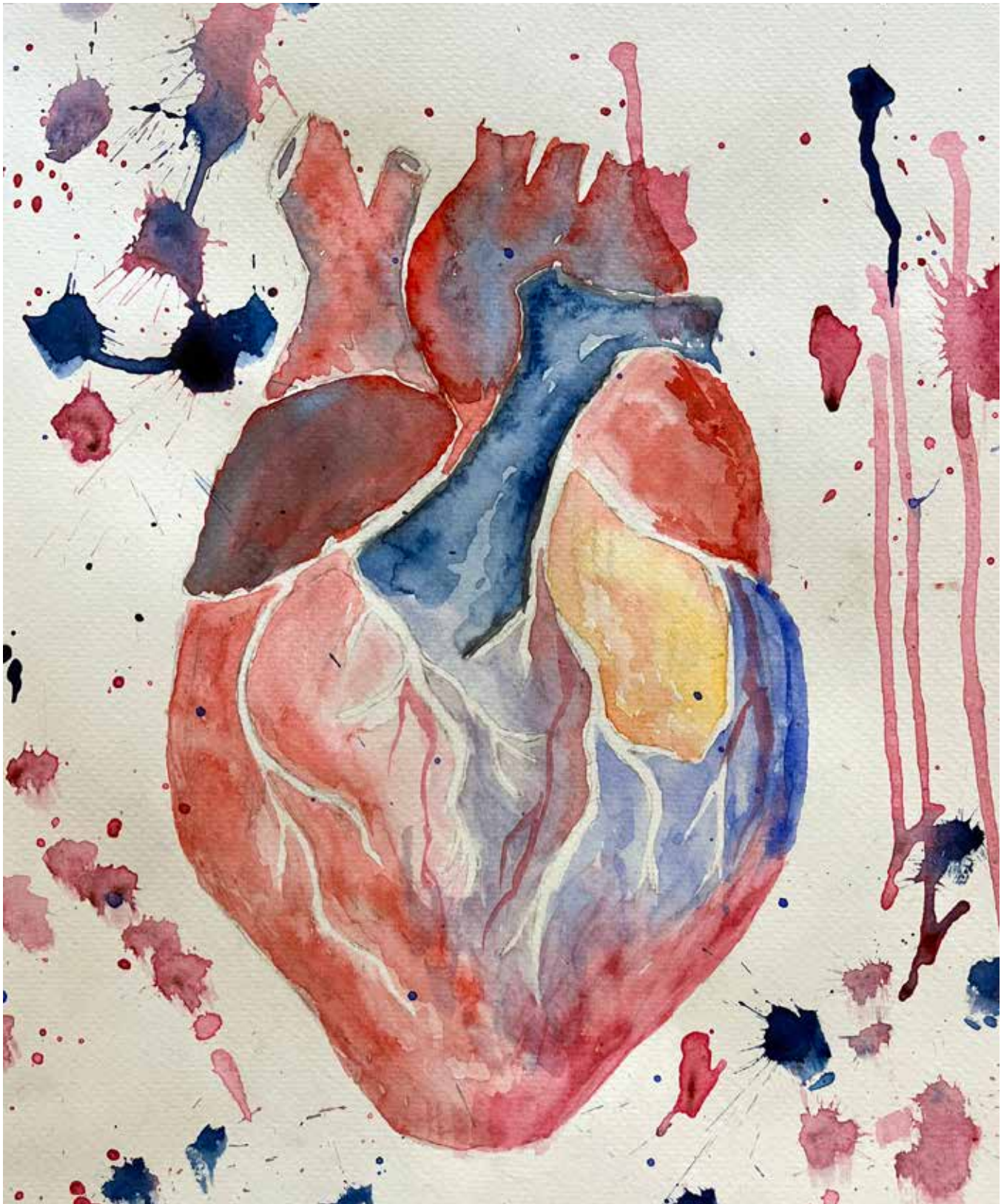


# CALYX

PLEASANT RIDGE  
WALDORF SCHOOL

Waldorf Education since 1980

Volume 47, Issue 2  
Spring 2026



## COMING EVENTS

### MAY

- 14 5th grade Pentathlon
- 15 Faculty in-service, no school
- 25 Memorial Day, no school
- 29 Kindergarten dismissal, 10:30 a.m.  
Closing-day assembly, 10:45 a.m.  
Grades dismissal, 12 p.m.  
End-of-year picnic, 12 p.m.  
Graduation, 6 p.m.

