

Whisper of the Woods

A SCHOOL IN THE WOODS MONTHLY COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER – Vol. 2.2
Academy School District 20
December, 2019 – May You Enjoy the Solstice in Your Own Unique Way!

NATURALIST WRITING STAFF 2019-20

- Sophia A., Connor B., Katie B., Tommy C., Morgan H., Ben J., Chelsea O., Annya W. – Sponsor / Editor: Mr. BXB



Winter Solstice ... By Sophia A.

You know that time of year when the day is just too short? No! Not Christmas, silly! The winter solstice, the shortest day of the year! During this time of year, at SITW we celebrate the solstice as it represents our connection to nature, without any religious connotation.

During the winter solstice, the North Pole (yes, the place where Santa lives) is at the maximum tilt away from the sun. This year, the winter solstice is on December 21st. When we, the Northern Hemisphere, are experiencing the winter solstice, the Southern Hemisphere, however, is experiencing the summer solstice, the longest day of the year.



Did You Know? Here are some facts you *probably* didn't know:

- This solstice is also referred to as *mid-winter* or *Dark Night*.
- There are two types of solstices: winter and summer.
- The winter solstice is the shortest day of the year.

Embrace the Journey: Young Naturalists Thrive in the Woods

By Bill X. Barron, SITW News Club Sponsor

On December 3, 2019, Photojournalist Byron Reed of Denver's Channel 9 News visited Academy District 20's School in the Woods (SITW) to film a segment for the television studio's monthly "Cool Schools" program. It's scheduled to air on the December 20th morning broadcast: short version – 5:15 am and 7-7:30 am; long version – 6:15 am and 8-8:30 am.

Each year seventy-eight fourth graders are selected by lottery to attend this school, which welcomed in its twenty-first year by moving from trailer classrooms into a permanent building in April, 2019.

In advance of Mr. Reed's film session, I had the opportunity to meet with School Coordinator Mr. Jon Wuerth, as well as sit down with five engaged student "naturalists," probing them on what makes the SITW such a special, once-in-a-lifetime, and potentially life-transformative experience.

Mr. Wuerth celebrates the school he helped create in 1999 as "a place where one's voice matters, where students have power," and "where naturalists learn they can make a difference." He encourages teachers to challenge students to "take on higher level projects" and to create a learning environment "in which there is openness to relationship building."

What students learn at this special school ultimately comes home; Mr. Wuerth believes that "this dialogue changes families." Teaching takes place through "kinetic learning which creates the foundation for a sustainable base of knowledge." Uniquely empowered with "self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-determination," naturalists "impact future teachers and classrooms."



SITW Newspaper Club with News 9 Videographer – (Front L-R) Sophia, Connor, Anyna, Tommy, Chelsea; (Back L-R) Morgan, Mr. Byron Reed (Ch. 9), Ben, Mr. BXB (Club Sponsor)

Fourth Graders Anyna, Tommy, Chelsea, Connor, Katie are all student writers for the "Whisper of the Woods" SITW school newspaper. Each has a uniquely passionate perspective on why this year may change their lives.

The woods environment provides many opportunities to celebrate the freedom of choice which energizes

these young naturalists. For Tommy, a thinker and a doer, his favorite activity is building wiki-ups, where all you need is to be resourceful enough to utilize that which the forest landscape provides in multiple varieties. On Fridays, students participate in a number of "Specials"; Tommy is inspired by the art and tech offerings. Ever since his older brother Luke loved being here three years ago, it has been Tommy's dream to be here, too.

One freedom that a joyful Connor appreciates is the choice to chew gum at school. He and his classmates are learning the important lesson that freedom comes with

responsibility. Thus, as a school, we voted on options that will allow young people to have gum in a way that respects both the school and the natural environment. Connor says that here at SITW it's more like middle school because students "rotate between teachers" and "take ownership" for their learning.



A vibrant young learner, Annya celebrates the ten-acre preserve on which SITW has grown a new home, because with no perceptual boundaries but flags on neighboring trees, this setting offers "a recess like no other school." Instead, SITW teachers entrust their youth to make wise decisions. "They trust us outside," not only with playtime, "but also with jobs," states Annya. In her free time, Annya writes haikus to nature, knits, and participates in yoga.

A natural writer who appreciates the quiet of nature, Katie enjoys being where she can study the natural environment in a classroom or just step through the school doors into nature itself. She not only likes creating wikis but, like Tommy, gets a kick from practicing archery. Katie has embraced the school culture by openly encouraging her classmates to "reduce, reuse, and recycle."

An active student who learns through doing, Chelsea raves about the field trips which can "last all day or even become an overnight." She appreciates "learning which comes from the land," looking forward to creative Fridays where she can use art to represent the animals she admires and the landscapes she remembers.



