

# WALT WHITMAN MONTHLY



## Teaching Empathy: Evidence based tips for fostering empathy in children

Dear Walt Whitman Families:

“Teaching empathy? This might sound strange if you think of empathy as a talent--something we either have or lack. But research also suggests that [empathy is a complex phenomenon](#) involving several component skills:

- A sense of self-awareness and the ability to distinguish one’s own feelings from the feelings of others.
- Taking another person’s perspective (or, alternatively, “putting oneself in another person’s shoes”).

- Being able to regulate one’s own emotional responses.

These skills might seem like standard-issue, grown-up social skills, and indeed they are.

However, even adults can have trouble with these abilities. For instance, some adults would shrink from offering a wounded person first aid, not because they are callous but because they have trouble coping with their own emotional reactions to the other person’s plight.

So I don’t think of empathy as something you either have or lack. There are degrees of empathy, and with practice and an understanding of psychology, we can probably develop stronger empathic skills.

Here are some tips for teaching empathy--tips inspired by scientific research...”

To read the full article visit:

<http://www.parentingscience.com/teaching-empathy-tips.html>

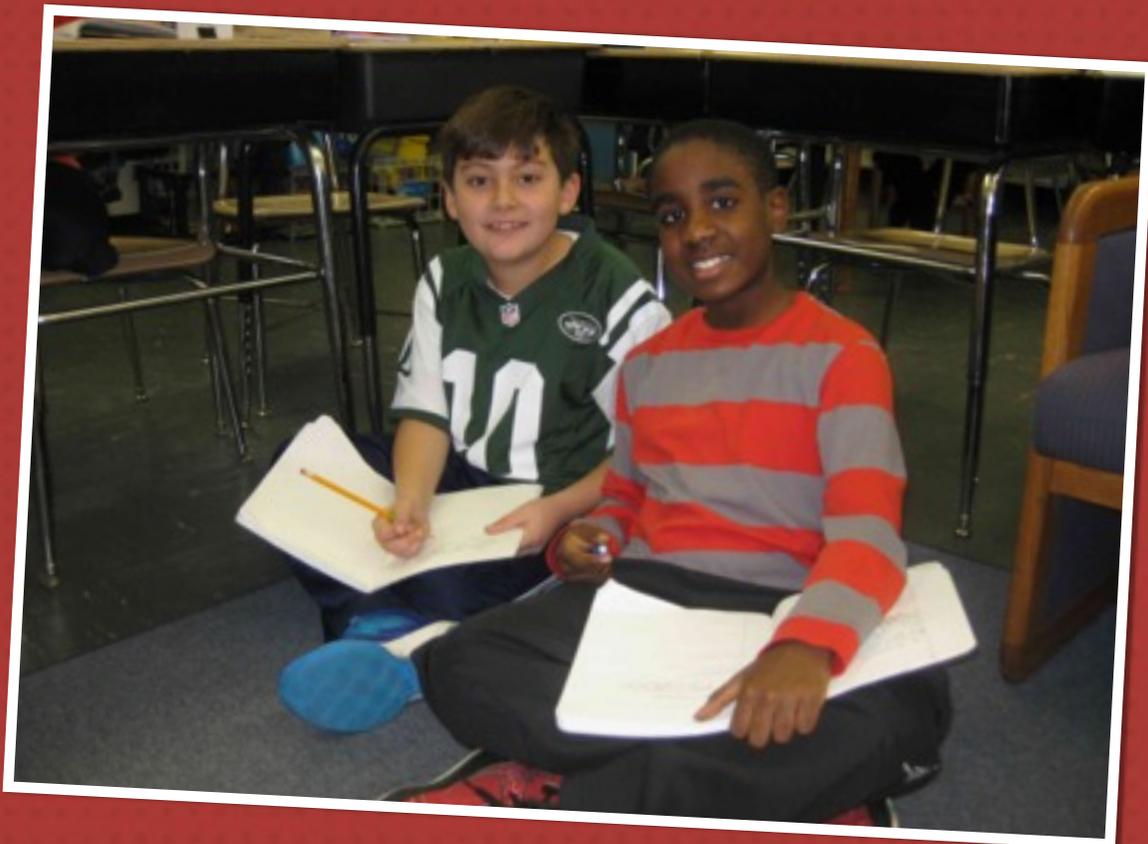
~Mr. Snyder, Principal



# Fourth Grade

The fourth grade students have been very busy! They have traveled to the moon and back and learned how the moon affects the tides of the ocean. We have studied how the Earth is tilted on an axis, which is why we experience the four different seasons. Fractions are the current focus in math. The students have been learning about equivalent fractions, fractions in simplest form, and adding and subtracting fractions with mixed numbers. We are  $\frac{1}{2}$  way through our fraction unit!! We are wrapping up our study of the Native Americans and will be *exploring* famous European Explorers. In reading and writing, we have been analyzing and creating our own persuasive pieces. Although we may feel strongly about a topic, we realize the importance of seeing both sides of an argument.

