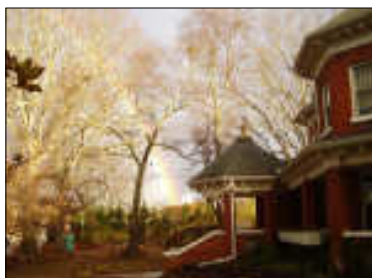




*Connecting hands, hearts,  
minds...and learning!*



## Omega Awakens Sources of Inspiration and Leadership in Students



For the class called 'Omega,' the year 2008 passed not with a whimper but a bang. On stage at Lipinski Auditorium, the sixth through eighth graders of Rainbow Mountain led their younger peers in a hit holiday musical, capping off a successful semester full of the twists and turns endemic to the journey of self-discovery. From the team-building games of early August to their performance on stage in mid-December, the first half of the year hit many highlights.

In the new Hospitality League (with other middle schools) the Omegans took to the fields for flag football and the courts for basketball, making new friends and developing good sportsmanship. In Omega's annual haunted house, the students took their literature studies to a whole new level, transforming the school into 'Lord of the Rings,' J.R.R. Tolkien's classic tale of the triumph of goodness over seemingly insurmountable odds.

And, speaking of good taking on seemingly impossible odds, the semester marked the first, small, drop-in-the-bucket of Omega's effort to help implement sustainable solutions for our world watershed. This first effort was the student-lead installation of an educational rain barrel, complete with lesson plan stickers, in our front garden. In January, we donned our hats and gloves and cleaned State Street Stream making a cleaner environment here in West Asheville. The big splash comes in May when Omega, along with hundreds of other middle school students, help usher in WOW, the World Olympiad of Water, a 'feedback' festival that will promote water conservation at home

and distribution of clean water to those in need around the world. While world water philanthropy is certainly a worthwhile cause, the students' own education is not being ignored.

Omega students showed themselves very well at the annual Clean Air Trust Air Quality IQ Contest. Out of a couple hundred entries from several middle schools in the area, Omega took three awards and six honorable mentions. This year's school-wide math hour has created an excellent rhythm in 'rhythmic up in Omega. Students are on track for their May EOC (end-of-course) exams in algebra and geometry. Omegans' topics for their personal interest projects, a Rainbow tradition, span the spectrum from nuclear power to Mickey Mouse. In language arts, we are set to begin George Orwell's classic Animal Farm, a cautionary tale from which the students will be able to draw parallels from their history studies of twentieth century totalitarian political systems. Just last month, Omega was privileged to have Lotte Meyershon address our class. Ms. Meyershon related her experiences as a Jewish eyewitness to Hitler's Germany, having lived there as a teenager from 1933 to 1937.

Finally, the students are also on track to meet their fundraising goals. Through Parents' Night Out (an Omega-led evening of child care), weekly bake sales, pizza sales and our famous Gourmega restaurant, the students have already raised over \$2000 this year. In addition to helping pay for the Omega end-of-year trip, a portion of these funds will go toward student-designated philanthropy.

In short, up in Omega, the 'Big Bang' continues and a universe of possibilities opens up as the students evolve into empowered young adults.

*William and Susan*

# Preschool Naturalists Are Growing Their Hearts

## Growing Our Hearts

The first few weeks of our school year are spent in classroom exploration with a focus on making connections with one another. This ties in smoothly with our classroom theme for the year: "Growing Our Hearts." In September, we established some basic guidelines for growing our hearts:

- We take care of ourselves.
- We take care of each other.
- We take care of the earth and all living things.
- We take care of our belongings.
- 

As we moved into October, we began to expand upon those guidelines. We learned calming techniques to help us take care of ourselves and others when we feel sad, frustrated, angry, or over-excited. We held discussions about how to handle challenging situations with our friends... and we practiced using our words and speaking in strong voices. A basket, located in our quiet reading area, is filled with materials that assist the children in creating calm within themselves.

## Setting Goals

As part of our Rosh Hashanah celebration in September, we had a discussion about atonement... talking with the children about mistakes that people make. We explained to them that a part of celebrating Rosh Hashanah is recognizing your mistakes and setting goals to fix those mistakes. Just saying the words, "I'm sorry" isn't enough to fix some mistakes. An apology for one's actions should be backed by action... saying "I'm sorry" means that you should try your best not to make that mistake again.



*Chestnuts from the class's chosen tree are just the right size for a preschooler's hand.*

The children were very receptive to this and their introspection was amazing. Each child gave serious thought to mistakes that they make and was able to voice those mistakes with honesty. Some children discussed the way that they "screech" at their parents, or use hurtful names when they are upset. Some children recognized that they make messes when they play. Some children know that they forget to flush the toilet, or need to learn to wipe better without making a mess.



*Taking care of the class fish is a big responsibility.*

The children then set goals for themselves, based on the mistakes they shared with the group. They cut hearts from special paper and have written their goals on them, which are displayed on the bulletin board titled "Growing Our Hearts."

This process was extremely touching and empowering for the children. We revisited our goals in January in celebration of the New Year. The children evaluated their progress on achieving their goals. Many children were eager to set new goals, while others recognized a need to continue working on their original goal. The heartfelt honesty some of the children showed was beautiful.

## Connecting With the Natural World

Taking care of the earth and all living things requires a basic understanding of the natural world around us. In October, we held a discussion with the children about what kinds of living things we would find on our playground. Almost all of our children sincerely believed that we would find elephants, lions, giraffes, and even dinosaurs on our playground if we looked hard enough. A follow-up exploration of our playground left the children a bit mystified... they didn't see a single elephant anywhere! We were then able to guide the children into a much more realistic (but magical) exploration of plant and animal wildlife native to our area.

We regularly practice using our “naturalist eyes” by holding scavenger hunts that encourage the children to look closely at natural objects around them. They now know to look up, down, under, and around... to look in secret camouflaged spaces when they want to find insects. The children also use naturalist eyes observing our classroom pets (hamster and fish) and our terrarium... which is full of native plants and small animal life. As a class, we chose a chestnut tree on our playground to observe throughout the year. We continue with our tree study once a month; photographing and observing the tree, discussing any changes we see, and drawing our observations.

In November, the children were so excited about the Presidential election that we decided to hold an election of our own. The children cast a series of ballots, choosing an animal to adopt at the Nature Center. First they voted on



*Preschoolers take a closer look while investigating their playground companions - bugs!*

an animal group they wished to choose an animal from. Their choices were birds, large mammals, small mammals, and reptiles. We tallied the votes and the reptile group won. Next we voted on specific reptiles, choosing between a box turtle, a black rat snake, a timber rattler, and a copperhead. The copperhead won by a landslide! The children then turned their attention to fundraising. They made snake necklaces from Sculpy clay. They made signs and launched a “Copper for Copperheads” fundraiser, collecting spare pennies to send to the Nature Center. Their hard work raised just over \$75, and the children learned a great deal about snakes in the process!

We will continue to connect with nature and with each other throughout the remainder of our school year.