### JUNE

- 1-3 Faculty in-service

### AUGUST

- 18-20 Faculty in-service
- 22 All-school workday
- 26 First day of school for grades  
Cubby day for kindergarten
- 27 First day of school for kindergarten  
with early dismissal

### SEPTEMBER

- 7 Labor Day, no school
- 18 Faculty in-service, no school
- 25 Michaelmas assembly, 8:15 a.m.

### OCTOBER

- 2 Kindergarten in-service,  
no school kindergarten
- 16 Grandparents & Special Friends Day  
Assembly, 8:15 a.m.
- 24 All-school workday
- 28 Faculty in-service, no school
- 29-30 Parent-teacher conferences,  
no school

## Remembering Leo Klein (October 20, 1928 – February 11, 2026)

In 1994, after retiring from the Waldorf school in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, Leo Klein began to visit Waldorf schools in the United States, Canada, and the Czech Republic. He worked with teachers, students, and community members to share his love of art and teaching.

For many years Pleasant Ridge was blessed by his annual visits. He came as a mentor, sharing his knowledge and expertise as a Waldorf teacher and artist with the faculty and students through classroom visits, teacher mentoring, and art workshops. Many of his paintings, gifted to the school during his visits, still grace our walls in the classrooms, the lobby, and the library. He would often bring a collection of new paintings to exhibit, and there would be a time for the whole community to meet and welcome him. One such event happened in the fall of 2008, during which time we helped Leo celebrate his 80th birthday!

His visits were full of life. He regaled us with paintings and stories, singing, dancing, and accordion playing. There was joy in everything he brought, from his eclectic approach to painting to his sense of humor and his devotion to Waldorf education. He created new words to describe the painting process he wanted us to use—more “frittze/frettze” and less “krk-krk.” Both words were accompanied with hand gestures—flowing Fs and hard-edged Ks. We all knew what he meant and strove to frittze/frettze as well as he did, while avoiding the dreaded krk-krk.



Many times in the early years, Leo's wife Ada, a eurythmy teacher, would travel with him and provide eurythmy mentoring and workshops. They usually came in the springtime, and the mood was always festive and enlivening. Leo took great delight in all the relationships he was able to establish with members of our community.

I am so grateful for all that I learned from Leo Klein. His gentle and honest way of mentoring inspired and challenged me to take up the work of Waldorf teaching in a profoundly heartfelt way.

In the summer of 1995, our school moved from the Old Main Building campus to the current building. That next spring, when Leo and Ada visited the school, they purchased a tree for the new playground. My husband John and I helped to plant that crab apple tree in the 1st grade play area. When we watch our grandchildren climb the tree now, it brings back fond memories of the times we spent with Leo and Ada. May the school always hold dear the gifts we received from Leo and Ada, true Dutch masters.

—Maureen Karlstad, class teacher, 2001 and 2010

# SCHOOL NEWS

## The 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Projects

The entire school community anticipates this multiday event with much excitement. The 8th grade project presentations draw everyone from kindergarten students to alumni, creating a full and attentive audience. To kick off, Mr. Ronald Schirmer sought to convey the enormity of what the 8th graders have accomplished in getting to this point. We often speak of rites of passage in the PRWS curriculum, such as competing in the Pentathlon in 5th grade. In these events, the children are transformed in the process and arrive at the finish having made a big leap in their development toward becoming their true selves. Mr. Schirmer likened this to an adventurer who goes out on a journey, experiences unfamiliar and unexpected challenges that prompt them to think and feel in new ways, and then returns home to a community who recognizes what they have been through. Mr. Schirmer reassured his class that at the other side of their presentations, they would be congratulated by alumni, alumni parents, and previous project mentors who can relate to their trials and triumphs.

The presentation itself is a notable feat, but there are many challenges along the way that push these 14-year-olds to become a little more adult and a little more understanding of the complexities of life. At the beginning of the school year, the students must think into the distant future and create a plan and a timeline. Mr. Schirmer compared this challenge to targeting the moon with a rocket: just a slight degree off and you can miss the target by miles. Inevitably, they also experienced unexpected snags and complications that they had to overcome, maybe forcing them to reassess their timeline or even the scope of their project. Each of these students experienced the exhaustion of pushing through to meet deadlines, the frustration of mistakes and do-overs, and in the end, a great sense of accomplishment. What great life skills!

