



## The Lion's Roar

### STRENGTHEN THE WHOLE, SO ALL WILL BE STRENGTHENED



The trials of the past six months have been evident. Conveniences many of us took for granted have been stripped away and replaced with sacrifices of extra morning preparations, masks, and reminders to physically distance. What has not changed is that Birchwood has remained Birchwood. Why is this possible? Birchwood has long set a culture where collective sacrifice is second nature. With extra emphasis on this need this year, we have appropriately labeled our efforts – *Strengthen the whole, so all will be strengthened.*

**STRENGTHEN THE WHOLE, SO ALL WILL BE STRENGTHENED** is the epitome of our Pillar IV, which states: *We urge everyone associated with Birchwood School to assume personal responsibility for the welfare of the Birchwood community at large.* Our families have made a demonstrated effort and made a collective sacrifice to maintain a safe community with regard to COVID-19.

**STRENGTHEN THE WHOLE, SO ALL WILL BE STRENGTHENED** is also the opportunity for our community of alumni, parents, grandparents, faculty, staff, and friends to come together to demonstrate our commitment to our mission by making a gift to the Birchwood Fund. Donations are used to bridge the gap between tuition receipts and the actual cost of providing the first-class

education and individualized attention that every student receives. We rely on this unrestricted best-use funding in order to underwrite our Signature Programs, upgrade facilities, and take advantage of unexpected opportunities as they arise. Our fall appeal mailing outlines the importance of participation as members of the Birchwood community. Also included in our mailing is the 2019-20 Birchwood Fund Report and a remittance envelope for you to make a donation. You can also pledge or give online at [birchwoodschool.org/giving](http://birchwoodschool.org/giving).



**STRENGTHEN THE WHOLE, SO ALL WILL BE STRENGTHENED** is underway. We ask you consider making a gift to the Birchwood Fund in an amount that is personally meaningful for your family. Birchwood relies on the generosity of Birchwood Fund donors and we heartily thank those who have made gifts to the Annual Fund in the past and thank those who will join now.

*Tim LaBar*  
Director of Development

## UNDER THE CANOPY NEWS FROM BIRCHWOOD

### CATCHING UP WITH BIRCHWOOD GRADUATE OLIVIA SAVONA



*Olivia joins Mrs. McNaughton from Ontario, Canada where she is a sophomore at Trinity College, University of Toronto.*

Recently, Mrs. McNaughton sat down with Birchwood alumna Olivia Savona '15 to catch up with a Zoom chat. Olivia, a sophomore at Trinity College (one of seven colleges within the Faculty of Arts & Science at the University of Toronto), is both a Canadian

and U.S. citizen. She is pursuing a double major in urban studies and human geography. "I want to study how cities work and how people live in the geographies that they're in," said Olivia.

During their conversation Olivia shared how she plans to be helpful to others in the future, gave some study advice, talked about her favorite Birchwood Signature Program, and thanked Birchwood's wonderful teachers for their guidance.

#### My Place in the World:

Not everybody can be a superhero, but I think everybody can have an effect on the world in very small ways if you let yourself do it. People can really improve the world in small ways. Just give back. I want to do small things that can help large amounts of people.

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# REFLECTIONS BY CHARLES DEBELAK

## MISSION MATTERS

Our school mission matters. It matters because our mission embodies our beliefs about how children grow and how they learn. It matters especially during this pandemic when restrictions and limitations abound. As the centerpiece of how we think about education, it permeates our decisions for curriculum, pedagogy, materials, and professional development. When we hold fast to our mission, we provide the level of education and character development for which Birchwood is known.

### *Becoming*

Our mission statement claims that we are equipping children with the attitudes and skills to *become*. The term *become* is purposely vague, as in answering the question, “Become what?” It is vague because no one can predict the life our children will

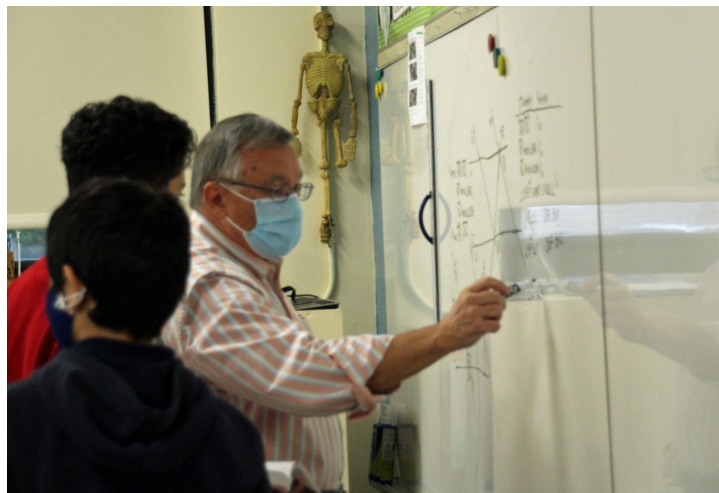
*When we hold fast to our mission, we provide the level of education and character development for which Birchwood is known.*

face or the framework of their adulthood. But the term *becoming* is not so vague that we cannot invest in their attitudes, their knowledge, their behaviors, and their life-skills so that whatever situation life presents, our children will grow, thrive and flourish.

