and we need to continue the process. Our approach to resolving conflicts involves the students and is built on their feelings and needs, and their ability to listen to the feelings and needs of others.

Leon Sawyko

Chess Craze

A chess wave has hit Little River and the students cannot get enough! Nico in the Olders room has always been up for a game of chess, but morning chess games between Liam and Enzo started to attract spectators with many students showing an interest in playing. There is only so much time before class begins each day so the teachers began brainstorming ways to incorporate chess into our day. Elena began with an introductory chess lesson and activities for those interested in playing, but who did

not have background knowledge. Once everyone understood the pieces and how they move, they were off!

Elias Nelson, a junior at Little River with an affinity for chess, expressed interest in coming during recess on Thursdays to form a Chess Club. During those days, the students from both the Middles and Youngers classes congregate to play chess, find new strategies, and of course, have fun.

Colden shares, "I just like playing chess, it is one of my hobbies that I have been doing it since I was five. I like that I get to play at school, because it is fun and people who may not play at home get to play at school." Liam adds, "I learn new things from Elias like en passant and castling that I never knew about." Lauren stated, "It's good. It is fun basically." The students look forward to Chess Club each Friday and it is a joy to see them so involved in the great game of chess.

Nuala Woods



Remi and Enzo, enjoying a game of chess during their break.

Encouraging Families continued

role-model for the children. In a mixed-ages class, it is not easy to teach multiple levels of math, spelling and reading, but Aubree and Nuala create schedules and lesson plans that meet the needs of all the varying abilities.

These are a few phrases I hear frequently from Ira: "I'm not ready to leave!" (at the end of the day) ; "I love school!" ; and, my favorite, an anticipatory "Is today a school day?"

Sending my child to Little River is one of the best decisions my family made regarding our children's education. There is no place like it in the North Country. I encourage new families to learn more about our school and see if it would be a good match for your family, too.

Esta Tovstiadi

Thank You

Elizabeth and Marnie Salisbury-Becht, Anna Sommer, Esta Tovstiadi, and Sarah Oakley for help with the monthly author party in the Youngers' room; **Jim Williams** for presenting on Developmental Disabilities Awareness to the Youngers and Middles; **Jeff Miller and Bob Dixon** for physics supplies; **Kevin Irwin, Everett Smith, Brianna Dixon, Zoya Kocho-Williams and Claude Aldous** for music at the Winterfest; **Anna Sommer, Peter Pettengill, Dennis Morreale, Elizabeth Salisbury-Becht, Emily Dixon, Nico Petroccione, Esta Tovstiadi, Maddie Hansen-Schreiber, Aaron Iverson, Sasha Kocho-Williams, Kelly Charlton, Ali Coates and Rebecca Pickens** for the many activities provided at Winterfest and **Brianna Dixon** for coaching BOTB. Thank you to all the families that helped out with goodies at the Winterfest!

Have your child come home happy!

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