The students presented with poise and confidence. They maintained their composure despite missing slides, misspoken

or forgotten words, and complicated questions asked of them. They showed confidence in themselves and expertise in their areas of study. It was a joy not only to learn about their projects but to see them smile and laugh!

### Evelyn Hundt–Fermenting Dairy

Evelyn learned about the history and process of making many food products, from yogurt to cream cheese, and her lucky family got to enjoy the delicious results! She is excited to reattempt making kefir and to try more complicated cheeses such as Roquefort.

### Sonora Wermager–Screen Printing

Sonora, who has always loved art and aspires to be a lifelong artist, learned new skills in screen printing, a stencil-based technique that literally involves a screen and the finesse of pushing just the right amount of ink through it. This project challenged her to adjust and problem-solve, creating intended outcomes as well as some unintended, improvised outcomes!



Screen Print by Sonora Wermager

### John Levermann–Building a Wooden Dragon Sculpture

Inspired by the troll sculptures of Thomas Dambo, John learned to work with a variety of materials and tools to create a beautiful, complex, and realistic life-size dragon. He looks forward

to continuing to use his new carpentry skills on future projects.

### Julian Lavoie–Hosting MTB Rides for Kids and Rebuilding a DJ Bike

Concerned with the lack of mountain biking experiences for young children in the area, Julian led a series of lessons at Sidie Hollow. He learned to work through the challenges of students not always willing to do what has been asked of them! For the second part of his project, he refurbished a 2001 dirt jump bike.

### Alex Yates–Directing a Play

Alex directly experienced all the pieces of putting on a play, from selecting and purchasing a script to holding auditions and guiding rehearsals. He worked through dilemmas such as the logistics of one actor playing multiple roles and ensuring enough time for costume changes. The preview skit performed that evening had the promise of an enrapturing performance!

### Naiya Myszka–Sewing an Outfit

Naiya described her journey of learning to sew and alter clothing, including an amazing red hoodie which she wore for her presentation. During this journey, she dealt with unexpected challenges such as overwhelming decision-making and mechanical maintenance.

### Lily Hood Nicholes–Crocheting

Lily improved her crochet skills and had the opportunity to work through adjusting and redoing her products, which were a scarf and a top. In the end, she made beautiful and wearable pieces. She looks forward to building on her skills and attempting new projects such as a skirt.

### Trey Turben–Designing a Keyboard

Trey impressed us all with his extensive knowledge of and eloquence in speaking about the technical aspects of designing and constructing a keyboard. He showed us his resourcefulness in working with his mentor and open-source communities to figure out what he wanted to do, how to do it, and how to solve problems. The keyboard is customized to his liking

and, though perplexing to many of us in the audience, reportedly fun to use!

#### Fin Kandler—Making a Comic

Fin blew the audience away with his amazing illustration skills, character creation, and story-telling creativity. This project gave him the opportunity to work through the challenges of re-starting and to learn how to focus and manage time. He realized quality work takes a lot of time!



Sketch by Fin Kandler

#### Meyer Holmes—Building a Slap-o-Phone

Meyer's project was a crowd delight. Inspired by the Blue Man Group, they constructed a large musical instrument using PVC tubes. This took a lot of time, precision, and refining as the length of each tube had to be exact to produce the correct note. To close their presentation, Meyer performed "Crazy Train" by Ozzy Osbourne, inspiring much cheering and an encore request.

#### Solomon Thomas—Card Tricks

Solomon bravely volunteered to give the 11th and final presentation. Solomon learned important lessons around time management and realistic expectations. He mastered four card tricks, which, he learned, take about 200 repetitions each to truly prepare for a show. He proved his mastery performing a live trick that astonished us all.

Congratulations to Mr. Schirmer and the Class of 2026 and their parents and mentors. Well done!

—Kelly Slentz, development director

# CURRICULUM

## Class Plays as Pedagogical Theater

A question I have come to anticipate each year from a handful of my students on the first day of school is: "Ms. Schmid, when is our class play this year?" Though my current constellation of students is dramatically and creatively driven, I am certain that other class teachers could share similar stories. Beginning in grade 1, continuing all the way through the grades and culminating in grade 8, students joyfully anticipate their class play block. A vital and necessary change to the school rhythm, the class play block enlivens the students socially and artistically.