In elementary and middle school we do not have the final word on the person each child will *become*. Life takes too many twists and turns for Birchwood to make any definitive statements about the contributions we make to each child’s life. Nevertheless, we

can plant seeds. We plant when we tell stories about great men and women. We plant when we examine inspirational quotes or thoughtful poems which engrave virtue into children’s minds.

Day after day, week after week, year after year, we can plant seeds of growth through our curriculum, through instruction, and through the loving relationships we endeavor to create with each child. We plant seeds that help frame a mindset toward growing, thriving and flourishing. We believe these seeds foster productive internal conversations that guide children to grow when facing diverse environments and situations.



Our mission envisions children engaging with both favorable environments and adverse environments. Favorable environments provide opportunities to flourish. In these settings, children discover possibilities to realize their potential and develop their talent.

But our mission also envisions children facing adverse environments, times when work is hard, filled with disappointments and failure. Here they must learn to dig deep inside of themselves to find the reasoning, the fortitude and the resolve to overcome and achieve.

We believe that in carrying out our mission, as we plant “seeds” for growing, thriving and flourishing, we help create an internal conversation within children’s hearts and minds that will impact how they view the world long into the future. These seeds will help them navigate any environment they confront and turn their situation into an opportunity for *becoming*.

*Charles Debelak*  
*Head of School*

*Day after day, week after week, year after year, we can plant seeds of growth through our curriculum, through instruction, and through the loving relationships we endeavor to create with each child.*

## OUR MISSION IN PRACTICE

### CLEVELAND AS OUR VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

One of our underlying commitments to remaining in the city of Cleveland is how proud we are of our city and its rich culture. It has been Birchwood's tradition for 35 years to use the city as our classroom. It is normal for students in all of our classes to go *out* on field trips to museums, playhouses, concerts, and parks. We also bring the city *into* the school by way of residencies in drama and dance, visits from museum curators who bring in artifacts, invited speakers, and presentations featuring fire trucks.

In our current circumstances, our teachers were determined to continue to open such doors to their students, so they once again donned their hats of innovation. Happily, they found that museums, nature centers, and arts organizations know how to wear the same types of hats. (No surprise there.) A snapshot of upcoming social studies experiences portrays the wonders that are in store for our students this year.

Grades 5-8 social studies teachers will be taking their classes on virtual trips to the Cleveland Museum of Natural History to explore Sky Legends of the Ancient World or Climate Change: Investigating our Impact Level. Students will also view an exhibit at the Cleveland Museum of Art on the Harlem Renaissance. In their study of world cultures, sixth graders normally visit the Cleveland Museum of Art several times throughout the year. This year, they won't skip a beat because they can travel virtually to partake in a program titled Egyptomania and another one on medieval art.

In anticipation of the fourth grade study of Ohio history, Mr. Boyer has toured historical sites taking videos at various locations throughout Cleveland and Ohio, including Fort Hill in Cleveland Metroparks, Flint Ridge, Schoenbrunn Village, Fort Laurens, the Village of Zoar, and Fort Meigs. Students will have the exciting experience of seeing their teacher in all of these places bringing history alive. To further enrich their study, Mrs. Weglian from Tri-C Western Campus will present Native American artifacts to the class.

Third graders will get to know their city and its history as they take a virtual Lolly the Trolley field trip around Cleveland. During another excursion, they will visit the memorial sites of famous

Clevelanders through a virtual visit to Lake View Cemetery. Students also have high hopes for a field trip of the Cuyahoga

River and the Flats this spring. And, in the works, is an invitation to Councilman Kazy to give a virtual presentation during their government unit.

First and second graders have observed what's on our street in our neighborhood. How fun it will be for them to further explore urban, suburban, and rural communities through *trips* uniquely designed for this purpose. Their world will continue to expand as they take off on virtual adventures in Canada, Europe, and Asia.

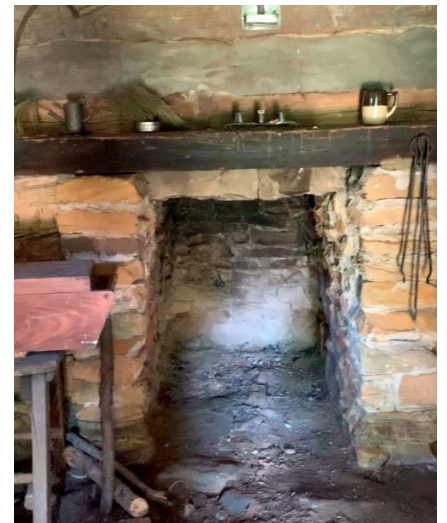
Trips are afoot in other subjects as well, like experiences with The Cleveland Orchestra and Playhouse Square as well as National Geographic explorations, and encounters with The Nature Conservancy.

