

We hope everyone enjoys the cooler weather that may come with October. The classroom is more comfortable, though recesses are sometime chilly for those who forget a jacket. Encourage your children to dress for the varying temperatures of this time of year.

Please look over the October newsletter to see in what topics and activities your child will be engaged this month. Asking about specific activities often make better “conversation starters” than “What did you do at school today?”

General Information

Standardized Testing

Fourth through eighth graders take the Terra Nova Tests (which used to be called the California Achievement Test) in October. This is the only national, standardized test given at SJMS. For most fourth graders, it is the first test of this kind that they have taken and the first two days can sometimes be stressful.

Our procedure is to explain what kind of test this is and to reassure them that a person cannot fail this test. We use the results in our classroom for diagnostic purposes for individuals and for small groups. It can also be a tool for us to evaluate our approach and teaching techniques for some subjects or for particular students. Part of the test is in multiple-choice format and part of it asks questions that need to be answered in writing.

We began with a practice test the afternoon of Thursday, October 13. The official test begins on Monday, October 17. Reading and mathematics tests will be given only in the mornings, and other subjects on some afternoons. Here are some suggestions for you that might help your child through the Terra Nova, whether he/she is a fourth, fifth, or sixth year student:

- Have some conversation with your child about this test. Giving strong effort and personal best is expected; there is no way to “fail” this test.
- It is important to see that your child gets a good night’s sleep and gets up early enough each morning to have a healthy breakfast.
- It is important to arrive at school by 8:30, giving time to get settled before the testing begins.

Use your cheerleading skills to encourage a positive outlook!

International Children’s Day

Friday, October 28th is International Children’s Day. Your child is encouraged to wear clothing representative of another culture or country. There will be the annual parade around the playground in the morning (weather permitting). Middle school students are encouraged to bring an international snack to share in the morning.

Mohican Outdoor School

The fifth and sixth year experience at Mohican Outdoor School was a huge success! Bill and Karla were impressed with the program, the employees of Mohican, and the facilities. Highlights of the three days included classes in Geology, Orienteering, and Limnology (ask your

child if you don't know what it means). Students had positive comments about the meals and the dorms; the girls received a perfect score on their dorm inspection Friday morning! Boys only missed 2 of 25 points! These children know how to clean!

We have already begun plans to return next year!

Orthodontist Visits

When your child goes to the orthodontist for spacers, braces or other implements that affect the teeth, be sure to get a prescription for pain medication to be given as needed. Then give the prescription and medication to the nurse in the event of pain. Many children don't experience pain, but the ones who do should have ready access to relief.

Academic Information

Mathematics

We are making headway in facts, but we have a lot to finish. When students finish, they choose another person to help. Michelle Daniel, Sonya Thesing, and Deb Rumsey have been coming to the classroom to time and coach. Maybe the fifth and sixth years will be finished by Thanksgiving.

In November we will have the second survey of skills. Susan will get them checked and returned the Monday following the tests. These are a way of reviewing skills, practicing skills, and seeing a growth in specific math skills. Each child has chosen a particular skill in whole numbers and in decimals (only 5 and 6). They will work on these skills alone, with Susan, with classmates, and with parents. Then in November, they should get feed back on their improvement and the next skill to work on. The tests are of the basic skills to know solidly by the end of sixth grade.

The fourth years are working on multiplication and division. They practice addition and subtraction as well. They are working on lines and angles and triangles. Word problems are becoming easier and a number of them have moved beyond the minimum. The next concepts will be rounding and place value.

The fifth years have trouble with multiplication and division in both whole numbers and decimals. We are just learning decimal division, but the rest is review. Therefore, these are the skills we will be working on. Look for homework after the Terra Novas.

The sixth years have more individual needs, but already are showing personal initiative and responsibility for learning. They will do some work as a group and some on their own. A few indicate that they work faithfully in the text book. Some say they do it sporadically. Others say, "Text book? Work? At home?" The request is that they work about 1 ½ to 2 hours each week. Each family can set the schedule to fit the week. Some have asked for help in choosing work, others for specific pages. One way to do it is to use the recent survey of skills. If a skill is weak on the test, do some work on that topic.

This sixth grade is highly social. However, they have become more serious about their work in the classroom. The social element is there, but not interfering in the daily class work. Also they chose to work on being more aware of others and more inclusive during the month of October. They are choosing different people to sit with or work with. Some have extended it to include fourth or fifth years.

Geography

The fourth years have done several reports on the solar system and beyond. These reports seem to be copying information from the given sources. We will work on note-taking and using information from different sources. The Sun research will culminate in a test. They will be expected to label and describe the parts of the sun.

The fifth years have done work on weather and are stopped at the point of choosing which weather instrument they will make. This work will continue after the Terra Novas. At that time, Susan would like to take them to the Ohio Historical Center. There is a good weather exhibit which would benefit their study. This would be late October or early November.

The sixth years have been studying chemistry. The latest assignment is to use notes to create a time line of the major contributors to the atomic theory. Each student is in a group of three. The groups have worked well together. The outline shows Mendeleev and the periodic table as our next topic but we are also starting on the vocabulary. Vocabulary is due at the end of the month.

Biology

We have begun the study of THE GREAT RIVER. This is Maria Montessori's name for the study of Anatomy. As is the philosophy of Montessori, we begin with an overview of all the systems. We heard the story of THE GREAT RIVER followed by a lesson on all of the systems of the body on Thursday. We are working during the months of October and November on the Skeletal, Muscular, and Nervous Systems. The children received a packet of materials and a list of required work. The Biology binder may come home any or every night, however, it must be in school each day.

The sixth year students have begun to dry out their plants and we will be harvesting seeds on Tuesday afternoon. They want to plant them so I think another planting cycle would be a valuable learning activity.

Fourth year students need to have a plant in school to care for. If your child does not have a plant, please send one in. Please choose hardy plants!

Grammar

SRA work is coming along very well. For the next two weeks, the children are only required to do 3 SRAs total. If that is too much with the testing, I will happily adjust. After testing, we will begin work with adjectives.

History

Fourth year students will be studying the Clock of Eras, which gives an overview of the formation of the Earth and the beginning of life on the planet. This transitions into a study of the Timeline of Life.

Fifth year students will soon finish their review of the Timeline of Life and will spend a few weeks analyzing the Timeline based on the lessons it teaches about adaptability, care of young, animal instinct, and "the cosmic work". Montessori called these concepts the Morals of the Timeline of Life.

Sixth year students will be finishing their study of Ancient Greeks. At the end of the month we will begin to study the Romans and how their civilization has contributed to our modern world.

Reading

Fourth year students are listening to Bill finish a mystery that takes place, in part, at the Field Museum in Chicago, and involves a theft of Tyrannosaurus Sue's head! When we've finished that, the students will be reading a book by Betsy Byars.

Fifth year students are finishing, Hatchet, and then they will be expected to choose some other books by Paulsen to read from our classroom collection.

When sixth year students begin studying Rome they will read Detectives in Togas, a mystery story set in Ancient Rome with several teens students as the main characters.

Writing

All four levels have turned in their first "Monthly Writing Project", which will be read and returned with feedback. Students will be asked to begin October's project as well.

Practical Life

The care of the classroom is our practical life in Middle School. There is a list of chores in some sections of the room that the children may perform during independent work time. Each chore should take less than 5 minutes and we look forward to a spiffy clean classroom all year. Included on the charts are cleaning of each child's tote tray and locker each week. We hope work comes home in a more timely manner this year.

Thank you for your support as we work with your children. As always, if you have any concerns or questions, please contact us.

Sincerely,

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