As far as I can tell from my research and reading over the years, Rudolf Steiner never gave a curriculum indication that each class, beginning in grade 1, shall perform a play every year. (Interestingly, indications were given specifically for grade 8. The indication is that the work with drama during this year not only includes reading and recitation of poetry and literature but also should involve a larger theatrical project, such as a class play. The importance of having the children work together in a social way is part of this indication.) Despite no direct words from Steiner, PRWS is not alone in having students perform class plays each year, in each grade; it is a common theme throughout Waldorf schools in North America, and likely the world.

While little was shared by Steiner specifically about class plays throughout the grades, he shared much about language, literature, music, art studies, crafts, eurythmy, social skills, history, and more. A class play is a beautiful event in the life of a class that weaves together many of these curricular areas in a developmentally appropriate way. While the final performances that the audience enjoys are exciting for the students and are fabulous ways to share our work with and give a gift to the school community, they are just one small aspect of a weeks-long process that holds deep significance for the students. In many of the artistic endeavors we undertake with our students, we emphasize the process, not the product. This is most certainly the case when working with the class play.

#### The Process

It all begins with the teacher considering which story or stories would be most fitting for their particular group of students to dramatize. Because the literature and history curriculums in Waldorf education are so beautifully designed to meet the students developmentally, the class play is often derived from a story that resonates with the students. In 5th grade, this could be a story of an ancient civilization; in 6th grade we may see a medieval play; and in 2nd grade perhaps a beloved fable is shared. Although stories from the history or literature curriculums are often chosen, this is not always the case. The social dynamics and development of the class are also taken strongly into consideration when choosing a play, and we may find that a story from a different time period or a story that is created by the teacher is what the class is asking for. Other purely logistical things are taken into consideration as well: cast size, length of play, time of year, and performance space.

Sharing which play we will be working on together has always been a special moment. Sometimes I have built up the process over time, giving clues over days leading up to the reveal. Other times, as was the case this year, the class was caught completely off-guard and felt the play drop into their laps out of the blue. Those moments of joy and awe are irreplaceable. Regardless of how the students learn what their play will be, from the moment they learn the title until we strike the set, we know there is one goal: to work and play together well.

Becoming familiar with the script is the next step. This looks different throughout the grades. In 1st and 2nd grades, the script is learned by imitating the

teacher, call and response, and with recitation practice. As is the case with most recitation work in the lower grades, movement and gestures accompany the speech. The entire class learns the entire script. In contrast, in 7th and 8th grades, read-alouds of the script happen in class, and once casting is complete, students work on their individual lines, often as homework done outside of school.

Casting the play is often a very challenging undertaking. In contrast to most theater productions, there are no auditions. The most talented actor may not receive the lead role. Actors may be cast as a character toward whom they initially had great antipathy. When casting the play, the teacher takes many, many threads into consideration with the goal of weaving a beautiful tapestry for the whole class. Perhaps this is the year to shine the spotlight on an individual who has had a difficult school year and who needs their shining moment onstage. Maybe the child who is the peacemaker in the class needs to experience what it is like to be the antagonist. In our 7th grade play this year, many of my casting decisions were not favored initially by the students. I knew that some of the actors would be challenged in new ways, whether that was with the number of lines they needed to memorize, the emotion they would need to convey, or that they would be taking more of a backseat in this play. Creating moments of dissonance, discomfort, or tension between where a student sits comfortably and where we know they can go is one example of class plays as pedagogical experiences.

Casting a play in the lower grades is a similar but different experience. Although the entire class works on learning the entire script together, the teacher still holds in their mind and heart certain students who need to experience a certain feeling or mood in the play. The movements and gestures of all the roles are practiced by all the students, and as show time gets closer, students may receive more individualized parts. Through the 3rd grade or the nine-year change, children do not have a strong experience of individuation and separation from their peers, and creating a play together in the way that we do in the lower grades is developmentally beneficial.

