



November 2010

Life and Times in Lower School

“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”

John Dewey



Alfie Kohn

On October 8, Pistu, Joe and I went to Little Red Elizabeth Irwin School in Manhattan to hear a talk by Alfie Kohn, author, educator and, according to *Time* magazine, “perhaps the country's most outspoken critic of education's fixation on grades [and] test scores.” He had many interesting thoughts to share and mentioned *Race to Nowhere*, a reminder that we must keep the dialogue open as we move forward in educating children. I urge you to take a look at his [website](#) when you have the opportunity. One of his earlier articles, [What to Look for in a Classroom](#), reaffirms the hard work of our talented faculty in creating a learning environment that works for all our students.

Community Forum

Last year Ruthie Shaw and I visited University Child Development School in Seattle. They have a very interesting all-division committee, with a student representative from each class. Two teachers acted as facilitators in these weekly meetings, giving children an opportunity to discuss and make decisions about shared spaces such as the lunch room or the playground. Ruthie and I were quite taken with this group as

an example of the democratic ideal. In the lower school this year we have initiated a similar committee, Community Forum. We meet in my office on Fridays at lunch. Our agenda is set by the students and comes out of their classroom meeting time. Every student in the division (except for pre-k, which will not participate at this point) will have the opportunity to participate at least once this school year. I am a permanent facilitator and our teachers will rotate in the other facilitator slot. Josie even made a guest appearance last week. So far, we have discussed our bathrooms and ways to make sure that we all keep them clean and remember to wash our hands. The group went back to classes to ask them to make signs for the main bathrooms near the Chapman Room, as well as for the pre-k/kindergarten and the 1st-grade bathrooms. Those signs are now posted. The group has also discussed ways to keep the tricycle track safe and how to ensure a turn on those tricycles for everyone who wishes one.

Halloween Sharing

On October 29, the lower school came together for an informal in-house performance to celebrate Halloween. This was a chance for students to become more comfortable about performing in the theater while sharing some of the great work they do in specials with their peers. The pre-kindergarten and the kindergarten recited "Five Little Pumpkins," and the 1st graders sang "The Three Little Witches" with Bill. Pistu, Bill, and Dorothy collaborated with the entire 2-3 on a movement-and-music Spanish chant about the Day of the Dead (el Día de los Muertos), and the 4-5 performed a mock-radio show loosely based on their scary story work earlier this year. In true radio tradition, we have created a podcast for your listening pleasure. I will send out a separate email with details to access the podcast in the next few days.

All School Activity

October 29 was a busy day. We also had our second all-school activity. Students met with their groups to carve pumpkins and dress up their senior(s). Then we all met in the theater to watch as the seniors modeled their newly created costumes. At the end, Steve and his helpers lit the pumpkins. It was beautiful. I hope everyone had a wonderful Halloween.

Koi Creativity



We are very much looking forward to the Fall Festival Reimagined on Saturday, November 20. Coincidentally, that is the Day of the Child celebrated in many countries throughout the world. The festival planning committee had the creative idea that every child pre-k-12 at PDS should make a koi, or carp, for will display at the festival. On October 20, 22 and 25, Catherine Harris (Tucker, in grade 2), along with Browning Kay, visited every classroom and every student created a koi with gold paint and metallic paper. Don't forget to look for your child's koi on November 20.

As Seen Around the Lower School

Pre-k enjoyed sequencing photographs from their apple-picking and applesauce-making to create a class book. During their second visit to Sprout Creek Farm, kindergarten explored seasonal changes along the creek and in the garden beds. Their garlic has sprouted, native plants have begun to wilt and the trees wore brilliant colors of yellow, red, and orange. Students visited with a three-day-old calf and comforted the mother cow, who wasn't feeling well. Back at school, they created a fall mural of Sprout Creek Farm, turned their dramatic play corner into a working farm market and culminated their investigation of patterns with a Pattern Museum that hosted teachers from pre-k, 1st grade and lower school. First grade went to Market Street to see the types of businesses and services there. They also attended a performance of three Leo Lionni stories at the Bardavon Opera House. They also hosted a visitor from India who spoke about markets there. The 2-3s went to Mohonk as part of their Native American Lifeways program. They used a fire-starting bow-drill, played Poppasickawawin, made clay pinch pots and plant fiber bracelets and listened to stories in the Longhouse. To support and extend their understanding of their read-aloud book, *A Bone from a Dry Sea* by Peter Dickinson, the 4-5s have been watching a video from the Nova *Becoming Human* series about the discovery of Lucy. The story is set in East Africa both in present time as the area is being excavated and at the same location 4 million years ago, when a tribe of early hominids lived there. In science, Emma has created a dig site where the students enjoyed firsthand experience of archeological work. Each classroom retold the Greek creation story and then illustrated it. Look for displays in the 4-5 hallway.

Food Service

The food continues to be delicious in our new lunch program. Don't forget you can find the PDS [lunch menu](#) on the PDS website.

Please Drive Carefully

A reminder to families: Please slow down when entering our parking lot. And remember to obey the "One way" signs. As you know, many people move in and out of our parking lot and we want to keep everyone safe.

Important Dates to Remember

TUESDAY, November 2—No School, Family Conferences, Child Care Available

THURSDAY, November 11—No School, Veterans' Day

SATURDAY, November 20—Fall Festival Reimagined (5K Fun Run begins at 8 a.m.)

WEDNESDAY, November 24 to FRIDAY, November 26—No School, Thanksgiving Recess

Best,

Debby