

SYNERGY TIMES

The newsletter of Synergy School

Winter 2017



Kindergarteners play a board game invented by the Middle School Students.



History Game Project

by Tomi and Nabila, Middle School Students

In previous years, both teachers and students have noticed a social unfamiliarity between kids in the younger and older grades. Dominic Altieri, the middle school history teacher, discovered a way to close this gap. For the past two years, he has had the middle schoolers create two different types of interactive projects that, upon completion, were presented and given to the kindergarten class. “Our main goal is getting the older kids interacting with the younger kids,” Dominic says. He remembers doing an interactive children’s book project himself as an eighth grader. “Our

second goal is to get students design thinking and making educational products like games and books for a specific age group – making that connection. Instead of just simply learning about the Civil War or the Middle Ages, they use fun, creative thinking to expand their knowledge on the topic and learn how to connect with younger kids.” These projects have opened a level of communication, ease, and familiarity between the two age groups that wasn’t there before.

Last year, the middle school classes took on the task of creating a

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“Our main goal is getting the older kids interacting with the younger kids.”



Rainbow Room visits the Mission Science Workshop.



4/5 students works on their cantilever projects.

children’s book that took place during the Middle Ages, the era they focused on that semester. The middle schoolers not only created funny, magical stories that had a kindergartner as a main character, they also incorporated fun facts about that era. The students were

in kindergarten could play. Once split into various groups, the students brainstormed some designs and based their games off of topics ranging from the American Revolution all the way to Westward Expansion and Native American removal (however, for obvious

and one group even made a Guess Who inspired game. Some of the board games were influenced by already existing games, such as the computer game Oregon Trail, Monopoly, Life, and Candy Land. Others were designed to highlight leaders in history who are underrepresented, such as women, African Americans, and Native Americans. The students had access to game boards, cards, pieces, and spinners that looked as though they were from professionally made games. “When we were kids, we got to make games and stuff, but we never got to do it with the right resources,” Ian Doyle, an alumnus of 2016, recalls. “It was nice to have something that actually looked like a real game, and I think it really helped step up the experience for the kindergartners.” Thank you Bare Books for allowing the middle schoolers to enjoy decorating their own games on real game boards and cards!

For two months, the students worked hard on their games. We’re happy to say that the hard work paid

“Our second goal is to get students design thinking.”

split up into twenty-four groups, and each group was introduced to a kindergartner that they had to focus the story around. For three months they worked hard on drawing colorful pictures, writing creative narratives, and interacting with their kindergartner. When the middle schoolers had their finished project, they read their stories out loud to their younger friends. It was a big hit!

This year, the middle school block classes worked on creating a history inspired game project that the kids

reasons, they avoided including harsh topics in their finished products). After their topics were chosen, the kindergartners came up to the history classroom to play some classic board games with the middle schoolers. This allowed the middle schoolers to better understand the younger kids’ style of playing and see what their interests revolved around.

Many groups were inspired by several different types of games. The final products included styles such as matching games, board games,



Mixed age learning groups make art together.



off in the end. “Sometimes it got a little boring for us,” seventh grader Sasha Hopewell says, “But sitting there and watching the kindergartners play our games, having the times of their lives, made it all worth it.” Although creating a high quality, informative, fun game did take a lot of perseverance, when the games were finished, most students were proud of how their game turned out. The middle schoolers introduced their games to the younger kids and then played them together.

“It was so interesting to see kids make connections and understand the facts on our board while still having fun! It was a very fun experience, and I actually made some friends,” seventh grader Jessica Schott says. Not only the middle schoolers had fun, though.

When asked, all of the kindergartners said that they had fun playing the middle schoolers’ games too! “I really, really liked the card games,” kindergartener Tabitha exclaimed, “I learned new

presidents like George Washington and... Martin Luther King Jr.!” Although some – not surprisingly – didn’t pay any attention to the educational aspect of the game, all kindergartners loved the social aspect and the game itself. The day was full of laughter, high fives, and fun times.

“There is a stronger connection between the two age groups.”

“I don’t think every middle schooler is now going to go out and say, ‘Hey, do you want to go and hang out with the kindergartners?’” Ian said. “However, I do believe that there is definitely a stronger connection between the two age groups.” Many middle schoolers, when asked, said that they now say hi to the kindergartners on the school yard, and many know each other by name. Ollie, a kindergartener, said that even though he didn’t instantly become friends with any

older kids, when he ventured upstairs to play the games, he felt more comfortable around the middle schoolers afterward.

