

April-May, 2022

## EXPLORATIONS & ENCOUNTERS BLOCK

GRADE 6/7



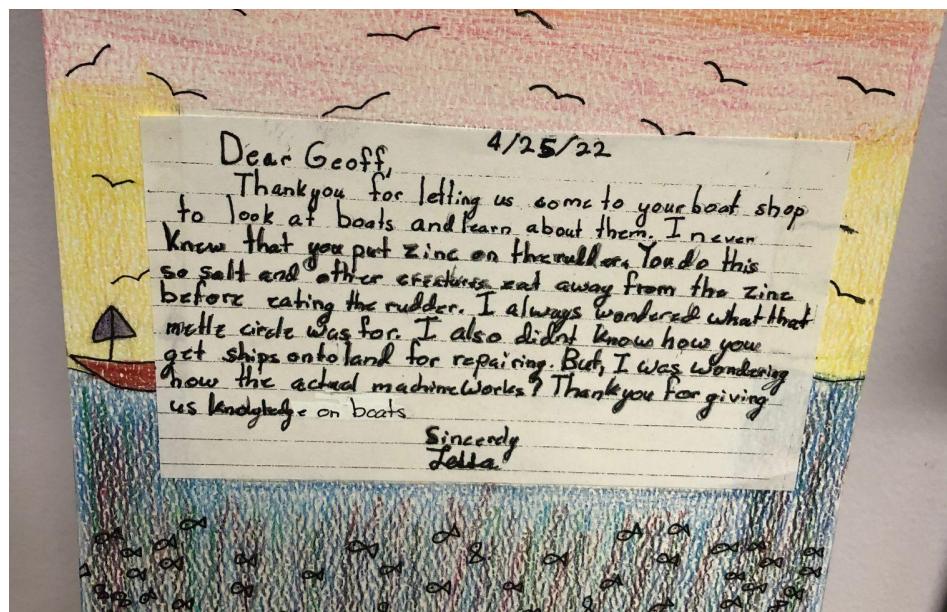
This month in grade 6/7 we completed our exciting Explorations and Encounters history and geography block. We began our study by following the dreams, skills, and voyages of one of the legendary heroes of exploration, Ernest Shackleton, whose skillful leadership enabled his crew to survive two years trapped in the Antarctic ice. We then looked back at the timeline of human exploration from the first humans to cross the land bridge into the Americas to Marco Polo crossing the Silk Road via camel caravan to Columbus seeking a shorter way to the Spice Islands. Along the way, we examined the beliefs that underlaid some of these historic voyages. This included human

understanding of world geography, competition among nations, European attitudes of

expansionism, and how people viewed native populations. Through works of historical fiction (*Encounter*, *Morning Girl*), one primary source (*Columbus' journal excerpt*), and examples of paintings from the time, the students were introduced to indigenous populations of the Americas, including the people of Guanahani who welcomed Columbus and his crew upon their shores.



The students learned about the ancient Americas, long before the Spanish Inquisition. They studied the impressive Aztec and Inca Empires, both rich in farming techniques, architecture, engineering, religion, and more. The students painted Aztec Sun Stones, representing the worship of sun and other forces of nature. With each encounter between the Old World and the New, we highlighted how cultures on both sides of the Atlantic were forever changed by war, disease, slavery, and the exchange of goods like crops, weapons, and horses. We culminated our studies with a focus on ships and boatbuilding,

