CALYX

PLEASANT RIDGE WALDORF SCHOOL

Waldorf Education since 1980

Volume 46, Issue 2 Spring 2025





COMING EVENTS

МАУ

- 15 Pentathlon
- 26 Memorial Day, No School
- 30 Kindergarten 10:30 a.m. Dismissal Closing Day, Early Dismissal End of Year Picnic Graduation

JUNE

2-4 Faculty In-Service

AUGUST

- 23 All-School Workday
- 27 First Day of School, Grades Cubby Day, Kindergarten
- 28 First Day, Kindergarten, Early Dismissal

SEPTEMBER

- I Labor Day, No School
- 12 Faculty In-Service, No School
- 26 Michaelmas Assembly 8:15 a.m.

OCTOBER

- 3 Kindergarten In-Service, No School Kindergarten
- 17 Grandparents & Special Friends Day Assembly 8:15 a.m.
- 25 All-School Workday
- 29 Faculty In-Service, No School
- **30-31** Parent-Teacher Conferences, No School



Morning Verse - Lower Grades

The sun with loving light
Makes bright for me each day.
The soul with spirit power
Gives strength unto my limbs.
In sunlight shining clear,
I reverence, to Thee
The strength of humankind
Which Thou so graciously
Hast planted in my soul.
That I, with all my might,
May love to work and learn.
From Thee streams light and strength
To Thee rise love and thanks.



Volume 46, Issue 2 Spring 2025

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Cover: Painting by Lilia Sumer, Grade 4.

SCHOOL NEWS

8th Grade Projects



The purpose of the 8th grade project is to provide a structured opportunity for the students to engage, as independently as possible, with a topic or skill that interests them. It offers space for learners to practice self-direction in researching a topic and engage with members of their community who act as mentors.

Over the course of six to nine months, the 8th grade students researched and wrote papers, set schedules, met with mentors, and documented the creation or experience of their choice. Some of the topics were more academic and some were more skill oriented. Projects ranged from horse training to fly tying, woodworking, and researching the impact of plastic on our environment. Regardless of their chosen topic, students were able to explore areas of interest and demonstrate the knowledge they gained.

An important aspect of the project is the connection to a mentor. Often these are people in our community who agree to offer guidance and share their knowledge in their area of expertise. Through this relationship the students gain a bigger picture of the gifts that are already present in their community. They find out that their sphere holds gifted crafts people, artists, builders, advocates, and so on, who are open to passing their talents on to others.

The final component of the project is a presentation to the larger community. Each student stands before the audience to share the results of their hard work: what they have learned and built, and insights they have gained.

It is a powerful demonstration of the kind of striving and achievement the 8th grader is capable of. Some choose to continue further with the study or skill they gained, but even if they don't, the lessons they've learned that translate to other areas in their lives are invaluable.

Class Plays

Grade 6: The First Test

This year the 6th grade class performed The First Test as their class play. With a script based on the Tamora Pierce novel of the same name, students shared the story of a girl in the Middle Ages who wished to become a knight. Typically only boys were allowed to take on such a task, and this girl faced many trials during her first year as a page. This class took up the challenges and opportunities of this experience with great gusto and enjoyed three successful shows in late March at the Landmark Theater.



Grade 7: Robin Hood

Play season for this school year kicked off in February with the 7th grade's performance of Robin Hood, in the Landmark Center Theater. The class was enthusiastic not only for the story and their parts, but for their first opportunity to perform in that special venue, with its multi-leveled stage, labyrinthian passages in the back, and professional lighting. They were also delighted to have Jeongwon Lee, our visiting Korean student, join the cast and perform together on her last days before returning home.

The story unfolded through a series of dramatic episodes of adventure interwoven with humor and folly—true to the tradition of Robin Hood stories, and a natural fit for this ebullient and waggish band of 7th graders! The play was well-received by young and old alike over the course of three performances. We are grateful for the indispensable support we received from our class parents (set building and costumes), Pita Daniels (tech support and acting workshops), Stephanie Pedretti (music), and all of our audiences (for their participation in the Nottingham Faire).