Dominic plans on continuing these interactive projects in a three year rotation, so no middle schooler repeats a project.

The third project? It’s still under consideration, however, he is toying with the idea of having a living museum/costume project. Asked to describe his plans for maintaining this newfound interaction between grades, Dominic said, “I want this to be a legacy project, where in just a matter of years, the very first children’s book people will be up here and will remember back to when someone did it with them.”





Melvin coaching students in basketball.



Melvin Smith, Director of Finance & Operations

by Cynthia Louie, Administrative Coordinator

Melvin Smith, middle school physical education teacher and beloved member of the staff for 15 years, assumed his new role this fall as Director of Finance and Operations. He replaces Joan Pettijohn, who is returning to the classroom.

to pay for his apartment and living expenses. After graduation, he continued working at the YMCA while attending Laney College for two years, then Merritt College for an additional two years.

centers in the neighborhood; navigated two mayoral administrations; negotiated funding at a time when few non-profits were receiving city funds, and worked with various stakeholders including schools, church groups, the Police Athletic League, and his own board of directors.

Melvin's background includes extraordinary experience in conflict resolution and mediation.

Melvin's background includes extraordinary experience in conflict resolution and mediation. During the 1990s when the city was plagued by gang violence, he brought the leaders of two rival gangs together to negotiate a peace. At the time, he says, "They just wanted to be acknowledged and heard." That led to a series of basketball tournaments over a period of several weeks in which gang members got to know each other on neutral ground and actually cheered for each other during slam-dunk contests. He was later named recipient of the Western Addition Unsung Hero Award and the Willie Brown Youth

Melvin grew up in New Orleans, one of 7 siblings in a close-knit family. As a self-described "independent kid," Melvin convinced his parents to allow him to move to San Francisco on his own and complete his senior year at Galileo High School. His goal was to find better opportunities and to get as far away from the Louisiana heat and mosquitos as he could. His parents provided financial support until he took on a job at the YMCA

Melvin began his career in social work as an outreach worker with Operation Contact in the city's Western Addition. His work focused on gang intervention and providing academic, recreational, and social services to at-risk youth and their families. After four years, he became its executive director, managing budgets, staffs, and three sites. During his decade-long tenure, he established one of the first teen



Task Force Agency Award for his efforts. His work in the community came to an end when he took a year off to care for his ailing mother and the three young nephews she was raising at the time. He and his wife, Sonya, were also raising their own two children. It wasn't easy, but Melvin says, "My mother was a giving person and I got that trait from her. It seemed like a natural thing to do."

In 2001, Melvin joined the Synergy staff as a PE teacher and middle school aide. He says he was attracted by the opportunity to work in a teachers' cooperative and by the school's philosophy of social justice and personal responsibility. His daughter, Majesty, enrolled as a kindergartener and his son, Adonis, came in as a 6th grader. Adonis, Class of 2005, is now a radiology assistant and Majesty, Class of 2011, is at Texas Southern University.

Melvin says he loves teaching, seeing children grow and find their voice. "Each kid is going to grab something different (from his teaching). You may not see it the first month, the first year, but you may see it two months, two years down the line." And like his students, Melvin wants to continue to grow himself, which is why he applied for the administrator position. He feels he's coming full circle by assuming the director of finance responsibilities. It gives him the opportunity to sharpen old skills and learn new ones, while also supporting the teachers' co-op and the school to which he is devoted. ∞

Interactive Workshop in Orff Percussion!

SF Jazz Center

Joe Henderson Lab

Sat. February 25, 2017 at 11 am

http://www.douggoodkin.com/orff_workshops.php



From the Bush to the Blues

by Sam Heminger, Music Teacher

After spending the night outside with the eighth graders as part of their "Rites of Passage" farm school experience, Sam skipped his post-farm school nap and flew right to St. Louis to teach his Orff/Jazz workshop "From Jump rope to Jazz."

He and his teaching partner, Joshi Marshall, who teaches at Presidio Hill, have been teaching teachers around the country on how to weave jazz into an Orff curriculum from kindergarten on through 8th grade. Their last two stops were San Diego and St. Louis and they are off to Reno next.

