

Happy Holidays! We hope you enjoyed the Thanksgiving holiday and are looking forward to the many December holidays that are quickly approaching! We know your children are excited about the two-week break that begins on the 17th!

Susan, Karla, and Bill, as well as the rest of the staff, are very grateful for the wonderful meals provided for us during parent-teacher conferences. Many thanks to those who helped with providing and coordinating the dinner offerings. Your generosity is MUCH appreciated!

In the classroom we are preparing for the Birth of Jesus with an advent wreath. We are lighting the candle each day and saying an advent prayer. We are also celebrating the Jesse Tree with an ornament each day. The Jesse Tree traces God's promise of a savior and Christ's ancestry and thereby allows us to share in the waiting and hoping for the promised savior.

General Announcements

Dressing for the Weather

Please be sure that your children are prepared for the cold weather recesses. We go outside ALMOST every day, staying in only when the wind chill is very low. The final decision is made at recess time, so it is often that the morning may seem too cold, but by noon it is warm enough to go out. Students who aren't fully prepared are often quite chilly by the time we come inside.

Also, if possible, please have a second pair of shoes available to stay at school for days when shoes get muddy outside.

Winter Festival

Winter Festival is THIS Sunday, from Noon to 5 pm! Please come and enjoy the festivities, food, music, crafts, and raffles! We hope to see most of you there!

Interest Fair

This year Interest Fair will be February 23, 2012. Accompanying this Newsletter is a 4-page packet of information about requirements and due dates. Each child has been assigned a teacher-mentor. While, Middle School students are not required to participate in the judging, we STRONGLY encourage them to do so.

They ARE, however, required to do the research paper.

Interest Fair should not be considered a once-a-year project. The skills it emphasizes are valuable all year long. It involves learning to take notes, how to handle a long-term project, how to write a paper without plagiarizing, and how to manage one's time. The work is worth it. The judges are impressed every year with the competence and knowledge of the students. Our alumni frequently refer to how well Interest Fair at SJMS prepared them for research in high school and college.

Academic Announcements

Mathematics

The fourth years have started decimals using the Montessori decimal materials. The first emphasis is on place value and exchanging from one category to the next higher or the next lower. They seem to be enjoying the work and will begin addition and subtraction. They are really working on the word problems. This set has 30 pink, 40 white and 30 red. The goal is to finish all three sets or be working in red by the end of the month. (The end of the month is the sixteenth!) If the first set is finished, they start the green set which is a different format and has 80 problems. The emphasis of this set is to learn and use strategies for word problems.

The fifth years are starting fractions with a review of terms and types of fractions. Then we will work on the different techniques for simplifying fractions. This used to be called reducing to lowest terms. The operations are grouped with addition and subtraction of fractions with same denominators and addition and subtraction with different denominators. Multiplication and division of fractions by fractions and then fractions with whole numbers. As students become competent in those areas they have other choices in the room including squaring binomials and trinomials - arithmetical not algebraic.

The sixth years are reviewing fractions as well. As they become competent in these skills, they work on mixed numbers. They, too, have other work to do including squaring arithmetical binomials and trinomials. There are also new math games which will be introduced. The text book could be a source of support for the students who want to practice skills that they find difficult.

Facts

We didn't get finished with facts this session. They begin again in January. Learning facts is rote memory, with a few tricks to help. Memorizing is best done in small doses but frequently. Three suggestions are: to write fact families; to write the fact 3 times while saying it just loudly enough to hear; to sort the set of facts into three groups of easy, medium, hard and not yet known. With the sorting, they can do the easy and try to increase their speed. The hard set moves to the medium and the medium begins to move to the easy.

Geography

The fourth years are in a three-pronged research and experiment study. They have been taking notes on static electricity and on magnetism. When they finish the note, they do an experiment. The experiments have just started. The third topic is current electricity which will begin in January.

The fifth years have finished experiments about weather and have made a weather instrument. Some worked well while others fizzled. In some the learning occurred mostly in the preparation. In others the result was dramatic and shared with others.

The sixth years have started preparing experiments concerning chemistry. They will have the chemistry test on Thursday, December 8.

Reading

This month, fourth years will finish reading their group reading book, and will then choose additional books to read individually from a collection of books by Betsy Byars. They will have some small group discussions and sharing sessions based on the books they select.

Fifth year students are participating in similar activities based on the Gary Paulsen books they are reading.

Sixth year students are in the midst of the twisty mystery of Detectives in Togas. Examining the motive, means, and opportunity of the varied clues is providing some interesting discussion.

Writing

December's and January's writing projects are one-in-the-same: Interest Fair. Please assist your child in keeping to the periodic deadlines of this project. Classroom lessons will emphasize researching, note-taking, and organizing.

History

Fourth year students are working with a variety of materials focusing on the information found in the fossil records of the earth. The Timeline of Life is an impressionistic material that has them organizing information about the different species of life found in fossils throughout time. Students have been asked to memorize some specific information as well as to research and learn more general information about each geological period.

Fifth year students will review the Needs of People. In small groups they will compose paragraphs summarizing how people met their needs in one of six time periods. Each group is working on one of the following time periods: Prehistoric, Egyptian, Greek, Medieval, Renaissance, or Modern. This work is a review and is designed to prepare them for our next study – Ancient Civilizations, beginning with Sumer.

Sixth year students are beginning the researching of Ancient Rome. They are researching how Romans met their Needs of People, how their government was organized, how their government interacted with its neighbors, how the geography of Rome affected the culture, what flora and fauna were part of Roman life, and what legacy the Romans left to the civilizations that followed.

Biology

The children who are finished with their October – November Anatomy have received a new packet for December – January. The systems for study are circulatory and respiratory. Most were excited to receive their new packet. I hope they were as excited by the time they got home. I am enjoying the evaluations from the children. I really do care what they think.

Grammar

We are all working with verbs. All are conjugating verbs but at different levels. We love those irregular verbs! We are also working with adjectives.

As you can see, although December is short, it's full of planned activities! As always, if you have any concerns or questions about what's happening with your child in the classroom, please contact us.

Sincerely,

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NEWS FLASH

We are going to the Nutcracker on December 15! More information to follow!!