

Celebrating 20 Years!



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LITTLE RIVER COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Little River News

School in a Tent

We have largely held our classes outside in three large tents throughout the fall, even now as we approach mid-November. Our motto of the year has been “Little River is Cool, Exciting, and Different”. Yes, it has been different.

This summer as we discussed our reopening safety plan, the idea came up that we should spend as much time as possible outside. Families embraced that idea and added that we should also take advantage of our outdoor time doing activities we don’t always get a chance to do.

School in a tent is a rather unique experience. We are outside in the elements all day long. There have been mornings where we scraped the frost off our desks, sunny afternoons where we sought the shade of trees, and rainy days where we have been

just plain damp. The wind has proven to be the biggest challenge. Not only can it tear at the plastic sides of our tents, but it is also loud as it blows across the tent. It is like being on

a boat at sea in a storm with the tents rocking and squeaking and the sound of the wind on the plastic just roars.

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Read aloud with Leon

Learning on the Farm

Although our whiteboards and desks are under the tents, our classrooms this fall have extended much further. The Middles and Youngers have enjoyed frequent trips to Birdsoot Farm this year.

Under Dulli’s patient eye, they have picked potatoes,

green beans, and carrots.

Dulli has graciously welcomed each group every week and taught them the ins and outs of harvesting fall crops. Nuala, who works at Birdsoot part-time, also helps both groups pick vegetables.

The Middles always return to the tent with smiles on their faces and their arms full of fresh organic produce to bring home. The Youngers love working with Dulli and look forward to going each week.

By: Elena Pignone

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

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School in a Tent (continued from page 1)

Yet in the midst of all this, the students and staff just collectively ignore the adversity. When it is loud, we speak up. When it is cold, we put on more layers. When it rains we scooch the desks by the open wall forward so they don't get dripped on. Class goes on without missing a beat. These kids are tough.

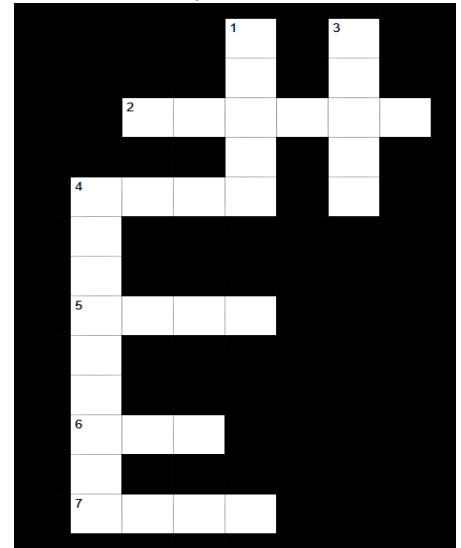
There is a certain joy to being outside. We have fresh air. We are in tune with the cycles of the day. We can hear the birds singing and the donkeys are only ten feet away in their pen peering into our tents.

We have adapted our tents to facilitate our classroom activities. Leon and the Olders hung 4' x 8' whiteboards in each tent so that we have a big place to write class notes, daily schedules, and solve

math problems. Each student has a hook on a board attached to the poles to hang their coat or extra layers. The single desks have a space for books, but the kids also have a basket to keep other items. There is a little chaos with teachers running back and forth to have all the materials they need for class. We have alcohol spray bottles and rags to wipe the desks several times a day, especially before snack and lunch breaks. There is artwork hanging with clothespins on a string around the sides. These tents have been our new normal. We will be spending time indoors during the winter in well-ventilated rooms, six feet apart, but we will continue to spend as much time as we can outdoors daily.

By: Steve Molnar

Crossword by Brianna Dixon



Down

- 1. A puff in the sky
 - 3. Another word for stream
 - 4. It is transformed
- Across**
- 2. A pretty plant
 - 4. A feathered insect
 - 5. A big plant
 - 6. A pesky insect in the house
 - 7. It has four seasons

"It's a little different, but I think we are doing pretty well with it. It's still Little River with more technology, more masks, and more washing hands."

