

MECCS

A newsletter for Mother Earth's Children's Charter School to share its successful traditional and innovative programming.

Mother Earth's Children's Charter School
Box 42, Site 2, RR 1
Warburg, AB T0C 2T0

780-702-7531 school office
780-232-4481 family liaison

Principal Erin Danforth - edanforth@meccs.org
Family Liaison Janet House - jhouse@meccs.org

MECCS is on Facebook!



Find driving directions and more at www.meccs.org

Partnership with Wildwood School

Huge student transformations happened during a cultural exchange that took place over the last two years. Maxine Hildebrandt, a grade 3/4 teacher at MECCS, organized the exchange with Lisl Gunderman, a teacher at Wildwood School. Wildwood is a small community with deep Ukrainian roots 90 minutes west of Edmonton.

“It is difficult to single out one particular thing that pleased me the most about the cultural exchange,” says Maxine. “There were so many incredible pieces compiled together that all contributed to a fantastic enriching experience for all of us. If I had to sum it up in one idea, then I would say what pleased me most was

seeing transformations happen in my students, where they totally embraced learning moments and forged new friendships with other like-minded students.”

The exchange program is offered by the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation, in partnership with the



Left: Crystal, Tristin, Lynnea and Jody Nero present author David Bouchard with a gift from their trapline. Below: David talks to students.





Through the cultural exchange that took place between MECCS and Wildwood School, students took part in a two-year study of books by noted Métis author David Bouchard. School staff and community members also took part.



Alberta Teachers' Association. Its aim is to promote understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Alberta. Through in-person visits or electronic contact, the exchanges aim to maximize students' understanding of each other's values, family life and community life. This allows them to get beyond stereotypes and respect each other as individuals.

"This is such a rewarding program," says Maxine. "I can't say enough good things about it. It's one of the highlights of my teaching career."

At the outset of the exchange, teachers developed a vision for the goals of the cultural exchange project. A list of the shared activities follows.

Focus on Literacy Project: Over the two years, both schools engaged in an author study of Métis writer David Bouchard. The students learned about his stories, flute music and personal history. They conducted a number of book studies on a wide range of his stories. This focus on literacy through our ongoing and long-term relationship with David culminated in spending an entire school day with him each year and forms the backbone of the exchange program.

Scrapbook Activities: Students kept a scrapbook of new experiences throughout the project, which included a variety of items like journal entries, letters, pictures, drawings and copies of maps.

"All About Me" Posters: Students from both schools created posters with information about themselves as a way to introduce exchange buddies to one another.



In addition to David Bouchard's visits and interactions with students, staff and community members, the cultural exchange program also included activities like participating in a smudge ceremony (above, right) and having fun with math games (below, right).



Letter-writing Activities: Students wrote letters to one another. They told each other about things that happened at their schools and asked each other questions about their respective schools.

Shadow Puppet Plays: Students read stories about Aboriginal legends and related content, then created scripts to retell the stories. They used a frame with a white screen to produce shadow puppet plays and performed the plays for other students in their schools. This activity was a final project in their science topic on light and shadows.

Conservation Education/Focus on Alberta's Natural Resources: Students from both schools studied the topic of conservation, with a focus on caring for and managing Alberta's natural resources. This covered topics in literacy, social studies and science. Students gained an appreciation for the renewable and non-renewable resources we have within the province. They learned about the importance of preserving our natural areas for future generations. They also learned how to do their part to help maintain fish populations by following Alberta's regulations for sport fishing. Students learned that fishing, hunting and trapping have played a role in developing Canada's fur trade and that Indigenous people have relied on fishing, hunting and trapping for sustenance for centuries.

Traditional Heritage of First Nations: Students studied some of the traditional cultural practices of Aboriginal people in Alberta, primarily those of the Cree and Stoney people in the Treaty 6 area. They learned how hide tanning was a cultural practice for Aboriginal people and how the knowledge was passed from one generation to the next for hundreds of years. Students at both schools learned the steps in tanning hides using traditional Aboriginal methods. They took part in a workshop where they could try scraping the hair off a deer hide. Students listened carefully as a Cree Elder

taught them about the process of hide tanning. They also took part in a craft activity where they created a miniature hide painting laced onto a willow frame. Finally, they learned all about pow wows, including the singing, dancing, drumming, celebrations and princess pageants that take place at them, and shared their own experiences as performers, participants and spectators.



Elijaah House Alexis, Adrianna Bull, Lazura Roan, Jackson Adams, River Letendre, Brennon Adams, Tenzin Bird, Adam Bull and Rinzin Bird during Readers Theatre.

Field Trip Activities: Both years, Wildwood students travelled to MECCS to listen and take part in a literacy day with Métis author David Bouchard. On a second field trip at MECCS, students learned about the importance of conservation as well as the Aboriginal practice of hide tanning.

On another occasion, students from each school travelled to Evansburg to learn about the local history of the area and the establishment of the local coal mine. Students gathered at the Tipple Museum to listen to a presentation. From there they hiked over to the Pembina River Provincial Park, making whistles out of willow sticks, building inukshuks along the river edge, and stamping designs into strips of leather to create beautiful bracelets.

A fourth field trip took place at Stone's Pond near Wildwood. There students took part in fishing for trout along the edges of the pond.

