

This Week at Central Academy

November 9, 2009

“I wonder...

what job I'll have when I get older?

if I will ever go to college?

if I will ever get laid off?

how Middletown will be in 30 years?

if global warming will be the cause of the end of the earth?

if there will be a World War III?”

Large poster paper signs on our walls at Central are full of the wonderings of our students. Walking down the hall of our Middle School, you will see student-generated wonderings such as:

Central Academy has always had structures that support individual student interest and voice, but James Beane's September visit to our classrooms to work with students and teachers, has truly helped to deepen our understanding of student-inquiry/project-based learning. The impact this has on learning is immediate and clear. Students are engaged and excited about their work – anxious to share with others what they are learning.

As I left Mrs. Roe's Early Primary room the other day, *Austin* came bounding up. Grabbing my hand he asked, “Did you know there are 134 beans in that jar?!?” For Austin and his classmates, math is not only fun, but also a really exciting part of the day.

And this enthusiasm isn't found only in our Early Primary students. *Lizzy*, in Muenchenburgey's Intermediate classroom, was anxious to tell me a week or so ago, some of the things she's been learning about orphanages. She has many questions she's trying to find answers to, and the excitement in her eyes as she shared some of that with me was just as evident as it had been in *Austin's* face.

When students are given the space to pursue their own, unique wonderings about themselves and the world, a passion for learning erupts. From these passions, teachers carefully map backward to ensure that state standards are being covered, but in ways that are far more engaging than simply turning the next page of a textbook.

I invite you to stop by anytime to observe our classes, and to feel that enthusiasm from both teachers and students. Better yet, feel free to join us for any of our Celebrations of Learning, where students of all ages share their learning with the rest of our Central family. At Central, learning is something carefully cultivated and shared, while recognizing the insights and worth of each student.

Dianne

Central Academy's Website

Find out what's going on at Central by frequently visiting our website. The website includes:

Important Dates Newsletters Classroom Web pages

Pictures of Students (**You can search by student's first name, teacher name, or by level!**)

www.middletowncityschools.com

(click on Central Academy)

IMPORTANT DATES

Nov 9-13	Middle School Conference Week
Nov. 11	Veteran's Day Luncheon
Nov. 12	Skating Party – 6:30 – 8:30
Nov. 16	Picture Retakes
Nov. 18	Early Release – 2:00
Nov. 16-20	Elementary Conference Week

EARLY PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

When student interests are taken into account, students tend to delve deeper into subjects, ask more questions, and maintain focus for longer periods of time. Here in **Mrs. Jantausch's Early Primary** room we try to capitalize on student interests as often as possible. For instance, we try to use student names and real life information in our CGI math problems. When authentic information is used, children pay attention and care about finding the answer. When *Ashlynn* and others hear their names in a problem they become very invested in solving the problem correctly.

Another example of how student interest extends thinking was seen during our recent weeklong science project with roots. While we were trying to find out about the leaves, we stumbled upon interesting information about a tree's trunk and roots. Our original question led us to discover that roots suck up water and that trees actually "drink!" To explore this further, we set up a station with a carrot, stalk of celery, a potato, and roses in colored water. We made predictions and then spent the week checking in on the changes. *Justin*, *Keiara*, and *Sarah* were all excited to see that each of the plants "drank" in the colored water! They then wondered on Tuesday if the entire rose would turn red, or just the tips. In addition to the plant observations, we also had two big cross-sections of a tree to examine this week. Using our magnifying glasses, we counted rings, poked at bark, and noticed little tiny holes in the wood. "I wonder how those holes got there?" asked *Elijah*. Right away, a friend answered that they were probably made from bugs eating the wood – just like in one of the books we had read the week before! It was wonderful to see their natural curiosity bubbling up ... all because we started out with the simple goal of learning why the leaves fall from the trees.

In **Miss Miller's Early Primary Class** we have been begun thinking about topics to research and learn more about. We created a poster of things we wondered about such as things at home, in school, about the world, and about life. Everyone had great ideas and things they wondered about. *Jerrel* started out our "I Wonder" chart by stating that he wondered about his sister. Then *Stacey* added that she wondered about her mom and what she was doing. This then turned into a lot of wondering about our families and what they were doing while we were in school. We then went around the room and said what we thought our families were doing while we were in school.