If you want to catch some of the Orff/Jazz material, come check out one of the workshops they do along with Doug Goodkin (San Francisco School) at the SF Jazz Center following the family jazz matinees. The next workshop is February 25th!



¡Bienvenida Tania!

by Angela Magyari, Development Assistant

This year we are lucky to have a fantastic new Spanish teacher joining our team. Tania Petricevic brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to Synergy as someone who has spent her life living all over the world. Born in Bolivia, Tania moved to Guatemala when she was

Synergy's agreement system," Tania says, reflecting on what attracted her to our school. "Many schools try to implement similar guidelines around behavior and natural consequences, but in the process they lose student engagement. At Synergy, students understand the

Tania tries to incorporate her cultural background into her lesson plans. One of her goals for this year is for students to participate more in Synergy's larger neighborhood community. "I want students to engage with the rich history of the Mission and to have conversations in Spanish with the people who have lived here for generations," she says. This year, she's taken students to the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts to see the Day of the Dead altars. Students learned about the historical significance of the holiday and some of the ways it is celebrated in San Francisco.

One goal Tania has this year is for students to improve their conversational abilities. She doesn't want them to simply conjugate verbs, but expects them to be highly engaged in Spanish conversation. A challenge, of course, is in balancing all the lesson plans for each class and level. Never before has Tania taught at a pre-kindergarten through 8th grade level—at the same time! ∞

"I step out into the neighborhood and feel at home."

12 years old, and as a young adult she studied and taught in Florence, Hong Kong, and New York City.

Since moving to the Bay Area in 1998, Tania worked primarily in Daly City as Jefferson High School's Spanish teacher. Ready for a change, she says she was thrilled to see the open position at Synergy last May. "I always wanted to work here," she says, "and I walked into the school to inquire only an hour after you had posted the job."

"I have a lot of admiration for

importance of the agreement system, so they use it. They recognize it as fair and logical. Synergy truly is a progressive school."

As a Latina woman, Tania also loves the sense of community she's found here at the school, and more broadly, in the Mission. "The fact that the school is located so close to Mission and 24th streets makes my experience here more comfortable. If I ever need to take a break, I step out into the neighborhood and feel at home."



Synergy buddies read together.



Middle schoolers at Farm School.

2017 Synergy Event Calendar

February 10	Rainbow & Sun Room Plays
February 12-18	Costa Rica Trip
March 10	Kindergarten Play
March 11	Auction Fundraiser
March 29	Science Fair
April 6	Spring Concert
April 10-14	Spring Break
April 28	Grandparents & Special Friends Day / Art Show
May 1-5	4/5 Farm School
May 24-25	8th Grade Plays
June 3	8th Grade Graduation



Stay up to date on all Synergy events online at synergyschool.org/calendar



Students browse titles at Synergy's biannual book swap.



End of Year Book Swap

by Angela Magyari, Development Assistant

“This must be my lucky day!” exclaimed Zaiden, a Sun Room student, as he fished out *Frog and Toad Are Friends* from under a pile of books. Synergy’s annual book swap is one of the school’s celebratory end-

of-the-year events where students from every grade excitedly stream in and out of the Big Room to scour the stacks and take home the perfect summer reading book. opportunity to slow down and recharge. Every year, the students get the chance to sift through hundreds of community-donated books and choose an addition—or two, or three, or ten—for their personal book

students cannot get enough of the epic space saga!

The mission of Synergy School’s Wilma Messing Library is “to promote literacy, foster a love of reading, support the school’s curriculum, and create a place where inquisitive young minds feel welcome to explore.” It seems like the library committee is doing a pretty good job of making this mission a reality. After the swap, the committee generously donated all remaining books to the Mission’s Community Thrift, giving other folks in the area a chance to enjoy our favorites too. ∞

“The book swap gives students the opportunity to slow down and recharge.”

of-the-year events where students from every grade excitedly stream in and out of the Big Room to scour the stacks and take home the perfect summer reading book.

In our ever more connected and plugged-in culture, the private act of reading can be refreshing as we unwind from the constant hustle and bustle of the school year. Thanks to the hard work and organization of Synergy’s library committee, the school’s book swap gives students the

collection.

