



Grade 3-4

November 16, 2007

Dear 3rd and 4th Grade Parents,

Between the Cabaret and the Colonial Fair there are some pretty excited children in 3rd/4th right now! Both events are the culmination of lots of hard work and both offer children the opportunity to show what they can do, what they know, and how excited they are about it.

Culminations are a key part of learning. A unit like our colonial history unit will start with a hook – something to spark interest and capture the imagination. The children's genuine interest then drives the unit forward. I always find that the plans I make have to be changed, expanded or tossed out and started over, based on how the students engage with the activities and reading that we do. This group loved Jamestown. My two day plan became a week-long exploration, a one class reenactment became a lengthy drama that the children want to perform and film. Their drive for historical accuracy drove me back into research mode, and we wound up investigating and translating some of John Smith's own writing.

I knew they would love creating their own projects for a fair, but I could not know what those projects would focus on, or what resources they would need, or, indeed, what the format of the fair would be. So much of any unit is determined by what interests them, and how they best learn.

There are the predictable parts, of course. Everyone has to write at least a page as part of their project. Although this can take any form, they must take their writing through our regular writing process. They must draft and revise and edit. They must attend to spelling and punctuation. They must also consider their audience and try to make their writing interesting and engaging. These are all skills that we are developing every day, and in every project we do.

In choosing a project students had to list not only their interests, but their skills, and their experience with previous projects. My goal was for everyone to choose a project that would stretch their learning, and be a little challenging, but also showcase their talents and enable them to share what they have learned and enjoyed about this topic.

Their projects are a cross section of our academic endeavor – none are intended to demonstrate the sum total of anyone's learning. Taken together, though, they'll give you a neat insight into all our learning, and into the ways we like to learn. Given the many ways we present material in Ring Mountain, it won't surprise you that children chose all sorts of ways to present their projects. You'll

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experience hands on learning while you find out about Pilgrim dishes developed from the Wampanoag, about the hardtack they ate on the Mayflower, how they preserved food to keep them going over winter, how the settlers grew their own food, how they dyed and sewed their own clothes, and about children's games and toys in the early colonies. You'll also get to see and discuss models of Colonial houses and Colonial clothes. The number of students who chose to present their learning in this interactive, visual, kinesthetic way says a lot about the kind of impact this sort of learning has on them. Several students also chose to use technology – wanting to use the project as a way to learn a new skill. Many students love to re-imagine, and act out the dramas they are learning about, so you'll also get to see our whole class drama and an interview between a modern day historian and a character from the first colonial settlement. If all that isn't enticement enough, we'll finish with a Thanksgiving snack-feast!

I've sent an email with specifics about time and location – let me know if you can only make a part of it, and I'll try to schedule the presentations as best as I can.

Sincerely,
Liza Butler

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