It is clear that as educators and as parents, we have an unparalleled opportunity to support our youthful participants in their path of learning, encouraging them to respect and appreciate the journey, more than leading them to a known destination. Through appropriate challenge as well as our continued guidance, a young person learns to accept ownership and take initiative, while acquiring the life knowledge necessary to become the difference in the world that they will one day lead.

SITW Is a 'Cool School'

Visit & Interview with Byron Reed, Channel 9 News

On Tuesday, December 3rd, School in the Woods had a special visit from Byron Reed, a visual photojournalist with Denver-based Channel 9 News. Mr. Reed produces a monthly news program titled "Cool Schools" featuring Colorado learning institutions with a creative and unique approach to education.

When contacted by Mr. Reed about doing a segment of SITW, Staff Resource Coordinator Karla Powers answered: "You have reached the right school – we are so proud of our program and wish to share what we do with other schools, as it works so well."

The Channel 9 visitation began with the morning Mindfulness Walk, followed by a morning meeting where students were considering which animal to donate to a family in need for the holidays (they voted to give a goat).

Mr. Reed, who views himself as a "visual storyteller," then visited classrooms in action, took a tour of the new building, and finally sat down for individual interviews with three students from the newspaper club and a one-on-one dialogue with the school administrator, Jon Wuerth.

While the final product, airing on December 20th, will only be approximately two minutes, the video will give the work of SITW – with its twenty-first year welcomed in by our brand-new facility – the higher profile it deserves.

The newspaper club had some questions for Mr. Reed in regard to his work.

Why did you become a news reporter? Did your experience begin in a school setting?

My first experience in journalism was in high school when I took a radio and television class and joined the video club. It exposed me to the many opportunities there were in the field and really sparked my interest in photojournalism. From there, I followed my passion into the news industry because I loved watching TV news as a kid and wanted to give back to my community. According to my mom, writing and photojournalism were my strongest skills, so it was a field that I wanted to enter.

How do you determine that a story is newsworthy? Describe the editing process.

At our television station, we go through an editorial meeting process where story ideas are presented and discussed by reporters, photographers, producers and our web team. From there, we decide which stories will be covered for that day and the best way to cover them.

What is one of the most interesting stories you have done and why?

I have a couple of choices for my most interesting stories. My first is the Mikhail Gorbachev (former President of the Soviet Union) visit to the US in the early 90's. The Berlin Wall had just fallen. President George Bush and President Gorbachev were speaking in Fulton, MO. As President Gorbachev walked by the media, he took time to shake all of our hands and answer a few impromptu questions.

My second is the presidential nomination of Barack Obama here in Denver. I have never seen so many news outlets in Denver before. I was on the floor of Pepsi Center for convention coverage all week and then on the field for President Obama's acceptance speech ... it was great to be part of that historical event.

What characteristics of School in the Woods will be of most interest to your viewers?

I think our viewers will find School in the Woods very unique and well-suited for our state. Colorado has so many people who love the outdoors and we believe learning about your school will be just as interesting as its students.

Why would it be of value for a young person to consider a career as a news reporter?

I think this career would be a great choice if it's your passion. The news business isn't for everyone (long hours, working weekends and holidays), but if you like writing and telling the stories of your community, it's for you. My biggest privilege is getting to hear from our viewers, then telling their stories almost every day on the evening news.

Play in the Snow: It's Winter! ... By Annya W.

It's the time of the year for snow and playing in it. It is winter! If you don't like winter, I might just be able to convince you to like winter.

One AMAZING reason is nature. The trees are so beautiful with the lightly and perfectly placed snow. Also, it is the best time of the year to look for tracks. One of my favorite tracks to find are those of the cotton-tailed rabbits. They are a lot easier to see in the snow than the mud.

Another reason to love winter is playtime in the snow. What is your favorite thing to do with snow? Some things that you can do at school with snow are ... build snowmen, make snow angels, build igloos and even just sit with your jacket, hat, gloves and snow pants reading a book.

The last and third reason that I would say would be important is taking a walk. When you take a walk in the snow, it makes a lot of sounds. Some kids/people love satisfactory sounds. If you are one of those kids/people, did you know sometimes when you step in a freshly knew patch of snow that it can make a crunchy, satisfying sound?



What do you do during the wintertime? With whom do you do it? What is your favorite thing to do during this wintry time of year?

Seeing Winter ... By Katie B.

"A mountain chickadee, a Steller's Jay!" everybody whispers. In the winter in Black Forest, these are a few of the more common birds you will see. Which animals live in your home ecosystem?



Mountain Chickadee



Steller's Jay

In the snow, you won't, probably won't, see reptiles, amphibians, insects, arachnids, or anything like that. They would be way too cold out in harsh winters. But you can see plenty of mammals and birds out there.