Before the field trip, students learned about the different varieties of trout species; this particular pond is stocked with rainbow trout. Students learned how to identify the parts of a fish, various techniques for trout fishing, and all about the tackle and equipment used in fishing. They also learned how to clean and gut a fish, as well as different methods used for cooking fish. Students also had a chance to gather with local Elders and grandparents from Wildwood to hear stories about the region's local history.



Some of author David Bouchard's handcrafted flutes.

Follow-up Reflection Activities for Cultural Exchange: Students had the chance to reflect on their experiences and to share items of interest with their classmates. They were able to express some of the things they learned over the course of the student cultural exchange.

Below are some of the thoughts from our students.

"It's nice to learn about grandparents and their culture, and their life stories."

"I learned how to make whistles out of willow sticks (and they actually work)."

"I learned how to identify different kinds of furs."

"There is food, shelter and medicines that are found in the woods."

"I learned you can stay under a tree for your shelter. Also you can use nature for making a rope out of willow. You can also chew on a piece of willow if you're sick."

"We learned that Evansburg and Entwistle were named after people."

"I learned about hide tanning and the parts of the process."

"I know how to scrape the hair off a mule deer hide."

A Visit From Alberta Education Officials

Dr. Curtis Clarke, Alberta's Deputy Minister of Education, Michael Walter, the Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs and System Supports Division, and Garret Doll, Field Services Manager, Central Services, recently joined us for a special day at MECCS. In a meeting back in January, Dr. Clarke had expressed an interest in seeing the school in operation.

We were pleased that members of our Board of Directors could join in the day's activities. Emil Durocher has been connected to the school since it began in 2003, serving on the board several times as well as providing Elder and cultural advice. Terry Regamey has been on the board for six years but has been connected to the school since 2003, with his wife Lorraine Regamey being on staff for many years, all their children attending the school and now some of the grandchildren attending.

The most important thing that happens in the school is students learning. We started with a visit to the kindergarten room, where principal Erin Danforth, EA Elaine Boe and substitute teacher Christie Strong were



Round Dance: Dr. Curtis Clarke, Garret Doll, Lazura Roan, Michael Walter and Rinzin Bird.

leading a literacy lesson. The Deputy Minister soon became engaged in a discussion with student McKenna Roan-House about word classifications.

Next stop was with the grade 1/2 class, where Mark Ehnes, the longest serving teacher at MECCS at 13 years, was involved in another literacy lesson with students reading aloud. Maxine Hildebrandt's grade 3/4 class provided the group with a Readers' Theatre presentation based on David Bouchard's book *The Elders are Watching*. They then explained the project



Brisa Lewis, a grade 6 student, performs the Women's Fancy Shawl Dance.



Garret Doll, Dr. Curtis Clarke, grade 4 student Lazura Roan and Michael Walter.



Garret Doll shows genuine interest in the work created by Elijah House-Alexis.



Clockwise: Dr. Curtis Clarke visits with McKenna Roan-House, Azarielle Kimiksana and Christie Strong; MECCS grade 1/2 class welcomes Alberta Education visitors; our guests were impressed by the gym; Maxine Hildebrandt engages with the Deputy Minister; Adam Bull and Adrianna Bull share a class math project with Assistant Deputy Minister Michael Walter.

work they had done for their partnerships with Wildwood School in Grande Yellowhead and Academy at King Edward in Edmonton Public involving a year-long study focused on the books written by David.



The Deputy Minister became involved in a discussion with Maxine, as her passion for Indigenous education, literacy, cultural heritage and her students came through loud and clear. The students were proud to show the group the literacy projects and math projects that came out of the work.

It was important to have the group understand the facility issues we face so Dale LeMoignan, MECCS Facility Director, joined the group for a tour of the school and property. As are most school visitors, they were particularly impressed by our gym, which is huge for a school our size. Our kitchen and cafeteria were another highlight; there aren't many schools in Alberta that wouldn't want something like that. Our uniqueness stood out when the Deputy Minister looked at our 6,000-gallon tank under the school, which serves our fire suppression system but is also the water source for our washrooms and drinking fountains. The level is maintained by two wells.

Our guests were served a traditional meal of stew and bannock. They were then entertained by some of our traditional drummers and dancers. We are fortunate to have Terry Paskemin and his group Blackstone work with our boys on drumming. They recently returned from Albuquerque, New Mexico, where the most



famous and largest pow wow in the world is held.

Azarius Rain, in grade 2, performed a Men's Fancy Dance. Lazura Roan, in grade 4, performed a Chicken Dance. Brisa Lewis, a grade

6 student, did a Women's Fancy Shawl Dance. Jayden Lewis, a grade 9 student, performed an intricate Grass Dance. Storm Mackinaw, also in grade 9, did his energetic and acrobatic Men's Traditional Dance.

We were also pleased to welcome back one of our graduates when Tuskonne Blais performed her Jingle Dance. We are so proud of Tuskonne, who graduated with honours from Memorial Composite High School in Stony Plain and starts university studies in Psychology at UBC-Okanagan this fall.

The visit ended with a traditional Round Dance. We hope the three Alberta Education officials learned a lot about our school and will spread the word about our successes. We hope they will help us in making things even better for our students next year and beyond.