By Mrs. Castaldi, Mrs. Haxton, Mrs. Hoffman, Fourth Grade Teachers



# Understanding Speech & Language

As a child's language develops, parents can help children understand how to use their language more effectively through their own use of appropriate grammar (classes of words, their forms, and functions) and syntax (the arrangement of words and how we put them together for a specific meaning). Some children with speech and language difficulties have problems understanding, pronouncing, and using even the simplest and smallest units of a word (-ed, -ing, -s). Therefore, their sentences may present as immature and sometimes illogical. Even before children learn to read and write, they can learn to use correct grammar and syntax. Having a grasp of grammar and syntax will help your child with reading comprehension and writing competence.

## **Children with speech and language difficulties often:**

- Use words in the wrong order (their sentences don't make sense or are misleading).
- Struggle to use pronouns correctly (identifies self as 'she,' 'her,' or 'me' when 'I' is correct).
- Cannot grasp how to use word endings (-ed, -ing, -s) correctly.

- Do not understand how to connect sentences or thoughts using conjunctions (and, but, or, yet).

- Do not understand verb tenses (past, present, future).

**Here are some strategies to use with children at home to help improve their use of grammar and syntax.**

- Use correct grammar and syntax when speaking or responding to your child. Don't focus on correcting your child. For example, if your child says, "Her hitted me!" you should respond, "Did she hit you?" Always respond as an adult. Don't use "baby" talk.

- Play sentence games. Cut pictures of everyday items from magazines, paste them on cards, and have the child give a sentence verbally describing the object to the other players for them to guess the item. ("It has icing you can eat and candles that tell how old you are.")

- Cut simple scenes from magazines and glue them on cards. Give the child open-ended prompts, and have the child complete your prompts verbally or write sentences. (Picture of dog playing catch with his owner – "What is/was the dog/owner doing?" "The dog is/ was/will...,

His owner is/was..., The ball is/ was..."-this gives the child opportunities to use the correct form/forms of the verbs.)

- Write words on note cards – Sentence Scramble. Pick words that make a complete sentence/question and scramble them (include the punctuation mark). Have your child organize the words into a sentence/question that makes sense.

For more information regarding typical speech and language development please refer to the following web based resources:

<http://www.asha.org/slp/schools/prof-consult/norms/>

<http://www.education.com/reference/article/acquisition-sentence-forms/>

By Mrs. Krimitsos, Speech Pathologist

## Kindergarten Russian Classes Ring in the New Year With a Winter Folktale

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С НОВЫМ ГОДОМ! Happy New Year! In 2013, the Kindergarten Russian classes learned some important facts about Russia (Россия). They colored maps, discovering that this is the largest nation in the world, located in the continents of Europe and Asia. They learned that Moscow (Москва) is the nation's capital, and viewed scenes from Red Square (Красная площадь), including the Kremlin (Кремль) and St. Basil's Cathedral (Храм Василия Блаженного). They learned some facts about another major city, the Gateway to the West, St. Petersburg (Санкт-Петербург). The one-time capital was founded by the Tsar Peter the Great (Пётр Великий) in 1703. It is often referred to as the "Venice of the North," since the Neva River flows through the center of the city. Due to its northern location, it is also known as "the land of the midnight sun" because the sun can shine throughout the night in the summertime there.

In addition to examining the geography and some fascinating facts about key Russian cities through maps, globes, posters, books and video segments, the children have learned some basic

expressions in the Russian language. They know how to greet people, introduce themselves, inquire about the well-being of others, and say farewell. They can respond to simple classroom commands, count from 1-10, identify and say colors, identify some classroom objects, as well as name members of their immediate family. We have used our Red Books to explore colors and basic vocabulary expressions, and played "The Jumping Game" and BINGO to learn numbers and colors. Also, we practice children's songs in Russian, reinforcing important themes like "friendship."

In addition to learning some geography, history and language expressions, we have explored cultural topics through storybooks. We read *The Littlest Matryoshka*, by Corinne Demas Bliss, which introduced the children to the popular Russian handcrafted toy known as "nesting dolls" or *matryoshkas*. The book tells the story of how Nikolai the doll maker lovingly creates and names his dolls, highlighting the intricacy of the doll-making process. He sends the "sisters" across the ocean to a

toy store in America. When the littlest matryoshka is lost, the adventure begins. She travels far and wide, but, happily, she is reunited with her sisters as the tale concludes. The book was followed by live class demonstrations and coloring activities. Some of the children and I brought in matryoshkas, allowing other classmates the opportunity to take apart and reassemble the dolls.