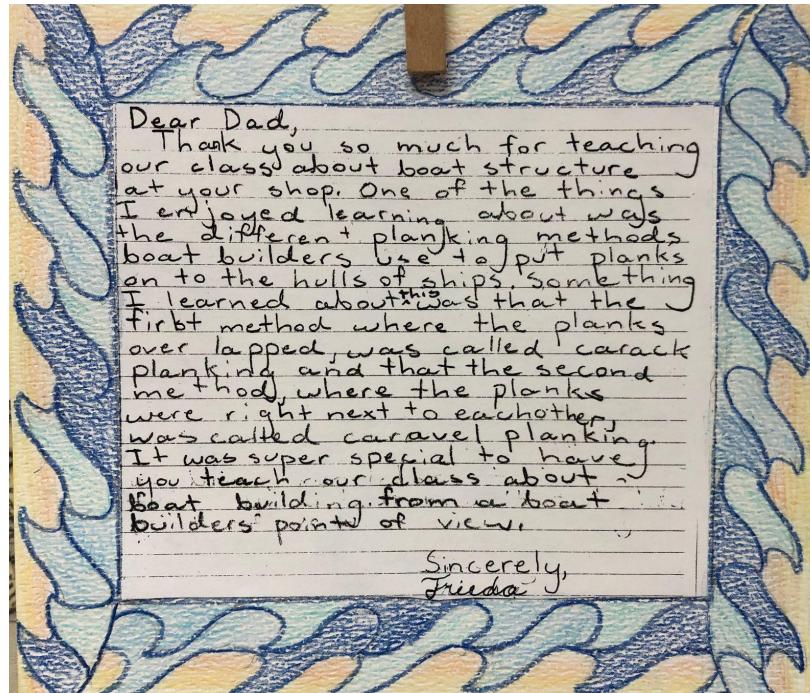


---

including a trip to Gloucester Marine Railways led by Frieda's dad, Geoff Deckebach.

### Class work:

- Drawing ancient maps representing geography as it was understood at the time
- Examining the silk-making process and real examples of spices of the Silk Road
- Creating a class map of which goods and diseases traveled from the Old World to the New
- Writing first person accounts of Columbus' landing from the Taino perspective
- Creating a Venn diagram comparing the Aztec and Inca cultures
- Drawing and painting Aztec sun stones as a way to learn about the Aztec artistic expression and religion



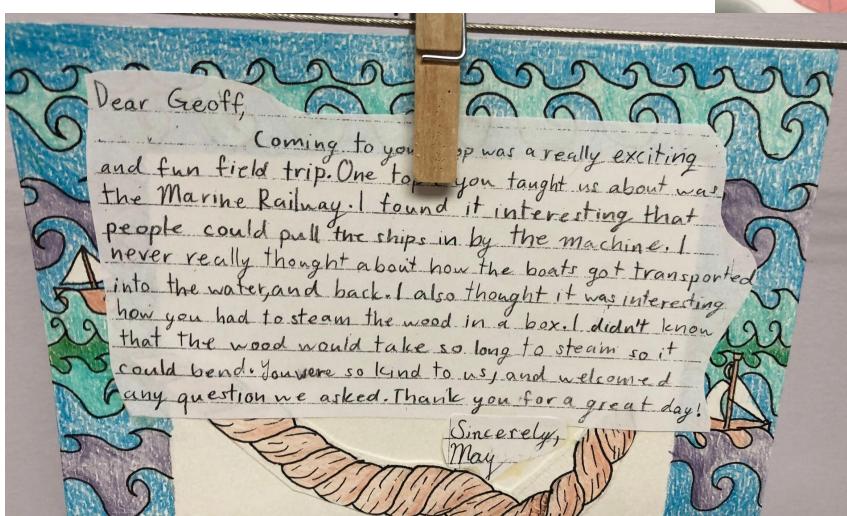
### Why do we teach this way?

