

Special Edition

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Special News About Special People

Free of Charge

Meg's Group (OG)

Shop

Fifth and Sixth Grade offer children two years to apply their already substantial woodworking skills, enough time to challenge themselves with truly ambitious projects. New skills are often picked up along the way, but it is the independent and thoughtful application of accrued techniques that marks this period as one in which fully integrated learning is most confidently and joyfully demonstrated.

Geography and sustainable forestry may not be the first things that come to mind when thinking of elementary school children engaging in woodworking, but they found their place in your children's Shop curriculum this past month. We established that wood comes from trees, that the majority of wood we use comes from pine trees and what kind of animals and insects live in, on or among pine trees. We talked about why we use pine. Pine is softwood which makes it easy to saw, shape and nail through. Pine grows relatively quickly and is grown primarily by lumber companies who practice sustainable forestry, planting and harvesting trees in methodic cycles. Pine is grown in the United States where government and private organizations regulate and enforce sustainable practices so that ecosystems and animal habitats are not permanently disrupted or destroyed.

We can determine where the pine we buy comes from based on the lumber identification stamps used by these organizations. We can favor buying pine that was grown relatively close to us over lumber grown in distant states to minimize the environmental impact of transporting the wood to our local stores. We can avoid buying unmarked wood as it may have come from regions of the world where the lumber industry is not well regulated and where it may have been harvested solely for profit without regard to the surrounding ecosystem.

We used the shop's supply of lumber and the identification stamps on them to determine where the wood had been grown.

Example



SPIB-◀ This mark told us that the wood was inspected by the Southern Pine Inspection Bureau which inspects a large portion of the lumber cut and milled in the southern United States. We used a map to locate this region.

(771)◀ This mark allowed us to identify the mill where it was cut, dried and graded. Knowing that lumber companies mill their trees as close as possible to the cut site to save transportation costs, we could be reasonably sure that the wood came from trees grown near Troy, Virginia. A look at our map showed the relatively short distance this mill was from our local lumber suppliers as opposed to lumber milled in the northwest states which bore different markings.

We concluded by talking about the opportunity to buy other kinds of goods locally to reduce the environmental costs associated with bringing them to market.

In October of '08 Adam had the idea of creating a flashlight powered by a hand generator. The year-plus odyssey that followed resulted this past week with a hand-held generator capable of producing and storing upwards of three volts. Adam can now use his successful prototype (yes, duct tape was involved) to power an LED or any other small electrical device capable of running on small voltages. I tip my hat to Adam for both his creative vision and perseverance in seeing it through.

Woodburning has figured heavily in Brinley's efforts to date as she has gone about the business of creating a prayer stone emblazoned with a cross, a replica license plate and a decorative wall hanging. Brinley has also spent enough time at the Tinker Table to extract a hard drive from an old Mac Powerbook.

Chris would be happy to spend all of his Shop time reducing ailing electronic devices to their constituent

parts with the aid of screwdrivers, wrenches and pliers. When the suggestion was made at conference day that perhaps Chris might do some woodworking this year I floated one of the suggested project ideas in his direction and he ran with it. Now instead of further oversanding the trimaran he built last year when cycled off of tinkering, Chris has been working on a sizable carved wooden shield.

Eric finished a shield of his own to start his year in Shop and has since moved on to making a miniature fly trap based on an idea in a Roald Dahl book. When a classmate suggested that the project, reminiscent of a hangman's scaffold, probably wouldn't work Eric cheerily replied, "I know – but it's still fun to make!"

Yet another shield was completed by Gabe during the fall months, his being a carryover from May of last year. Since making an ultimately fruitless effort to resurrect a near functional personal DVD player, Gabe has turned his attentions to the building of a canjo with an electric guitar styled body. Hmm, where have I seen one of those before...?

With the help of some classmates, last week Jane hauled her assembled loft out onto the brick walk and accepted a boost from me to try it out. This brief test which came on the heels of long hours of sawing, sanding, drilling and screwing together, confirmed that the structure would need bracing for stability, bracing that might ideally also serve as a ladder for ascending to the elevated seating area.

Julian spent his initial Shop classes finishing up the tabletop golf game he had drawn up plans for last March. Julian fashioned a golfer and golf club with the aid of the drill press and his seasoned coping saw skills, then used a plunge router to create sand traps to increase the toy's level of difficulty. Currently working on a model submarine, Julian is considering by what means he can make the wooden vessel submerge.

Many hours behind the crosscut saw, hours that extend back to last year, finally paid off for Magdalia as she went from fabricating to dry assembly to the final assembly of her large dog bed built of plywood. Magdalia has plans to make a large pillow to line the low-walled structure, oh, and to *get a dog*. Magdalia is currently engaged in chisel and mallet work as she makes a small relief carving of a tapir. (Find *that* in your standardized Industrial Arts curriculum!)

While not the most advanced dancer, I suggested that Maya needn't make both of her wooden sandals to fit right feet. The quick removal and re-installation of her footwear's leather straps and Maya was ready to declare last year's project completed and move on to her current

endeavor, a project book inspired pencil holder. If you like running gags ask her to tell you what animal the project is intended to look like.