As the holiday season approached, we briefly discussed how the winter holidays in Russia are celebrated. We read *The Nutcracker Ballet*, by Vladimir Vagin, introducing the children to the story behind Peter Tchaikovsky's famous musical composition. We also watched scenes from the ballet so the children could experience the music and excitement of the action in the production itself. We spoke about the importance of ballet in Russian culture, naming the most famous centers for the study and performance of ballet in the world, the Bolshoi and Kirov theaters in Moscow.

## Kindergarten Continued...

In the Russian tradition, children receive holiday gifts on New Year's morning. These presents are delivered by Grandfather Frost (Дед Мороз) and his helper, the Snow Maiden (Снегурочка). After reviewing some vocabulary expressions from the beginning of the year, in January, we continued this seasonal theme by reading *The Snow Princess* by Ruth Sanderson. This version of a popular Russian folktale is based on the Tchaikovsky opera-ballet *The Snow Princess*. In this tale, the daughter of Father Frost and Mother Spring enters the human world and finds her icy heart warmed by love. When the Snow Princess falls in love with Sergei, she must give up her magical powers to become human. Of course, we had the wonderful opportunity to compare and contrast this storybook with the currently popular Disney film, *Frozen*. Although the film is based on *The Snow Queen*, a Danish fairytale told by Hans Christian Andersen, the children were able to find many similarities between the two stories. They were also able to explain the differences as well. This was an exciting and animated classroom discussion!

In honor of the International Fairs being celebrated this time of year, our kindergarten children are also listening to Russian balalaika music and experiencing the Troika folkdance through video segments and classroom attempts to perform the dance with one another. The Troika (тройка), meaning "a set of three," can refer to a sled drawn by three horses harnessed side-by-side. This is an iconic symbol of Russia. The Troika dance is performed in groups of three as well, and it imitates the movement of the horses pulling the

sled. In the Red Books, the children will color a Troika sled to make the connection between the dance and its inspiration...

As we look ahead to the month of February, it is certainly an eventful year to be a Kindergarten student in Russian class. We will be discussing the Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia! To celebrate this historic time, we will be learning the names of some popular winter sports in the Russian language. The children will do some fun sports-themed coloring pages to reinforce their vocabulary studies. We will listen to both the Russian and the United States' national anthems, and discuss character education themes such as good sportsmanship and the importance of teamwork.

Until next time... до свидания!

By Mrs. Morton-Greiner, Kindergarten Russian Teacher



# Music to My Ears

This month in General Music, Grades Kindergarten, First Grade, Second Grade, and Fifth Grade have been up to a number of activities. In Fifth Grade, we continue to learn more musical terms and listen to and respond to different types of listening material. Also, we've been playing the instruments exploring different rhythms and timbres.

Kindergarten, First, and Second Grade continues to learn new songs. This month, we've heard the story "The Snowy Day" by Ezra Jack Keats and responded to music by Claude Debussy entitled "The Snow is Dancing." Second Grade is in the process of creating art work for the new music bulletin board. They are making "Animal Rhythms," where they draw a picture of their favorite animal and pair it with a musical rhythm. We had successful performances for the Halloween

Parade in October as well as the Thanksgiving Feast in November. With regards to Rhythm and Movement, K-2 continues to learn new dances. A favorite for Second Grade has been a dance from Russia called "Sasha!" Kindergarten is learning and exploring stationary and locomotor movement. Kindergarten especially enjoys "The River Song" in particular as well as "Animal Action I" and "Animal Action II."

The combined Fourth and Fifth Grade practiced extremely hard for their Winter Concert and performed on January 16, 2014 for both the school and the community. The concert was nothing short of amazing and the children emerged as true performers.

By Ms. Olsen, General Music Teacher



# Third Grade Takes an Internet Safari to the New York Philharmonic

The third grade has been busy learning all about the instruments of the orchestra. We took a safari, via the New York Philharmonic website, looking for various instruments, and then we listened to Benjamin Britten's "Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra." We learned that instruments are grouped in families because of their similarities, but just like our own families, each instrument (or person) has certain qualities that make them unique and special. Our culminating activity was to create our own orchestra. This is a picture of an orchestra one of our third graders created. Notice how each family is colored the same color.

By Dr. Conklin, Music Teacher