-Maddie Hansen-Schreiber

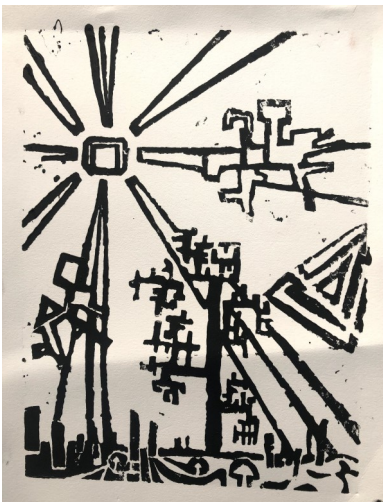
Adventures in August

Every August the staff at Little River spends time getting the building ready for the new school year and attending teacher training workshops. This year was a little different as we did all of our normal preparations and made the changes necessary to reopen in the midst of a global health emergency.

We also held a graduation ceremony for five seniors, which had been postponed from the Spring.

Our daily staff meetings took place in a socially distant manner on the basketball court. Instead of slumping into the

community room couches and putting our heads together around the coffee table, we sat, in our face masks, 6 feet apart at a huge set of folding tables. Our conversations centered on topics like hand washing stations, traffic flow through the school, and the virtues of teaching outdoors. In addition to purchasing paper and glue sticks and textbooks, we also bought hand sanitizer and soap dispensers, paper towels and ethanol, face masks and thermometers. We worked to refine the policies Steve drafted on topics like how often we would wash hands, visitors at school, and field trips.



Print by Elwood Warren-Kuelgen

When the sit-down portion of the day was over, the real fun began. Traditionally, Little River has been a place that emphasized learning in groups and working with partners. We shared materials like scissors and

colored pencils, and sat close together around tables. All of these behaviors had to change this year and the changing behaviors required physical adjustments around the building. Out went the couches and classroom tables. In came the individual desks and chairs. No more loft (too small), bean bag chairs (too hard to clean), shared supplies (too grubby), or cloth towels at the sinks (yuck).

Social distancing required that we reconsider which groups used which classroom spaces. The largest group this year is the Middles, and they did not fit in their downstairs classroom. In fact, they needed the two upstairs rooms that have a connecting door. Elena can stand in the doorway and speak to all of the students at the same time. The Olders have the other upstairs classroom, which holds seven kids plus a teacher at 6-foot distancing. The Youngers moved to the larger downstairs room. As a consequence of shifting every classroom, all the relevant supplies, books, and furniture also had to move. We ran up

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Finding Their Way

According to the internet, Benjamin Franklin once said, "Out of adversity comes opportunity." This perfectly sums up teaching outdoors this year. We have been forced to scrap some of the activities we normally do and instead to think of activities that lend themselves to the outdoors. This has led to some wonderful experiences. The Middles for example have taken a couple hikes to a special place in Birdsfoot that they call the 'Sacred Spot.' This rocky knoll overlooks a beaver dam and has served as a place of exploration and inspiration for us this year. In a 'normal' year we would likely have stayed in the comfort of our classroom and not strayed so far.

The Middles have also learned an



Print by Jackson Close-Madore

important life skill: how to navigate with a map and compass. Students were overwhelmed at first by all the parts of the compass, but once we got rolling we made quick progress.

First, they learned how to take directional bearing, i.e. how to find out what direction they are facing. They practiced around the school yard for a few days and finally utilized their skills to lead them to Halloween candy using only their compass and a set of bearings.

Of course, the Middles always find a way to make things quirky and creative, so instead of the old standby 'put the red in the shed,' they changed the slogan to 'put the dark pink in the silo.'

Middles also learned about topographical maps. They made some terrains out of sand and then mapped them, and looked at some topo maps of the area. Finally, they learned to triangulate their location. Triangulating allows you to find your location if you are lost but you have a topographical map and a compass. Hopefully these activities will pick back up in the Spring.

By: Elena Pignone



School in the Time of Corona

The top priority for the school is to be a safe space for students and staff in this time of Corona, while creating an inviting academic atmosphere and a place for students to have fun and be themselves. That was a tall order this summer after having had several months of distance learning in the spring.