CALYX

CURRICULUM

Email to Grade 2 Parents

Hello, Dear 2nd Grade Parents! March 16th, 2025

Up and down, up and down, up and down goes the thermometer, and with it ride all the different rises and falls of energy. Steiner lectured about cultivating different capacities as adults, and equanimity was one of them. Springtime—with its time change, the fickle weather, the dusty and cold wind, the impending summer, the feeling of being more like 3rd graders than 2nd graders these days—Springtime gives us a clear realm in which to practice equanimity so that perhaps it can come a bit easier in the other realms of life where that inner balance is harder to find.

In the world of these 2nd graders, this past week brought an image that keeps coming back to me, of little birdies in a nest reaching their heads out for food, calling and calling and calling out. Do you hear this at home? "Mom. Dad. Mom, Dad—can I...I need...what are vou...when can we...?" Fill in the blank. At school I so often hear "Ms. Beth! Ms. Beth! What are we doing next? Where is she going? What are you talking to that teacher about? What do we have to wear outside? What's for hot lunch today? What is written on that note? Why are they going to the office?' There is a flurry of energy around all that's happening.

At times it's that lovely interested energy—this class has interest and engagement in spades—but the energy that I am noticing these days has the hint of that fine line between excitement and anxiousness and a habit. It's like excitement with a nervous undertone. On the outside they are showing that they want to know everything at once, at all moments of the day. This is a good moment to pause and lean back into our inner calm and resources: What might they be asking for behind the overt message? What might they need more than the quick answer? What am I missing or overdoing that could help them to feel more balance and assurance from the adult world? "We've (the

come back to what we were working on." They get to be the children with their learning; we get to be the adults holding them in that space.

These are the questions I take into my weekend and evenings.

They are transitioning; they are more and more like 3rd graders each day, and with that a dawning new awareness is rising among our group. Instead of a slow sunrise, however, it can look as chaotic as the spring winds we are also experiencing. When I think about this kind of energy in myself, what I know is that I am not paying deep and close attention to all that is happening in a particular moment and most of the other surrounding moments. My attention is shallow, and my desire for quick answers dominates my ability to listen to them and retain them. In fact, I am hardly listening to the answers that people give me in general. This is my busy springtime tendency.

Perhaps what is rearing up is a tendency to want to receive quick answers because there is a bit of a habit to ask questions for the sake of asking questions, rather than for receiving an answer. Perhaps clearer boundaries need to be established and reinforced. practiced. In giving instructions for a main lesson page, I let the students know, "I'll say this one time to everyone when we are all together. Please listen so that you know. I won't repeat it." I am practicing a sort of "active ignoring" of the questions that come at me that have already been answered, or of the questions that are not for them—adult stuff. But in asking this of the students, I need to do something a little different inside myself, too.

How often do we as adults wait a long time for anything these days? For a package, for a response to a text, for a song lyric that I just can't quite remember so I pick up my phone, for a recipe that is easier to get online than to look through my dust-accumulating cookbooks.... This morning Tom and I were

adults) got this. Don't worry. Relax and trying to remember back to the trails along the Ski Valley road in Taos that we used to frequent, and we couldn't remember the last one; after a few minutes we googled it and of course it came back with a "duh!" feeling. But what might have happened had we allowed ourselves to let it go, forget about needing to know the answer, only for it to resurge in our memories with more impact and emphasis and satisfaction than our quick google search could bring? Would it have come back with specific memories about that trail—the smell of it in autumn or right after it rained; how parking was tricky around that steep turn; hiking with Oli as a toddler, then Mae as a toddler, then Anna as a toddler; the time we hiked it when one of us was really sick and oh my, what a relief that right now we are all well?

> What would have been different in waiting and allowing for a longer remembering? When we engage in this process, we begin with a scattering of information and then we literally remember the pieces of the thing: We put a memory back together, and in doing that we put a part of ourselves back into alignment again, only now there is more to that whole picture because time has passed and we are different.

I think that can only happen when time is taken to allow the re-membering of information, to let it come back together. Things must intentionally slow down enough for the learning to be deep. We do something; we move on and forget all about it; we come back to it again in a slightly different way and bring all of our new learning to this old memory, and now it is revitalized.