As children are working on living into the play and memorizing lines and cues, the teacher is working behind the scenes (often with class parents) on costumes, set, props, music, and staging. There is always plentiful work and fun to be had in these realms, and depending on the year, sometimes the students are involved in these tasks. Papier-mâché Cyclops heads made by students have traveled with us since 5th grade, and our darling knitted sparrows made by a student for our 6th grade play have settled into a nest by the window. A number of students have played the role of musicians over the years.

#### Show Time

Finally the culminating days arrive. The dark night of the soul in the class play cycle comes to bear in one of the final rehearsals, when the teacher and students experience their lowest moments and are truly left wondering how they'll be ready for a show the next day. The class teacher is eager



to be rid of the dreaded class play dreams that haunt their sleep. These lowest moments are just as essential as the moments when we rise on stage and share a story that brings laughter and tears, moving our audience from the depths to the heights. Our task as educators of children in the grade school, ages 7 to 14 years, is to teach to the feeling life of our students. Class plays are genuine ways to work with the depth and range of human emotion and to allow our students to try on different feelings as a character from another time period or walk of life.

There are many ways of understanding the impact of a class play on a group of young people. Younger children live into the story fully with the body and heart and may reenact the play or recite line upon line upon line at home. Our upper grades students are more capable of articulating their thoughts around their experiences, and I like to ask my older students to reflect upon the play in class the week after our final show, either through a written reflection, verbal sharing, or both. After our play this year (7th grade), students wrote about their experiences, and I want to summarize some common themes:

*"Over this play block, I think I improved a lot in my ability to share emotion, use arm gestures, and movement in general."*

*"This play helped me with my confidence."*

*"I think we worked well together as a class, and even though we messed up sometimes it was still fine. We figured out how to do the next thing."*

*"I realized that it's not always the big part that is important but all the little things along the way that can make a big difference."*

Being the director of a play never made it close to my list of coveted careers; rather, I think it was on my list of least desirable ones. The students whom I work with truly make the work doable. Leading them through these experiences is humbling. The courage they show during rehearsals to try new things, the gusto with which they take on the work of memorization, and the strength they provide for one another from start to finish brings me hope for the future.

—Elaine Schmid, 7th grade teacher

# Faculty Spotlight: Ronald Schirmer

Interview by Kelly Slentz, development director



## What brought you to Pleasant Ridge and Viroqua?

I had just finished my Waldorf teacher training in the spring of 2012 and was looking to work at a Waldorf school. My family had been living in Chicago for eight years and our kids were attending the Chicago Waldorf School (CWS). We had met several folks in Chicago who spoke highly of Viroqua. I applied for the 1st grade teaching position and was instead offered a job co-teaching 3rd/4th grade with Ximena Puig. It was a blessing to get to spend my first two years as a class teacher working alongside a colleague of her talent and vision.

## What was your teaching experience before Pleasant Ridge?

Before finding Waldorf education, I had a brief and unsuccessful experience working for Chicago Public Schools. I was in a pilot program that fast-tracked aspiring teachers into high-needs schools, and that endeavor never took flight for me. Later that same year, I encountered Waldorf education through CWS. Touring there one day, I recall feeling overwhelmed with feelings of childhood familiarity, even though I had never attended a school like that in my life. Feeling deeply inspired by that visit, I decided to give teaching one more try. I began Waldorf training and eventually worked as an early childhood assistant under Nancy Matson for two years before coming to Viroqua. It was an extremely foundational time for my life as a teacher. Even in the upper grades, I find myself calling on things I learned in those years with kindergarteners.

## Why do you feel Waldorf education is important?

This is a hard one; I will strive to be succinct! I think this education is important for a number of reasons, not the least of which being this idea that there's an imperative to let children grow and mature at a pace that is natural and innate to childhood—a pace that is often at odds with the pace that the outside conventional world imposes upon

them. Thus, one of the things we are doing is trying to make conscious decisions about where we have to hold boundaries with that world and forge our own way, and where to allow it to be and follow along. This is not always easy to do, but I think our willingness to grapple with those questions sets us on a better path towards holding space and rhythm for child development.

That's a big reason, but there are several other key ones for me. A favorite of mine is storytelling! Storytelling is a huge part of the curriculum. That alone holds such a tremendous value for the children and for the adults who get to do it. It is a key ingredient in another variable that we work with: using imaginative ways to get to abstraction. The teachers are tasked with bringing new ideas to kids through lively pictures, working the ideas over in dynamic ways, and then finally bringing the ideas into abstraction. This is most easily demonstrated in early grades, but I have found that the principle continues to hold true when working with older students as well. Another facet of Waldorf education that feels super-important to me is the priority placed on incorporating movement into so many parts of the day—really, all the parts of the day.