At the swap, students have the chance to fill paper bags full of stories for the summer. This year, there was an abundance of picture books, with copies of classics such as *Goodnight Moon* and *The Little Prince*, as well as funny titles, like *Miss Nelson Has A Field Day* and *The Big Beastly Book of Bart Simpson*. The most sought after books? Anything and everything *Star Wars*. From the kindergarteners to the middle schoolers, Synergy

Save the Date!
**Synergy Auction
 Fundraiser**
*“When The Lights Go Down
 In The City”*
 Saturday, March 11, 2017
 6:30pm-11pm
 SOMArts Gallery



Redesigned Website Coming Soon

by Cynthia Louie, Administrative Coordinator

Synergy School's website will soon have a new look. As part of our strategic plan to improve communications, the school's administrative staff and the Board of Trustees' communications task force are working on a website upgrade.

By late January 2017, we will move to a new web platform by Schoolyard, which will create a beautiful design that allows us to better tell our unique story. The goal is to more clearly communicate our approach to progressive education and our founding vision to bridge the ideals of progressive education with a structure that empowers teachers to shape Synergy's educational environment.

Embedded within our new site will be a component called ParentSquare, which is a safe and secure platform for all school-to-home communication. It will enable parents to access information and communicate with the school more easily and to feel more connected. For smartphone users, ParentSquare will also be available on a mobile app.

In addition to the website upgrade, strategic plan work continues on other fronts including program assessment, collective leadership, short and long-term use of our building and campus, and support for teachers and staff. To read the plan, *A Vision for 2020*, go to www.synergyschool.org. To contact the board, email trustees@synergyschool.org. ∞



Mosaic Donor Column

Our students created a mosaic donor column in the Soft Yard honoring gifts at \$1000 and above toward our Securing the Promise Endowment Campaign.

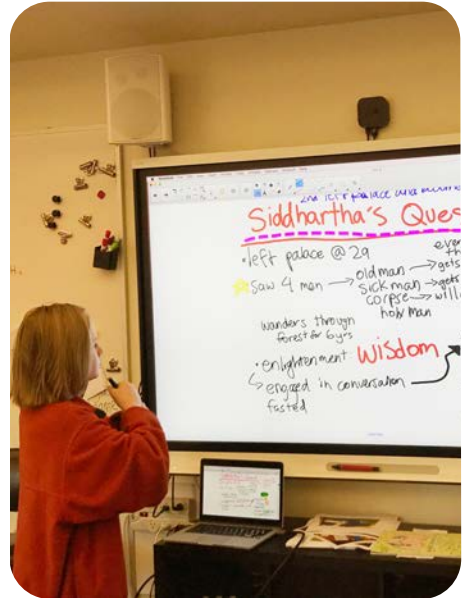
Students worked for months to make the tiles, and collaborated with Art teacher Pam Heyda to create the finished column!

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Local artist Victor Reyes discusses his artwork with students.



SMART Boards Open Up New Channels to Learning

by Russ Curtis, Director of Technology

Thanks to generous parents at last year's school auction, Synergy is now home to a growing number of interactive, flat panel classroom displays. More than \$40,000 were raised to pay for the new devices.

Seven new screens were purchased and installed in classrooms just

Synergy started in 2015 with one SMART Board in the Sun Room. Teresa Rodriguez and Jesse Kitses demonstrated each day how they can use it to enhance the delivery of classroom content. Organically it showed other teachers in the school how they may use it to benefit their classrooms.

sun and earth in real time using Solar Walk," says Jesse.

In tandem with Notebook software and interactive pens, teachers can build content digitally and share it with the class. Like a traditional chalk or white board, students can come to the screen and add notes or make choices using the styluses.

"They are like a new instrument – you need to practice, practice, and practice with these devices."

before the start of the 2016-17 school year. These wall-mounted SMART Boards include AppleTV for Airplay and external speakers for high quality audio. They also feature a digital white board app called SMART Kapp that can save notes to send or print for students.

"They're basically a wall-sized iPad that allows teachers to quickly share videos, lesson notes and class content," said Russ Curtis, Synergy's Director of Technology. "I think it's a real win-win for teachers and students."

"In math it allows me to seamlessly color code lessons, with one stylus, as I deliver lessons in real time," says Teresa. "No fussing with multiple colored markers! The best part is that I was able to save the documents I created for future and repeated use," she added.

For science, Jesse believes it has helped share videos quickly and use apps to effectively convey information. "The class is able to explore the solar system and learn about our moon's relationship to the

These new screens replace older ceiling mounted projectors with pull-down screens that were being used in sun-drenched classrooms. The new flat panel screens deliver a higher quality viewing experience at 1080p with up to 75" in viewing space.