*A relaxation movement, called ballooning, helps keep the class calm, and entertained.*

The coming spring offers many opportunities to explore plant propagation and a variety of native animal life - some of which we may add to our terrarium! As we explore our natural world and our connection with all living things, we will emphasize how to care for the life around us, growing our hearts as we do so.

*Jessy and Brena*



*Rolling pennies collected during the Coppers for Copperheads fundraiser was a fun, tactile activity and the rolls really added up.*



*Having fun on a Muddy Sneakers field trip.*

## Field Trips, Collaborative Projects And Service Learning Enhances Fourth Grade Experience

knowledge of the environment and ecosystems, and important life skills such as orienteering and appreciation and respect for their surroundings. The Muddy Sneakers program has been a fun and rewarding opportunity for the students to experience what so many children are lacking today in our media-ridden, technology-focused culture.

Fourth-grade at Rainbow Mountain Children’s School has had an excellent year thus far in and out of the classroom. Beginning in August, the goal was set to create a strong community in the classroom. This community needed to work together, respect each other, be willing to try new things, and always support one another. Through many games and activities, our community was built. In one fun activity, students interviewed each other with big questions, such as, “If you were president, what would you do?” Then the interviewer drew a picture of their partner and wrote all their questions and answers on the poster, which was shared and displayed in the class.

Once the feeling of a solid learning community was established, it was easier to focus on academics. Working together and following rules that enable learning to flourish occurred easily now. The first main lesson focus was U.S. Geography. Students used all their multiple intelligences to learn about their country’s states, regions, and major landforms. Locations were memorized through songs, drawings, games, and technology programs. A collaborative project of magnificent hand-drawn maps was presented to parents and classmates to conclude the unit at the U.S. Geography Regional Celebration and Feast.



*Hard work shows on the face with huge smiles.*

After all students felt a solid understanding of how our country looks and feels on a map, it was time to see the history of the U.S. from the beginning. Students studied Native American cultures, tribes, and regions. Skits of Inuit life were enacted to reinforce customs and cultural traditions of the tribes. Dioramas made in class of different aspects of tribal life brought the words from the pages of a book alive. Small wigwams, longhouses, totem poles, and birch bark canoes, each created with care and precision, were included in the students’ representations.

Besides beginning to learn about our country’s history, the fourth grade has participated in so many other exciting activities. This year we are fortunate to be a part of a new local program called Muddy Sneakers. Each month throughout the school year, Muddy Sneakers teachers, along with RMCS teachers and parents, take students out of the traditional classroom and into the outdoor classroom. Surrounded by the beauty of nature in the Blue Ridge Mountains, students gained

The

Finally, it is important to mention the service-learning projects that the fourth-grade has participated in this year. In the fall, every student learned to knit. Knitting, although often seen as a feminine activity in our culture, was taught to all students because it increases brain synapse firing through the repeated crossing of the needles, similar to other midline crossing activities, while also improving hand-eye coordination, dexterity, and overall increasing students’ brain functioning abilities proven to strengthen academic skills such as reading. Knitting is also fun and easily learned for most children. As a class, the students, teachers, and parents knitted over twenty-five scarves, hats, and other warm items for our local women’s shelter. The handmade gifts were delivered to the women and children right before the holidays. The students felt so proud of their work and were happy to see their creations go to those in need.

Our other ongoing service project is volunteering at Manna Food Bank. Once a month, students, teachers, and parents work in the Manna warehouse for a few hours sorting food. It is amazing how motivated and willing to help the fourth grade students are. So far in our two visits to Manna, we have sorted and packed about 20,000 pounds of food for hungry families in Western North Carolina. The impact of these service projects, along with all of the other in and out of class projects the students are working on every day, makes the fourth-grade at Rainbow Mountain Children’s School a very special place to be.

*Julie*



*Being outdoors always creates an appetite for apples and good friends.*

## Peace, Love and Respect Stressed in Third-grade Classroom



The third-grade began the school year with the tradition of naming our class. Taking a step in a magical direction, we chose to be called the third-grade Sprites! We decided that helpful, sometimes mischievous, spirits of nature are wonderful creatures to emulate. It seems that fairies and mythical creatures have long been a part of the Rainbow Mountain experience, which led some new students to ask if we really believed in fairies and sprites. We let each child answer this question in the Witness Chair, where beliefs were shared individually. The rest of the class listened, respected, and honored the viewpoints of their peers.

This theme of peace, love, and respect for everyone begins with self, and spreads out through our families, our class, and our community. Our class followed this natural flow by getting to know ourselves, and then our classmates, to create an awesome classroom community. We then extended this out into our local community. What are our needs, and how do people and businesses in our community help provide for them? West Asheville is a great community-oriented area, so we took several walks, made maps, and eventually wrote letters to local businesses to see how the parts of our community work together. We like to contribute to our community, too, so we sang songs at a local assisted-living center and Christmas carols downtown to share joy and music.

In an expanding spiral, we opened our perspective from our classroom and our local community out into these beautiful Appalachian Mountains. The Sprites first explored how these ancient mountains were formed, which led to a more in-depth study of rocks. Small groups researched and reported back to the class about rock types, and a field trip to Colburn Earth Science Museum was a fun highlight of this study.

Other aspects of our Appalachian Mountain study included many traditional Jack tales, singing, instruments, sewing, and dancing. Local dance caller, Laurie Fisher, shared some social dances with us. These children love to sing and dance! All of this culminated in a wonderful feast, where families brought their favorite southern foods, and the Sprites shared the

variety of ways we studied mountain life.

The Sprites chose our next topic of study: Appalachian animals. We first researched and compared animal classification in groups, and then chose animals to study individually. Third graders voted on the information we should gather and how we should share the information. Student involvement in planning definitely impacts motivation!

We are now deep into writing our books and look forward to the annual Authors Luncheon with our families and friends. The Sprites also enjoy Centering three days a week with our companion class, the second grade. This is when we get to experience wonderful nature activities with their teacher, West. We also take swim lessons with second-grade, and look forward to many more activities with them. The journey continues, and the spiral extends.

*Eddy and Amorn*



*Despite the fog, the Sprites had amazing adventures and a wonderful day at Chimney Rock.*

# Fifth-Graders Link Together Small Acts of Love

The fifth-grade Dolphins began the school year with an eye on appreciation! In our very first week, we started our appreciation chain. Just what *is* an appreciation chain? At the end of each school day, we routinely sit down and reflect on the people in our class and how their words, actions, and presence have benefited us during the course of the day. Perhaps a friend picked up a pencil that dropped on the floor. Maybe a classmate shared a snack or offered help in math. Each of these small appreciations is written on a strip of construction paper, and at days end they are linked together in a chain.



Even our smallest acts of kindness in the classroom are noted and lauded. Together these small acts add up to a classroom environment that is positive, supportive and makes each child feel that their words and their actions make a difference – and they do! It is just like Mother Teresa (whose words we studied throughout the month of November) once said: “There are no great acts, only small acts performed with

great love.” We are living that reality in fifth-grade.