I also really value being encouraged to spend lots of time outdoors with my class and making space for free play. It's okay to drop my plans for the morning, walk with my class to the cemetery, and have them do a sit-spot on a grassy hillside; or pause an afternoon lesson because we need to discuss a playground issue in Class Council.

## How long have you been at PRWS and what have you taught? What are you teaching now?

I started here in September 2012, co-teaching 3rd/4th grade (Class of 2017–18) with Ms. Ximena. When Ximena was having her first child, Jenny Allen came along and we co-taught 5th/6th. That class was split the following year, and I took the older half through 8th grade (2017). The following year, Jenny had to leave, so I got to work with the younger half of my old combined class for 8th grade—the Class of 2018. The following fall, I started with my current class, the Class of 2026, in 1st grade. We are now within weeks of graduating 8th grade!

## Please talk about your current class and what it's been like to go through eight years with the same group of students.

In looking back over the eight-year journey, it is hard to say anything that is summative; each year stands on its own as a unique world unto itself. I can never figure out which one was my favorite, because they all feel sacred in their own particular way. But there are a few recurring themes that I have come to love about staying with one group for so long.

I love being able to know the individual children over a long stretch of time. Young children are like a mythological version of their older selves. To be working with a 13-year-

old at their desk while recalling an image of that same child standing on the sledding hill at the age of 8, contemplating the snowflakes on their sleeve . . . something special exists for me in having that broad vision of the person I am striving to serve.

The shared experience of the classroom community is another aspect of the journey that I deeply appreciate. Each class seems to develop its own character—a gestalt, a folk spirit of some sort. I love getting to know and tending to this character over the course of time. They tend to it and augment it as well. The class plays are a big part of that development, but so are the tiniest rituals that happen every day around lighting the candle, how we manage our pencil pouches, or how we eat snack together. My current group has a very jolly and ebullient character. They are endeared to me mightily.

## What memories of this eight-year journey stand out?

I could write volumes on this topic! But to name a few. . . In the lower grades, in those first two to three years, the word that comes to mind is elemental. We spent so much time outside. We got dirty every day. I loved how we were constantly mingling with the natural elements: hauling wood around to build houses, making autumn leaf mosaics, or building sculpture gardens of ice sheets atop the sledding hill. I recall their eyes during a well-told story, gazing almost through me as they watched the story unfold in their imaginations. I remember their endless enthusiasm for nearly everything we did.

In those middle grades, 3rd through 5th, I often recall our class plays: Watership Down and The Epic of Gilgamesh. I remember the hilarity of El-ahrairah (a trickster character in Watership Down) telling Lord Frith (God) to bless his bottom (this is how rabbits got their tails). I recall Gilgamesh enduring freezing cold and burning winds while passing under the mountain on his quest for immortality. Children have a gift for bringing epic characters to life in a way that is unique and earnest. It leaves indelible impressions on my memory.

In 6th grade, I loved stargazing with my class at the Hundt farm, doing physics demonstrations in the dark, walking all the way to VARC as we tried to re-create a scale model of the solar system, and getting to watch the solar eclipse in Brown County State Park.

In 7th grade, drawing comes to mind. We dove into figure drawing as well as perspective drawing. In history, the rise of Islam and Christianity, the Golden Age of Islam, medieval Europe, and African cultural geography all made for a very rich year. Chemistry was fantastic that year: testing for acids and bases in everyday substances, building a lime kiln in my backyard to burn marble in . . . We even made our own cement!

8th grade goes too fast. There are so many exciting events you get to participate in. It all feels very special; I wept

through half of the Santa Lucia celebration! But my favorite part is probably just enjoying the rapport I have with the students. I love shaking their hands in the morning and having a laugh, or hearing about how they didn't get good sleep the night before, or learning about something they are super excited about. We've also gotten really good at playing space ball this year. That's been a blast to watch. I'm not ready to say good-bye to them yet.

