



Generations

A newsletter connecting past, present, and future students of St. Anselm School

Roller coasters for marbles and flippers for hands: engaged learning in middle-school science

By Thomas Nelson

Have you ever wondered what life would be like without our opposable thumbs, or even our two legs? If so, you would find the adaptation lab the sixth-graders at St. Anselm School do very interesting and fun. In fact, middle-school science at St. Anselm contains a lot of these inventive experiments and field trips to help students discover how science affects our daily lives.

The sixth-grade adaptation lab consists of two main parts. First, the two students who will be lab partners are assigned a human adaptation, such as opposable thumbs or even two separate legs. The adaptation they are assigned is the one that will be taken away from them during the lab. An example of this would be having to duct-tape their hand and transform it into something similar to a club or a flipper. Then, the two partners head to the schoolyard where the teacher has laid out towels with candy on them. The students have to go from towel to towel and find a way to bring the candy back to their "home-base" without their adaptation. Sound hard? You have no idea!

In addition to the labs and projects students are introduced to in the sixth grade, they are also visited by a very special person about twice a month, astronomer Gordon Reade. Gordon teaches the students about astronomy, including historical moments in astronomy as well as the science behind it. He has a slide presentation in every class filled with interesting facts and astronomical topics. Gordon also always brings a special treat, such as his famous "Gordon cookies," for the students to enjoy.

One year, a former Apollo 17 moonwalker actually complimented the sixth-grade astronomy group in a magazine on their logo, designed with help from Gordon. To describe this rare moment, Gordon said, "I was thrilled when Apollo 17 moonwalker and former United States Senator Harrison Schmitt praised the St. Anselm Sixth-Grade Astronomy Club insignia in the pages of Sky & Telescope Magazine."

Continued on page 7.



In this Issue

A Conversation with Mrs. Pisciotta | 2

Alumni Corner | 3

The Gift of Arts Education | 4

Drake High PALS | 5

Do Good. Be Kind | 6

Class of 2015 Goes to College | 8



A conversation with Mrs. Pisciotta

By Elise Brinck

EB: How many years have you taught science at St. Anselm and what inspired you to teach science?

Mrs. P: I've been teaching science at St. Anselm for 25 years. I guess my inspiration came from a love of nature as a child. My dad is French and we used to go backpacking for vacations. We never took more traditional vacations, so I grew up exploring nature and hiking Mt. Tam.

EB: How did you develop your science curriculum?

Mrs. P: Well, of course some of it is standards-based, as set by the State and archdiocese, but in conjunction with that, each year I attend the California Science Education Conference or the national conference. I've been doing that for as long as I've been a science teacher. I also attend numerous workshops that interest me, and bring ideas back to the classroom. So I use the standards but incorporate interesting topics and activities from those workshops and conferences.

EB: How has your class evolved over time?

Mrs. P: Over time you have a set standard but you have to go with the flow and the times. I teach a lot of the same things but there are always new things that I like to add on to challenge the students and myself. And you take what's happening currently and you adapt to that. So for example, in the last few years a large part of my curriculum focuses on the Ocean Ambassadors at the Marine Mammal Center, dealing with marine debris, plastic pollution, wildlife entanglement. I feel like it's really important to deal with current issues, and I like to keep up with the times.

EB: What still inspires you about teaching the course in middle school?

Mrs. P: Believe it or not, I love middle school. It can be challenging but I love having them for three years. You really build a relationship, which takes time. They start out as my sixth grade young ones and by the end of eighth grade I feel

like I really know each student. They keep me on my toes. I really feel like they keep me young. I wouldn't trade middle school for anything!

EB: How does your science curriculum evolve from sixth grade through seventh grade and into eighth grade?

Mrs. P: Because I have them for all three years of middle school, I really know the flow of what I am trying to accomplish and if I feel like something was missed or rushed I can work it in later. There is a consistency of instruction and an ability to fill any gaps. I'm obviously easier in sixth grade because they are getting adjusted to middle school. As we move through seventh and eighth grade and get closer to high school, I expect more and they need to develop strong study habits. So having them for that three-year period enables me to adjust the rigor and cover all the material so they are really prepared for the challenges of high school science.

EB: You take your students on many wonderful field trips. Which one is your favorite?

