

January 17, 2017

*North Wind, North Wind, fierce in feature,
You are still my fellow creature,
Blow your worst, you can't freeze me,
I fear you not, and so I'm free!*

Dear Northern Lights families,

We have certainly braved the cold north wind since returning from our holiday break. The children are still eagerly dressing in all their layers, for the most part. The thrill of getting outside to sled on our hill and dig in the snow has kept our enthusiasm high, and your children are loving every minute of it. This month we painted with the color blue and immersed ourselves in the light and dark shades of the landscape around us. I set up our teepee and taught the children a circle about Little Eagle Feather, a young brave who saves his village when their fire goes out. Little Eagle feather must make a long journey through the forest to search for the light. We encountered deer, beetles, owls, squirrels, and more who were scurrying away to find shelter from the cold. Everyone loved pretending to be these animals and moving their bodies just as they do--leaping strides, wings outstretched, scurrying, climbing. At the end, Little Eagle Feather takes out his magic bow and arrow, aims it high, and releases the arrow toward the stars until it hits one and comes back down with a burning fire for his people. The class loved the imagery and theme of bravery in this adventure. We worked for several weeks sewing and stringing the bow and arrows and I was delighted to see so many of them pretending to be Little Eagle feather on the day when we had finished our craft and were able to play with it. They were reminded many times to always point their arrows away from people and to use them for good. I do hope that message holds strong in their minds at home as well, because most of them shot farther than we ever could have hoped using yarn and big, thick dowels!

The children heard two traditional Native American tales over the last few weeks. We heard "Her Seven Brothers," a Cheyenne tale, and "Shingebiss," a Chippewa Indian tale. The passage in italics above comes from the story of Shingebiss, a brave duck who ventures out each day to catch fish in spite of the cold air and frozen waters he must dive below to survive. Then he drags his fish home to cook them over a warm fire. He works so hard each day and most importantly, does so with a cheery and positive spirit; so much so that Big Chief North Wind is angered that the duck will not hide and cower as many of the other creatures do. The North Wind follows Shingebiss day after day, blowing colder winds, heaping piles of snow on his fishing holes, and finally, tries to put out his fire to show the duck who is Chief. Shingebiss sings a brave song and stirs his fire as the North Wind creeps closer and closer. But soon the North Wind realizes he is too close to the warmth and is starting to melt. He dashes out the door and jumps in a bank of snow (which all of your children found to be hilarious) and thinks to himself, "Brave duck Shingebiss is not afraid of me, I will let him be." This story coincided with our days that were so cold we couldn't even go outside and we often referenced how brave we all are for buttoning up our coats and heading to school while the North Wind blows its worst. We have

been reenacting the tale through a shortened version in a puppet story at the end of circle each day. Two children move the puppets while the rest of us recite the poem.

We have been busy crafting our bow and arrows, baking bread, chopping fruit and vegetables, and engaging in rich and productive imaginative play. We have so many creative ideas going on at all times that on the outside our room may appear to be complete chaos, but when you observe closely as Ms. Nicole and I do you can see that the children are working together, listening, sharing ideas, building, tearing down, and imitating the worlds around them. The classroom can get rather noisy as all of this is going on. Along with reminders about "inside voices," we help the children to learn the importance of listening. This is very difficult for children to do! They want to be heard, they are bursting with ideas, stories, and are living deeply in their individual imaginations. I am often bombarded with four children at once saying, "Ms. Rebecca," each one trying to speak louder than the friend next to them. Our main sources of conflict in play arise from one friend not listening to another. Ms. Nicole and I respond patiently by saying, "I cannot hear you all at once. Right now I am listening to this friend and you can wait patiently for your turn." We help the children navigate situations in play where listening is crucial. This is such an important lesson to learn in life.

. I shared an article with you all by Sue Gimpel because it is good for us to remember that when we are speaking to our children and they appear to be ignoring us, they are often in another world while looking right at us. When there is so much going on around them (a classroom full of 16 enthusiastically speaking students, for example) it becomes a background noise that they have to filter out in order to carry on. Another point this article makes is that we adults often talk or respond too much to the children in our care. I have to stop myself sometimes at home and in the classroom from answering every single question over and over again. For example, when we are working on a project, I am interrupted constantly with, "What are you doing? What are you doing with that? Why are you putting that there?" It feels natural to explain it over and over again, but when I stop and say, "If you watch me quietly, you will see just what I am doing," then we are all left with a peaceful moment of learning. I ask myself, "Is what I am about to say necessary?" We practice the invaluable skills of listening and self-control every day, over and over again through waiting to speak at snack, resting quietly for 5 whole minutes, painting in silence so that we can all think about our own painting, play, and patient reminders from teachers. Imagine sixteen four to five year old children painting in complete silence, focusing fully on their own work! It is a real gift to them, whether or not they know it yet. As adults in the real world we can accomplish so much more by watching, listening, processing, and responding with respect and awareness of others.

We enjoyed the Dial 4 screening process. Though it seemed daunting and intrusive to me at first, in retrospect, it was a wonderful opportunity for me to get one on one time with each student. I have finally finished scoring them all and will put the results in your child's mailbox as soon as possible. The only thing the results will show you is a percentile of where your child ranks in each area tested among the "norm" of other children in that particular age group. At Northern Lights we believe each child develops at their own natural pace and that academics are better introduced and tested after the age of seven. I do not consider each child's score to be indicative of future performance, or even in many cases, to be an accurate representation of their current abilities (as standardized testing cannot account for how the children express their

knowledge or how they react to being tested). If you have any more questions about the experience or your child's individual performance please don't hesitate to contact me.

In the next few weeks we will be working on our picture display for Winter Carnival. Our theme is "Winterfaire," and so our window at Compass Printing will be a winter scene. We are looking for parents who are interested in working on our float and costumes, so please contact Erika or I if you are willing to help us. On the day of the parade we dress up based on our theme and either ride on the float or walk beside it (only children and families who are able to brave the distance and the cold). It is great fun, but it not possible without parent volunteers. There will be more information to follow. Thank you for all of the food donations that are pouring in right on schedule. I cannot fully express how hungry everyone is at snack time! We have a parent volunteer working on installing a dishwasher so that we can end our use of disposable cups, bowls, spoons, etc. once and for all, but we appreciate your help in the meantime. We have six birthdays coming up over the next month, as well as a Valentine's Day celebration. I will send out more information about that as it draws near. Please keep the date **Tuesday, January 18th at 6:00pm** on your calendars in hopes that you can attend our parent evening on the subject of Discipline. Thank you all for your constant support and your wonderful children! I am always here if you need to reach out.

Ms. Rebecca