Dear families,

Each summer, Arts and Letters staff returns to school a week early in order to grow and learn together. This year, one component of our professional development focused on an exploration of race and racism. The Arts and Letters staff was joined by facilitators from Border Crossers, a New York City nonprofit, whose mission is to train and empower educators to dismantle patterns of racism and injustice in schools. Border Crossers’ staff skillfully built community trust, contextualized the history of race and racism in our country, encouraged self reflection and empowered teachers through role plays to talk about race and identity with students of all ages. (see attached article for a sense of our conversations).

Institutional racism against people of color is not new, but with the mobilizing support of social media, these issues of racial injustice have recently been receiving increased attention. Schools have an important role to play in both the dialogue and the solution. Arts and Letters is deeply committed to diversity and social justice. We know that bringing together children and families from different backgrounds leads to rich learning and helps to break down the barriers of segregation that plague our city.

Race is real for our students, even our youngest ones. Studies show that by age four, American children will group people by race over other identifiers, and by kindergarten, children express explicit bias. (see http://www.bordercrossers.org/). Supporting our school community to promote racial equality through our instruction (in age appropriate ways) and our institutional structure lies at the heart of our mission. We don’t have all of the answers, but we are raising big questions that influence our thinking and drive our planning.

Below is a snapshot of some of the work we are doing. Over the course of the year, through these letters, we will share our progress and continue the conversation around the following themes.

Inventory our classroom libraries/shared texts: Do the characters in the books in our classrooms mirror the diversity of our city?

Analyze our curricula: Where can our units of study be even more inclusive of multiple perspectives, various racial/ethnic identities, and themes of social justice?

---

**Upcoming Events**

- September 29th - Curriculum Night 6pm
- October 3-4 Rosh Hashanah (No School)
- October 7th- Lower Grade Family Sing
- October 10th- Columbus Day (No School)
- October 11th- A&L Day of Service
- October 12th- Yom Kippur (No School)

**Important Announcements**

**Forms/Paperwork**- Your student received important paperwork in their backpacks last week, including:
- Lunch Form (everyone should fill it out, regardless of your lunch plans)
- Media/Walking trip form
- Blue Cards
- Medical Forms

Please return these ASAP to your student’s teacher or advisor.

**Lost and Found**- As the temperature starts to dip towards autumn weather, please make sure that your student’s coats/jackets/lunchboxes are all clearly labeled with their name. This helps us make sure that they find the proper home, if misplaced within the school building. Our lost and found is now located in the hallway by room 309.
Assess opportunities and outcomes for students through an equity lens: What structures are/need to be in place at our school to ensure that ALL students have access to rigorous engaging curriculum? What supports can we utilize to move towards greater equity in achievement?

Create space for students to grapple with race and identity: How can we really listen to and support students’ questions, observations, and concerns around race, racism, and identity in an age-appropriate way?

Acknowledge race as a potential factor in interpersonal and institutional interactions: How does race fit into the context of what is happening in a given interaction in our community?

Maintain diversity in our student body and in our staff: How are we maintaining and sustaining our diverse community?

Build and cultivate community: How can we as adults intentionally support our young people to build relationships across race and class lines?

We are excited to continue this conversation and to challenge ourselves to be vulnerable, open and committed to this difficult but imperative work.

Look forward to seeing you at curriculum night on Thursday.

-Meg

Thursday’s Book Talk
with Ms. Ballantine

Timmy Failure: Mistakes Were Made by Stephan Pastis

He may be clueless, but the comically self-confident Timmy Failure is CEO of the best detective agency in town, perhaps even the nation. Now Timmy’s legion of fans are invited to set off on their own path to mastery with the help from Stephan Pastis.

Added material includes step-by-step instructions on how to draw Timmy and his impressively lazy business partner, the polar bear Total—including a trick to making them both look a tiny bit nuts (hint: the secret is in the eyes). Even better, kids are invited to share the spotlight with Timmy by sending their drawings to his website, for a chance to be featured in the Timmy Failure Gallery of Greatness.

Word of the Week

Abdicate: to leave the position of being a king or queen

: to fail to do what is required by (a duty or responsibility)

Celebrations for 9.23.16

5th Grade: Juan Colon-Courage
6th Grade: TJ Edgar- Compassion
7th Grade: Paola Velasco- Courage
8th Grade: Zindzhi Sonyika- Confidence
Staff: Ms. Swift and Ms. Johnson- Confidence
**IN THE CLASSROOM**

8th Grade Humanities
With Ms. Casey and Ms. Jacks

**Crossing the River: Intro to Social Justice**

On the second day of school, students were given a challenge which at first seemed like a simple team-building exercise, but was really a simulation of some of the basic causes and effects of social injustice.

Below are excerpts from the day's presentation....

In that first round of the game, most teams were able to find a way to get all of their members across, and even teams who didn't were able to see the strategies used by the other teams.

Then, they played again with some changes. Two teams were given docks and for one team, the river got wider due to a chemical spill from the dock construction. To make matters worse, the team with more river to cross lost half of their raft pieces, as did the team next to them (who had no dock). Meanwhile, the teams with docks got extra raft pieces. After these changes, the teams again attempted to cross the river.

In the second version the teams with docks and extra raft pieces had no problems crossing the river. The teams with more river to cross and less raft pieces tried valiantly, but didn't make it across.

As we debriefed the game students made many astute observations and connections between the game and the world around them.
It is the mission of the A&L Arts Team to provide opportunities for students to explore, cultivate and demonstrate their work. Our intention is to make their learning visible through the technical and aesthetic creation of art. Visually, musically, theatrically and in motion, we open doors for children to make meaning with materials and ideas. Using the techniques of the arts we guide students to grow an open mindedness that drives them to see the world through multiple lenses.

Just launched their new website:

http://www.artsandletters-artsdepartment.weebly.com
This week in Math and Science...

In Math Workshop, students continue to develop skills with place value. We compared and ordered numbers using a place value chart. In a game we played, Place It and Top It, each teammate used a die to create a 4-digit number and then figured out which was the higher number. We'll continue to work with Place Value throughout the coming week as we examine number lines and number patterns.

In Science, we are learning about what it means to be a scientist. We also explored some of the tools scientists use by examining them, naming them, and figuring out what experiment a scientist might do to use them. Some students tried on safety goggles, worked with balance scales, and looked closely at graduated cylinders and other measuring tools.
A & L HAPPENINGS

3rd Grade Home Culture Study

2nd Grade Family Read Aloud Breakfast
Quotable T-Shirts

Work time in K-2
8th Graders Collecting Samples for Bacteria

Recess Corner