It all adds up mathematically, as well. Using our powers of estimation, each student made an educated guess about how many of these appreciation links were in our chain when we came back from winter break. We looked at the data and figured out the minimum and maximum estimate as well as the range, the median, the mode, and the average. Then we counted the links in the chain and figured out how long the chain was! We are happy to report that, at mid-year, the chain had over 750 links and measured approximately 155 feet! We figure that by the end of the year, our appreciation for one another will stretch the length of a football field.

We have spent time discovering the magic of literature by reading aloud The Van Gogh Café by Cynthia Rylant. This chapter book is set in a small town in Kansas, at a little café where magic always happens and changes the lives of the ordinary people who encounter it. Each chapter is a new story that teaches a moral about the importance of the connections we have with the people in our lives. The Dolphins enjoyed the story and working together to analyze the characters and their motivations. We also looked at each story’s structure and found that they followed a pattern. Our first venture into literary analysis!

With these tools under their belts, the fifth-graders wrote

their own stories that followed the same structure we noticed in The Van Gogh Café. Each student decided on the moral they wanted their story to teach. Some of these morals were:

- You have everything you need to be happy
- Never pass up the opportunity to be nice
- Don’t worry about the past or the future; think about the present
- Magic is not in any object; it’s in YOU!

The Dolphins wrote wonderful stories and showed not only their growing literary talent, but their strong desire to do good in the world.

From this whimsical literary investigation, to research and investigation of more serious historical issues, the students show a strong willingness and a great curiosity when it comes to understanding the world. We began history with the migration of native people into North America. We learned how these people adapted to their new environments and used the natural resources to build shelters, to hunt, and to create cultural artifacts. Students worked as individuals and in pairs to create models of Native American shelters from each of the seven cultural regions of North American Natives. The students developed a great respect and appreciation for how much work it would take to survive and thrive in a primitive environment.

But our lives in the fifth-grade are not limited to the classroom! We have spent time outdoors learning about nature. We have taken day-long expeditions with fourth-grade, in which we perform scientific investigations of our environment. On our most recent outing, we strained water in streams to see what creatures were living there. We found all manner of larvae, insects, spiders, and salamanders. We then used that data to determine the health of the stream. This was a fantastic hands-on investigation as well as an opportunity to become familiar with the beauty of the natural world around Asheville.

This has been a time of richness and excitement for the Dolphins. We have learned a great deal about ourselves, our environment, our history and our community. We look forward to gaining even greater knowledge and perspective as we start the second half of the year!

*Lauren*



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# From Appalachia to Africa, First-Grade Explores the Beauty and Culture of Communities

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*Making apple cider produces sweet rewards.*

The first-grade Ferrets started the school year learning about community. With each unit, we begin our exploration with multiple intelligence stations. We learned about what a community is, how it works, why communities are important, and how we can impact and influence each other in a community. During this unit, we observed ant and worm habitats in our classroom to see how they live and work together! We heard stories and acted them out, we took a walk through West Asheville to see what is in our local community, and together we constructed a fairy village including all the things the first-graders thought were important parts of a community. They had

into our study of immigrants and how they influenced the Appalachian culture, and where our own families came from! As we explored the various cultures that influenced Appalachia, we began our study of world celebrations, traditions, and holidays in December. Saint Nicholas, Las Posadas, Christmas, St. Lucia, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, and Winter Solstice were some of the celebrations we learned about.

After our holiday break, we travelled around the earth to begin our African unit. We are deep into our studies of African animals and their biomes, and the peoples of Africa and their cultures. At the end of our unit, we look forward to sharing what we have learned at our exciting African Safari. Come and visit our classroom to learn about the biomes of Africa!

*Sandra & Ruth*



a great time constructing and playing with the fairy village.

Our next unit of exploration was Appalachia. We learned about the area that encompasses Appalachia, the plants and animals that live here, and how people lived here in the early twentieth century. We discovered what is beneath our feet, starting with the layers of the earth! We learned about soil, rocks, magnets, and plants, resulting in many neat experiments, studies, and field trips.

We visited a local apple farm, the Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education, the Colburn Earth Science Museum, and the Green River Preserve. We took two field trips to Manna Food Bank. We delivered food that we collected and helped sort it for those that need food in our community!

One of our exciting projects this term was when the first-graders became experts on Appalachian animals: researching them, creating miniatures of their animals out of Sculpey, and constructing habitats for their animals. Then we learned about the Cherokee people and early Appalachian living. We made Cherokee fry bread, apple bread, apple cider, and butter. We explored what life was like for the coal miners. We tried weaving, made paper, learned a contra dance and early Appalachian and Native American songs - and more! This led



*Drawing portraits of nature from a worm's point of view in Rainbow's outdoor classroom.*

# The Busy, Happy, Busy, World of Kindergarten

The meaning and importance of community is one of the very first concepts explored in the Kindergarten class at the beginning of each school year. Beginning with the family community, the children listen to books and poems about families, draw family portraits, and share about their own families. They discover that, although every family is different, they are also very much the same. A family is a community filled with love, and the members all help to take care of each other.

The Kindergarteners then explore the importance of our classroom community. We unwind a ball of yarn, creating a complicated and beautiful star-shaped web as each member of our class holds onto a piece. We realize that it took all of us working together to create it, and that anything any one of us does will affect it. We brainstorm ideas about how we can build a strong and positive community in our classroom. We create a class We Will Book filled with their beautiful thoughts and ideas, each page lovingly illustrated by the children. "We will say kind things to each other," "We will remember self space," "We will listen," "We will take care of our classroom," "We will take care of nature," "We will help animals and people when they get hurt," "We will take care of our bodies," "We will be happy," ... If we remember our "We wills" every day, we cannot fail to have strong classroom community.

The Kindergarteners explore our school community by visiting other classrooms and meeting the other students, teachers, and staff of our school. They learn playground safety guidelines and play outside with each other and students from different classes. Other classes visit and share what they are learning with us. We attend school-wide celebrations and work together in multi-age level groups. Families spend time in our

classroom. The children know that their school is a place where they are safe. They are loved and respected by the entire school community.

By volunteering at MANNA Food Bank, the Kindergarten class became more aware of their local community and realized that they could make a difference in the lives of others. Alongside their parents, teachers, and younger siblings, the children sorted through boxes and boxes of toiletries and health products. They worked tirelessly, and were astonished to see the completed cartons stacked in enormous piles that towered over their heads.

The Kindergarteners were proud and excited by what they had accomplished, and anxious to do more. They were already working toward reading one hundred books for Scholastic, who would then donate books to a charity in their name. The class chose to support The Pajama Program, which gives pajamas and new books to children in foster care waiting for their forever families. Learning that these books would be donated all across the country, the children wondered if they could find a way to give books to children right here in Asheville.

