



The St Michael Steiner School NEWSLETTER

11th June 2010
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Dates for Your Diary

JUNE

Sat 12th Open Day 10 - 12.30

Fri 25th St John's festival at
Dulwich scout camp

JULY

Wed 7th The Merchant of Venice
Class 7&8 play 6.30pm
Rudolf Steiner House.

Thu 8th End of term festival
Times TBA

Fri 9th TERM ENDS
12.30 FOR ALL CLASSES

SEPTEMBER

Mon 6th Staff INSET - no school

Tues 7th SCHOOL STARTS
10am

St. John's Day

The festival of St. John the Baptist, also called Midsummer Day, is celebrated on 24th June, three days after the Summer Solstice. The solstice itself (literally "Sun standing") has always been a special moment in the cycle of the year - the time when the sun reaches it's highest point in the sky before the days begin to grow shorter again.

In ancient times, the new day was reckoned to begin at nightfall and so many traditions celebrate on the evening of 23rd June. In Sweden and Finland, Midsummer's Eve is considered the greatest festival of the year, except for Christmas Eve. In the morning people go out and pick summer flowers to make a garland. They raise a 'midsummer pole', like a Maypole, covered in flowers, and wear their garlands and their best clothes and dance and sing around it. As we see from Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', this is traditionally the night of love magic, of love oracles and divination. Lovers would jump together through the luck-bringing flames, maidens would find out about their future husband, and spirits and demons were banished.

In Britain from the 13th century Midsummer was celebrated on Midsummer Eve with the lighting of bonfires after sundown. This was known as 'setting the watch'. In some places, people still stay up until midnight to welcome in Midsummer day, and, when the fires die down, men run or jump through the embers to bring good luck. An adventurous few even stay up all night - the shortest night of the year. The Germanic tribes and their neighbours, the Slavs and Celts, celebrated with huge bonfires. Druids said it was the time of the wedding of Heaven and Earth. Spirits are said to appear, both good and evil. People gathered herbs and flowers to protect themselves. One of the most powerful was the plant known as 'chase-devil', which we now call St. John's Wort or Hypericum. It was used in potions, and people wove the flowers into garlands to decorate their houses or protect their farm animals. They believed that the herb could shield them from the power of evil spirits and also help them see into the future. Other customs included decorating the house, especially the front door, with birch, fennel, orpin, and white lilies.

Five plants were thought to have special magical properties on this night: rue, roses, St. John's wort, vervain and trefoil. In Britain, it was once believed you could gather fern seed at the stroke of midnight and rub it onto your eyelids to make fairies visible and that wearing your jacket inside-out on Midsummer's Eve would keep you out of danger.

The festival of St. John is still very much alive in Scandinavia, perhaps because, for a few days around the solstice, the sun doesn't go below the horizon. But in the rest of the world, it is hardly marked at all. In Steiner schools, however, it is one of the four main festivals of the year. As is often the case with ancient festivals, the deeper significance of St. John's Day has been all but lost. It is this deeper aspect that we bear in mind and try to bring, though not usually overtly, to our celebrations.

'Midsummer Day' is celebrated three days after the solstice and not at the solstice itself and, unlike all other saints' days, St. John's feast is celebrated on his birthday and not on the day of his martyrdom. This is not insignificant, since we also celebrate the birthday of Jesus, exactly six months later. The 3 days of stillness before crossing over to the other side of the year reflect the 3 days between the winter solstice and Christmas Eve and also echo the 3 days between Good Friday and Christ's resurrection. St. John points the way to what lies ahead, saying "I baptise you with water, but the one who comes after me will baptise you with fire." As Jesus is baptised by St. John and announced as the Saviour, it points to Christ's role as the one who will triumph over death.

Amanda Bell

From The Early Years

Over the half term holiday, Leigha and I travelled to the Goetheanum in Dornach, the centre of Anthroposophy in Switzerland for an International Early Childhood Care conference entitled: "The Dignity of the Young Child". Over 750 participants attended from 27 countries and we took part in workshops alongside colleagues from Asia, Australia, America, Africa and much of Europe.

The conference focussed on the child from birth to three years, as care of these children is gaining increasing importance in society at large and in crèches and nurseries. Although in England we currently have only one Steiner Waldorf day-care centre (at the University of East London), many Steiner Waldorf schools, including our own, offer Parent and Child groups and parenting workshops. We looked at the way in which children's dignity is perceived and respected at this age, as this is decisive for their future biography and thus for each person's individuality. The main speakers addressed three key questions:

- How can the child's environment be suitably fashioned to give him sufficient scope for developing his future potential to the greatest possible extent (movement development, learning to walk)?
- How can we support and nurture the child's autonomy and will to learn so that his inner personality can grow on the basis of trust and security (speech development, learning to communicate)?
- How should the young child's surroundings be structured? How can parents' and educators' self-education and self-development enable the child to experience himself both alone and in relationship with his surroundings (learning to think)?

We were fortunate to hear first-hand about the experiences of two day-care centres in New Zealand and America, as well as look around some inspiring displays of day-care furnishings specifically for the very young child, including some materials developed by the Hungarian pedagogue and theorist Emile Pickler, and photographic exhibitions from around the world. It was an inspiring few days, and we have come back with much food for thought for developing the Early Years in our school.

