

Newsletter
OCT/NOV
2010

207-781-6321

Mackworth Island
Falmouth, ME 04105

friendsschoolofportland.org

Upcoming Events Calendar

Monday, October 4 -
Friday, October 15

Scheduled Period for Parent/
Teacher Conferences

Friday, October, 8

Professional Day, No Classes

Monday, October 11

Columbus Day, No Classes

Tuesday, October 12

5:30pm FSP Board Meeting

Tuesday, October 19

7pm Parenting for Peace "Wild
Play: Parenting adventures in
the great outdoors," presented
by David Sobel

Friday, November 5

End of Term 1

Tuesday, November 9

5:30pm FSP Board Meeting

Wednesday, November 10

10am & 6pm Admissions Event:

Q & A Session w/ Head of
School

Saturday, November 13

10 am Admissions Event: Open
House

Wednesday, November 17

9am Admissions Event: Tour of
the Classes

Wednesday, November 24

Thanksgiving Break Begins

Monday, November 29

Classes Resume



**FRIENDS SCHOOL
OF PORTLAND**
inquiry • reflection • action



Friends School, GBSD,
and the Real School
Celebrate their 5th
Pinwheels for Peace on
Causeway Beach.

in this issue

Calendar • News
Reflection from the Head of School
Assessment • Potato Inquiry
Place-based Education at FSP

WILD PLAY

Parenting adventures in the great outdoors

with

DAVID SOBEL

A Parenting for Peace Speaker Series Presentation

Tuesday, October 19th at 7pm in Carter Hall

Free & open to the public. Childcare \$5. R.S.V.P. 781-6321

F.M.I. www.friendsschoolofportland.org/parenting-peace-0

News Flash

CLOSE BUY Orders Due 10/7

FSP relies on fundraising to support its financial assistance programs, enrichment programs, and some activities. This year, we are pleased to offer the CLOSE BUY catalog which features goods and services from artists and businesses right here in our Maine community. Please point grandparents, co-workers, and friends, to the CLOSE BUY website at (<http://friendsschoolofportland.org/close-buy-catalog>). FSP students involved in the sale should bring the orders in to school by **OCTOBER 7TH**. A huge thank you to founder of CLOSE BUY, and FSP parent Masey Kaplan for developing such a beautiful catalog and to Kathy Pipkin (kipkin@earthlink.net) for leading our fundraising effort this fall. Orders will be available for pick-up November 16th.

Fall Admissions Events

FSP fall admissions events begin with Q&A Receptions with the Head of School on November 10th at 10am and 6pm and then again on December 2nd at 10am. Families are invited to tour the classrooms at 9am on November 17th

and December 8th. On November 13th at 10am FSP welcomes perspective families to an open house. Perspective families are encouraged to R.S.V.P. for all events to Jessica in the FSP office at jessica@friendsschoolofportland.org. Please help us grow our community by talking with other families about the good experiences you and your children have with FSP!

Parenting for Peace Series

On Tuesday, October 19th, at 7pm FSP welcomes David Sobel to Carter Hall. David will present place-based education information and activities from his new book, "Wild Play: Parenting adventures in the great outdoors." The event is funded in part by a grant from the Quimby Family Foundation. Look on page three of this newsletter for a quick primer on place-based education in the interview with Corie. For more information and a pdf of the poster please go to www.friendsschoolofportland.org/parenting-peace-0

Reflection by James Grumbach, Head of School

In the May newsletter, I reflected upon many of the accomplishments in a wonderful fourth year and looked forward to some rest and relaxation during the slower pace of summer. And, what a summer! As the weather turns autumnal, we celebrate our fifth anniversary with 85 students—our highest enrollment yet. This is a good time to look forward to our new goals including a renewed focus on reading skills throughout the grades, a revised BodyMindSpirit course for the middle school students, a self-study to confirm that we are “walking the walk” as we apply for accreditation with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, and continuing attention to our place-based approach to teaching and its connection to environmental literacy.