After talking about our families, we then began talking about the world around us and what we wondered about it. *Taylor* began our talk by wondering about the environment and how to take care of it. So later this year we will learn more about our environment and ways to help take care of it.

After wondering about the environment, there were a lot of things we wondered about our pets and animals in general. So we took a vote and decided to research to learn more about animals. We started by making a list of our favorite animals. *Mason* said his favorite animal was a Chinese Tiger, so we will be reading a story about a tiger. Then we will talk more about tigers, as well as the other favorite animals of the students.

By creating our “I Wonder” poster, the students have been extending their thinking by being driven to want to know more. This is a great beginning to learning more about the many things the students wonder about every day.

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Ms. Roe’s and Miss Smith’s Early Primary students have recently discovered the exciting world of shapes! Through student-centered exploration and discussion, our class is learning about properties and characteristics of common geometric shapes. When shown these shapes for the first time, students were asked what they noticed. *Emma C.* quickly identified that a circle is round; while *Christian* was eager to share that a rhombus looks just like a diamond. Taking it a step further, several classmates were able to identify common shapes around the room. *Payton* noticed the clock was in the shape of a circle. *Curtis* and *Andrew* found squares on the calendar and *Bree* pointed out that our Word Wall Words are all rectangles. By the end of the week, we were all seeing shapes!

Through daily, hands-on experiences with three dimensional shapes, our Early Primary students are learning how shapes fit together to create patterns and larger shapes. Using the same pattern blocks two different ways, *Jordan* showed us how shapes can be manipulated or moved to create new patterns. His strategy came into practice the next day when filling in hexagons as many ways as possible. Students were able to make the connection to *Jordan’s* work, knowing that although the positioning of shapes was different, many students used the same shapes to create hexagons.

During our Quick Image routine students recorded the images shown to them on individual white boards. After seeing and drawing the image of a square on his board, *Ian* shared that he thought the image looked like a box with four sides. When viewing a half-circle, *Heath* noticed the image he drew looked like a backwards “D”. To test *Heath’s* idea, we put the images side-by-side and many students made the connection that together they make a complete circle. We look forward to more exploration and revelations to come as our students continue to demonstrate excitement and ownership for their learning.

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Mrs. Uhl & Ms. Stillwell’s Early Primary Class is full of scientists and mathematicians! We have been researching Space and engaged in Geometry investigations! Each morning, during our reading comprehension time, the students have been reading Just Right Books about the sun, moon and planets. After reading, the students are thinking about their reading and responding to what they read in their Reading Response Journals. As well, we have incorporated class read alouds related to space. Through shared and independent reading the students have gathered a lot of knowledge about space. *Ashley* learned that Earth is the 3rd planet from the sun and that Venus is the second planet from the sun. *Lexey* made a prediction about her Just Right Book. After doing a picture walk, she predicted her book would be about a space shuttle shooting off into space.

Rhombus, trapezoid, hexagon, Oh my! Have we been investigating Geometry! The students have spent the last two weeks exploring shapes and finding ways to make a trapezoid, rhombus and hexagon by using other pattern blocks. While working on an activity to use the most pattern block shapes, *Jakob* discovered that he could make a hexagon by using 3 rhombuses. However, when he explored further, he realized that he could replace the 3 rhombuses for 6 triangles. While using the geoboards, *Gabe* figured out how to make a hexagon with a rubberband, and *Josie* discovered how to make 16 squares. While working with pattern blocks, *Trinity* found all eight ways to make a hexagon and shared them with the class in our math meeting! Wow! During another math meeting, the students got into a discussion about whether using 2 rhombuses and 2 triangles in an AB pattern was a different way of making a hexagon than using 2 rhombuses and 2 triangles in an AABB pattern. They class could not agree on whether it was or was not. *Aidan*, however firmly believed that they were simply two different designs but the same way to make a hexagon because they both used 2 rhombuses and 2 triangles in the solution. After much discussion, several students changed their minds and agreed with Aidan. I am truly amazed with the extended thinking and wonderful discussions taking place from 5, 6 & 7 year olds!