Back to school, our big children are working with great determination on their hobby-horses, sanding long hazel sticks, carding wool and ensuring their finger knitted reins measure the right length. Over the next few days we will be creating a large sand-pit in the Secret Garden with logs from the Common, and the children are eager to help water the seedlings in our raised beds. We would be grateful for any contributions of feathers, tree bark (largish pieces) and pine cones during the next few weeks, which we will be using in some of our crafts this term.

All parents are warmly invited to our Kindergarten Farewell Evening on Monday, 28th June from 7-8.30pm where we will say goodbye to some parents and staff. If anyone would like to offer any musical or other entertainment, please let Leigha or myself know. Contributions of finger food or drinks (non alcoholic) are welcomed. We look forward to seeing you at our St John's Festival and the end of term festival, details of which will be sent out separately.

Katie Sharrock

For the Early Years team

What's Happening in the Classroom(s)?

Class 3&4 has been getting to grips with times tables, decimals and fractions with a rigorous programme of daily tests and "millions" of sums (that's got six zeros, by the way), but hardly a millionth (that's only got five zeros - why? because there isn't a units column after the decimal point. "What??? You never told us that!" Only a million times) of what they could have done without the loud complaining, which they enjoyed very much. Anyway, the 'Golden Challenge' chart is finally almost full which means that most people can answer correctly most times table questions asked at random, most of the time. Most people also remember, most of the time, NOT TO ADD OR SUBTRACT THE DENOMINATORS!!!! to SIMPLIFY THEIR ANSWERS!!! and that, whatever they did to the denominator, they HAVE TO DO THE SAME THING TO THE NUMERATOR!!! A few more years' practice and most of the 'most's should become 'all's. Fingers crossed - it's all I have left. Thankfully, we will spend the last four weeks of term practising our play, making props and costumes and painting scenery. By September, everyone will have forgotten all their times tables, they will swear they have never seen a fraction before and I may have strangled one or two of them. Don't say I didn't warn you.

Amanda Bell

St John's Festival Friday 25th June

Our St. John's festival will take place at the Dulwich scout camp again this year. More information will be sent out next week. Parents are warmly invited to join us and should arrive, with their children, at 10.30 am.

There will be optional camping for classes 3,4,5 & 6 on the Thursday evening. Please let your child's class teacher know whether your child will be camping or not. Those not camping should then come for the festival on the Friday morning.

THE BIG RUN

Get ready for the Sponsored Walk / Big Run by picking up an organic cotton t-shirt specially designed by Raphael.

Assorted adult and child sizes will be available.

They are £10 each or come included with a Big Run registration. See Leila on Friday 18th June at pick up.

SOCIAL & OUTREACH GROUP

Please join us @ the next Social & Outreach meeting Monday 14 June at 8pm @ Leila's. We would be very happy to have new members as we'll begin planning events for the year ahead. Speak to Leila or Leigha for more information.

Thank you,

Leila

The Management Team meets approximately every two weeks to monitor and co-ordinate the School Support Teams. If Support Team members have items or information for our meetings, please put them in the box in reception or email them to Jin Yee Lim at j.lim@liminaires.co.uk

The next meeting will be on 14th June 2010

Amanda Bell
On behalf of the Management Team

Help needed for

SWSF Class preparation conferences

The Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship has asked us to host the preparation conferences for classes 3,4 and 5 this year and we will be holding them all on Saturday 26th June.

Current Class 2,3 and 4 teachers from all over the country will be attending to work together with us to prepare for September.

Thank you to everyone who has offered accommodation for our visitors on Friday night. We are expecting between 30 and 40 people all together, so we may need a few more beds.

Also, the participants would like lunch on the Saturday. If you would like to provide this or can offer a bed, either privately or as a fundraiser for the school, please contact me.

Amanda

ACCOMMODATION NEEDED FOR VISITORS

Occasionally we have students, advisors, therapists or speakers, who do not live in London, come to our school. Often we need to find a place for them to stay for the night so that they can join us for our early starts. If you have a room available and are happy to have lodgers there from time to time for mostly one night at a time, and with plenty notice, please let us know as this would help the school hugely.

Thank you,
Lara

Would you like to see this newsletter in colour and detail?

This Newsletter - as well as back issues and all future issues - is available in full colour on our website at

www.stmichaelsteiner.wandsworth.sch.uk

Newsletter Contributions

The next newsletter will be distributed on Friday 9th July

We are always keen to publish contributions from parents in the newsletter. If you have something interesting/funny/controversial/moving/profound to share, however small, please send it to me.

Deadline for contributions is

6pm Wednesday 7th July

Email them please, to: amandabell@mac.com

Community Pages

Please note that the school does not endorse or recommend, either in general or in particular, anything offered in the Community Pages and parents are advised to check the qualifications of practitioners or people offering services here.

WANTED: 1-BED FLAT

I am looking for a 1 bed-room flat to move into by August 1st. If anyone knows of something suitable, please contact me.

Brian Jacques