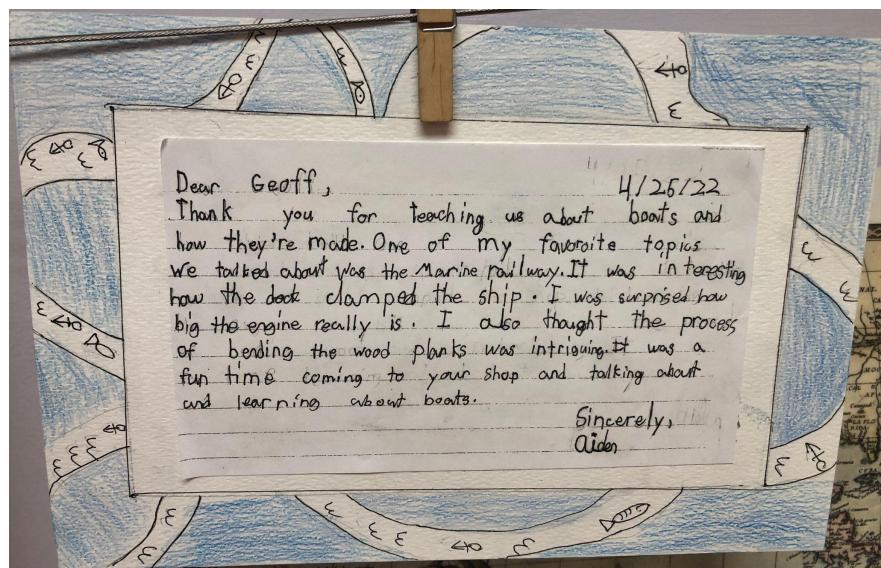
- Literature and storytelling provides a human context that brings historical events to life on the individual, human level. (i.e. students are not just thinking, for instance, about "native people" generically; they are thinking about individuals like Karana and her brother, and how these events affect their life)
- Writing from a first person point of view also allows students to gain an intimate, human understanding of



historical events as well as to practice taking on new perspectives

- Looking at paintings of historic events enhances “visual literacy” and fosters discussion of point of view (i.e. What is the artist trying to convey through this rendition versus that rendition?)
- Understanding the mindset of explorers and the cultures that sponsored their expeditions helps give context and deeper understanding of their actions.
- Our field trip enabled the students to interact with and broaden many ideas they learned about and allowed them to bring their learning into the present day, connecting history to the here and now.





# Science in Nature- Middle School

Hannah Yaeger

## Learning Goals



The students in grades 6/7 and 8 have spent their year transitioning from learning *about* science and nature to actively participating in it. Throughout the year, the middle school students have taken part in several citizen science projects. They have collected data, completed studies, assisted in wildlife observations, and more. This work will benefit the

Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation as well as our greater Waldorf School Community. They have spent many classes exploring the woods around our school to write and compile our very own Waldorf School at Moraine Farm Field Guide. This book covers all of the plants, animals, and treasured locations to play and learn from around the school.

