



Welcome to the Oldest Group 07-08

Hello Everyone

Oldest Group Newsletter September 07

Best Laid Plans, an argument for keeping one's ear close to the ground...

Every year, as your children's teachers, Erin and I spend a great deal of time thinking through all of the things we want to do with your children. Before we left in the spring this year, we sat down with Gloria and Ali and talked both in general about the nature of the group and then specifically about each child. We do this so that we can tailor our curriculum specifically to the group we are receiving and to the individuals within the group.

Some years, we have a group with specific interests that we want to capitalize upon. Some years, there are individuals within a group who have specific needs and specific interests that we take to heart as we look for the best way to teach them all that they are going to need to know.

Part of what we want to prepare ahead, are some of the overarching themes that we will be working with over a year. This year for instance, we knew we wanted to study an ancient culture and, from all we had heard about them, we felt clear that this group would do well to have a big, hands-on project right off the bat. So, with that in mind we picked the Vikings....

For language arts, we knew we wanted to do a great deal of essay work this year so we honed some processes we have used in the past for teaching them to fit what we anticipated the needs to be for this particular group. We did similar work around our curriculum for math, spelling, reading and creative writing, all with the intent to best foster a culture of learning for this specific group.

As well as getting ready in terms of specific skills and in order to best assure academic excellence across all subjects, Erin and I have done a lot of preparation in terms of coming up with activities centered around developing strong learning dispositions in the individuals in the group as well as developing a general culture in the room that promotes real learning on every level. This work includes developing trust in the room between teachers and

individuals, teachers and the group as a whole and student to student. This work includes identifying and communicating specific issues of individual kids that need to be addressed over the entire year in terms of their social, emotional and academic achievement. This work includes making classroom expectations and our expectations for individual kids crystal clear even while it sets the tone for honoring individuals' personal expectations of themselves and of us.

And so, when the year opened, we had a weighty bag of tricks at the ready! Specific lesson plans at the ready! Our setup of the room at the ready! All with your specific children in mind!

However, one of the *essential* elements of great teaching demands that teachers, while being prepared in this way, must also remain ever vigilant of not just what they have planned, but of where children actually are at any given time.

Thus, when your kids arrived and as we began working with them and it became clear that some of what we had thought would be best to do in the first weeks was *not* in fact best, we regrouped in a moment, adjusted our plans, pulling afresh from our ever-present 'bag of tricks.'

What did this look like?

Well, instead of an all-out project on the Vikings first thing, we have opted to pull the focus of our work inward more tightly, focusing instead on specific skills such as problem solving skills in math and essay skills in writing. We have started reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* now rather than taking it up this winter as we had planned as this will dove-tail nicely into the essay work we have started as it gives us ample subject matter for class discussions and for individual essay work. We also

have turned to this work of literature now because we watched your kids set up a mock courtroom this week and we got it that the courtroom drama in *TKM* would be just the thing to help them really understand how this judicial body really works in our society! What an opportunity. Man does it pay to keep one's ear close to the ground!

Is this okay?

Not only is it okay, again, **it is essential**. Essential that we remain flexible so that we can remain ever mindful and open to the exact needs of our children as they present themselves to us. After all, I am not telling you this as a cloaked way of excusing a shift in plans we had not anticipated! Hey, how would you know exactly what we had planned? No, I am telling you all this as a way of exposing the real and wonderful brilliance of Progressive education at its best. That is when it truly serves its students' real and present needs. This way of doing things can be nerve-racking but it is also exhilarating as the effects of doing things this way in terms of our children's progress, is oh so very profound.

Will we still hit all the areas we should—had planned to?

You bet! Our core values and our core curriculum are never compromised. Instead of learning how to share ideas in a group while discussing *The Vineland Sagas*, we will be learning these invaluable lessons that are the underpinnings of excellent academic work, through reading and discussing essays such as those from the *This I Believe* series broadcast on NPR. The problem solving skills we are working on already in math even as I write this, will now include some work on organizing ideas using Venn and Euler diagrams so that the kids can work with these when organizing their thoughts on a page in writing. *And*, there will still be time to take up that hands-on, exciting, enterprise with the Vikings later in the year when the group is ready for it and more able to make the best of the opportunity to learn the essential skills that that work will provide.



Picture of the bridges of Königsberg . Last week the kids tried to solve the problem of crossing each and every bridge only once...

❖ **Hey, read along with us on your own at home. We have just begun chapter three in *TKM*.**

- *We have been working toward understanding just what happened to cause the great depression*

❖ **Listen to NPR's This I Believe series by going to <http://www.npr.org/thisibelieve/about.html>**

Some of the 'big ideas' that children came up with for essay topics so far:

Why was the world created?

What would it be like if there was no time?

What would it be like if there was no death?

All roads lead to anywhere just as all thoughts lead anywhere...

What makes one become annoyed?
build more things?

Why do people always feel that they have to

What will happen to all the wide open spaces
if they do?

Ongoing Curriculum at a Glance

September/October

| Language Arts | Math | Social Studies |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essay writing skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Developing ‘big ideas’ from simple observations ○ Finding other examples to back up the ‘big idea’ ○ Investigating published essays such as the ones on NPR’s <i>This I Believe</i> series • Assessing and developing basic l.a.’s skills such as punctuation • Vocabulary based on spelling work, individual reading books and TKM • Spelling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Investigating prefixes ○ Assessing and developing individual skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving skills • Assessing and developing basic skills in multiplication, division, addition and subtraction of whole numbers • Estimating • Venn and Euler diagrams • Place value <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Looking at ancient number systems ○ Beginning work with decimals ○ Relative value of whole numbers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing classroom expectations • Discussion skills • Philosophical discussions • Time line research project • Student government development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Looking at government in general ○ Establishing protocol • Vikings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Geography ○ Mythology ○ Government ○ Economy ○ Trade ○ Art ○ Literature • TKM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Context and themes of the book • Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who are you? ○ How do you fit into the world? ○ Connect to TKM |



New OG mucks the sheep for the very first time!!!