At school we work deeply into one block of study at a time. Of course, we are still doing math during a Language Art block or vice versa, but the emphasis and the new material are in the current block of study. When we come back to math later on, it has the benefit of the intervening time and space and pause and maturation to allow it

to be revisited in a whole new way. I can't wait to do our circle of different geometric stars with the times tables later this spring. When we did it last fall, they "got it" to a certain extent. They were in awe of the shapes created by following the ones' place of each multiple. They noticed that the "friends of ten" make the same shapes. They could do the work. But then we learned place value in the winter, made a deep dive into multiplication in January, and now we are letting some of that learning rest. I'll let you know how the revisit goes later this spring when we come back to the same exercise as a new group of students—a little more like 3rd graders than 2nd graders.

With these intentional pauses and not over-intellectualizing or over-explaining everything that we do in the meantime, one day the rhythmic way we do math might bring an aha! moment in a music lesson that will reach deeper into their beings than any wordy or didactic thing I could have told them. I have been thinking about this same dynamic with another example: We have been learning an Arabic song with a challenging "theta" pronunciation in it; while singing together I keep picturing how five years from now, in a middle school history lesson or in a Spanish class, they will learn about the Moorish influence on Spain, or they'll hear that same theta accent in Spanish, and they'll remember that song from 2nd grade. Connections, integrations, deep learning, all in the passing of time. These are my hopes and intentions.

Some say the beauty of music is created from the moments of silence—the pauses between sounds. I think that must be true. In a world that emphasizes speed and immediacy, we are working to educate in a holistic way, taking the whole picture into consideration; a slow and patient pace is called for. We are playing the long game. It really asks for equanimity. It would be understandable to wonder about the pace, questions of "Shouldn't they have this down by now? When might they get this or that?" We live in a world where we have tools that provide more information at the ready than one can process, and we can get that information or those answers with very, very little effort on our part. At school, I am

of effort into a variety of things every day, and each part makes up a piece of this whole beautiful process that we call education. I appreciate your patience, your understanding, and your the Gandhi story where a mom asks support in this.

What I ask the students to do is also what is good for me to practice. I need to work on waiting, on listening more deeply the first time, on "operation opposite"—trying to do something that is not easy for me, like pulling out the instruction manual for a project and making myself read it and try to follow it. When I ask something of the students and I also work on a new thing

asking the students to actually put a lot or on ending an old habit myself, this creates a very powerful and quiet force that lives between us. If we ask them to work hard, they need us to authentically do the same in our own way. It's like him how to make her child stop eating sugar, and he replies, "Come back in two weeks and I'll tell you."

"Why?" she asks.

"Because I have to guit it myself to know how to help him."

Blessings on this work we have together, and on your evening

Ms. Beth, Grade 2 Class Teacher

The Garden Is in Itself Magic

As we leave behind the rhythm of the school year, moving into the summer season, it is helpful to remember that children are always learning! The world is their classroom, and summer offers special times for exploration, for connection with other friends, family and nature, and also for rest and relaxation.

In 2015 our school hosted Helle Heckmann, a very special educator from Denmark. She shared the philosophy and practical aspects of Nokken, her innovative preschool in Copenhagen, located on roughly a quarter-acre plot, a vibrant space filled with shrubs, trees, gathering space and gardens; the surrounding neighborhood offers larger areas to visit.

During Helle's visit to Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School, she worked intensely with the Kindergarten staff, conveying the benefits of mixed-age groups of young children who spend most of their day outdoors engaged in play and practical work, surrounded by an engaged parent/caregiver community.

Helle also presented an inspiring talk to the whole community on the "Five Golden Keys" to a healthy family life—sleep, rhythm, nutrition, movement, and love—with the suggestion to view them as equally important and working in harmony like spokes of a wheel. This workshop is available to view in several segments on the Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School YouTube channel. Perhaps you can find a little time this summer to view these 7- to 15-minute segments for inspiration and a reminder of our primary role as our child's first teacher.

-Mary Christenson, former PRWS parent

The garden is in itself magic, a joyful working place. I'm happy every day when I come to the garden to begin the day's work. It gives me sustenance through its recognizable transformation processes, and yet it is never the same. The stress of everyday life is put on hold and I get the chance to just be. It has the same effect on the children who come happily running in and immediately immerse themselves in the snail's travels since yesterday, or the night's rain puddles and mudholes. The garden helps us to understand that the world is good and that life is best lived in the now for a child.