Training for teachers was included during the week leading up to the start of school. And history teacher Dominic Altieri was quick to help coach fellow teachers. "They are like a new instrument - you need to practice, practice, and practice with these devices," he said. ∞



In Memoriam: Thea Anderson and Christy Watterson

Thea Anderson, '06

Synergy alumna of 2006, Thea Faust Anderson died on May 24th, 2016, in the town of Napier, New Zealand. Thea was on a quest, traveling the world to find adventure, work, and her life as an independent young woman. Most recently, Thea found a job (in her journal she wrote THE JOB!) at the Hohepa School in Napier, working with intellectually challenged students. Thea looked forward to using her dance training in therapeutic settings, and planned to pursue a graduate degree in dance therapy. Thea worked on and cherished her friendships-- in life, in the dance studio, and throughout

her schooling in San Francisco, where she attended Buen Día Family School, Synergy School, and Waldorf High School. At Mills College Thea majored in dance, where she worked with an inspired corps of dancers and faculty. She learned something very special about how to be at home in her body, and in performance Thea somehow became the dance, as if to say, "I'm not anything special, but look at this! And think about this!" And one did. Thea's love of music, water, movement, friends, family, and the beauty of nature brought her great joy, and she shared that joy with an open heart, fearlessness, and grace. ∞

Christy Watterson, '06

With heavy hearts we also learned of the death of Christy Watterson, Synergy alumnus of 2006. Christy died as a result of a car accident on Sunday, November 6, 2016 at the age of 24. Christy was born in Norwich, UK, and lived in Ireland before his parents moved their family to San Francisco. He grew up in Bernal Heights and attended Synergy School and Ruth Asawa School of the Arts, where he graduated in 2010. Most recently, Christy was pursuing a career in the construction industry. Christy is survived by his parents Joe Watterson and Jan Holliday, sister Amy, brother Thomas, uncle Gerry, aunt Brenda and family, grandparents Malachy and Rose Watterson, Co. Antrim and grandmother Meryl Holliday, Co. Down. ∞

Stay up to date with Synergy happenings

Synergy School photos:
synergyphotos.smugmug.com
password: *bestpics*

Synergy School blog:
synergytimes.wordpress.com



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Thank you for your support.

We are grateful for the generosity of our donors who helped to raise \$256,000 for the Synergy Annual Fund in 2015-16. Our Board participation in Annual Fund giving was 100 %, and Synergy families' participation was 97%.

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Mail your donation to:
Development Office
Synergy School
1387 Valencia St
San Francisco, CA 94110

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at www.synergyschool.org/giving

Gifts of appreciated securities are gladly
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contact Liz McDonald at 415 567-6177 or
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We are grateful for the generosity of
 our donors who helped to raise over
\$256,000 for the Synergy Annual
 Fund in 2015-16. Thank you for your
 support.

Donors who made gifts to the school
 between September 1, 2015 and August 31,
 2016 are listed in this annual report. We
 have tried to provide accurate and
 complete information for this report. Our
 apologies for any names omitted or listed
 incorrectly. Please contact the Director of
 Development, Liz McDonald, to correct
 any records.

**Thank you for your
 generous support!**

Return Service Requested

Mission Statement

Synergy Times is published twice a year by the Development Office of Synergy School. Feedback and story ideas are welcome.
Editors: Liz McDonald
Photography: Russ Curtis

The mission of Synergy School is to provide a quality education by empowering children to flourish academically, to blossom as individuals, and to become self-confident, creative learners.

Synergy School was founded in 1973 and is a non-profit teacher cooperative, wherein students, parents, and teachers cooperate together to further a rewarding education for each child. We are a vibrant, diverse community with 190 students in kindergarten through eighth grade located in San Francisco's Mission District.

Synergy Annual Fund



Every Gift Counts

The Annual Fund helps to bridge the gap between tuition and the actual cost of educating a student at Synergy School for a full year.

The support we receive from our community of parents, friends, alumni, and grandparents helps Synergy to maintain the strength of our program while keeping our tuition affordable and offering financial aid to more than a third of our community.

Every gift counts. Donate online at www.synergyschool.org/giving

If you have any questions about donations, please contact Liz McDonald, Director of Development, at liz@synergyschool.org

Thank you for your support!