Had I known that Peter's F-16 would be produced on Lockheed Martin's schedule, I might have suggested a shorter undertaking. Over two years in the making, Peter completed the handsome model aircraft and, true to form, looked for a bigger challenge. When we determined that the time required to manufacture a gas powered go-cart might fall just a *tad* outside of his closing window of Shop opportunities, Peter shifted his sights to a gravity powered model.

In May of '07 Roland put pencil to paper and designed an elaborate gerbil playhouse replete with external electrical elevator. This week Roland completed what to the untrained eye might appear to be a three story plywood parking garage with Plexiglas™ windows on one side. With all of the problem-solving opportunities that this structure provided Roland, he especially enjoyed those that required his use of a crowbar. Bravo for sticking with it, Roland!

Stephanie has just entered her second year on her lathe-turned, laminated, hardwood bowl. With a fair amount of that time devoted more to socializing than to woodworking (and in the long run friends are always going to trump pieces of wood that have been glued together), Stephanie is currently sanding the outside of the attractive vessel and will soon be getting equally abrasive with the inside.

Sylvia has devoted the whole of her Shop time to date to the turning of a hardwood candlestick. Inspired by a picture of a similar item in a catalog of handcrafted goods, Sylvia has successfully shaped, sanded and waxed the decorative and utile project and will next be moving to the drill press to drill a receiving hole for her selected taper candles.

Torin has been busy this fall and early winter. Having completed the Knock-Hockey game he began last February, Torin has since made a plywood shield and crafted a woodburned SRV plaque for his schoolmates to sign. Perhaps subconsciously inspired by his younger brothers (Kelton is making a small chair and Garrett began his year in Shop making a replacement stretcher for a wooden chair in for repairs) Torin has just drawn up plans and begun building a chair of his own.

For the most part I'm getting to see portions of William's work on his projects this year. I knew this day was coming. Having essentially relegated me to a supplier of materials over the past two years, it will only be a matter of time before I'll have to scour online patent applications to see what he's been up to. Beginning his

year by removing the motor from a cordless drill and turning it into an electric eraser at home, William then did the measuring, marking and miter sawing of 2"x4" components for a space capsule large enough for him to fit into before carting the pieces home for assembly. Now two weeks into the shaping of a small submarine hull I would assume that William will soon be taking it home to outfit with a nuclear power plant.

"Chickens" might not be the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about Swarthmore, but Zoe has set out to change all that. With neighbor and SRV camper Matthew Stewart perhaps giving her inspiration, Zoe has designed and begun building a chicken coop in preparation for her own egg producers. (Sure, one can't have a shed within three feet of a property line or small crack in their sidewalk, but apparently having a flock of New Hampshire Reds and Transylvanian Naked Necks is just fine!)

Sports

Children at SRV are given room to explore and build upon their natural abilities, to play in a structure in which all levels of development are valued and supported. They learn that inability is a starting point for growth, and ability an opportunity to teach one another.

The Sports program and organized recess games include a rich mixture of group-building activities, competitive and cooperative games, classic and newly emerging "neighborhood" games, and physically challenging free play activities.

The program is defined by the individual groups. The younger groups and I take turns choosing activities every other week, while the Oldest Group builds their own unique curriculum from the ground up. The democratic process through which the children arrive at their decisions is as integral to the program as the athletics.

Here's the program that your children and I have crafted thus far this year:

Zoo on the Loose – Tag game. Animals tag humans who in turn become more animals tagging a dwindling human population.

Capture the Flag,

All School Capture the Flag East/West,

All School Capture the Flag North/South – Defend your flag, free teammates being held prisoner and/or enact the name of the game. Lots of open field running and opportunities for developing timing and strategy.

Sardines – *Hide and Seek* but seekers hide *with* found hider.

Sharks and Minnows – Tag game. A single "shark" calls all "minnows" to try to run past him/her to safety at opposite end of playing area. Tagged "minnows" become "sharks" in next round. Rounds continue until all "minnows" are caught.

It has been great to see how regularly a large number of children initiate this opportunity for extended open field running during their break times.

Touchball – A noncontact goal scoring hybrid of *Soccer* and *Rugby*. While kicking the ball is legal, players generally prefer to pick it up and run with it until touched by an opponent at which time they have three seconds to pass or punt the ball.

Clean Up the Yard – Two teams vie to throw, kick, bowl, hike, bat and otherwise propel the most balls onto opponent's side of the gym before "Dad" gets home.

Sumo Wrestling – No contact above the shoulders, no mandatory mawashis, just good clean fun.

Doctor/Spy – *Team Dodgeball* style game. Teams throw soft balls from one side of gym floor at opponents on other side. Hit players or those whose throws have been caught by opponent sit down and wait to be "healed" by "Doctor" on their team. "Guard" protects "Doctor" from being hit, "Spy" can venture onto opponent's side to steal balls to throw. Round ends when "Doctor" is hit.

Until next time,

Mike