



Grade 3-4

October 19, 2007

Dear 3rd and 4th Grade Families,

Even with all the indoor recesses and rainy day “ickiness”, we’ve had a great week! What struck me most this week has been all the non-academic learning we foster and value at Ring Mountain. As much time as we are devoting right now to addition strategies, word solving, creative tricks for spelling tricky words, and sharing ‘Me’ books, we are also devoted to developing leadership, personal responsibility, and a sense of fair play. So this week I want to tell you about some of the non-academic strides these children are making, in Preferred Activity Time (PAT), rainy-day lunches, and chorus.

The ‘Preferred Activity’ right now is fort building fantasy play. Children make a blanket and table structure and create a game to go with it. Everyone can be involved in whatever role they choose. Children can come and go from the game and nobody is turned away. These are their rules, developed over many Friday afternoons; there is little management necessary. What happens when it feels too rowdy for one student? It can be empowering to realize that a game, no matter how it looks from a distance, is just not fun for you, and be able to choose to do something else.

Twister is the favorite rainy lunch game, but what happens when some situations are not covered by existing rules? Is it okay to add rules? These ad hoc times provide great practice for when the same issues come up at outside recess. Can I say I appreciate all the rain then? Well, I wouldn’t go that far...

These children are becoming such great leaders too. On Wednesdays Ms. Pockell teaches K-4 in a choir style class. Right away my kids started to see that some littler ones have a hard time focusing, and that I (designated police/crowd control) just can’t be in enough places at once. Their solution was to buddy with the “squirmers”. They have developed this to the point that today I did not get involved in any behavior management issues, but spent my whole time singing. What a pleasure. (Not so much for Luca and Brendan who have requested reinforcements! I of course wasted no time in comparing their frustration to mine when I have to deal with similar silliness. They gave me these super serious affirming nods as though to say, ‘Yes, we know exactly what you mean!’) It’s really exciting to see my students take on such extra responsibilities, and to seek these leadership roles. As much as mastery of math and language, it is these skills we all seek to inspire and instill in our students.

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In a few weeks we will have a K-4 Halloween activity party. I know these students will enjoy themselves. I know they'll have fun. I also know that I can depend on them to organize some of the activities and model appropriate behavior during the party. Even more than that, I know that they will be helping to run the show. They will partner the younger students, not because they have to, but because it is just what you do. They will be leaders. They will be extra eyes keeping everyone engaged and having fun. They won't let anyone be left out. The coolest part is that I really think that this is part of the fun for them! Maybe the show no longer revolves round them, but the pride they feel when they are recognized by appreciative adults, and the fuzziness they feel when their little friends seek them out more than compensates for knowing that.

Sincerely,
Liza Butler

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