Our future is in the hands of the children and their ability to step forward in the world and ask "What can I do?" rather than "What I can get?"

—Helle Heckmann, Danish early childhood teacher, In The Garden—To Play Is To Learn

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CALYX

Donor Spotlight: Julee Caspers Agar

How did you first connect with Pleasant Ridge? What drew you to the school?

I was living in Minneapolis with my young family. I had taught in bilingual education, but at the time, I was mostly at home with my children while also doing some interpreting at Hennepin County Medical Center. Through my husband, Ben, who was a carpenter at the time before starting medical school, we were invited to join the Friends of Waldorf group, which had founded the Minnesota Waldorf School. I also met MaryEllyn Doerr at a conference and first heard of Pleasant Ridge in Viroqua from her, as MaryEllyn's family was considering moving down there. Marianne Schneider was a eurythmy and early childhood teacher at the Minnesota Waldorf School, and I started to study eurythmy as her apprentice. Pleasant Ridge had no eurythmy teacher at the time, so Marianne would visit PRWS about four times a year to give eurythmy classes.

My husband and I were looking to move to a rural area, as we'd both grown up in rural areas. We visited Viroqua for an extended stay the summer of 1987 before Cole, our youngest, was born. Ben had to finish one more year of residency, and then we officially moved in 1988. The school was a one-room schoolhouse when we visited—15 students taught by Philothea (Karen) Bezin.



Did your children attend Pleasant Ridge?

We have three children who attended Pleasant Ridge: Erin Barstad, class of 1993 (6th grade); Hanna Agar Karlstad, class of 1999; and Cole Agar, class of 2002. Erin attended

grades 2 through 6, which is as far as the school went at the time. Hanna and Cole were able to do kindergarten through 8th grade.



What are your favorite memories from when your children attended?

I really enjoyed the festivals and the plays. I appreciate how the plays are so integrated into the curriculum. The one that really stands out for me is the year class teacher Michael Wright did a combined Grades 3, 4, and 5 production. Grade 3 did a Noah's Ark play, which was followed by Grades 4 and 5 performing a Gilgamesh and Enkidu play. Michael was still finishing up writing the play during the last practice! I also remember well the Roman comedies done by Hanna's class in Grade 5. They split into student-directed groups and Hanna directed her group. And the Shakespeare productions in Grade 8!

How has PRWS impacted your children and family?

Thanks to the school's commitment to integrating art into the curriculum, all our children continue to incorporate art into their lives. Cole continued to paint and do handwork through law school! Hanna performed in numerous theater productions while completing her BA in studio art and photography. Erin, who works for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the Department of Workforce Development, keeps a stream of ongoing art projects in her home.

We really enjoyed the community. I really loved all the families that we got to know, and the teachers. It was the community that we lived with, worked with, and played with. And then when Erin went on to the Westby school system, we worked hard to be bridges between public school and the Waldorf school. We really made it our mission to make more connections. I got involved with the drama and dance programs at Westby to make sure I was being an engaged parent.

How have you been involved with the school?

Upon Marianne's request, I started to teach follow-up eurythmy classes between Marianne's visits to Pleasant Ridge. The following year, we had an actual eurythmist, Mary Ruud, who came three days per week, and I worked as an assistant in all the classes and continued training. I started as a volunteer until the school was able to pay me. I also substituted for Connie Vanderhyden, who was teaching Spanish.

After three years, Mary Ruud could no longer hold the eurythmy position, so we spoke with the faculty about how I could carry on the work even though not fully trained as a eurythmist. When I took over, we called them movement classes and did only speech eurythmy (not the tone gestures that accompany music).

I also brought my work on world dances and rhythm games into the school wherever I could complement the curriculum, from Middle Eastern to Scandinavian dance—whatever fit the region or time period being studied by a class. I did this movement work with the students for about 20 years. During my final decade of teaching at PRWS, I integrated a social dance curriculum into my work with Grades 7 and 8. Lila Marmel (a PRWS parent with training in the Arthur Murray School of Dance) co-led those eight-week blocks.