The Kindergarten began a gently-used book drive for Reach Out and Read, a program that provides books for pediatricians, family physicians, and nurses to give to young children when they visit the doctor. Each child brought in many of their own much-loved books to give to children in need. It was extraordinarily moving to watch them introduce their books to the rest of the class. Many remembered, reminisced, and re-read the books from when they were "little." As the donations poured in, the children sorted, counted, and put a sticker inside each book, identifying it as a donation from the children and



*Book drives and food drives keep Kindergarten in motion*



## Artistic Expressions and Collaborations Abound at Rainbow Mountain

families of Rainbow Mountain Children's School. In all, 292 books were collected and taken to the Buncombe County Health Center. The Kindergarten received several beautiful thank you notes, detailing patients' reactions upon receiving the books. For many of them, these were the very first books the children have ever owned!

Confident and empowered by the knowledge that they were able to make such a strong impact on their local community, the children were ready to make a difference in the world community. They wanted to use the money raised from their Holiday Craft Sale for something very special. Inspired by Beatrice's Goat, the true story of an African girl whose life is forever changed by the gift of a goat, the Kindergarten decided to make a donation to the Heifer Project International. Heifer gives animals that provide nutrition and income for families and communities around the world. The children voted to spend \$120 to buy a sheep. They are already talking about the possibility of raising more money, so that they can donate a "flock of hope" (baby chickens, ducks, and geese).

The Kindergarteners have a strong understanding of the meaning and importance of community. They know that every single person, no matter how small, can help make the world a better place. The Moral and Spiritual domains are important foundations of Rainbow Mountain Children's School. The Kindergarten children, with their firm grounding in these domains, will continue to work together to help others and to spread peace, love, and kindness throughout their lives.

*Doreen and Jessica*

The students started the school year creating personal expressions books. Being new to Rainbow Mountain this year, this gave me an opportunity to get to know the students and to teach book making. With the beautiful fall weather the students were able to tackle paper making, which is always a wet project. They used recycled material like corn husks donated by Earth Fare.

For their performance at LEAF, Darrell Rose, an accomplished drummer and Artist-in-Residence, taught African drumming methods to the fourth and fifth-graders. The fifth-graders also designed and painted a banner for the performance. This beautiful banner had its own special visual rhythm.

When the weather cooled it brought the students indoors to start their artist studies. While studying Georgia O'Keeffe, they explored value through the use of black charcoals, color chalk pastels and oil pastels. While discovering Frida Kahlo, they painted from their hearts and imagination. Omega and fifth-graders planned and prepared a shadow puppet performance honoring Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera for the annual school-wide Day of the Dead celebration. While delving into the use of color and Vincent Van Gogh, they trained their eyes to mix and blend colors.

Some students had the opportunity to try printmaking using additive and subtractive printing plates. Soon, we will be visiting our neighbors at Blue Barnhouse to see their beautiful letterpresses.

This spring the students going three-dimensional - watch out!

*Beth*



*Drumming, acting and papermaking are just a few projects the students have been up to in art class.*



## All One:

# Understanding Our Communities: Past, Present, Large & Small



For the Phoenix Bird second-grade classroom, fall months brought a true transformation. The Phoenix Birds have truly lived up to their name! In the minds of my students, the Phoenix Bird represents growth. Each time the bird rises up from its ashes, much learning and growth has occurred. The growth that has happened so far this year has been tremendous.

At the beginning of the year the Phoenix Birds began investigating their communities, both large and small, and the roles that we play in each of those communities. As the focus narrowed to our immediate community, cooperative learning, problem solving and teamwork challenges helped to facilitate the growth of our fresh community. Many great emotions, lessons and strong bonds immediately emerged.

The Appalachian Mountain culture - both past and present - became a natural segue into the study of our larger communities. Discovery and experiential learning yielded a better understanding of Appalachian culture. We embodied the pioneers by grinding our own wheat and corn grains with a mill, churning our own butter, and learning to square dance to traditional WNC bluegrass. Collectively, we also constructed a pioneer village out of natural materials, and each child researched one pioneer community member. Becoming the expert, they then represented their community member through presentation. The village, once it came to fruition, was beautiful, resulting in the Phoenix Birds graciously giving and receiving many appreciations.

Quickly, the students became inspired by the primitive skills used by the people of Appalachia, their interest leading naturally into a Cherokee unit. Once again, our Cherokee lessons brought lots of hands-on, experiential learning. Nature became a great inspiration throughout the theme. We molded bowls out of clay, ground grain with rocks, wove placemats, chose Cherokee names, created memory scrolls (pictures that were used, before the Cherokee had a written language) built lean-to shelters, played authentic Cherokee games, danced the Cherokee "stomp" and "serpentine" dances, reenacted several Cherokee legends, used natural dyes as paint, spent time on a loom weaving and ended our theme with a living-off-the-land-feast. We started the feast by going on a walkabout with pokeberry face painting, arrowhead hunting, walnut smashing and gathering and ended with a meal made from items harvested almost entirely from the forest. The experience was spiritually enlightening as well as very grounding for me, the parents and the children. What a beautiful sight!

The onset of colder weather brought the scientific studies of animals in winter and their survival strategies. I used many kinesthetic games to teach the children about scientific concepts such as camouflage, predator-prey relationships and winter survival adaptations. After spending time researching animal behavior in winter, our research led to some beautiful winter habitat displays and animal poetry.

As the energy began shifting to the holidays...so did we. We spent two weeks in December exploring the many winter holidays. Books, foods, crafts, traditions, reenactments, and discussions facilitated much spiritual, social and academic growth. This mini-theme ended with a feast that included traditional foods from Hanukkah, Kwanza, the winter solstice, Las Posadas, and Christmas holidays. Rainbow Mountain's school-wide holiday program reinforced all that we had done by honoring each holiday through song and dance.

The spring will bring new growth all around. We will continue to embody our mascot, the Phoenix Bird, by rising up to the challenge and finding new growth in all our domains.

*West*



## Preschool: Adjusting, Playing, Learning, and Growing Into a Community

Every year, we put a lot of thought into setting up our classroom with diverse activities for the children to creatively explore, make choices, absorb new information and thereby gain independence, concentration and coordination skills. We believe that **children's work is their play**, and we provide lots of individual free choice time for this to happen balanced with some structured group time.

Children also learn to be social beings here. For some, it is their first time away from home, and it's an adjustment to be working together in a new community of friends, learning to respect each other and our environment and learning to resolve conflicts in constructive ways.

In the beginning of the year, we spend a lot of time getting to know each other, ourselves, daily and weekly routines and expectations in the classroom. The children learn words for their emotional vocabulary and begin to use a simple script for solving problems that may arise. We all practice calming techniques in addition to our regular yoga stretches.

In the fall, we celebrated the equinox, made our annual trip to Hickory Nut Gap Farm, and explored the changes that autumn brings. We also began our thematic unit on Night. We focused on the moon - learning its phases and moon facts, hearing myths about how the moon ended up in the sky, learning moon poems and reading lots of stories about the moon. We also explored sleep and our dreams. In concluding our unit, we learned about nocturnal animals and heard the constellation myths.

Always a time of celebration, during the holidays we provide stories and information about many traditions by singing songs, eating food and creating art with the children.