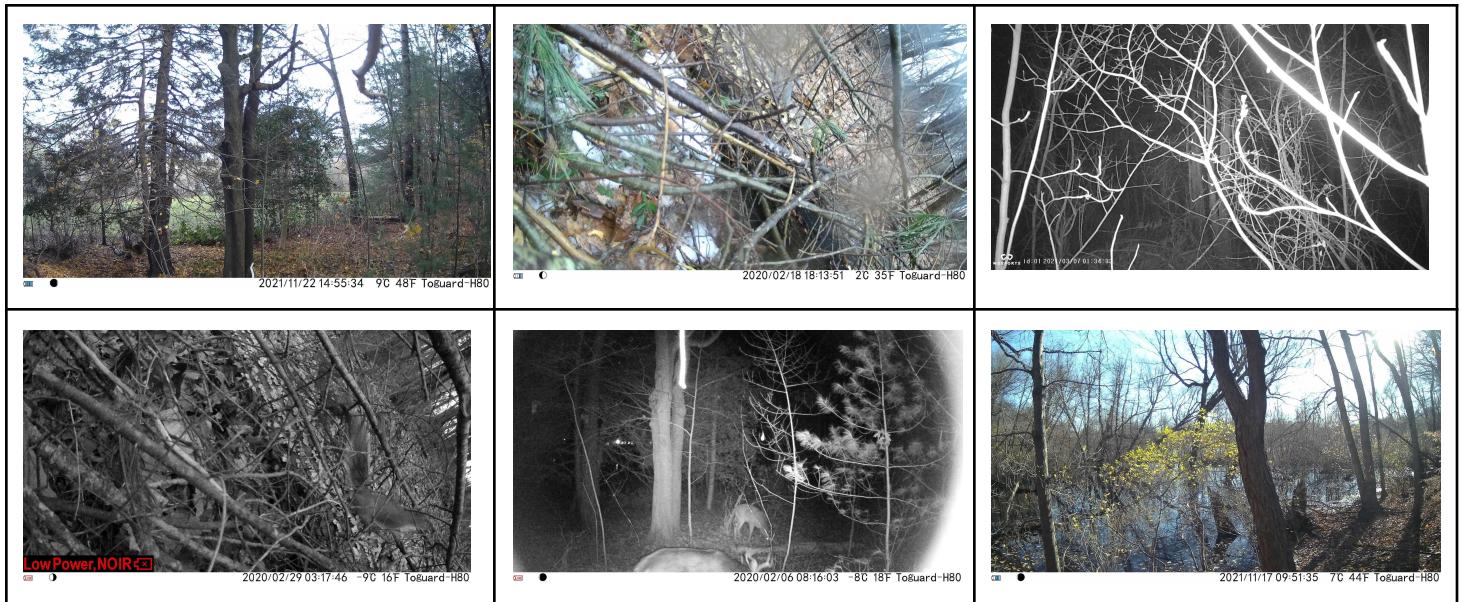
## Class work

By actively participating in science that has an impact on the world around them, the students can feel a deeper connection to the material.

During the late fall, the middle schoolers set up their trail camera studies. The class broke up into small groups and each group came up with their own question that they wanted to find the answer to using their trail cameras. Some of these questions include:

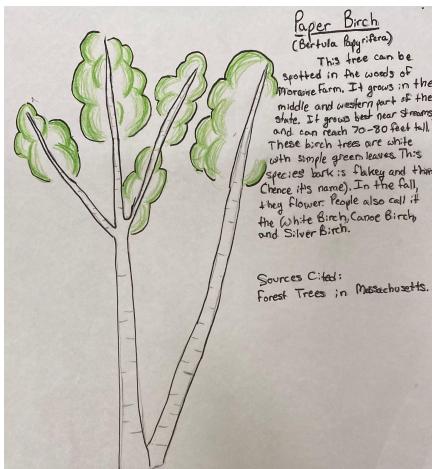


"What time of day are birds most active?", "What animals will drink the water?" and, "Which animals will swim?" To best answer these questions, the groups placed their cameras at different locations around the school campus. After weeks of checking the cameras, the class realized that we were not getting the information that we would have hoped. While we only caught a few critters on the camera, the process of troubleshooting, recording information, creating a hypothesis, and developing a research question, are all valuable skills to practice. Here are several of the pictures that were captured. Can you identify what, if any, creatures were found?



As the fall progressed into winter, the middle school students craved exploration. Our classes were dependent on the weather. When it was a crisp, dry day, the students

hiked through the woods recording which creatures stayed behind during the winter. They observed many bird species, as well as squirrels, and evidence of critters like coyotes, rabbits, and raccoons. This information helped the students plan their next project which was the Waldorf School at Moraine Farm Field Guide. For this project, the students had to research different animals they could see on our school's campus. They then created a book page



for each creature. Throughout this process, the middle schoolers were practicing their skills in writing, researching, drawing, and citing sources.



some hills!

When the winter days gifted us with a beautiful snowfall, our class couldn't help but take advantage of that. We made good use of the school's cross country ski equipment. For many of the students, it was their first experience on skis! Although there were some wobbles and falls, the group did a great job. They encouraged each other, gave helpful tips, and bravely skied down

As the snow melted, the middle schoolers moved into their next few projects. They continued to write and edit their Field Guide pages, explore the forests for interesting creatures, tap maple trees and collect sap, and they used their imaginations and research skills to complete a very exciting project.