How are you involved with the school today?

Throughout the years and today, I continue to support the Santa Lucia celebration and share my love and skills in puppetry and storytelling. I have been leading the tree lighting ceremony at the Holiday Faire, leading the dances on May Day, and participating in the yearly Pentathlon. Catherine Young and I, both percussive and folk dancers, lead dances with many of the grades on Wednesday mornings. I also help substitute throughout the grades as needed.

What hopes do you have for the school going forward?

I'm really pleased about Elsa Macauley's therapeutic eurythmy initiative. I'm a big proponent of any work in student support. The work done by Mark John in Integrative Student Support and Nan Oldenburg in student reading support needs to continue.

It's also really important that Pleasant Ridge continues to interface with the local community and continue to build and support bridges. Historically, staff like Mary Christenson have worked really hard at this. When I taught Irish dance classes, I would open the classes to the broader community and then perform at each student's school—Westby. Viroqua, Seneca, Kickapoo—wherever the kids attended.

Why do you choose to support PRWS financially?

I want to see this school continue, see my grandchildren and great grandchildren have the opportunity to continue. (Julee currently has three grandchildren at the school: Amina Agar, 4th grade; Sina Agar, 1st grade; and Mila Karlstad, 1st grade.)

I continue to attend assemblies and festivals. These joyous community gatherings are what the world needs. These gatherings are so lovely and so essential—where we share our stories and gifts with one another.

Why do you think it's important for the whole community to support PRWS?

We need to continue to have the range of choices that we have in our area. All of our school choices should be honored. Pleasant Ridge must continue to carry the rhythms of the year and bring this to the community. We need schools like this in the world. We need to make sure our gifts and ideas at Pleasant Ridge are being shared with other school systems to the benefit of all. The interchange of ideas is essential.

—Kelly Slentz, Development Director



4 5

Greetings from the Development Office!

Thanks to the generosity of our community, the Development Department is on track to meet and likely exceed our budget goals for fiscal year 2025. The school's budget as a whole is also on track. We want to express our deep gratitude for everyone's support, whether through financial donations or donations of time, talent, and expertise. You are ensuring that our students continue to thrive, as these gifts help to bridge the gap between an accessible tuition and the cost of this beautiful education.

Reflections on the Pleasant Ridge Experience

Being still fairly new to this role as Development Director. there has been an important piece of work perpetually on the "warmer" area of my work stove that I keep returning to and stirring a bit: how to concisely explain the educational experience at Pleasant Ridge. In my position, it's critical that I'm able to explain to our wider community just who we are and what we do, as it will always be important to have their support and partnership. It turns out that creating a short elevator speech is not so easy! There are so many beautiful, unique, and key parts of Pleasant Ridge that it's difficult to capture them all in one clear, not too lengthy thought.

I started by collecting quotes from various materials I've come across in the Development Office that seem to do a good job of communicating what we do:

- We offer an education with an emphasis on experiential learning, music, and the arts.
- Waldorf schools teach creativity, community, and cooperation.
- Our curriculum inspires imagination, cultivates creativity, encourages freedom of thought and expression, and promotes problem solving.
- Waldorf education looks at the whole child. Its extraordinarily rich curriculum incorporates movement, foreign language, music, and artistic activities, striving every day to exercise the physical body and the artistic sense as well as the expanding intelligence of the growing child.

I did not truly understand our education until my first WOW (Waldorf Open Wednesdays) day this winter. In true Waldorf fashion. I could not understand it until first experiencing it. We started in first grade, where movement and images are critical for learning. The children recite verses with movements to express each word. Ms. Carrie later explained to me. "The beanbag movements are designed to cross all the midlines, helping to integrate retained reflexes, all of which are crucial for a child to be able to regulate emotions, and ultimately to create new brain pathways and to learn!" This was followed by learning multiplication through marching to

a rhythm, and learning subtraction by tossing beanbags into a basket. Later we visited the 5th grade, who were learning angles by drawing each type—right, acute, obtuse. The 7th graders were experiencing the digestive system visually, rather than just reading and memorizing. Mr. Schirmer drew each step along the digestive path as he discussed with the students the anatomy and its functions.