The days in Preschool seem to fly by! Robe and I are so pleased to watch the changes that occur in each young child as they become more comfortable, more confident and feel a part of what we've all created together. We all are truly blessed to be here.

*Judith and Robe*

# Dates to Remember

Feb 27 No school for K-8

March 6 School closed; Teacher work day

March 16 & 17 Student-Led Conferences

March 27 Grandparent Tea 10 to noon

March 27 RMCS Auction 6 to 11 pm

April 4 Tom Sawyer Work Day 9 am to 3 pm

April 13-17 No School: Spring Break

May 1 May Day Celebration

May 2 Spring Carnival noon to 3pm

May 15 School closed; Teacher work day

May 22 & 28 School closed; Parent conferences

May 29 Graduation; PS 10 am, K-8 6:30 pm

## the RMCS mission:

To nurture the discovery, enjoyment and development of the unique gifts of each student through a holistic, community-centered educational environment that encourages self-directed, lifelong learning and fosters a holistic moral understanding of our connection to all people and to the earth.

## Vision Statement

RMCS is a diverse learning community. Drawing upon our long history, we model educational leadership and innovation. We teach from a rich curriculum encompassing the five domains, multiple intelligence theory and essential lifelong learning skills. We challenge students to meet appropriate academic goals. We hire, support and retain staff of the highest quality. We create and maintain facilities that meet our educational needs. We are a strong community of students, staff and families developed through respect and responsibility. Students go forth with confidence, hope, joy, compassion, creative imagination and leadership.

-January 2006



Music teacher, Gary Mitchell, belts one out with the preschoolers.

### The Banner

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Downloads of the current *Banner* and *The Heart of the Matter* (from our director) are available online at [www.rmcs.org](http://www.rmcs.org). We hope you'll take a look.



*Connecting hands, hearts,  
minds...and learning!*



## Omega Awakens Sources of Inspiration and Leadership in Students



For the class called 'Omega,' the year 2008 passed not with a whimper but a bang. On stage at Lipinski Auditorium, the sixth through eighth graders of Rainbow Mountain led their younger peers in a hit holiday musical, capping off a successful semester full of

the twists and turns endemic to the journey of self-discovery. From the team-building games of early August to their performance on stage in mid-December, the first half of the year hit many highlights.

In the new Hospitality League (with other middle schools) the Omegans took to the fields for flag football and the courts for basketball, making new friends and developing good sportsmanship. In Omega's annual haunted house, the students took their literature studies to a whole new level, transforming the school into 'Lord of the Rings,' J.R.R. Tolkien's classic tale of the triumph of goodness over seemingly insurmountable odds.

And, speaking of good taking on seemingly impossible odds, the semester marked the first, small, drop-in-the-bucket of Omega's effort to help implement sustainable solutions for our world watershed. This first effort was the student-lead installation of an educational rain barrel, complete with lesson plan stickers, in our front garden. In January, we donned our hats and gloves and cleaned State Street Stream making a cleaner environment here in West Asheville. The big splash comes in May when Omega, along with hundreds of other middle school students, help usher in WOW, the World Olympiad of Water, a 'feedback' festival that will promote water conservation at home

and distribution of clean water to those in need around the world. While world water philanthropy is certainly a worthwhile cause, the students' own education is not being ignored.

Omega students showed themselves very well at the annual Clean Air Trust Air Quality IQ Contest. Out of a couple hundred entries from several middle schools in the area, Omega took three awards and six honorable mentions. This year's school-wide math hour has created an excellent rhythm in 'rhythmic up in Omega. Students are on track for their May EOC (end-of-course) exams in algebra and geometry. Omegans' topics for their personal interest projects, a Rainbow tradition, span the spectrum from nuclear power to Mickey Mouse. In language arts, we are set to begin George Orwell's classic Animal Farm, a cautionary tale from which the students will be able to draw parallels from their history studies of twentieth century totalitarian political systems. Just last month, Omega was privileged to have Lotte Meyershon address our class. Ms. Meyershon related her experiences as a Jewish eyewitness to Hitler's Germany, having lived there as a teenager from 1933 to 1937.

Finally, the students are also on track to meet their fundraising goals. Through Parents' Night Out (an Omega-led evening of child care), weekly bake sales, pizza sales and our famous Gourmega restaurant, the students have already raised over \$2000 this year. In addition to helping pay for the Omega end-of-year trip, a portion of these funds will go toward student-designated philanthropy.

In short, up in Omega, the 'Big Bang' continues and a universe of possibilities opens up as the students evolve into empowered young adults.

*William and Susan*

# Preschool Naturalists Are Growing Their Hearts

## Growing Our Hearts

The first few weeks of our school year are spent in classroom exploration with a focus on making connections with one another. This ties in smoothly with our classroom theme for the year: "Growing Our Hearts." In September, we established some basic guidelines for growing our hearts:

- We take care of ourselves.
- We take care of each other.
- We take care of the earth and all living things.
- We take care of our belongings.
- 

As we moved into October, we began to expand upon those guidelines. We learned calming techniques to help us take care of ourselves and others when we feel sad, frustrated, angry, or over-excited. We held discussions about how to handle challenging situations with our friends... and we practiced using our words and speaking in strong voices. A basket, located in our quiet reading area, is filled with materials that assist the children in creating calm within themselves.

## Setting Goals

As part of our Rosh Hashanah celebration in September, we had a discussion about atonement... talking with the children about mistakes that people make. We explained to them that a part of celebrating Rosh Hashanah is recognizing your mistakes and setting goals to fix those mistakes. Just saying the words, "I'm sorry" isn't enough to fix some mistakes. An apology for one's actions should be backed by action... saying "I'm sorry" means that you should try your best not to make that mistake again.



*Chestnuts from the class's chosen tree are just the right size for a preschooler's hand.*

The children were very receptive to this and their introspection was amazing. Each child gave serious thought to mistakes that they make and was able to voice those mistakes with honesty. Some children discussed the way that they "screech" at their parents, or use hurtful names when they are upset. Some children recognized that they make messes when they play. Some children know that they forget to flush the toilet, or need to learn to wipe better without making a mess.



*Taking care of the class fish is a big responsibility.*

The children then set goals for themselves, based on the mistakes they shared with the group. They cut hearts from special paper and have written their goals on them, which are displayed on the bulletin board titled "Growing Our Hearts."

This process was extremely touching and empowering for the children. We revisited our goals in January in celebration of the New Year. The children evaluated their progress on achieving their goals. Many children were eager to set new goals, while others recognized a need to continue working on their original goal. The heartfelt honesty some of the children showed was beautiful.

## Connecting With the Natural World

Taking care of the earth and all living things requires a basic understanding of the natural world around us. In October, we held a discussion with the children about what kinds of living things we would find on our playground. Almost all of our children sincerely believed that we would find elephants, lions, giraffes, and even dinosaurs on our playground if we looked hard enough. A follow-up exploration of our playground left the children a bit mystified... they didn't see a single elephant anywhere! We were then able to guide the children into a much more realistic (but magical) exploration of plant and animal wildlife native to our area.