## What do you love about Pleasant Ridge?

I love that we are allowed to take our time. I can't speak for the rest of the world; I have been here too long now. But I feel like we live our days at a healthy pace at this school. I also appreciate how we are embedded in a place that is highly conducive to working with the Waldorf curriculum—walkable neighborhoods, organic farms, dark night skies, forest reserves close at hand. I appreciate the history of the school and that a lot of the pioneering folks who initiated it are still present and involved. It's a multigenerational community, which I find to be comforting and empowering to be a part of.

I also just love the people: all the parents, colleagues, kids, and friends of the school. It is here that I became more cognizant of the importance of community in a person's life.

## What do you hope for Pleasant Ridge in the future?

I hope we will continue to advance our relations with the public school community. There are modest efforts for that here and there, and I hope that down the road those efforts continue to increase and bear more fruit. I also hope we can continue to find ways to evolve and meet the times we are living in while retaining the traditions and aspects of our school that feel essential and vibrant.

## What are your plans for next year?

I'll be stepping away from teaching for the 2026–2027 school year. I am exploring different options of work that will hopefully involve being outside a lot and preferably working with my hands. Moreover, I am seeking work that does not have to come home with me. I wish to devote more time in the coming year to my loved ones and to further developing my artistic interests.

I would like to return to teach at PRWS again sometime in the future.



## Development Message

### Kitchen Upgrade Campaign

Goal = \$30,000, Progress (as of 4/23) = \$14,600



At the core of Waldorf education lies the understanding that children's physical well-being directly influences their capacity to learn and to engage with the world. Pleasant Ridge is located in a rural area where the median income is below the state average, and typically 30 to 40 percent of families are eligible for free and reduced-cost school lunches. We are proud to offer an organic hot lunch program at the price of \$4 per meal. This program was initiated by parents in 2002, and each day a parent volunteer assists our beloved school cook, Ms. Julie, in preparing and serving the meal.

Coming together around delicious, nourishing food is also at the center of our culture. In the fall, the entire school gathers for a harvest feast to which each grade has contributed, from gathering apples to baking bread. Annually, at the end of winter, we open our doors to the community to enjoy food and live music to thank those who contributed to our annual raffle. The kitchen is also vital for class fundraising for 8th grade trips which includes pie sales, pizza sales, and Friday hotdog sales, all of which are very popular! We also make our kitchen available for community use at an affordable rental rate. Recently this has included organizations such as the Driftless Folk School (for cooking and canning classes), our local community radio station WDRT, and Youth Initiative High School.

This past summer, during a facilities assessment, it was noted that the kitchen hood and exhaust fan are from the original construction of the building in 1952. They have exceeded their expected service lives and are at high risk of failure. Our goal is to raise \$30,000 by July in order to install new equipment for the 2026–2027 school year. **Please consider making a gift so that we are able to continue to serve nutritious and delicious meals in a safe and healthy environment.** You may use the remittance envelope included in this newsletter (please indicate “Kitchen Fund” on it) or donate online through our website: <https://pleasantridgewaldorf.org/giving/donate/>.

We are super grateful to the individuals and organizations who have donated to our Kitchen Fund thus far:

Anonymous	John & Maureen Karlstad
Cole Agar & Dina Yehia Mostafa	Martha Karlstad & Eric Levermann
Jordan & Mark Brudos	Stephanie Kitchen
Shihhan Chou	Kathleen Kroska
Steve & Mary Christenson	Christian Leal & Kelly Slentz
Citizens First Bank	Erik Pheifer & Elaine Schmid
Jenny & Doug Detrick	Angela & John Rubottom
Roberta Ducharme	Cori Skolaski & Dave Heath
Tarah Freymiller & Bruce Brochtrup	Maureen Slentz
Josh Gerrity & Hannah Hastings	Amy & Robert Stevens
Paul & Paula Grenier	Carrie Treviranus & Aaron Schmidt
Daniel Heublein	Waldorf Schools Fund
Emlyn & Lydia Jones	

Thank you for your support, and thank you to our school cook, Julie Turino, and all the hot lunch volunteers!

### Mid-States Shared Gifting Group Supports Several Waldorf School Projects

I was honored and delighted to be able to participate in my first Mid-States Shared Gifting Group session. Several Waldorf schools meet annually to discuss challenges and opportunities and to share resources. Every other year, this group has the unique opportunity to share and gift to each other the interest made on the Mid-States Shared Gifting Fund.