LATE PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

In **Mrs. Andrade and Miss Zumbahlen's Room**, student-based learning continues to keep the students engaged. We've moved down to the students' next item of interest: Pluto. We searched the internet together to find out as much as possible about Pluto. We learned that no evidence has ever been collected from Pluto. In 2006, a spacecraft was sent to investigate Pluto, but it will not arrive there until 2015. It was great to see the children figure out how old they will be before they can actually find out more about this mysterious planet—oh, I mean dwarf planet now. We also tried to figure out why they had demoted the poor thing. When we saw a comparison of Pluto only covering half of the USA in size, there was lots of good conversation and debate about its new title.

As always, each child has written down something they are still wondering about. Here were some of their wonders. Cross-curricular extensions here we come. *Anna* wondered about the temperature on Pluto. *Jocelynn* wondered if Pluto was going to get smaller. *Madison* wondered why it was going to take so long for the spacecraft to arrive at Pluto (9 years). *Briley* was curious about Pluto's three moons. *Briella* wondered about the width (in feet) of Pluto. *Hayden* wondered about how many inches Pluto was from the sun. The list goes on and on. Our next step is to let the students delve into their inquiries.

The question of whether or not there is life out there in space remains a mystery, especially on Pluto where no spacecraft has yet to land and explore. If you think about it, it is really something neat to look forward to learning more about. If you have the patience to wait six more years, then you are in good shape. Until then, we will do all that we can to answer each student's wonderings, keeping them highly interested in their academic pursuits.

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In the last TWAC from **Vanburgey's (Mrs. Amburgey and Mrs. VanOstrand's)** class, along with **Miss Qua** and **Mrs. Zahora**, we talked about students' love of learning and how their interest in insects propelled them forward to research and extend what they had already learned. Our students have also had the opportunity to continue to extend their thinking as they have been learning about animals.

Logan excited to learn about animal adaptations. He brought in a deer jaw and teeth. He matter-of-factly explained to the class how the deer's flat teeth help it to chew its food. When students pick their own topics to research, we have found that even though we go on to another topic, students continue to be excited, and find ways to continue their learning on their own. There goes that student-based learning again!

Jaylen has been our number one insect collector. This week he found a wally-wooly bear and brought it in, (Wally bears are the caterpillar stage of the tiger moth). Coincidentally, we had a wally-wooly bear in our Insect Reader's Theater we shared with the school. *Jaylen's* sharing of the caterpillar with us helped all of us to extend our understanding of interesting insects. Again this week, *Casey* brought in a huge praying mantis. Mrs. A. said. "Keep those insects on Mrs. V's side." Now that we are studying animals we don't know what we'll have in our classroom next! Until next time, Go Central!

INTERMEDIATE CLASSROOMS

The current Content Contract in **Mrs. Larison's Intermediate classroom** is mostly about exploring the lives of some of the Native American groups that lived in what is now Ohio. The students are absolutely enjoying this topic. Many of the activities on this contract provide students with opportunities to extend and broaden their thinking. For instance, Megan is making a model of a Native American dwelling. The directions do not specifically say exactly what structure to make or which materials to use. The students have a lot of choice in determining how their dwelling will be constructed. Of course, in order to make sure that they are correctly depicting the homes of Native Americans, the students must dig deeper into the research.

Megan has been collecting twigs and bark to cover the outside of her structure. She is learning about Native American dwellings while having a great time. Another activity on this contract is to write five or six diary or journal entries from the point of view of a Native American child who would have lived in Ohio. *Nic* wrote some realistic journal entries about food gathering and other aspects of life in a Native American community. He was so excited to show me his finished entries. He is very proud of them. Providing opportunities for students to delve into topics and research, and to take their learning as far and as deep as they can, extends their level of thinking and usually gets them more engaged and excited about what they are learning.