Mrs. P: That's a really hard question; but I think Año Nuevo is still my favorite because I love hiking in nature and being so close to the large elephant seals on the guided tour. I also enjoy the marine science trip on the San Francisco Bay in eighth grade. And this year is the second year doing Safari West in conjunction with our eighth grade unit on endangered species. That was a lot of fun so we are trying it again this year.

Alumni Corner

by Julia Slane

When I tell someone that I'm a junior at Marin Catholic, their inquisitive response usually goes something like, "Oh that's great! Do you know where you want to go to college?" I've come to anticipate it, but for a while, this question seemed like a presumptuous leap to my very distant, unforetold future. At only 16, I'm really not sure where I'll go to college, but it's definitely on my mind. As I begin to consider what kind of university I'll attend in the fast-approaching fall of 2021, I've also begun to think about the very beginnings of my career as a student.

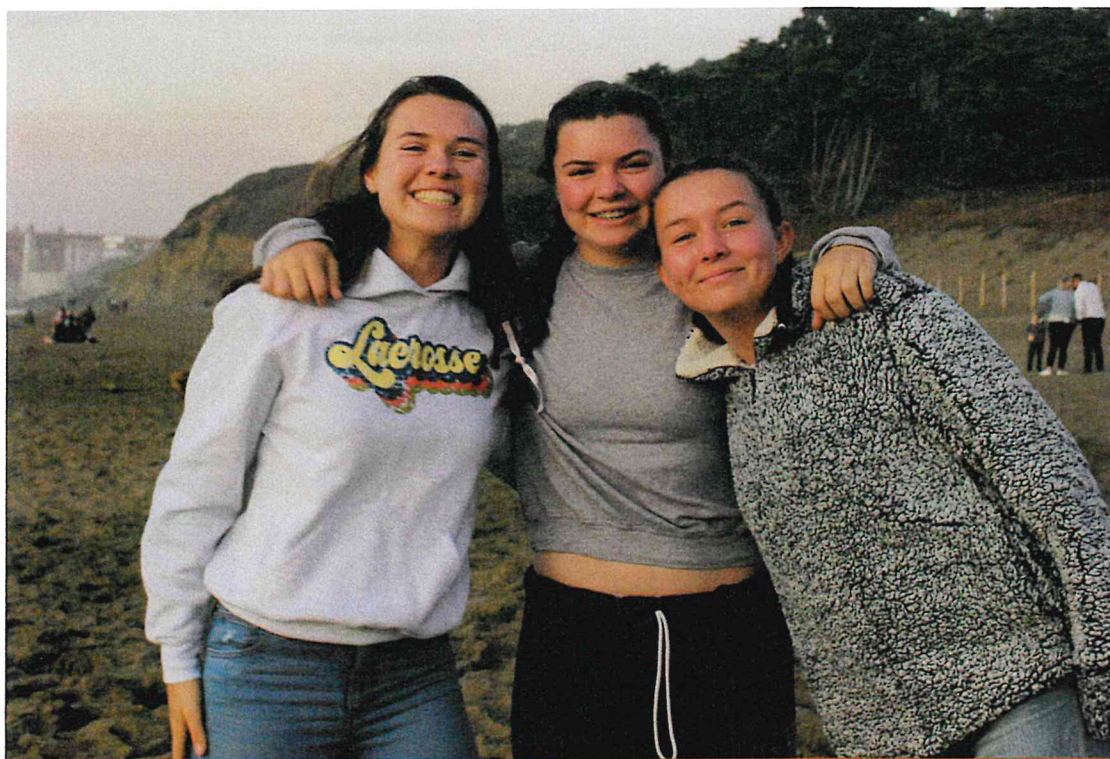
Saint Anselm was my first real school, and the only one I ever knew until coming to Marin Catholic in 2017. The people I met, teachers I learned from, sports I played, and faith I was introduced to are all still important aspects of my life more than two years after graduation. My nine years as a Panther undoubtedly contributed to the person I am today, and, as I fantasize about leaving home for college, I've found it increasingly important to remember with pride and gratitude my roots at 40 Belle Avenue.

St. Anselm was the environment I needed to build a sustainable foundation for success in high school. In elementary and middle schools I had the unique opportunities to play basketball and other sports, participate in Swim Across America, and develop my faith—all with my tight-knit class of 2017. In hindsight, these opportunities were my first introduction to my favorite activities today, and made it possible for me to thrive at Marin Catholic. Basketball was my favorite sport from third to eighth grade, and while I played on the B team every year, I play varsity at Marin Catholic now and I have loved every part of my experience here.

