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Cambium

MONOGRAPH

INNOVATIVE K-8 CURRICULUM FROM THE ARBOR SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES

WINTERS COME AND WINTERS GO BUILDING COMMUNITY IN THE COLD SEASON

by Sarah Pope and Maureen Milton



Winter has come to Arbor School. With it come steady rain, deafening indoor recesses in the Arena, swollen doors that let in the damp chill if they don't get an extra push, and creek waters rising over their banks. There is light and beauty if you know where to look. The persimmons outside the library are ripening into golden globes. Richly colored portraits of root vegetables adorn the Primary classrooms and vivid rangoli designs brighten the Senior building, where studies of India are underway. But for real warmth on these damp and ever-darker days, we look to our community. Winter is a wonderful time to foster closer connections between students and to focus on giving where there is need.

We take official notice of the coming dark by gathering as a school at Samhain, the Gaelic festival marking the end of harvest and beginning of winter, lighting a bonfire and huddling close for poems and songs—Stan Rogers's "The Giant" is a must-sing—and the much-anticipated Rolling of the Oatcake. The fourth- and fifth-grade Intermediates have baked an enormous oatcake, marking one side with an X and the other with an O, and now a teacher will bowl it down a gentle slope. If it lands X-side up, as it did this year, foul weather (perhaps even a Snow Day in temperate Oregon!) is forecast. We cap the celebration by sharing oatcakes... one can carve off the muddy exterior of the large one, but we bake batches of unsullied individual portions as well.

In addition to our all-school assemblies, we relish more personal cross-grade connections for our K-8 students and have constructed frequent chances for older students to be buddies to the younger students. Each child has an official buddy for the duration of the year, eldest paired with youngest, and is part of a buddy family that meets weekly for activities designed by our eighth graders. A cherished buddy family event is our Thanksgiving celebration, with buddy families clustering on blankets to share pumpkin pie and apple crisp baked in the classrooms with the help of parent volunteers—a vital element of the community we seek to build—and adding donations to the mountain of canned food we are collecting for the Oregon Food Bank. Students also make presents and then tramp through fields and lanes to deliver them to the school's neighbors. And in the spirit of connection with the larger community, our Seniors take money raised at Arbor School to Annie Ross House, a shelter for homeless families in Clackamas County with whom we have a long-standing relationship (For more on our particular connection with Annie Ross House, see our Cambium issue "Community & Stewardship.")



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The Tomten is a figure from Scandinavian mythology, a guardian spirit and gift-giver. See also Lindren's *The Tomten and the Fox*.

Less structured and lighter-hearted connections knit our community together, too. One such opportunity occurs before Winter Break, when the Intermediates carry on a tradition that has occurred at Arbor for more than 20 years. About two weeks before Break, during storytime, our librarian will read Astrid Lindgren's *The Tomten* to the K-1 Primaries. Intermediate teachers will read this same favorite to the misty, nostalgic Intermediate class, who will coo and recall memories of their own long-ago Primary days. Then the teachers assign each Intermediate a Primary Tomten buddy who will be the recipient of magical Tomten visits. The Tomten's presence on campus is first noticeable when mysterious, strategically sprinkled glitter trails begin to appear outside.

The Intermediate teachers have their students compose decorated (often with more glitter) notes to the Primaries, sometimes including bits of the Tomten's song:

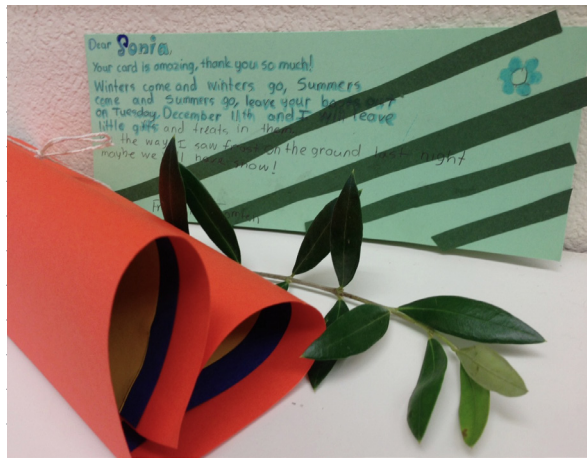
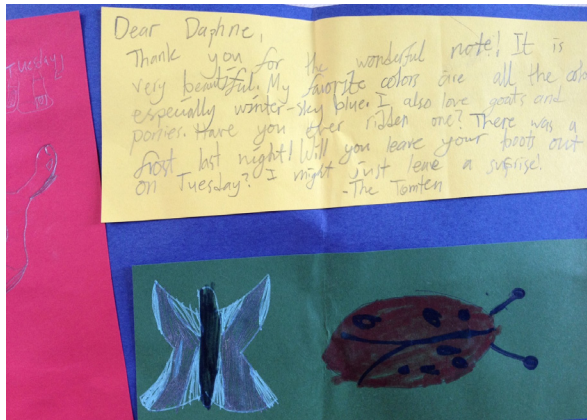
*"Winters come and winters go,
Summers come and summers go,
Soon..."*