Student-based learning has continued to extend students' thinking in **Muenchenburgey Land**. As we mentioned in our last article, theme time is a great opportunity for students to work on the curriculum through studying a topic they have questions about and are interested in. *Eboney* and *Zion* decided they wanted to learn more about our current economy. They specifically wanted to discover why food and gas prices have risen and how this has affected people. Recently, through their discussion about the rise in gas prices, they realized there may actually be a connection between gas prices and food prices, which is something they had not considered before. They were so excited about this new idea and could not wait to research it further!

Teaching reading through Book Clubs opens up another opportunity for student-based learning. Because the students are able to select their Book Club book, the reading skills and strategies we teach them through these books become more meaningful, as it helps them better understand the text *they* choose to read. For example, we have recently been discussing how an author builds his characters in a book, as well as the setting, and the impact each has on the flow of the story and keeping the audience engaged.

Cassidy, Ahriana, and Amari have been working on identifying these story elements through their Book Club book discussion of *Listen*. The girls absolutely love this book, which has made learning these important story elements more engaging and meaningful.

We continue to be impressed with how student-based learning extends students thinking and increases their engagement when learning new skills!

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Ms. Thinnes' Intermediate Class has been very busy creating opportunities for extending student learning. Students during our Math time of *Investigations* have been extending student thinking through inquiry-based learning on arrays. Students were asked to draw diagrams of arrays that include the dimensions of arrays in the classroom. Then, students were asked to think and draw arrays that have been seen in the real world setting outside of school. Students are being asked to apply their knowledge on arrays to real world applications.

Students also extend their thinking in the closure of the lesson through a daily CGI Problem that is posed at the end of our Investigations Lesson. These student-created questions challenge students to write a number sentence, draw a diagram and create a written explanation prior to sharing their solutions with the class. *Amia S.* and *Nolan C.* shared their strategies on whiteboards with the class in our Share Chair. Both of their solutions included an array diagram and three sentences to explain their work. The students received a "round of applause" for their connection between arrays being represented in Investigations and in their CGI Problem.

Students extend their thinking through student learning in many other ways as well. Students choose their own Silent Sustained Reading Books to read. Then students have the opportunity to discuss reading standards on characterization and setting from their individual books in the Share Chair. During this literary discussion students are not only responsible to answer questions on comprehension, but also higher thinking level questions on application (What connections could you make to the text?) and synthesis questions (If you could rewrite a the order of the chapters in the book, what would you write?). Many books are shared and discussed on a daily basis that encourage students to see several genres in literature while extending their thinking by discussing the books at higher thinking levels.

A couple of students shared and discussed these books: *Abby B.* shared *Where the Sidewalk Ends* by Shel Silverstein, a well-known poetry book, and *Noasia P.* shared a chapter book entitled *The Thief* by Megan Whalen Turner, a Newberry Honor Winner. The students enjoy learning about other genres of literature through a student's perspective on the book. Also, many students have shared the books they have written and created in Writer's Workshop. So, there are many opportunities to extend student thinking through student learning in **Ms. Thinnes' Intermediate Class**.

MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

Central's curriculum centers around project-based learning. Since project-based education requires active engagement of students' effort over an extended period, it gives the students the opportunity to more deeply explore a topic. Project-based learning also promotes links among subject matter disciplines and presents an expanded, rather than narrow, view of subject matter. In **Mrs. Hodson's** classes, students are beginning their Renaissance Projects. *Kashley, Paige, and Angel* are researching the Silk Road. The class generated a list of topics to be explored along with the guidelines and rubric about how it will be evaluated. Castles are the hot topic at this time.

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The students in **Kristi Joseph's** math class are making tremendous progress on their independent math. Since the students have had a voice in choosing their independent work, they are more fully engaged in the work. *Aleah, Stevie, Angel F., Leta, and Althea* have all really taken on the challenge and responsibility of their selected materials. The students in **Kristi's** Humanities class are beginning to work on a Renaissance project which is also student based. *Mark, Braden, Jacob S., and Miles* have all been highly motivated to work on their projects.

