



FRIENDS SCHOOL OF PORTLAND

An independent Quaker day school for grades preschool – 8

January Newsletter 2009

207-781-6321 Mackworth Island, Falmouth ME 04105

www.friendsschoolofportland.org

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<http://friendsschoolofportland.org/giving.htm>

News

Two join the Board of Directors:

Jeff Peterson, pediatrician with InterMed and attender at Portland Friends Meeting

Nolan Thompson, therapist and former ombudsman for campus diversity and equity at USM

Calendar

Prospective Family Open House followed by a free concert by children's musician, Matt Loosigian	Saturday, January 24, 10-11:30
Community Chorus rehearsal	Monday, January 26, 3 p.m.
Prospective Parents Visiting Day	Thursday, January 29, 9-11 a.m.
Step Up Night: visit next year's teacher	Thursday, January 29, 5:45-6:45 p.m.
Deadline for priority enrollment new students only	Monday, February 2
Board of Directors Meeting	Tuesday, February 3, 5:30 p.m.
Parents Association Meeting	Wednesday, February 11, 6-8 p.m.
FACTS Grants & Assessment forms due for currently enrolled families	Wednesday, February 11 (online is best)
Red Day with GBSD (calendar change)	Tuesday, February 10, 10-11:30 a.m.
February Break NO CLASSES	Monday, February 16 – Friday, February 20
FACTS Grants & Assessment forms due for new applicant families	Wednesday, February 25 (online is best)
Potluck dinner & Contra Dance with the band, Crooked Stovepipe	Friday, February 27, 5:30 – 6:30 p.m. 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.



FSP hosted Quakers from New England and they joined us for a celebration of Martin Luther King's 80th birthday, directed by music teacher, Ellie Chase

Reflections from the Head of School

This newsletter is arriving about a week later than usual because of the significant and special events in the life of the school and the country. You all received the January 7th EXTRA! edition of the newsletter with a link to the wonderful Portland Press Herald story by staff writer, Kelley

Bouchard. This story was prompted, of course, by the Obama family's decision to send Malia and Sasha to Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C. If you have not yet read the story, treat yourself; there is a link on the FSP website. We continue to glow from this article which seemed to capture the essence of Quaker education as well as FSP. It is always reassuring to have an objective voice affirm the values that we believe are evident in our school. It was heartening to hear that teaching critical thinking through inquiry, creating a peaceful setting through reflection, and giving testimony to our beliefs through our actions were so apparent to the reporter. The article brought to mind last January's panel of distinguished, Quaker educated, Maine residents who had attended six different Friends schools. Remarkably, each one talked about learning to think critically, to put beliefs into action, and the importance of silence in meeting for worship. Quaker values and education do make a difference in children's lives, in the quality of the school community, and in the world.

This resonated all the more for me in the next fortnight. On Friday of last week, we hosted 30 Quakers from Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut to show them the school. They joined us at the assembly in which the students from each class performed music, songs, and readings to celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday. On Monday, at the Portland NAACP celebration, I was reminded that King spoke of building the "beloved community." On inauguration day, we joined the students and faculty of the Governor Baxter School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to watch that historic occasion. I looked out over the gathering as students and adults spontaneously signed their applause (waving hands in the air) at the announcement of Barack Obama's taking office, and I realized how much closer we have come to that "beloved community" in the country and here on Mackworth Island. ~ *James Grumbach, Head of School*



The 7-8 class plans a winter social, inviting students from Breakwater & several public schools

Learning Update

How do we do "real science" with our students in the winter? Jamien, our 5th-6th grade science teacher, shows how "messing with boats" is real science:

"We started with the question, How do oil tankers float? How can a vessel made of steel and filled with thousands of tons of cargo possibly float? That question quickly led to other questions and before we knew it, we were up to elbows in water, carefully placing blocks of wood, paper clips, buttons, potatoes, and other 'found objects' into a half-filled aquarium to try to make sense of floating and sinking. What did students discover? That floating and sinking is harder to explain than they originally thought!

“In edu-speak, these first experiences are called the exploration phase of the learning process. After identifying an interesting overarching question – preferably one with relevance and intrigue – giving students a chance to ‘mess about’ with the subject matter is a very effective way to introduce the material. In this case, by simply having students select items to place into water, and by giving them the structure of making and recording their predictions, they were provided a safe place to informally investigate their current understanding. Experiences such as these allow students to experiment with a range of materials, identify inconsistencies in their understanding, make and modify hypotheses, and inevitably generate more complex questions. This was certainly the case with our opening investigation! Questions that arose and resulted in further, more deliberate experimentation included the following:

- Does the shape of the object affect its floating or sinking?
- Does size matter?
- Does it matter if you put it in wet or dry?
- Does “compactness” of the material matter?
- Does it matter how you place it on the water, or will certain materials always float or sink?
- Does the temperature of the water effect whether something will float?
- Why do some things sink really fast and others sink slowly?