Initially, we had to wait for state guidelines to create a reopening plan that substantially addressed safety concerns based on what is known about the virus. Critical to controlling the virus is wearing a mask, maintaining a six-foot distance, frequent hand washing, working in cohort groups, frequent sanitizing of commonly touched surfaces, screening for COVID symptoms, and record-keeping for contact tracing.

Inside the building, we set up the

classrooms with desks spaced six feet apart and purchased HEPA filters for each room that filter out particles smaller than the virus. We are set up to make strategic use of open windows and doors to move air through the room. One parent shared studies that showed the spread of the virus is reduced with proper humidity levels and we added humidifiers to each room.

Students are greeted outside each morning with a hand-held thermometer and a list of questions about COVID symptoms to be certain that everyone attending school is feeling healthy. Parents stay outside.

We report daily to the NY Department of Health and meet weekly with the county Public Health Department.

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Adventures in August (continued from page 1)

and down the stairs a lot.

To preserve the cohort structure as much as possible, we built a "hallway" along one edge of the community room, so kids headed to the bathroom wouldn't mix with a group of kids using the community room for a project. The hallway is a sheet of heavy, clear vinyl hung from the ceiling in such a way that allows airflow above and below the vinyl.

In one corner of the community room we hung a curtain to create a sick bay. If

a child becomes ill during the day, we can isolate her from the rest of the group until a parent can come and take her home. There is a cot and a chair in the corner and we can open the window for good airflow.

Did I mention the plumbing? After 20 years of lidless toilets, each bathroom now has a lid on the toilet seat so flushing can't aerosolize any nasty viruses. We built and installed a handwashing sink outside, so each cohort could have their own sink. As always, we had great support from the families, with a large group of parents and students helping

with plumbing, moving furniture, setting up tents, assembling the tent walls, and carrying stuff from one place to another.

As we roll into the colder months, many of our outdoor adjustments will be left behind as we move back indoors. Social distancing, hand washing, and masks will be even more important than they are now. In our next newsletter we will let you know how it all works out. Stay tuned!

By: Leon Sawyko

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School in the Time of Corona (continued)

Thanks!

With all of this in place, our students have been able to come to school five days a week in a year when everything is anything but normal. Several of our satellite families have elected to do their program exclusively from home. Here it is mid-November and we have held all but a few days of our studies outside. The kids are great. Mask wearing is a normal part of our life as are all of the safety procedures. We carry on in the face of the obvious challenges, provide an academic program, and are thrilled that we have found a way to be together in a manner suitable to these Corona times.

By: Steve Molnar



Woodland Creature by Ella MacKentley-Thorton

Halloween Parade

Little River students got to do something a little different this year for Halloween.

Halloween is not traditionally a day celebrated at Little River, but this particular sunny fall day was filled with treasure hunts, games and a costume parade!



Artwork by Remi Oakley

Dulli Tengeler, Eric Potash, and Bob Wagner for weekly gardening; **Claude Aldous, Phil LaMarche, Rob Carr, Steven Clark** for tent-set up and indoor set up; **Kelsey Adams** for tent sides; **Jackson Close** for the work he put in all through August and the yardwork; **Finn Pignone** for yardwork and moving boxes; **David Katz** for use of his barn; **Tobias Maendel, Emily Dixon, and Sarah Oakley** for moving furniture; **Benchmark** for SmartBoards; **St. Mary's School and St. Lawrence University** for furniture; **Sarah Oakley** for weekly Yoga; **Sue Willson** for lessons in bird watching; **Kelsey Adams** for sharing her ritual; **Josh Akins** for installing the outside sink; **Ann Petroccione** for answering COVID medical questions; **Elizabeth Becht** for reviewing immunization records; **Marnie Salisbury** for helping set up the Youngers classroom; **Veigh Mehan** for offering a workshop on social emotional health; **Steve Fetcie** for years of I.T. work; The continuous outgoing support from **Dr. Williams, the Board of Health, Dr. Dana McGuire and St. Lawrence County Public Health.**

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