The second note, glitter now mandatory, asks the Primaries to leave their boots or shoes outside of the classroom on the last Friday before Break. While the Primaries are at PE or similarly occupied, the Intermediates, barely able to suppress their glee, deliver final, sparkly Tomten notes along with a small orange or a similar treat—an origami crane, a tissue paper flower—to the recipients' boots. A glitter trail leads to the entry to the Primary classrooms. (The Intermediate teachers create a few extra treats in case of absence.)

One of the great joys of the Tomten tradition is observing the whole school gathered at afternoon carpool, when the Primaries are bursting to announce the amazing appearance of the Tomten! The Intermediates employ their formidable skills as thespians to register wonder and surprise at the mysterious marvel of the visit, and the Primaries head home for the Break with a magical tale to savor through the waning days.

Perhaps the ultimate expression of winter community feeling at Arbor is our Solstice gathering. We now allow it to float into mid-January to better suit the school calendar and avoid overburdening mid-December with another celebration requiring exhaustive preparation; classroom studies already demand culminating events for the end of the term's work. When we have rested and restored ourselves over the winter holidays, we will take up rehearsals for a performance involving every child at the

school in story, song, dance, or verse. Curricular content will inform the program, with the Primaries bringing their hibernating animals; the Juniors' geology focus giving us an original composition of Stone Soup with stones as instruments; the Intermediates' immersion in ancient Greece yielding a musical tale of Echo and Narcissus and a setting of the world's oldest complete song; and the Seniors adding the kinetic exuberance of Bollywood and Jati beats. Rhythm in the year's cycle, rhythm in the earth and the sharing of its gifts with friends, rhythm in myth and music resonating through the ages, rhythm in the colorful pulse of modern life on the far side of the globe and the joyful noise you can make with the objects that surround you. Solstice, whether it occurs at the darkest part of the year or a month after (when there is still plenty of winter to endure), is a time to revel in togetherness, to celebrate the gifts we share and the fruits of our hard work, and to look forward to a season of growth. As will the new tree we wassail at the end of Solstice in hopes that it will thrive in our orchard, we sink our roots deeper and gather energy for the growing that is yet to be done.



Notes from the Tomten



The Arbor community gathers for Samhain



Intermediates perform Odysseus's adventure with the Cyclops at Solstice



Seniors beat Indian ragas at a Solstice performance linked to Humanities studies of SE Asia



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Cambium: (n) the cellular growth tissue of trees and other woody plants, from medieval Latin “change; exchange.”

What content would you like to see offered in Cambium? Do you have ideas about how we can improve it? Send us an email: cambium@arborschool.org

Masthead by Arbor student Jake Grant, after an 1890 botanical illustration.

The Arbor School of Arts & Sciences is a non-profit, independent elementary school serving grades K-8 on a 20-acre campus near Portland, OR. Low student-teacher ratios and mixed-age class groupings that keep children with the same teacher for two years support each child as an individual and foster a sense of belonging and community. An Arbor education means active engagement in learning, concrete experiences, and interdisciplinary work. For more information on the Arbor philosophy, please visit www.arborschool.org.

The Arbor Center for Teaching is a private, non-profit organization created to train teachers in the Arbor educational philosophy through a two-year apprenticeship while they earn MAT degrees and licenses, and to offer guidance to leaders of other independent schools. The ACT's mission includes teaching workshops and the publication of material underpinning the Arbor School curriculum.



Winter Solstice performers

Cambium is free! Please forward it to your friends and relations and don't hesitate to let us know if there's anyone we should add to our mailing list. Cambium came into being through grants from the Bloomfield Family Foundation, which has also generously underwritten the development of the Arbor Algebra series and the Arbor Thematic Curriculum guides. We are ever grateful for their support of our work. To purchase publications from the Arbor Center for Teaching, please visit our website: arborcenterforteaching.org.