Many of the faculty returned a week early in August to take part

in a workshop with environmental educators from the Department of Conservation and Maine Audubon as part of our training to be members of the Maine School Forest Network. This experience provided a practical resource for our place-based approach, which fosters environmental literacy. On October 19th, there will be an opportunity to continue this professional development with David Sobel, a leading proponent of place-based education. He will offer a workshop for educators, Cultivating Environmental Stewardship: Practical Strategies for the PreK – 8 Classroom, and a talk at 7pm, Wild Play: Parenting Adventures in the Great Outdoors, which is free and open to the public. Later in the year, on May 3rd, we will host Alfie Kohn, an outspoken critic of homework, grades, and testing.

By providing a forum for topics that are of interest to parents in Maine, FSP is at the forefront of environmental education. Many of you have supported our efforts with your involvement in the school as parents, volunteers, and contributors. We hope that you will attend our special events and visit on a “normal” school days. If you do, I am confident that you will experience a calm center within the vibrant energy of our active classrooms.

In the last five years, your wonderful support has been critical in making Quaker education a reality in Maine again. We appreciate your support throughout the next five years. We are blessed to have you with us on this remarkable journey forward.



FSP teachers take part in the Department of Conservation and Maine Audubon Project Learning Tree workshop.



Fifth & Sixth graders create gesture drawings of visting dancers in Celeste's art class.

Heads-up: *Hats Off!* sale takes place December 4th.

Hats Off! is an annual sale of handcrafted wares and food items created and sold by the FSP community, happening December 4th, 2010. Money from the sale of the items go to benefit FSP. If you have donations of food or handcrafted items, if you can help with the sale, or if you have craft ideas and materials for our students, please contact J.B. Kavaliauskas: jbk@maine.rr.com, 207•671•8389, or Rebecca Rundquist: rebquist@gmail.com, 207•712•6430.

Jen McNally is helping by creating a *Friends School of Portland Potluck Cookbook*, creating *Community Through Food*. Please send your recipes to Jen McNally at travelingjen@yahoo.com.

Assessment by Mary Tracy, Director of Studies

As we welcome students to school each fall, we find ourselves intensely trying to get to know each student. Even children who were in our classes the year before, change. We listen to their summer stories with an ear cocked for vocabulary and syntax. We watch how they connect with classmates. We get their hands back in motion and look at drawings, letter formation, spelling, and topic development. We listen as they read books, tackle math problems, question their observations and explain their thinking. All year, we continue this minute-by-minute assessment.

Ah, there's that word – assessment – a word some are uncomfortable with. We do assess student learning – we would be irresponsible not to. Most of the time we do it almost unconsciously. But at the beginning, middle, and end of the year we become a little more systematic and rely on some teacher-administered activities and tests. We need to collect information about reading, writing, and math in ways that help us see whole school trends and figure out the best instruction

for groups and individuals. We need to give students of the same grade the same tasks, so we can apply the same criteria and see what is already learned and what is left to teach.

We do this as quickly as possible. To assess reading readiness in midyear kindergarten and beginning first grade takes literally five to ten minutes per child. Once children are readers, we check a whole class at once to see how well they apply the rules of regular English spellings, and we listen individually to their oral reading for about three minutes. In third grade we add a three-minute reading comprehension activity for the whole class. At the end of sixth grade we stop.

We give the same writing prompt to all students, first through eighth grade. A prompt is a starting point for writing and we allow students one hour. This fall we asked, "If you could have any superpower in the world, what would you want and why?" We notice the developmental stages of writing and what we need to teach. In

this case, we need to focus on how to support an opinion. In the spring we will ask them to make another choice and explain why, so we can see their growth over time. In math, we give the most formal test – the G-MADE. It takes up to, but not more than three class periods because there are so many topics in math. We want to learn what students know and how well we are teaching. In this case, we can compare our school and individuals to all students in the U.S. who take the same assessment.

The big idea is that we assess to inform our teaching and we do it substantially less than public schools and many independent schools. These are not "high stakes" tests; they are one part of a bigger and more complex picture of how children do in a wide variety of learning situations. They keep us honest with ourselves and focused on student learning -that's why we are here. Please feel free to contact me with questions. mary@friendsschoolofportland.org

A Place-based Education Primer an interview with Corie Scribner by Anna J. Boll

Three things happened in FSP Kindergarten teacher, Corie Scribner's life to get her interested in place-based education. She returned from the Peace Corps inspired by her experiences, to incorporate environmental issues into education. Around the same time, she read the book *Last Child in the Woods*, by Richard Louv. Louv opined that our children are disconnected from their natural world. When she started teaching at Friends School of Portland, Corie discovered a community already involved and interested in reconnecting children and nature. She attended a workshop with David Sobel and found out more about place-based education.

