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LITTLE RIVER COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Little River News

The Great Outdoors

We go outside. A lot. Every day. We go out during recess, at lunch time, on field trips, and as part of our academic curriculum. Little River students attend school in a beautiful natural setting, and they take advantage of it.

There are two periods built into our daily schedule that allow time for eating and playing. At 10:00 we have a snack, and shortly after the doors crash open as the Middles and Youngers hustle outside for break. They also have a half hour recess after lunch. The kids

go out in all sorts of weather. As I write this in early March, they have been on the playground every day of 2025 in snow, cold, sun,

and wind. In fact, the only days they miss are when it is raining really hard. They spend their time running, swinging, playing tag and climbing on the pirate ship. The sandbox has been under a foot or more of snow since January, but in more mild weather there is a lot of action in the sand.

Same with the basketball court.

The current rage is going to the stream, where the Middles spend most of their outside time, and the Youngers get a special treat when a teacher is available to go with them. The stream affords opportunities for both imaginative and physical play.

The Youngers are often in the woods behind the playground, where they play with sticks, build houses, hang on the trees and, in the winter, look

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The Olders fall 2024 camping trip in the Adirondacks.

A Tribute to Beanie, the Donkey



Little River has cared for three cute miniature donkeys (Beanie, Sammy, and Lily) over the past ten years. Beanie and Sammy came to us through our 90-year-old neighbor, Isis. It worked out that she cared for them during the warm months, and the school had them during the colder months. Both Beanie and Sammy arrived pregnant and gave birth at the school. Sammy's baby is Lily, and we moved Beanie's baby to another farm because she was a bit nippy.

There is a group of about six students who serve as the donkey caretakers. They feed and water them, shovel the poop out of the barn, pet and brush them, and give them lots of love. The donkeys are very affectionate and enjoy human attention.

Sadly, Beanie died a couple of weeks ago. Several students brought to our attention that they had found Beanie on the ground in the snow, and she could not get up. The vet came out to

examine her. Beanie had not been thriving this winter and the donkey crew had given her a thick jacket and grain in addition to her regular hay ration. Yet her turn for the worse was still a surprise.

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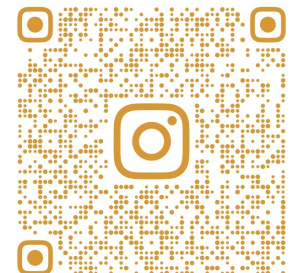
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Have your child come home happy

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

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100th Day of School

Each February, the Youngers celebrate the 100th day of school. As many students are in Kindergarten this is a day to celebrate their accomplishments and growth since the start of school. Students brainstorm and bring in projects surrounding the number 100. This year there were 100 piece puzzles, 100 homemade gummies, 100 screwdrivers, 100 munchkins, and more! The students practiced counting to 100 by 1s, 2s, 5s and 10s and played games rolling a dice, adding up each roll until they reached 100. The youngers also began a goal to read 100 books, which they completed upon returning after mid February break. Congratulations!

Nuala Woods



Max's 100 homemade gummies.

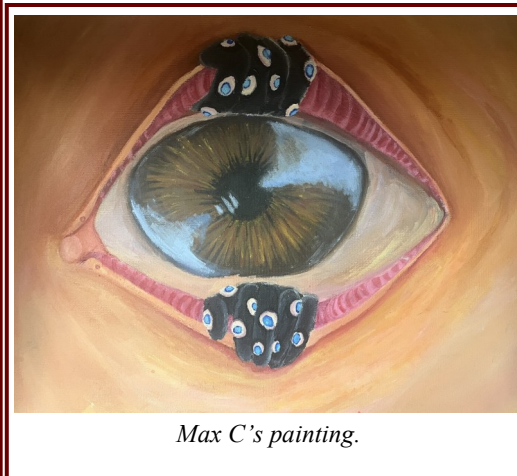


The Youngers gave a leopard 100 spots.

Art Feature



Maya's (above) and Weston's (left) Matisse inspired cut outs.



Max C's painting.



Colden's tessellation.

Estrellas in the Middles

In a small, multi-age classroom, students and teachers tend to know each other really well. But for the rest of the year, Middles will get to know even more fun facts about each other while sharpening their Spanish skills. Middles are taking turns being the *estrella* (star) of the room.

The *estrella* is interviewed in Spanish about their hobbies, plans for the future, hidden talents, etc. Parents are then asked to send in photos to help illustrate their answers. These family photos are combined with the interview to make a special slideshow about our *estrella* which is then presented to the class (in Spanish) and shared with the family.

So far we've learned that some students love trying strange food (*comida extraña*) while others stick to *comida normal*. Some of our students have travelled the world while

others have stayed closer to home. As far as language learning, this is the perfect activity because the students are focused on the meaning of the sentences rather than getting bogged down in the details of grammar. Students are not even thinking about whether the questions are in English or Spanish, they are just intent on learning new facts about their peers.

Middles look forward to the chance to dress up in silly costumes during their interview, and especially, getting a sparkle star pen, which all *estrellas* have bestowed upon them by the outgoing *estrella*. Students said they look forward to seeing pictures of their peers, and Signe adds "I like the slideshow because I get to learn about people."

Elena Pignone



The Middles latest star, Lauren.

Read, Recite, Share Your Voice

Our Poetry Out Loud journey began in December, when the Olders had a series of three workshops with Twinkle Burke, from Teachers and Writers Collaborative. Poetry Out Loud (POL) is a national recitation contest. Twinkle had us read and analyze poems, write response poems, and finally, we each chose one poem to recite from Poetry Out Loud's anthology of 1,200 poems. We then memorized our poems and perfected the performance of them. The sessions challenged us to think deeply about what we were reciting and encouraged us to step outside of our comfort zones. In January, we had a class contest with criteria based on physical presence, articulation, understanding, and accuracy. In the end, three of us advanced to the regional level.