When it comes to tracks, game trails, or scat, you can easily follow an animal. In the snow, you can see tracks clearly. First, find tracks and be sure not to step on them. Next, retrace the animal's movement. Lastly, you can create a story about its traces and leftovers like scat. Some animals that we may see in the winter are mule deer, many birds and raptors, sometimes coyotes and cats, tree squirrels, and porcupines. Ponderosa pine are the most common evergreen; we also have fir and spruce, as well as hardy plants like yucca and cacti.

Animals vs. Humans: How We Each Handle Winter

By Chelsea O.

Who prepares better for winter: animals or humans? Each has to prepare for winter, but they do this differently and they face their challenges in unique ways!

Humans

Food: Humans get food during winter the same way year-round. They hop in a vehicle, drive to the nearest grocery store, buy what they need, then go home.

Warmth: Us humans are warm-blooded, which means our blood will stay warm even in very cold temperatures. But if it's very cold and you are out too long, you will eventually freeze to death. We wear coats, gloves, scarfs, hats, etc. to manage this problem. When we don't have a body covered by warm clothing, that part of our body is really cold. Ears, in my opinion, get cold easier than the rest of our bodies.

Birds

Food: In case you have not noticed, birds don't have grocery stores. Somehow, they access food even though all the things they eat are buried under snow. They handle this problem (if they don't migrate during the winter) by searching for and storing foods such as fruit and nuts which may grow on trees.

Warmth: Birds are warm-blooded as well, but they can't wear coats and items to keep them warm. So how do they defeat this conflict? Many birds, especially insect eaters, migrate to places where they can find food.



Rabbits

Food: On cool winter days, most rabbits eat their normal food such as grass, flowers, greens. But as the weather gets really cold or it snows, rabbits eat tree bark, branches, and pine needles which in the Black Forest are easy to find. Even when it snows, and there is but a vegetable or two in your backyard, you may still find rabbit tracks.

Warmth: Instead of wearing a hat, rabbits put their ears against their bodies. On warm days you might see that a rabbit's ears are up and on cold days they are down. In snowy weather, rabbits stay in one spot. Since its body heat is warmer than the snow, the rabbit will go against a tree so no wind will blow on it.

Source: *Billings Gazette*, "The Nature Guy" on the YouTube video titled: "How Bunny Rabbits Stay Warm."



Deer

Food: In winter it is much more difficult for a deer to find food. Most of the time on snowy days they must scavenge for food. They love to eat leaves, twigs, or other plants. For more information on this, I highly recommend “The Best Facts” article on what deer eat in winter.

Warmth: The deer like most wild dogs, goats, and horses grow winter coats. You might already know (as Mr. Wuerth has said) that a deer's neck is a bit thin in the warm months, but in winter its neck is fatter because of the winter coat.



Summary

As you can see, all animals – including humans – have ways of surviving in winter. Even though a bird can't go to a grocery store and a rabbit can't wear a hat, perhaps they are smarter. Humans fight against winter and cold in artificial ways, whereas animals learn to adapt to their environment naturally in ways that allow them to get food and to stay warm.

Winter Preparations

By Tommy C.

Winter is coming and we get to go sledding, build snow people, or play like snow animals. But we need to be prepared. If you want to go sledding, you'll need snow pants and a jacket to go sledding. If you want to build a snowman, you'll need waterproof gloves and maybe a snowball maker.

You'll also want a warm wiki-up to shelter inside. Most likely, it's colder in Black Forest than at your home, so you'll want to dress a little warmer. Also, it snows a lot here; wear boots so you don't get snow down your shoes!

Our Special School

By Katie B.

School in the Woods is a very unique school environment. First of all, we have a *huge* amount of freedom. We are able to chew gum in school. They even trust us to go into the forest without supervision. We have jobs which have a huge responsibility, for example, wildlife feeder or meteorologist. We have peer leaders, but we usually don't need adult help.

Every day at school, we talk about conversation efforts, especially as our school building is in the woods, more specifically, Black Forest. We go to websites such as Astronomy Picture of the Day and Bird Notes in order to learn more about our natural world.

To begin each morning, we share good things and greetings to build community. We also have special days, such as Tie-Dye Tuesday where we wear our SITW tie-dye shirts and Wild Friday where we spend our TRACKS tickets to do an activity with a certain teacher.

On the 3rd of December, a news reporter came to Black Forest to film our school for a segment of his show called "*Cool Schools*." He came because he thought our school was a very neat place; my mom says I go to the best school ever! He interviewed three students from the newspaper club: Chelsea, Tommy, and Annya. Knowing that our school will be on television is amazing!

Movies, Birthdays, Insta Oh My!

By Katie B.