#### Mission Based on Rudolph Steiner's Fundamental Social Law

Descriptions from *Associative Economics* Gary Lamb (AWSNA, 2010)

The mission of the fund sharing group is to promote and put into practice Steiner's fundamental social law and his threefold social organism model. This fundamental social law states that the more that individuals work for the benefit of society or the needs of others, and the more that each person is supported by others to lead a dignified existence, the greater the well-being and overall prosperity of a society will be. The threefold social organism calls for these three areas of life to be in balance: the spiritual-cultural life, the political-rights life, and the economy. In the spiritual-cultural life, the highest goals are scientific truth, artistic beauty, and moral goodness. World peace depends on the degree to which these virtues influence the political and economic lives. The rights life should foster human relations, upholding rights, and maintaining safety and security. Its foundation is democracy and equality. The economy is to provide for earthly and spiritual needs, with its proper basis in altruism, concern for others and society as a whole. Steiner recognized that the world is suffering from an economic life that has developed at a far faster rate than the other two spheres, leading to a lack of sufficient ethical and legal guidance.

#### History and Evolution of Shared Gifting Group

Summarized from *Shared Gifting: From Commitment to Practice*, Freya Secrest (2002)

This Shared Gifting Group and Fund was created through the vision and initiative of Elise Ott Casper, born in 1919 into a prominent Milwaukee family. She was interested in fostering a demonstration of social principles in economic life. Her deliberations on the question, “What can I do to realize ideals of threefold social principles in the Midwest?” led her to form what is now called the Mid-States Shared Gifting Group in 1981. She created it to act as a study group to explore ways of handling money and as a working team to help allocate gifts to anthroposophical initiatives.

Beginning in 1982, the group invited anthroposophical initiatives throughout the Midwest to submit grant proposals. Each year a certain amount of interest money from the foundation was made available to respond to these grant requests. This evolved into a process they came to call fund sharing. They explored the idea that each applicant had a proportional claim on the gifted monies. Based on their understanding of gift money, the group felt that an appropriate way for a claim to be released was by the applicants themselves. Ideally, each applicant should be free to choose to gift back part of their claim in support of others. In this way an idea of how to engage the recipients themselves in the division of monies emerged.

#### The 2026 Gifting and Receiving Experience

In early March, representatives from eight Waldorf Schools gathered at the Cincinnati Waldorf School. Through our proposals and discussions, we learned about each other's histories, struggles, and accomplishments. This kind of information sharing always gives us a fresh perspective and better understanding of our own experience and situations. There

were many inspiring proposals, such as starting a Young Writers Education Retreat for middle school Waldorf students, as well as proposals for crucial undertakings such as teachers' professional development.

We then found out what amount of money was available (\$50,000) and began the process. First, we divided the funds equally, \$6,250 per school, and then started giving. Detroit Waldorf School would give \$200 to Da Vinci Waldorf School, who in turn would give \$100 to the Rudolph Steiner School of Ann Arbor, and so on. In the end, 78 gifts were made before we were satisfied. It's my understanding that there have been some difficult years where the total needs of the schools that were meeting was much higher than the funds available. Those years really required compassion and collaboration, I'm sure. This year, everyone walked away with a little less than their ask, yet with plenty to move their initiatives forward, not to mention reinvigoration to keep the Waldorf movement strong and the Fundamental Social Law alive. Not only did we share funds, but we also shared our experiences and knowledge. We walked away feeling stronger in our work and more invested in and connected to our community.

Thanks to this group, PRWS is \$5,400 closer to our goal of our fundraising goal to upgrade our kitchen. How can we all carry this model of associative economics forward? How can we think beyond the confines of supply and demand and better live out the fundamental social law? I hope this article has inspired you to think differently about community and supporting each other for the greater good of all through gifts, whether of money, time, or energy.

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Many thanks to all who have supported the work of our school December 11, 2025 – April 15, 2026

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Artwork by Sayana Erkelens, grade 6

In the outwardness of the senses' universe  
power of thought loses its being,  
And spiritual worlds rediscover  
their new human shoots whose seed lies above,  
But whose fruitfulness of soul  
they must find in themselves.

*Calendar of the Soul*  
[trans. Christopher Bamford]

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