The maple tapping season was a huge success this year. The middle schoolers used their math skills to calculate how many taps each tree could have. They then used drills to create holes in the trees where they could attach the taps. Over the course of several weeks, the middle school students helped to collect our grand



---

total of over 100 gallons of sap. This sap was processed into syrup by a local farm!

The start of March, signaled one of the most exciting events in zoology: March Mammal Madness (MMM). Inspired by the NCAA College Basketball March Madness Championship Tournament, March Mammal Madness is an annual tournament of \*simulated\* combat competition among animals. Scientific literature is used to substantiate the likely outcomes of battles. Attributes considered in calculating battle outcome include temperament, weaponry, armor, body mass, running speed, fight style, physiology, and motivation.

By participating in MMM, the students learned about how to research animals, the importance of adaptations, ecological habitats, and conservation management of endangered species. Each student filled out a bracket and waited weeks until the



battles played out. In the end the Lionesses won the championship! Many students predicted they would be in the finals!

After March Mammal Madness was finalized, we moved on to our next project. The students were asked to create art for NOAA's Marine Endangered Species

Art Contest. Before creating the art, we spent time learning what it means to be a marine endangered species. The students discussed the different ways these creatures could become endangered or threatened like: overfishing, habitat loss, warming of oceans, bycatch, and many more. The students then created beautiful works of art that represented these creatures.



---

NOAA will be picking winners in late May, I think many of our students have a great chance!

Our most current topic of study is wetlands! Since our school has many wetlands around us, we will be completing a wetlands assessment to see how healthy they are. There are many ways to assess the health of a wetland, but to begin, we are looking at the canopy coverage. The students created a tool called an ocular tube. The ocular tube will assist in counting how much shade is possible for that wetland. As a class we discussed what are the benefits and drawbacks of having a lot of shade around the wetland. After completing this assessment we will move on to other methods of assessing these waters. Once complete, we will be able to have a strong understanding of the health of our land. From there, we can see if there are ways to strengthen it even further.

## **Why do we teach this block and why do we teach it this way?**



These lessons have helped the students feel connected with nature. Our classroom is the forest and there is no better place to learn about nature. Many times in this class, the conversations are student driven. The middle schoolers are so curious about the world around them that they can spend entire class periods just asking questions and offering possible answers. Because of the location of our school, these students have real-world examples of what they are learning in the classroom. Now, what they are learning in the classroom is also benefiting the real world as well. Their participation in citizen science

---

projects will help improve scientific understanding of many topics. These hands on and tangible experiences can help to ground students and bring to life some of the more difficult to understand topics. The students feel such a deep connection to the lessons when they can touch, see, and hold exactly what they are learning about. By approaching topics from many different angles: conversational, observational and artistic, we are able to welcome all learning styles into the topic of discussion.

---

# German

Jennie Cain

This class continues to be a willing and open-hearted group and it is a pleasure to work with them! In the last few months, the students have enjoyed learning two new songs. One has them acting out being elephants on various adventures and the second is an homage to the return of spring and they've learned to sing it so nicely in two parts. We have also enjoyed two new verses or stories that have us moving around the classroom. The one is a story of two women on their way to the town Pernau who discover they have a surprising amount in common and students pair off and act out the parts. This story is not only fun but also involves repeated practice of fundamental grammar components like the possessive pronouns mine and yours, practice in conjugating the verb to go in the first-person and second-person singular (I go, you go) and in the plural form (we go). The students have also honed their pronunciation and speaking fluidity by working with a series of tongue twisters called 'Zungenbrecher' or tongue breakers in German!