At School in the Woods, we love community; each day we celebrate each other and recognize what we do at school.

In the first quarter of the year, we watched two movies as a whole group. The first movie was after a book we read *My Side of the Mountain*. Afterward, we all agreed that the movie was not a good representation; the book was so much better and had so many more details. The next day we split into groups and began writing an essay comparing and contrasting the book to the movie.

The other movie we watched at school was "*The Eagle Huntress*," a documentary about people (mostly men) who captured eagles, raised them, trained them to hunt, then eventually released them into the wild after 7 years. I learned by watching that movie that it doesn't matter what gender you are, because in this movie people believed women can't hunt and should stay at home. The thing that I enjoyed most about this movie is that it showed what this culture did each season to survive. I wonder what movies are next on the list!

For birthdays, it's a very special time for us to celebrate. We do it for everybody, even staff! Instead of the birthday person or people receiving gifts, they give gifts to the school. This year we have many books coming in for Ms. Powers; even one book is a lot, but we've had people bring in multiple books. Because we're having so many people having birthdays and so many more books coming into our library, it is becoming bigger and bigger. We even have our own birthday song, not the traditional one though; we make simple things really special, don't we! Some people, like me, have summer birthdates and might not have the same experience, but probably, hopefully, I can celebrate an early birthday.

If you look on Instagram we do have an account; it's called "*78naturalists*," and we post almost every day! Sometimes photographers get pulled from volunteers to take pictures or go through pictures to choose and post. Then, in the afternoon meeting, we review recent posts. Some posts are about class or special events; others are about school clubs. Every day we are getting more likes, so keep it up!

Plastic: Bad for Animals, Creative for Humans

By Anyya W.

Eva N., Audrey R., Audrey R., Sophia M., Addy J., Reilly R., Naomi O., and Anyya W. have started a fundraiser “CFFEA” (Children Fighting for Endangered Animals), specifically with regard to plastic straws.



One of their reasons for forming a group is to help save the wildlife and its animals. Putting plastic into garbage often leads to it going into wildlife areas. When it goes into nature, it gets into trees and animals.

Sometimes animals such as squirrels are scavenging for food; if they think the plastic is food, they eat it. When they eat it, it goes into their digestive system. This may cause an early death for this animal.

Another reason these naturalists are holding the “fundraiser” is because CFFEA plans to offer different crafts. It is open to anyone interested. You do not have to be in a special club; just come join the fun! This is an awesome experience for you to have.

When the plastic craft activity starts, it will be at the wiki-up hosted by Audrey R., Eva N., Sophia M., and Addy J. This wiki-up is located near the front of Wikitown, close to the lunch tables. If you have any further questions, ask one of the operators. They hope they see you at their wiki-up!



Candy & Responsibility

By Anyya W.

Candy! Most people like it a lot, some not so much. For Halloween, most of us were so excited to eat all that candy. However, there has been a lot of candy in the trash cans but, worse yet, it's on the ... oh, it's too sad to tell you, but I MUST... it's on the GROUND! I know, right? It's a tragedy.

At SITW, students are given much freedom, but with freedom comes responsibility. If we cannot handle our privileges responsibly, we will lose them! Do you still want to be able to eat candy at your school? If so, make sure you keep the wrapper; if you don't finish it, wrap it up before placing it in a trash can.

More Than a Building Manager: Mr. Bradley Roberts

By Sophia A.

Q: Why did you choose to become a building manager? A: I enjoy working for the school district and being around the kids.

Q: Why did you choose to work at School in The Woods? A: I came from Edith Wolford. I like that I am in charge of myself here and work only during the day hours.

Q: What do you notice is different about this school versus other elementary schools? A: The culture is completely different. You guys are called naturalists. Everyone has compassion and is looking out for each other and the environment.

Q: What is your thinking on the wasting of paper towels? A: Only using one paper towel per use reduces the number of paper towels being used considerably. That means less trash is being emptied out and fewer resources are being used. By the naturalists being responsible in this manner, it makes a great impact on the environment, as well as making my job easier.



Mr. Bradley Roberts, SITW Building Manager

Q: You came from the Northwest? A: Yes, I moved here 5 years ago from Washington. We moved for the landscape, the mountains, and the sunshine. I really like it here.

Q: What other jobs have you done? A: Before I moved here from Seattle, for 15 years I worked in portable sanitation. That consists of port-a-potties, delivering and picking them up on a daily basis. In Colorado, I thought it would be better to work indoors.

Q: Do you have less work because the naturalists help with emptying the trash and recycling? A: For sure. That gives me more time to do other things, which really helps.

Q: What other things do you do that a normal building manager might not do? A: I've had to do repair work on the furniture, help with landscaping outside like moving mulch, and different creative projects per Mr. Wueth.