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Mrs. Smith's morning class is beginning a new unit in math. We had a discussion about the importance of choosing our path for our education. We used the benchmark OAT practice test to determine our weaknesses and strengths. The students found the weakest links and those are the indicators that we will focus on in the next few weeks. The two areas that we chose were data analysis and ratio tables. *Asia* has really stepped up to be a leader. She is helping her group understand combinations based on ratios. I am really proud of that whole group. The second (data analysis) group is currently examining data involving heights of several father/son combinations. We are beginning to look at trends. Will more than half of our students grow taller than their parents? I believe that *Tyler* as well as *Andrew* really want to know. Today the students looked at the correlation between the circumference of the head and the height of the person. Tomorrow we will see what *Cole, Mikey, Charles and Jacob H.* find out about those combinations. Do the same ratios hold true for mothers/daughters? We may be asking for some data from home. Also we want to say that we are missing some of our class due to illness. Get well and hurry back.

Other Places and Voices Around Central

Hello Central Academy families. My name is **Vicki Brown** and I am returning to Central Academy in the position of Literacy Specialist. I was part of the original staff from Central Academy's beginning and taught Early Primary for 13 years. I am very pleased to be returning to Central to work with your children and the Central staff.

An important goal for our students is that they grow into life-long learners. Central Academy teachers model this by their continuous professional reading and monthly Professional Development meetings. This school year we are focusing on comprehension and vocabulary instruction.

We are very fortunate to have a nationally known literacy expert, Eve Hayes, to guide our Professional Development sessions.

To help students increase their understanding of informational text one "thinking tool" Eve shared was a graphic organizer labeled: TK/L/W. This guides students thinking as they read to better understand text. As students are reading they would ask themselves:

1. What do I Think I Know (TK) about this topic?
2. What have I Learned (L) from my reading?
3. What do I Wonder (W) about that topic now?

Strategies like TK/L/W provide a tool for students to use to help them better understand text as they complete theme studies and research projects. This is a good match to our student-inquiry work with the James Bean approach to engaging students in learning.

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Mr. Perdue and Mrs. Carroll have been working with students on their themes in the classrooms. **Mrs. Carroll** helped *Leta* make a few phone calls to people about smoking. She was looking for answers to questions that she could not find on the Internet. She asked a couple of smokers, “Why did you start smoking?” She was surprised by the answer of, “Because it was cool.” She wanted to find out more since she has always heard the negatives of smoking. In her research she is learning about the effects of smoking and what happens as a result of using tobacco. She is currently trying to find out what the ingredients are in cigarettes that make people want to keep smoking. In another classroom, **Mrs. Carroll** helped *Braden, Jacob* and *Miles* put what they have learned into a game in which they could share their knowledge with a group or with the class.

Mr. Perdue helped *Lizzy* learn more about orphanages during her theme work. She was curious about what happens in orphanages and wanted to learn more. **Mr. Perdue** made a few phone calls for *Lizzy* and put her in contact with adults that could help answer her questions. She wants to learn about what happens to the children and is asking such questions as: Do they go to college? How successful are the children when they leave? What process do they use and how do they determine if the parents are right for the child? She continues to learn and search for new information about orphanages.

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In **Mrs. Beatty’s** art classes some classes are working in groups on a topic (for example fall, dream world, or pumpkins) that they picked using Georges Seurat’s style. When students work in groups I think that it really challenges them to question each other and extend their learning. The students not only are using student-based learning, but are also getting different ideas from other group members. Since students individually have different opinions, they come up with ideas together that I don’t think that they would have by themselves. I think that the group setting really challenges them to include everyone’s ideas. As in any learning setting, individual groups are at different stages of learning how to work together. Learning how to work collaboratively is an important skill for every student. Combining that skill with a creative project can present even more challenge, but students grow by questioning each other and learning to achieve a great piece of artwork together.

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The Late Primary students will soon have a tremendous opportunity in **Mrs. Hick’s music class** to extend their thinking. Our first music program this school year (on Thursday evening, Dec. 17) will feature them. This week during music class time each class will begin discussing what the students would like their program to be about. For example, will we musically dramatize an existing story or choose a theme and relate all of the musical material to that theme? Or would we prefer to do a sharing of musical selections we have worked on so far this school year? How do we organize our ideas into a presentation that makes sense, shows our skills in a large group setting, and is entertaining? The possibilities are endless. I can’t wait to get started!