“Research into brain-based learning, such as that done by Eric Jensen, indicates that student-generated questions based on first hand experiences, help anchor learning experiences, provide the conceptual framework for more abstract understanding, and play an essential role in moving new-found knowledge into long-term memory.

“After identifying a question, teams of two or three students designed experiments to test one of the many complex variables influencing an object’s buoyancy. They conducted them, recorded data, and will report findings to the class in an effort to collaboratively identify factors involved in determining an object’s buoyancy. Students will practice measuring techniques for mass and volume and will learn how to calculate the density of a variety of materials.

“Recently, we broadened our wonderings about boats by looking at pictures students had brought in. Observations and questions abounded! Underlying most of the questions was an essential question: How does a boat’s form influence its function, or vice versa? The topic of form and function pervades science, and boats are a wonderful venue for exploring it. In class, students were asked to design tinfoil boats to hold as much weight (pennies) as possible. How might this design differ for a boat whose function is to move loads efficiently? Boats also provide a wonderful vehicle for investigating the connection between science and technology. For example, why might biologists be called upon to help design sailboats or submarines? The culminating project will be a boat-building challenge. Students will represent a ‘design firm’ and will be asked to design and build a small-scale boat to accomplish a given task. There will be a classroom store for materials and each firm will be required to build their boat within a budget. Design challenges tend to be incredibly effective at activating and accessing the minds of more kinesthetic learners and for giving students a context to work on problem solving skills. This project offers something for everyone while putting real science concepts to the test.”

Children at Friends School are lucky to have teachers in each class who help them get their hands wet and their questions flowing. ~ *Mary Tracy, Curriculum Coordinator*



Recess in the snow



Grades 3-4 water study: liquid, solid, & gas

Featured Classroom Newsletter: Grades 5-6 (continued)

Language Arts: What makes a hero? That is the essential question that ties together a wonderful and compelling group of readings this winter. The selections run the gamut of myth, poetry, fiction, essay, satire, and memoir, and are fairly challenging in terms of vocabulary and concepts. Using the anthology, *To Be a Hero*, published by Perfection Learning, students are practicing the thinking skills of classifying, analyzing, and synthesizing, as well as learning the value of rereading, especially rereading aloud to be sure that things make sense. The writing focus is on short answers to questions about each reading – how to be concise, but thorough; how to support an idea effectively without rambling; and how to edit for spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. It is now fine to have some parental assistance with the editing, since it is often hard to see the details in one's own reading. Each Friday we push back the desks, spread out on the floor, and discover colors, textures, images, and words that inspire collages about heroism. It's a welcome way to mull over a timely theme during January as we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. and the inauguration of the first African American president. ~ *Mary Tracy, 5-6 Language Arts Teacher*

Math: Since completing a block in geometry and a review of the long division, long multiplication, addition, and subtraction of whole numbers, the 5th-6th grade has been concentrating on the world of the fraction, or the "less than one." Students have become increasingly at home with expanding and reducing common fractions, moving back and forth between mixed numbers and improper fractions, finding reciprocals in division, making use of canceling in multiplication and borrowing in subtraction. They've become intimates of the common denominator, and a surprising number at this point even relish problems such as:

$$\frac{5 \frac{8}{9} - (15 \frac{13}{18} - 12 \frac{5}{6})}{5 \frac{1}{3} \times 1 \frac{7}{32}}$$

Shortly before the holidays, they went on to add, subtract, multiply, and divide decimals—and practice converting common fractions to decimal fractions and decimal fractions back to common fractions. Such has been their confidence and skill in handling decimals that they now are tackling the concept of percent, and in short order will be applying their abilities to problems involving simple interest, discounts, profit margins, tips, and other practical matter arising from the realm of business and finance. ~ *Lee Chisholm, 5-6 Math Teacher*

Social Studies: We have been continuing our study of Ancient Greece. The students recently researched and reported on the island of Crete during the early Minoan period. Within this project, they were each assigned an aspect of civilization to research (government, arts, trade, etc.), then combined their parts into a larger presentation. Part of the intent was to practice sifting through rather large amounts of information to find the relevant details, and then assembling the details into a sensible order, as an historian must do in order to reveal the shapes and patterns of history.

We are now involved in a second research project relating to the major Greek city-states during the Classical period. Each student has selected their own city-state and has identified a few areas of interest to research. This project is intended to allow students a more independent role in collecting and organizing information, and, ultimately, in deciding *how* they wish to present their findings to the class.

I can't help but see a connection between the self-contained, yet interconnected, city-states and the students in the class. It was important to most of the students to have "their own" city-states, which to me signifies an increased sense of responsibility and readiness for a more independent project, yet they are communicating with one another, sharing sources of information, and demonstrating a wonderful spirit of personally involved interdependence. ~ *Jonathan Ewell, 5-6 Social Studies Teacher*