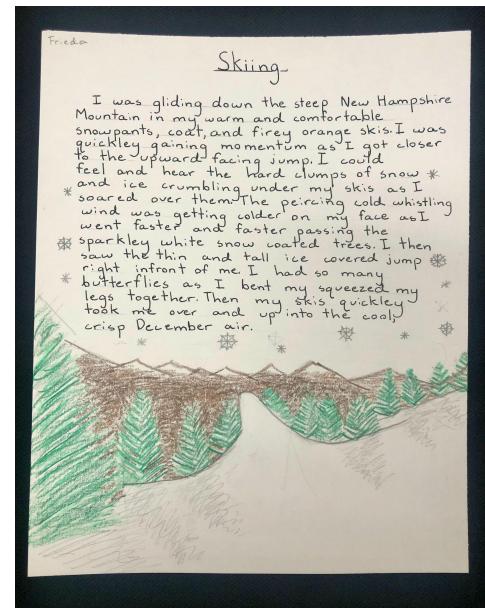
The students have continued to hone their reading skills by reading aloud in class and answering comprehension questions. They have practiced reading the Pernau story that they learned orally and the lyrics of the new songs. The students also read and solved a series of short riddles about nature and animals. It was a fun and confidence-building activity for them to experience figuring out the meaning of these themselves. They read a short story about a mix-up with a boy who orders thirty instead of three rolls at the bakery and three instead of thirty stamps at the post office. Along with reading the story, the students memorized the names of common city stores and a series of questions and answers related to this topic. They had a quiz on this content. Recently, the students have been reading a few new, engaging dialogues as well as a humorous song that includes helpful, basic conversational phrases.

# LANGUAGE ARTS

Corinna Hall

## Learning Goals

This winter and early spring, the sixth/seventh grade class continued their work on writing literacy and reading comprehension. Through reading and analyzing short stories, students learned to identify the components of a story arc: inciting action, rising action, climax, falling action, and conclusion. Students added these terms and understandings to their growing literature vocabulary and awareness. Students wrote a series of narrative paragraphs, both fiction and non-fiction, refining their growing skills with imagery, and integrating dialogue, metaphor, sensory detail, and rich description into their writing. In addition, students delved into the complex concepts of theme, motif and symbolism, and continued advancing their expository writing skills through a paragraph on the theme of a particular short story, using textual evidence to support their claim. Our short story/narrative block culminated in the writing of a fictional short story, which the students revised and rewrote based on feedback from their teacher and their peers.



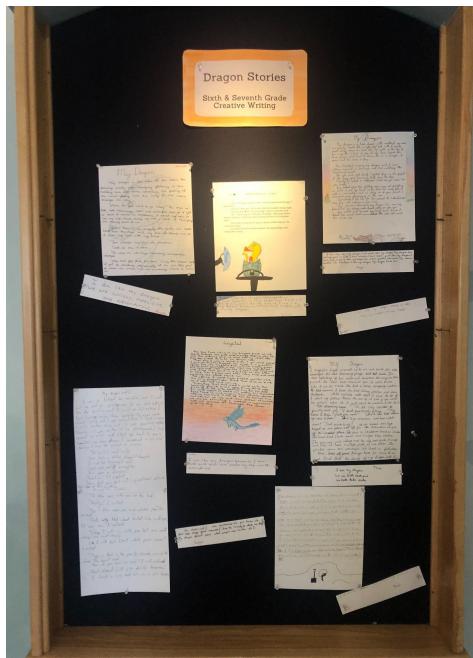
## Class Work

The sixth/seventh grade class are deeply engaged with learning and with their connection with each other. This class has quickly grown to trust each other, as demonstrated by their enthusiastic eagerness to share their writing and ideas with their classmates. The students began 2022 by reading and analyzing the short story "The Smallest Dragonboy" by Anne McCaffery. The fairly simple story arc and clarity of this

story allowed for the beginning of a series of discussions on the more abstract ideas of theme, motif, and symbolism. During this time, the class began a rhythm that we would continue for many months, alternating between analytical worksheet-based homework/discussion and creative/narrative writing. Students began applying the analysis and evaluation of their mentor short story text to their own writing. We soon moved onto the more complex story arc and themes of “Rikki Tikki Tavi” by Rudyard Kipling and “The Hitchhiker” by Roal Dahl.