*I think the real explorers and discoverers this year are our wonderful teachers who are continuing to bring the gems of our city and state to our students.*

*Helene Debelak  
Director of Curriculum*



*Mr. Boyer is bringing history alive to his students through videos and images taken at historic sites throughout Ohio. He captured Ohio history while touring sites throughout our great state in anticipation of this school year when remote visits would be the norm for his students who are eager to get a glimpse of the Ohio frontier.*



## IN OUR CLASSROOMS

### Tinkering: the Hallmarks of Creative Thinking in Birchwood's Early Childhood Classrooms

*Birchwood's preschool and kindergarten students enjoy tinkering and creating with all kinds of odds and ends in our Early Childhood loose parts play program.*

This month, kindergarten students went outdoors to spread out and tinker with wooden cookies, leaves, sticks, pine cones, acorns, and rocks. Using these materials, our students built hotels for bugs, castles, houses, fences, and cities. Working together or on their own, loose parts play awakens their creativity and enhances their ability to think imaginatively.

When Birchwood students engage in loose parts play, they can study concrete objects such as sticks, leaves, or buttons through play and engagement with various forms, sizes, and types of these items. This style of play encourages children to connect with other knowledge they possess and begin to create new pathways of understanding, which are the hallmarks of creative thinking and problem-solving.



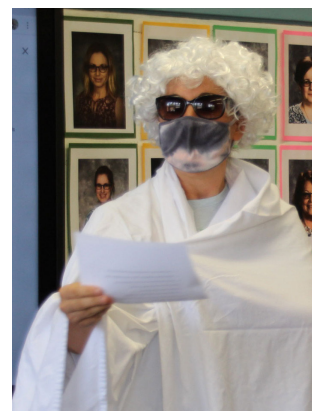
*Kindergarten students bubbled with conversations and interactions that encouraged collaboration and cooperation as they took part in loose parts play this month. In their play, you sensed adventure and excitement!*



### Trailblazing through Time in Grade 4

Mr. Boyer's and Mrs. Moore's fourth grade students are working towards becoming the embodiment of trailblazers this year. As they practice being historians, geographers, explorers, and citizens, they are examining their lessons through the lens of a trailblazer – a person who blazes a trail for others to follow through unsettled country or wilderness – a pathfinder. It is Mr. Boyer's and Mrs. Moore's intention that each student continues to wrestle with the virtues of a trailblazer and begin imagining and practicing being trailblazers themselves as they learn about the past.

*This month, their study began with Ohio's rich history and its connections to the United States. Students met Madame Glacier (played by Mrs. Alicea), who made her slow, land-shaping visit to the classroom. As the first trailblazer in Ohio, her job was to shape the land and leave behind fertile soil and freshwater that made it an ideal spot for human inhabitants that followed in her wake.*



The glacier that was over Ohio was twice as tall as the Terminal Tower. To demonstrate the weight and power of a glacier, the students participated in an ice bucket race. They got their own hands a bit chilled as they manipulated a miniature replica of the glacier through dirt, sand, and rock. This hands-on experience also allowed them to view how meltwater fills in some of the crevices left in the wake of a glacier. Next, the students participated in an ice bucket relay race. They were excited to race, and some were surprised at the sheer weight of ice. As it turns out, a 5-gallon bucket full is really heavy!

The following day the class created salt dough maps of Ohio. Students used a topographic map to create the lay of the land in Ohio. They had to build their maps showing the breathtaking peaks, hill-tops, and flatlands of Ohio.

Students marked the five natural regions of Ohio as well as several cities and water bodies that the class will discuss later this year. To conclude, the class discussed how Ohio's naturally renewable and non-renewable resources can be traced back to Madame Glacier.

*Cindy McNaughton  
Director of Marketing & Public Relations*



*Getting hands-on with ice and dirt helped the students understand and see the weight and power of a glacier.*

# IN OUR CLASSROOMS

## Thriving in Mathematics in Grades 5-8

Due to the need for social distancing, each fifth through eighth grade class is now divided into two classrooms, for math, for reading, and so forth. To keep things simple, the boys are in one room and the girls are in the other. Birchwood has also reduced the number of class periods to three 90-minute ones, in order to reduce the amount of time students spend in hallways moving between



*Dr. Haskins is so happy to see her students thriving through the changes this year. Her students are working hard and pushing through long class periods. They really enjoy their bonus time at the end of class to let off a little steam with some math basketball.*

rooms. These changes were driven by the need to spread students out and minimize their interactions with children outside their own homeroom. In the first six weeks of school, the math teachers have noticed some wonderful but unexpected effects of these changes!