We regularly practice using our “naturalist eyes” by holding scavenger hunts that encourage the children to look closely at natural objects around them. They now know to look up, down, under, and around... to look in secret camouflaged spaces when they want to find insects. The children also use naturalist eyes observing our classroom pets (hamster and fish) and our terrarium... which is full of native plants and small animal life. As a class, we chose a chestnut tree on our playground to observe throughout the year. We continue with our tree study once a month; photographing and observing the tree, discussing any changes we see, and drawing our observations.

In November, the children were so excited about the Presidential election that we decided to hold an election of our own. The children cast a series of ballots, choosing an animal to adopt at the Nature Center. First they voted on



*Preschoolers take a closer look while investigating their playground companions - bugs!*

an animal group they wished to choose an animal from. Their choices were birds, large mammals, small mammals, and reptiles. We tallied the votes and the reptile group won. Next we voted on specific reptiles, choosing between a box turtle, a black rat snake, a timber rattler, and a copperhead. The copperhead won by a landslide! The children then turned their attention to fundraising. They made snake necklaces from Sculpy clay. They made signs and launched a “Copper for Copperheads” fundraiser, collecting spare pennies to send to the Nature Center. Their hard work raised just over \$75, and the children learned a great deal about snakes in the process!

We will continue to connect with nature and with each other throughout the remainder of our school year.



*A relaxation movement, called ballooning, helps keep the class calm, and entertained.*

The coming spring offers many opportunities to explore plant propagation and a variety of native animal life - some of which we may add to our terrarium! As we explore our natural world and our connection with all living things, we will emphasize how to care for the life around us, growing our hearts as we do so.

*Jessy and Brena*



*Rolling pennies collected during the Coppers for Copperheads fundraiser was a fun, tactile activity and the rolls really added up.*



*Having fun on a Muddy Sneakers field trip.*

## Field Trips, Collaborative Projects And Service Learning Enhances Fourth Grade Experience

knowledge of the environment and ecosystems, and important life skills such as orienteering and appreciation and respect for their surroundings. The Muddy Sneakers program has been a fun and rewarding opportunity for the students to experience what so many children are lacking today in our media-ridden, technology-focused culture.

Finally, it is important to mention the service-learning projects that the fourth-grade has participated in this year. In the fall, every student learned to knit. Knitting, although often seen as a feminine activity in our culture, was taught to all students because it increases brain synapse firing through the repeated crossing of the needles, similar to other midline crossing activities, while also improving hand-eye coordination, dexterity, and overall increasing students' brain functioning abilities proven to strengthen academic skills such as reading. Knitting is also fun and easily learned for most children. As a class, the students, teachers, and parents knitted over twenty-five scarves, hats, and other warm items for our local women's shelter. The handmade gifts were delivered to the women and children right before the holidays. The students felt so proud of their work and were happy to see their creations go to those in need.

Our other ongoing service project is volunteering at Manna Food Bank. Once a month, students, teachers, and parents work in the Manna warehouse for a few hours sorting food. It is amazing how motivated and willing to help the fourth grade students are. So far in our two visits to Manna, we have sorted and packed about 20,000

pounds of food for hungry families in Western North Carolina. The impact of these service projects, along with all of the other in and out of class projects the students are working on every day, makes the fourth-grade at Rainbow Mountain Children's School a very special place to be.

*Julie*



*Being outdoors always creates an appetite for apples and good friends.*

The Fourth-grade at Rainbow Mountain Children's School has had an excellent year thus far in and out of the classroom. Beginning in August, the goal was set to create a strong community in the classroom. This community needed to work together, respect each other, be willing to try new things, and always support one another. Through many games and activities, our community was built. In one fun activity, students interviewed each other with big questions, such as, "If you were president, what would you do?" Then the interviewer drew a picture of their partner and wrote all their questions and answers on the poster, which was shared and displayed in the class.

Once the feeling of a solid learning community was established, it was easier to focus on academics. Working together and following rules that enable learning to flourish occurred easily now. The first main lesson focus was U.S. Geography. Students used all their multiple intelligences to learn about their country's states, regions, and major landforms. Locations were memorized through songs, drawings, games, and technology programs. A collaborative project of magnificent hand-drawn maps was presented to parents and classmates to conclude the unit at the U.S. Geography Regional Celebration and Feast.

After all students felt a solid understanding of how our country looks and feels on a map, it was time to see the history of the U.S. from the beginning. Students studied Native American cultures, tribes, and regions. Skits of Inuit life were enacted to reinforce customs and cultural traditions of the tribes. Dioramas made in class of different aspects of tribal life brought the words from the pages of a book alive. Small wigwams, longhouses, totem poles, and birch bark canoes, each created with care and precision, were included in the students' representations.

Besides beginning to learn about our country's history, the fourth grade has participated in so many other exciting activities. This year we are fortunate to be a part of a new local program called Muddy Sneakers. Each month throughout the school year, Muddy Sneakers teachers, along with RMCS teachers and parents, take students out of the traditional classroom and into the outdoor classroom. Surrounded by the beauty of nature in the Blue Ridge Mountains, students gained



*Hard work shows on the face with huge smiles.*

## Peace, Love and Respect Stressed in Third-grade Classroom



The third-grade began the school year with the tradition of naming our class. Taking a step in a magical direction, we chose to be called the third-grade Sprites! We decided that helpful, sometimes mischievous, spirits of nature are wonderful creatures to emulate. It seems that fairies and mythical creatures have long been a part of the Rainbow Mountain experience, which led some new students to ask if we really believed in fairies and sprites. We let each child answer this question in the Witness Chair, where beliefs were shared individually. The rest of the class listened, respected, and honored the viewpoints of their peers.

This theme of peace, love, and respect for everyone begins with self, and spreads out through our families, our class, and our community. Our class followed this natural flow by getting to know ourselves, and then our classmates, to create an awesome classroom community. We then extended this out into our local community. What are our needs, and how do people and businesses in our community help provide for them? West Asheville is a great community-oriented area, so we took several walks, made maps, and eventually wrote letters to local businesses to see how the parts of our community work together. We like to contribute to our community, too, so we sang songs at a local assisted-living center and Christmas carols downtown to share joy and music.

In an expanding spiral, we opened our perspective from our classroom and our local community out into these beautiful Appalachian Mountains. The Sprites first explored how these ancient mountains were formed, which led to a more in-depth study of rocks. Small groups researched and reported back to the class about rock types, and a field trip to Colburn Earth Science Museum was a fun highlight of this study.

Other aspects of our Appalachian Mountain study included many traditional Jack tales, singing, instruments, sewing, and dancing. Local dance caller, Laurie Fisher, shared some social dances with us. These children love to sing and dance! All of this culminated in a wonderful feast, where families brought their favorite southern foods, and the Sprites shared the

variety of ways we studied mountain life.

The Sprites chose our next topic of study: Appalachian animals. We first researched and compared animal classification in groups, and then chose animals to study individually. Third graders voted on the information we should gather and how we should share the information. Student involvement in planning definitely impacts motivation!