Students continued their creative writing during this time, however, while in the fall their “free association” time was simply a warm up, now they were asked to develop their writing further. Through the process of sharing their work, receiving peer and teacher feedback, and rewriting multiple times, students began to produce “finished copies” of

their creative writing. This finished work was neatly handwritten (or occasionally typed) on ‘presentation’ paper, and included illustrations or decorative borders. A favorite example of this process was the “Dragon Paragraph”. Students initially spent a few minutes listing their own “character traits” - they then chose one of these traits to assign to a dragon friend! Through a series of additional short writing assignments, students added specific detail, backstory, interaction, and dialogue to their dragon paragraph.



The final creations of this block reflected the dual rhythm of our work, culminating in an expository essay paragraph on “theme” and a student-written short story with a completed story arc. In writing their essay on the theme of one of our three analyzed short stories, students revisited the expository paragraph work of the fall, and once again supported their claim with both paraphrased

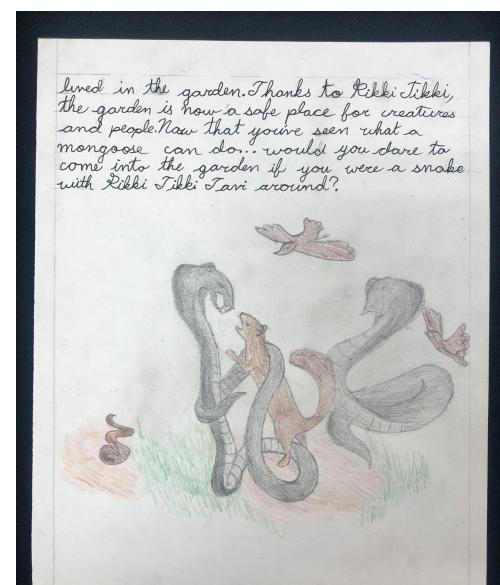
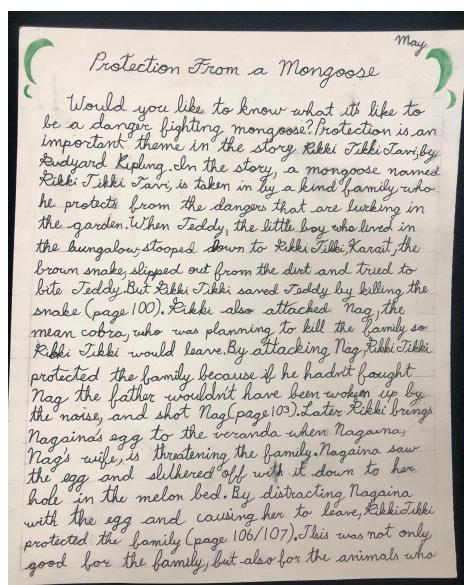
and directly quoted evidence from the text. Students also wrote a complete short story, that they revised based on feedback from their peers, and rewrote multiple times.

## Why do we teach this block and why do we teach it this way?

Through the dual processes of analyzing and creating, students are immersed in experiential learning. The analysis of literary elements are most deeply understood through their expression in the students' own writing. In addition, working simultaneously in narrative and expository writing forms enables students to clearly learn strong paragraph structure. Revisiting the process of writing an expository essay based on textual evidence helps solidify this learning in preparation for the multi-paragraph essays and research papers of later grades. As students connect their claim, evidence, and added reasoning in their expository paragraphs, they build their critical thinking skills. In this block, we ask students to apply to themselves the character analysis they have developed through the year. This analysis reflects one of the central questions students have reflected on through the year - "Who am I?"

For students, the action of developing their journal entries into completed work can be challenging. The practice of multiple rewrites, close proofreading, and added decorative elements helps students build persistence, will, and pride in their work as they create beautifully finished

pieces. Students also learn the steps by which informal journaling becomes formal written work. In integrating peer feedback, students learn



---

how to better communicate their ideas in writing. The structured peer review also helps develop safety and class connection in the vulnerable act of sharing unfinished work, along with respect and appreciation for the varied talents of others.