I then attended Maureen Karlstad's "Walk through the Grades" series, intentionally designed for participants to experience being students. In the early grades, I experienced the importance of storytelling in the Waldorf curriculum and observed how Ms. Maureen tied the stories into multiple lessons. As 3rd graders, in our "Living on Earth" curriculum, we listened to a creation story in which humans are formed from clay. We then made cups and bowls from clay while also learning about clay itself. As 5th graders, we learned geometry by first tossing beanbags in a star formation. We then experienced geometry by drawing a circle freehand (with radius, diameter, and chords) and then making beautiful polygons—all without tools, by feeling out the spacing and lengths ourselves. For our 7th grade experience, Ms. Maureen used a candle as an opportunity for us to practice our observation, the foundation of science, as well as our critical thinking—encouraging us to think through why a flame burns, without feeding us any answers.

Maureen uses the story of a magician to explain Waldorf education. After seeing this magician perform, people felt changed—the sky seemed bluer, the birds' songs more beautiful. What had happened is the magician had poked holes in their preconceptions. Not being able to make sense of his tricks, the audience fell back on their senses—what they were really seeing and feeling—thus walking away with amplified senses.

Waldorf education has the same effect. Teachers do not just Congratulations to this year's winners! feed the students facts. They paint a picture (sometimes literally) and let the students reflect and interpret. For example, a Waldorf teacher would not tell her students that "the Earth is round." Rather, she would describe the experience of seeing a ship come over the horizon toward land: "First you see the top of the sail, then the mast, then the body until eventually the whole thing is in sight." Then she would let her students contemplate that.

At PRWS, we often use the motto of educating "head, heart and hands." but Maureen points out that it's really hands first, then heart, then head. Experiential learning means the students doing first, then feeling, then thinking. The doing and feeling experience creates the foundation for understanding.

So, back to the elevator speech? Still working on it! I now truly understand what we mean by experiential. It's also important to point out how we allow students to develop their own thoughts on each subject, encouraging their critical thinking skills and building their confidence in their own ability to think and to act on those thoughts. Finally, the holistic aspect of our approach, incorporating movement, music, and the arts, allows each student to fully develop their whole selves—all their talents, skills and interests, and even their weaknesses.

As someone whose brain is best directed by keeping the end goal in mind, my favorite quote from my collection is this: The goal of our education is "that the children achieve clarity and flexibility in thinking, compassion of heart, and vitality of body, and that they take hold of these tools to develop most fully their potential as free human beings." (From PRWS "Ways of Giving," circa 2005.)

To put it in my own words, Pleasant Ridge provides a holistic education that nurtures children to be fully themselves so that they become happy, confident adults and may live fulfilling lives that better our world.

Raffle News

We have completed another successful Annual Raffle! PRWS families worked hard to sell tickets and raise funds for our school. Thank you to the Viroqua Food Co-op and Wonderstate Café for allowing us to set up a sales table in front of their stores. These venues create great opportunities for us to connect with community members interested in supporting our school.

We brought the raffle to a close with a festive prize drawing party, featuring delicious food prepared by our Grade 7 students and live music by our own Kindergarten dad, Ed Anderson.

- Grand Prize: Sarah Rowe Momentum Electric Cargo Bike
- Second Prize: Erica Gerrity 2 Stand-Up Paddle Boards
- Third Prize: Simon Stumpf Marmot Tent & Yeti Cooler

The Raffle Committee would like to express a BIG thank you to everyone who participated in our school's biggest annual fundraising initiative. We appreciate your support!

Alumni News: Contact Information Needed!

The PRWS Development Committee is working to reinvigorate our alumni program. We want to create more opportunities for alumni to connect with the school and with each other. First, we need to gather contact information. If you are an alum, please reach out to Kelly Slentz at kelly.slentz@ pleasantridgewaldorf.org and give her your email address. If you are an alum parent, please urge your children to do so. We hope to form an Alumni Committee to help send out a quarterly e-newsletter and to plan reunion events.

-Kelly Slentz, Development Director

DONORS

Many thanks to all who have supported the work of our school December 14, 2024 - February 28, 2025

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Visit us online at pleasantridgewaldorf.org