We are now deep into writing our books and look forward to the annual Authors Luncheon with our families and friends. The Sprites also enjoy Centering three days a week with our companion class, the second grade. This is when we get to experience wonderful nature activities with their teacher, West. We also take swim lessons with second-grade, and look forward to many more activities with them. The journey continues, and the spiral extends.

*Eddy and Amorn*



*Despite the fog, the Sprites had amazing adventures and a wonderful day at Chimney Rock.*

# Fifth-Graders Link Together Small Acts of Love

The fifth-grade Dolphins began the school year with an eye on appreciation! In our very first week, we started our appreciation chain. Just what *is* an appreciation chain? At the end of each school day, we routinely sit down and reflect on the people in our class and how their words, actions, and presence have benefited us during the course of the day. Perhaps a friend picked up a pencil that dropped on the floor. Maybe a classmate shared a snack or offered help in math. Each of these small appreciations is written on a strip of construction paper, and at days end they are linked together in a chain.



Even our smallest acts of kindness in the classroom are noted and lauded. Together these small acts add up to a classroom environment that is positive, supportive and makes each child feel that their words and their actions make a difference – and they do! It is just like Mother Teresa (whose words we studied throughout the month of November) once said: “There are no great acts, only small acts performed with

great love.” We are living that reality in fifth-grade.

It all adds up mathematically, as well. Using our powers of estimation, each student made an educated guess about how many of these appreciation links were in our chain when we came back from winter break. We looked at the data and figured out the minimum and maximum estimate as well as the range, the median, the mode, and the average. Then we counted the links in the chain and figured out how long the chain was! We are happy to report that, at mid-year, the chain had over 750 links and measured approximately 155 feet! We figure that by the end of the year, our appreciation for one another will stretch the length of a football field.

We have spent time discovering the magic of literature by reading aloud The Van Gogh Café by Cynthia Rylant. This chapter book is set in a small town in Kansas, at a little café where magic always happens and changes the lives of the ordinary people who encounter it. Each chapter is a new story that teaches a moral about the importance of the connections we have with the people in our lives. The Dolphins enjoyed the story and working together to analyze the characters and their motivations. We also looked at each story’s structure and found that they followed a pattern. Our first venture into literary analysis!

With these tools under their belts, the fifth-graders wrote

their own stories that followed the same structure we noticed in The Van Gogh Café. Each student decided on the moral they wanted their story to teach. Some of these morals were:

- You have everything you need to be happy
- Never pass up the opportunity to be nice
- Don’t worry about the past or the future; think about the present
- Magic is not in any object; it’s in YOU!

The Dolphins wrote wonderful stories and showed not only their growing literary talent, but their strong desire to do good in the world.

From this whimsical literary investigation, to research and investigation of more serious historical issues, the students show a strong willingness and a great curiosity when it comes to understanding the world. We began history with the migration of native people into North America. We learned how these people adapted to their new environments and used the natural resources to build shelters, to hunt, and to create cultural artifacts. Students worked as individuals and in pairs to create models of Native American shelters from each of the seven cultural regions of North American Natives. The students developed a great respect and appreciation for how much work it would take to survive and thrive in a primitive environment.

But our lives in the fifth-grade are not limited to the classroom! We have spent time outdoors learning about nature. We have taken day-long expeditions with fourth-grade, in which we perform scientific investigations of our environment. On our most recent outing, we strained water in streams to see what creatures were living there. We found all manner of larvae, insects, spiders, and salamanders. We then used that data to determine the health of the stream. This was a fantastic hands-on investigation as well as an opportunity to become familiar with the beauty of the natural world around Asheville.

This has been a time of richness and excitement for the Dolphins. We have learned a great deal about ourselves, our environment, our history and our community. We look forward to gaining even greater knowledge and perspective as we start the second half of the year!

*Lauren*



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# From Appalachia to Africa, First-Grade Explores the Beauty and Culture of Communities

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The first-grade Ferrets started the school year learning about community. With each unit, we begin our exploration with multiple intelligence stations. We learned about what a community is, how it works, why communities are important, and how we can impact and influence each other in a community. During this unit, we observed ant and worm habitats in our classroom to see how they live and work together! We heard stories and acted them out, we took a walk through West Asheville to see what is in our local community, and together we constructed a fairy village including all the things the first-graders thought were important parts of a community. They had



a great time constructing and playing with the fairy village.

Our next unit of exploration was Appalachia. We learned about the area that encompasses Appalachia, the plants and animals that live here, and how people lived here in the early twentieth century. We discovered what is beneath our feet, starting with the layers of the earth! We learned about soil, rocks, magnets, and plants, resulting in many neat experiments, studies, and field trips.

We visited a local apple farm, the Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education, the Colburn Earth Science Museum, and the Green River Preserve. We took two field trips to Manna Food Bank. We delivered food that we collected and helped sort it for those that need food in our community!

One of our exciting projects this term was when the first-graders became experts on Appalachian animals: researching them, creating miniatures of their animals out of Sculpey, and constructing habitats for their animals. Then we learned about the Cherokee people and early Appalachian living. We made Cherokee fry bread, apple bread, apple cider, and butter. We explored what life was like for the coal miners. We tried weaving, made paper, learned a contra dance and early Appalachian and Native American songs - and more! This led

into our study of immigrants and how they influenced the Appalachian culture, and where our own families came from! As we explored the various cultures that influenced Appalachia, we began our study of world celebrations, traditions, and holidays in December. Saint Nicholas, Las Posadas, Christmas, St. Lucia, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, and Winter Solstice were some of the celebrations we learned about.

After our holiday break, we travelled around the earth to begin our African unit. We are deep into our studies of African animals and their biomes, and the peoples of Africa and their cultures. At the end of our unit, we look forward to sharing what we have learned at our exciting African Safari. Come and visit our classroom to learn about the biomes of Africa!

*Sandra & Ruth*



*Making apple cider produces sweet rewards.*



*Drawing portraits of nature from a worm's point of view in Rainbow's outdoor classroom.*

# The Busy, Happy, Busy, World of Kindergarten

The meaning and importance of community is one of the very first concepts explored in the Kindergarten class at the beginning of each school year. Beginning with the family community, the children listen to books and poems about families, draw family portraits, and share about their own families. They discover that, although every family is different, they are also very much the same. A family is a community filled with love, and the members all help to take care of each other.

The Kindergarteners then explore the importance of our classroom community. We unwind a ball of yarn, creating a complicated and beautiful star-shaped web as each member of our class holds onto a piece. We realize that it took all of us working together to create it, and that anything any one of us does will affect it. We brainstorm ideas about how we can build a strong and positive community in our classroom. We create a class We Will Book filled with their beautiful thoughts and ideas, each page lovingly illustrated by the children. "We will say kind things to each other," "We will remember self space," "We will listen," "We will take care of our classroom," "We will take care of nature," "We will help animals and people when they get hurt," "We will take care of our bodies," "We will be happy," ... If we remember our "We wills" every day, we cannot fail to have strong classroom community.