Place-based education immerses children in the local landscape surrounding their school and community as a foundation for all traditional subject areas. For Corie, she found that place-based education helped establish a sense of place for the young children in her Kindergarten class. "For me, place-based education is about giving my students the opportunity to be in the natural world and going with what emerges from that," she says.

One of the emergent topics is "special places." The snow outside the classroom became a village. An initial beach exploration where students discovered run-off, became a water unit. Mapping the classroom with blocks, evolved into

maps with clay, and then drawings of the island. "The inquiry and reflection encouraged by place-based education, fits well with Quaker education," says Corie.

Place-based education is not just beneficial for younger students. As they grow, Corie points out, their world will grow. Place-based education is also about partnerships between community organizations, parents, teachers, and kids. Students connected to their surroundings are more aware of the issues and problems facing the community and the natural world. This leads seamlessly to stewardship of the environment and service learning.

Certainly FSP is lucky to have Mackworth Island, its woods, waters, and waves, but children in rural, suburban, and urban settings can all reap the benefits of place-based education. Corie explains, "There are 'special places' in every community: urban rivers, playgrounds, city parks and green spaces." Corie reminds us that all children start with an immediate sense of place that expands over time. Place-based education prepares students to take care of the environment and communities where they and their families live and work.

Potato Inquiry by Anna J. Boll

How does a potato inquire, reflect and act? It inquires with its eyes, reflects on the couch, and if at first it doesn't succeed, it fries and fries again. If you are a 5th/6th grade science student you inquire, reflect, and act by growing and harvesting potatoes.

Last spring, three inquiries set the great potato harvest in motion. It all started with Nicole Borasso, 3/4 teacher. The Garden Committee wanted to grow potatoes to expand the service component of the garden. It turns out that Preble Street uses 100 pounds of potatoes a day and Nicole thought that the garden might be able to contribute to the needs of the homeless shelter and soup kitchen. Second, in Body, Mind and Spirit, the students were learning about gender identity with Jamien Jacob, middle school science

teacher. Through their research, they found out that as many as "40 percent of unaccompanied homeless youth are forced into homelessness because of their sexual orientation. Shame and abuse from families drive LGBT youth into the streets and shelters." (Swann & Bicknell. *Portland Press Herald*. 2010, Apr 28.) They wondered what they could do. Finally, Jamien wanted the 5th and 6th grade students to design and carry out experiments. Planting potatoes was the answer to all three inquiries.

In science class, the students designed experiments and wrote methods. They had many inquiries: Would watering the potatoes in red or blue water make them grow better? Does more space between plants result in bigger potatoes? Would seaweed fertilizer be effective?

What would happen if the potatoes were planted sideways, or if they weren't weeded, or if the soil was acidic? Many of the experiments were planted.

This fall, half of those students moved on to the 7th and 8th grade, but the new 5th and 6th graders were out there harvesting the potatoes, reflecting on the data they collected, and trying to answer the questions posed last spring. Designing an experiment, setting it up, following it through. FSP students learned how clearly one must set up an experiment so another scientist can replicate the experiment or even just collect the data properly. The action? This fall, 70 pounds of potatoes will go to feed hungry people in our community.



Potato Lessons Learned:

- It is crucial to mark your potato plots very well.
- Data collection may mean that you count your potatoes several times before you enter your data.
- Acorns are not potatoes.
- Many bugs live in the garden.

Potato Planting Data:

- Ten pounds of seed potatoes yielded 60-70 pounds of potatoes
- Students planted Kennebec, Purple Majesty, and Yukon Gold.
- The Kennebec potatoes were markedly bigger as described.

Students in Lea's preschool enjoy Cuisenaire® Rods, snips, and paint. Lea was recently awarded a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential in recognition of outstanding work with young children from the Council for Professional Recognition in Washington, DC.

