

November 16, 2013

4th Grade Parents,

We've had sub 20 degrees Fahrenheit and snow this week, yet as I write this I've just finished raking leaves on a gorgeous and warm autumn day - welcome to Tennessee in the fall! And a very Happy Birthday to one Robbie McQueen who turns 10 years old today!

We had an eventful week writing autobiographical fiction stories and learning about Columbus, New Spain, the Sun, the Earth and the Moon. Hopefully the Pearson Guided Reading booklets I've started sending home this week will help the children connect in new ways to the material we are studying in Science and History. I've also put lots of links on my website to various YouTube videos, BrainPop topics and other internet sources to facilitate connections. None of this enrichment material will be included on any quizzes or tests, but accessing the links will certainly aid in the students' processing of the concepts we discuss in class.

I've heard from the students that some had trouble accessing BrainPop the other night when I assigned the viewing of the "conquistadors" segment. I've been told we have a school-wide license, so there should be unlimited access using the logon id "knobcreek" and the password "enrichment". Please let me know if you continue to experience difficulties. Also, please don't limit yourselves to viewing the segments I recommend - BrainPop has all sorts of easily searchable topics of interest to your children and may certainly be encouraged as a pleasurable alternative to video games or television.

One of our classroom "jobs of the week" is News Anchor, and this week Ella set a very high bar for all those who follow! Because of Ella's exemplary efforts, I've added a "News Anchor" tab to my website featuring links to the most interesting stories brought in. Ella has three currently on display - check them out if you're interested in the first new carnivore identified in North America in many years, or the oldest living creature discovered (and killed) by scientists, or how school children cope in Goma, Africa in the shadow of the volcano Mr. Nyiragongo. Blaise and Ella are anchors next week - let's see if they can keep up the high standard of reporting! (Also thanks to Ella and her mom for bringing in loads of snacks for the students, and some critical thinking games from home!)

In response to some questions from parents about extra math instruction focused on specific problem areas, I have decided to add math to our extended DEAR time at the end of the day. Students are now invited to stay Tues through Fri from 3:15 until 3:45 for extra DEAR time OR for help with their math. They may

choose to work on their homework and get help when they're stuck, or to come to me for help in specific areas (such as regrouping in subtraction, elapsed time, metric units of measurement, etc.)

Our next field trip is Wednesday Nov 20th from 1:00-3:00. We will be visiting the ETSU Planetarium to get some "close to real world experience" with our current Science unit on the Sun, the Moon, and Earth. We are truly fortunate to have a planetarium so close to hand, and parents so willing to drive. Thank you!

Conversation starters from the past week - ask your child about ...

- the "Buzz Blast" and "Hedbanz" games we've been playing in critical thinking this week
- the new kind of note-taking I introduced in Social Studies on Friday ("guided notes")
- the pictures I showed them of Mrs. Mac and I in Goma and climbing Mt. Nyiragongo back in 1988 (how did Ella know we'd been there?!)

Finally, I will be taking 2 days leave before Thanksgiving to visit my ailing mother in Canada. Mrs. McQueen has graciously agreed to substitute for me on Nov 25-26, and I plan for the students to each give a 5-minute (or so) presentation on their Country Project to the class on either that Monday or Tuesday.

Presentations will take place at the end of each day (from 2:00-3:00), so please consider attending if you can to support the students, swell the audience, and to acknowledge all the hard work the children have put into this project over the past 9 weeks.

Enjoy your weekend (and Robbie, enjoy your party!)

Mr. Mac