The Kindergarteners explore our school community by visiting other classrooms and meeting the other students, teachers, and staff of our school. They learn playground safety guidelines and play outside with each other and students from different classes. Other classes visit and share what they are learning with us. We attend school-wide celebrations and work together in multi-age level groups. Families spend time in our

classroom. The children know that their school is a place where they are safe. They are loved and respected by the entire school community.

By volunteering at MANNA Food Bank, the Kindergarten class became more aware of their local community and realized that they could make a difference in the lives of others. Alongside their parents, teachers, and younger siblings, the children sorted through boxes and boxes of toiletries and health products. They worked tirelessly, and were astonished to see the completed cartons stacked in enormous piles that towered over their heads.

The Kindergarteners were proud and excited by what they had accomplished, and anxious to do more. They were already working toward reading one hundred books for Scholastic, who would then donate books to a charity in their name. The class chose to support The Pajama Program, which gives pajamas and new books to children in foster care waiting for their forever families. Learning that these books would be donated all across the country, the children wondered if they could find a way to give books to children right here in Asheville.

The Kindergarten began a gently-used book drive for Reach Out and Read, a program that provides books for pediatricians, family physicians, and nurses to give to young children when they visit the doctor. Each child brought in many of their own much-loved books to give to children in need. It was extraordinarily moving to watch them introduce their books to the rest of the class. Many remembered, reminisced, and re-read the books from when they were "little." As the donations poured in, the children sorted, counted, and put a sticker inside each book, identifying it as a donation from the children and



*Book drives and food drives keep Kindergarten in motion*



## Artistic Expressions and Collaborations Abound at Rainbow Mountain

families of Rainbow Mountain Children's School. In all, 292 books were collected and taken to the Buncombe County Health Center. The Kindergarten received several beautiful thank you notes, detailing patients' reactions upon receiving the books. For many of them, these were the very first books the children have ever owned!

Confident and empowered by the knowledge that they were able to make such a strong impact on their local community, the children were ready to make a difference in the world community. They wanted to use the money raised from their Holiday Craft Sale for something very special. Inspired by Beatrice's Goat, the true story of an African girl whose life is forever changed by the gift of a goat, the Kindergarten decided to make a donation to the Heifer Project International. Heifer gives animals that provide nutrition and income for families and communities around the world. The children voted to spend \$120 to buy a sheep. They are already talking about the possibility of raising more money, so that they can donate a "flock of hope" (baby chickens, ducks, and geese).

The Kindergarteners have a strong understanding of the meaning and importance of community. They know that every single person, no matter how small, can help make the world a better place. The Moral and Spiritual domains are important foundations of Rainbow Mountain Children's School. The Kindergarten children, with their firm grounding in these domains, will continue to work together to help others and to spread peace, love, and kindness throughout their lives.

*Doreen and Jessica*

The students started the school year creating personal expressions books. Being new to Rainbow Mountain this year, this gave me an opportunity to get to know the students and to teach book making. With the beautiful fall weather the students were able to tackle paper making, which is always a wet project. They used recycled material like corn husks donated by Earth Fare.

For their performance at LEAF, Darrell Rose, an accomplished drummer and Artist-in-Residence, taught African drumming methods to the fourth and fifth-graders. The fifth-graders also designed and painted a banner for the performance. This beautiful banner had its own special visual rhythm.

When the weather cooled it brought the students indoors to start their artist studies. While studying Georgia O'Keeffe, they explored value through the use of black charcoals, color chalk pastels and oil pastels. While discovering Frida Kahlo, they painted from their hearts and imagination. Omega and fifth-graders planned and prepared a shadow puppet performance honoring Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera for the annual school-wide Day of the Dead celebration. While delving into the use of color and Vincent Van Gogh, they trained their eyes to mix and blend colors.

Some students had the opportunity to try printmaking using additive and subtractive printing plates. Soon, we will be visiting our neighbors at Blue Barnhouse to see their beautiful letterpresses.

This spring the students going three-dimensional - watch out!

*Beth*



*Drumming, acting and papermaking are just a few projects the students have been up to in art class.*



For the Phoenix Bird second-grade classroom, fall months brought a true transformation. The Phoenix Birds have truly lived up to their name! In the minds of my students, the Phoenix Bird represents growth. Each time the bird rises up from its ashes, much learning and growth has occurred. The growth that has happened so far this year has been tremendous.

At the beginning of the year the Phoenix Birds began investigating their communities, both large and small, and the roles that we play in each of those communities. As the focus narrowed to our immediate community, cooperative learning, problem solving and teamwork challenges helped to facilitate the growth of our fresh community. Many great emotions, lessons and strong bonds immediately emerged.

The Appalachian Mountain culture - both past and present - became a natural segue into the study of our larger communities. Discovery and experiential learning yielded a better understanding of Appalachian culture. We embodied the pioneers by grinding our own wheat and corn grains with a mill, churning our own butter, and learning to square dance to traditional WNC bluegrass. Collectively, we also constructed a pioneer village out of natural materials, and each child researched one pioneer community member. Becoming the expert, they then represented their community member through presentation. The village, once it came to fruition, was beautiful, resulting in the Phoenix Birds graciously giving and receiving many appreciations.

Quickly, the students became inspired by the primitive skills used by the people of Appalachia, their interest leading naturally into a Cherokee unit. Once again, our Cherokee lessons brought lots of hands-on, experiential learning. Nature became a great inspiration throughout the theme. We molded bowls out of clay, ground grain with rocks, wove placemats, chose Cherokee names, created memory scrolls (pictures that were used, before the Cherokee had a written language) built lean-to shelters, played authentic Cherokee games, danced the Cherokee “stomp” and “serpentine” dances, reenacted several Cherokee legends, used natural dyes as paint, spent time on a loom weaving and ended our theme with a living-off-the-land-feast. We started the feast by going on a walkabout with pokeberry face painting, arrowhead hunting, walnut smashing and gathering and ended with a meal made from items harvested almost entirely from the forest. The experience was spiritually enlightening as well as very grounding for me, the parents and the children. What a beautiful sight!

The onset of colder weather brought the scientific studies of animals in winter and their survival strategies. I used many kinesthetic games to teach the children about scientific concepts such as camouflage, predator-prey relationships and winter survival adaptations. After spending time researching animal behavior in winter, our research led to some beautiful winter habitat displays and animal poetry.

As the energy began shifting to the holidays...so did we. We spent two weeks in December exploring the many winter holidays. Books, foods, crafts, traditions, reenactments, and discussions facilitated much spiritual, social and academic growth. This mini-theme ended with a feast that included traditional foods from Hanukkah, Kwanza, the winter solstice, Las Posadas, and Christmas holidays. Rainbow Mountain’s school-wide holiday program reinforced all that we had done by honoring each holiday through song and dance.

The spring will bring new growth all around. We will continue to embody our mascot, the Phoenix Bird, by rising up to the challenge and finding new growth in all our domains.