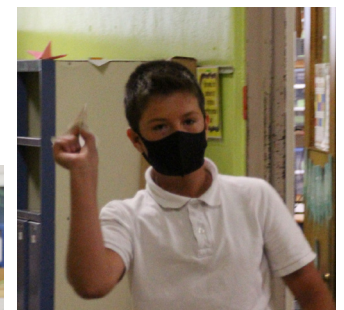
We feared that these hour-and-half classes would leave students exhausted and perhaps not in the best of spirits. To our surprise, we have found that on the whole, students are getting their work done and are feeling successful as a result! In addition, with such a long class period we can sometimes treat them to a little bit of fun at the end of class. In fact, having all the boys together in one room has created some exciting math basketball games! After 80 minutes of algebra or problem-solving you should see these boys race for more paper to do the computations that earn them a spot at the free-throw line!

On the other hand, Mrs. Gregory reports that in the modular, where most of her classes take place, the girls are quietly chatting, getting their work done, and sometimes spending their extra minutes at the end of class choosing to work on beading projects – or do more chatting! We've been remarking to each other how much progress our math students are making this year. Although no one thought that we would see silver linings in these changes to our class locations and to our daily schedules, we find that the students are happier and more content at the end of their math studies than we ever thought they would be.

*Dr. Catherine Haskins  
Grades 5-8 Math Teacher*

## Growing and Discovering through Change

*Birchwood students are reading in their classrooms, crafting tall tales at their desks, working math problems outdoors, learning new vocabulary with their teachers, testing piloting their paper airplanes in science class, and enjoying their time together in school or at home ... as they embrace their continued becoming in 2020 ...*



Head of School, *Charles Debelak*  
Director of Curriculum, *Helene Debelak*  
Questions and suggestions are welcome:  
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Clipboard Editor/Layout, *Brenda Spicer*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**November 23-24**

Teacher Professional Days - No School

**November 25-27**

Thanksgiving Break

### Catching Up With Birchwood Graduate Olivia Savona

*continued from page 1*

#### Best Study Tips:

In terms of study tips I would definitely stress and suggest doing things outside of academics and school. Give yourself time in-between studying, schoolwork, and the actual school day. This makes it so much easier on your brain when you force yourself to take breaks. It really helps me be more efficient in the time when I am studying and overall helps your mental wellbeing which is very important in the long run.

#### Her Advice:

My biggest advice is to never put schoolwork above your physical and mental health. I think that it's easy to trick yourself into thinking I can fit one more assignment in before I go to bed. While it's important to keep up with your schoolwork it's also important to take breaks if you need to. That I would say is my number one piece of advice.

Also, take classes that you're interested in, not just what you think is going to be useful for you.

If you make a mistake and you mess up an assignment or fail a test let yourself breathe a little bit. Tell yourself it's OK. You can always fix it. Forgive yourself if you do mess up a little bit. It can take you to fail a test to understand what you are doing right and what you are doing wrong when you're studying. I don't encourage people to fail, but if you do just let yourself learn from it, forgive yourself, and move forward.

#### Favorite Birchwood Moment:

I loved Power of the Pen in seventh and eighth grade. I thought that was really fun because you have less and less chances when you move up through your academic life to write creatively and just let yourself delve into the humanities a little bit. I really liked that there was the opportunity to do that if you wanted to at Birchwood. I am planning on doing a minor in art history. I don't think I would have ever learned to value the classics as much if there wasn't such a strong humanities program at Birchwood. I think it is important to value the arts and I feel that Birchwood definitely helped me pick that up.

*I loved Power of the Pen in seventh and eighth grade. I thought that was really fun because you have less and less chances when you move up through your academic life to write creatively ...*



*Olivia suggests giving yourself breaks in-between school and studying to give your mind a break and to be more efficient.*

#### Writing at Birchwood:

Learning about grammar, I would drag my feet every single class, but once I got into high school I could edit my own papers and I could edit my peers' papers. Even today I can edit my friends' papers because I have the ability to see and figure out why things don't make sense with a comma or an independent clause. That has been a huge help.

#### Thanks Birchwood:

Thank you so much to everyone at Birchwood for working so hard to bring quality education to so many young people and helping us figure out our own strengths and passions and our own life and career afterwards.

If you are an alum or know of an alum who would like to join Mrs. McNaughton for a Zoom chat, please email her at [mcnaughton@birchwoodschool.org](mailto:mcnaughton@birchwoodschool.org). It is a joy to share the wisdom and advice of our graduates with our community.

*Brenda Spicer*  
Marketing Manager