

Redwoods February Highlights

It was an eventful February here with the Redwoods! It is hard to believe we are entering the final 3 months of the school year. Please enjoy some of my thoughts on the highlights from this past month.



Real Reflecting

Ending the month with conferences meant that the second half of the month was partly focused on reflecting, assessing and preparing ourselves for the remainder of the school year. Of course it was informative to see their **assessments** for reading, writing, and math, but it was very interesting to see their “scores” they gave the class on how following our **Rights & Responsibilities** is going. They gave themselves and the class a score between 1-10 for each of our 14 agreements. We were able to take this data and use it in math to see our average scores for each agreement (and then they wanted to average the averages! It was 7). The most inspiring part is how honest and aware they are of their patterns. For example, the class continues to struggle with talking one-at-a-time during meetings and lessons. They gave themselves an average score of 5 in this area. These days, they are quick to take notice to the quality of our group listening skills. As we are learning with our meditation, the first step in being able to make stronger choices is **being aware of our habits** in the first place. One step at a time!



The Dirty Details of Democracy

For better or worse, it is quite a time to be an American! It feels like such an appropriate time for people of all ages to acquaint themselves with how our **Federal Government** works. Impeachment and the Presidential race provided an authentic backdrop as we looked into the basics of the system that the Constitution gave us.

In Math, we looked at proportional representation in Congress (how the House is so different from the Senate), and how the Electoral College numbers work. Ask your student about the mnemonic device “Fly With Pretty Monkeys” ... this will be the key to the November presidential election. In Writing, we wrote about the traits we think a president should have. In the afternoons, we got to look at the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, HOW of **each branch of government** and discover how they are each powerful in their own way, and connected to the other branches.

And it was quite an eventful 45 minutes when we performed a **“congressional simulation”** in which we split into the House and the Senate and each drafted bills about how we could spend our quiet time on the following two days. Things got heated when the Senate refused to sign the bill from the House unless there were certain changes made. While many of them wished to never decide something in that manner again (“Trevor, this was not a good idea”), it was a useful exercise in seeing how logical, but frustrating, democracy can be. They agreed that it was stressful, but also left them with a greater understanding of the law-making process.



A New Book to Bind Us Together!

We are 7 chapters into a new read-aloud book, *We're Not from Here*, which is proving to be even more relevant than I had imagined. Not only is it a very poignant and clever allegory about the refugee crisis in our world, it also touches on the value of emotions. With such a rich narrative, we are analyzing the book with a **Literary Circle**. In this project, we rotate through “jobs” for each chapter, and share our work before the next chapter. This allows us to envision the action, get inside characters minds, problem-solve, and so much more. Essentially, they are being given opportunities to grow in the depth of their reading comprehension. The new reading ritual takes practice in order for it to work effectively, and the students have shown to be very motivated thus far. We are eager to continue with the story in March and see what happens to Lan and her family on the planet Choom!