For six weeks, we met weekly after school to practice. We each had to memorize and recite three poems for the regional competition. We chose a wide range of poems from the POL anthology, including one written in 700 B.C. We gave each other feedback, tried

numerous different styles of recitation, and ate popcorn. Together with Steve, we developed the most striking possible way to present our poems. Our recitation got stronger every week, and our poems gained new meaning.

Last month, we met at the Adirondack Center for Writing in Saranac Lake for the semifinal. There were five contestants, the three of us and two other teens from Saranac Lake. The contest took place over three rounds, in which each participant recited one of their poems. After all fifteen poems had been presented, the winner and runner-up were announced. It was a lot of fun to participate in this nationwide poetry contest.

The New York State finals will take place in March in New York City. Two winners from each of the nine regions will participate in the final. We are very excited to cheer Aubrey on from Little



Max, Aubrey and Brianna at the Poetry Out Loud competition in Saranac Lake.

River as she goes to the New York State finals, representing the North Country!

Brianna Dixon

Outdoors continued



The Middles down by the stream.

for animal tracks. A shout-out here for Rachel, our aide, who is responsible for being out on the playground in all sorts of weather, watching for safety concerns and helping resolve conflicts between the kids.

The outdoors also plays a role in our academic classes. Rachel and Ola take the art classes outside for inspiration or *plein-air* sessions. Elena taught the Middles to use compasses a couple of years ago, and Steve had the Olders out experimenting with GIS mapping on the property. Nuala takes the Youngers to Birdsfoot to harvest veggies in the fall and plant seeds in the spring. Science classes go outside for all sorts of reasons in all seasons. The youngers tap

learn to identify trees and do forest inventories during biology. In Earth science we visit local mineral collecting sites and other geologically interesting locations around St. Lawrence County. Over the years we have also worked outdoors in construction class and for community service hours. Physical education and cooperative games classes are always better outside.

Field trips offer another opportunity to be out in the fresh air. We hike at Stone Valley, go to Birdsfoot to make apple cider in the fall or for a marshmallow roast at "The Sacred Spot," (also known as Coon Tree Knoll), and walk to Hart's Falls. We have skied at Titus, skated on the Rideau Canal, and climbed Mt Arab. Perhaps the greatest

maples for syrup in the spring and go on nature walks year-round. The Middles have participated in a community science project called Monitor My Maple for almost 10 years, which requires weekly trips to our maple trees for a month each spring and fall. The Olders

outdoor field trip is the Olders annual camping trip to the Adirondacks, where we canoe and go hiking for three days in the fall. Many alumni tell tales years later about the food, the fun, and the challenges of the camping trips.

Little River emphasizes the importance of being outside in all seasons and for all kinds of reasons. Some of our readers might remember that we were outside all day, every day in the fall of 2020 as a part of our COVID risk reduction plan. Although that was extreme, abundant fresh air is good for our physical, mental, and emotional health, so put down this newsletter and go outside!

Leon Sawyko



The Youngers enjoying sledding!

Fundraising Appeal

Please consider donating to Little River to support this dynamic educational alternative. Little River fills a unique niche in the schooling options available in the North Country.

We are just starting a new fundraising campaign to raise teacher salaries 23% to \$40,000/year. If you have a little extra and are inclined to give, we invite you to make a donation of any amount to the school. Your contribution is appreciated.

To make a tax-deductible donation, you can send a check to Little River Community School, 1227 CR 25, Canton, NY 13617, or go to our Pay Pal Giving Fund at <https://www.paypal.com/US/fundraiser/charity/142220>.

Donkeys continued...

We moved Beanie to a hay nest we made in the barn and laid her there. She appeared comfortable but lay flat on her side most of the day, hardly moving. The other two donkeys seemed curious at times, but otherwise, we had them eating hay all day to keep them out of the way. Throughout the day, many kids came out to say goodbye with hugs and some tears. Beanie died later that afternoon, and we buried her in the field. We were guessing that Beanie was about eight years old when she came here, so she would have been eighteen when she died.

The next morning, the students made plans for a simple ceremony. We gathered together in the donkey pasture where we buried Beanie, held hands, and made our silent wishes while spreading handfuls of grain on her grave. The next day was Valentine's Day, and many of the Middles wrote Valentine's wishes to Beanie and buried them on the site. We plan to spread wildflower seeds there in the spring. Beanie was loved and a part of our community. Sammy and Lily continue to bring us great joy.

Steve Molnar



Nicky's pastel walrus and Brianna's painted cross country scene.

Thank You

Wymberley Pfallmer from Bluebird Body-work Studio, **Ron Tavemier**, an A&P professor from SUNY Canton, **Sara Elliot**, LCSW, **Paula Youmell** from Wise Woman Nurse, **Kristy Coyle** from Cornell Cooperative Extension, **Will Trithart** from Big Spoon Kitchen, and **Jamey Merkel** from St. Lawrence Health Initiative all for volunteering in Olders Health Class; **Emily Dixon** for teaching the Middles knitting; **Katrina Hebb**, **Tihitina**, **Berinuca** and **Emory Telemos Dora** for visiting and teaching about Ethiopia to all age groups; the **fundraising committee** for efforts in raising salaries; **Jessica Burgoyne** for donating books; families and community members for help with Winterfest 2025; and our rotating **towel washers**.

Have your child come home happy!