In 2015 two of my classmates and I participated in Swim Across America together for the first time, swimming in the Bay to raise funds for cancer research. Since then I've completed four more Swim Across Americas, something that wouldn't have been possible had I not been introduced to the

event in middle school. Most importantly, Saint Anselm gave me a strong religious foundation that I have relied on and continue to develop. I never would have thought that the sports and faith I love now would trace back to third grade CYO basketball, a fun charity swim with friends, and long, arduous school masses, but I am inexplicably grateful for these chances I had while at Saint Anselm.

So to current kindergarteners and eighth graders alike, take advantage of what your school community has to offer. You may just find a hobby, sport, or activity that you really like. The passions for sports and faith that I developed at St. Anselm still inspire me long after having graduated, and I'm thankful for the school community that made this possible.



Julia Slane (left) with her sisters, Maggie, who graduated in 2019 (middle), and McKenna, a current eighth-grader at St. Anselm (right).

The Gift of Arts Education at St. Anselm School

by Danielle Machotka-Farley

One of the highlights of the end of the school year in our household is seeing all the art projects that come home in those big manila envelopes. Which to frame? Which to keep in keepsakes? It's always a big decision. But above all, it's a beautiful window into how our kids spent part of their school year.

Another peek-in is the beloved Christmas concert, where the school ushers in the holidays with a performance of music the students have been working hard on for three months. We can't be flies on the wall (and not even parents in a chair) in the art and music classes, but the teachers generously spoke to me about their work and philosophies.



ART | Jennifer Lipson (K - 5th) and Dante Nichelini (6th - 8th)

are a powerful creative teaching presence at St. Anselm. Both say that they are facilitators, providing artistic mediums, tools, and techniques, and then letting the students explore and create. Their goal for students at any grade level is to increase their confidence as problem-solvers and expressive artists as they take risks, try new techniques, and refine their skills.

And students get to try out a lot: sculpting clay, drawing and painting with different mediums, collage, printmaking, and mask-making. All along they are learning about the elements of art—color, shape, line, form texture, space, and value—as well as the elements of design—balance, rhythm, contrast, pattern, emphasis, unity, and movement.

People often think of art as outside the academic curriculum, when it really is an essential part of students' growth academically and personally. It not only utilizes the creative side of their brain—something increasingly important for the professional world our children will be part of—it also promotes experiential learning, problem-solving, and self-expression. It can also foster “a-ha” moments that tie into other subjects, such as the study of color and light in science.

“Art encourages students to closely observe, to practice and persist, to stretch and explore their capabilities, and to solve problems and express themselves,” says Jennifer Lipson. Building on that, Dante Nichelini says, “Art gives students agency and control. It asks them, ‘What can you put into this world instead of what can this world give to you?’”

MUSIC | Jon Chi

joined St. Anselm this year as its music teacher, bringing a wealth of musical experience as well as a love of working with students. Recognizing that not every individual will relate to every type of music, he looks for ways to engage students through different musical styles, different singers and songwriters, and different instruments.

As a believer in learning with great songs at any age, he challenges students to connect to songs through both rhythm and singing. Older students begin to explore instruments, as well. Working with songs, students are exposed to history, lyric interpretation, song form, rhythmic structure, instrumental arrangements, emotional expression, chord structures, and melodies, in a deeper way at each grade level.

His goal is for students to find their own way to relate to music—one that ignites their passion while fostering true connection. In his words, “Outside of the fact that it is a fundamentally human instinct, music can teach us so much: self-discipline, perseverance, a willingness to listen intently, creative expression, teamwork, empathy, knowing when to lead and when to play a supportive role, and so much more.”

St. Anselm is lucky to have these three teachers offering our students such creative possibilities. Next time your kids start to talk about their day at school, find out if they've been in art or music—chances are they'll have something interesting to tell you.



St. Anselm Alumnae Help Normalize People of All Abilities

by Danielle Machotka-Farley

Studies have shown that we make judgments about people within fractions of a second of first seeing them. It's a trait that helped with survival when humans were living in the wild and had to decide whether to trust a stranger they stumbled upon, but it has more insidious effects in our communities today.

These snap judgments are something people with disabilities experience daily, but a student group at Drake High School is working hard to address misconceptions about those with disabilities and demonstrate support for them by spending time together and becoming friends. Three St. Anselm alumnae are among the students who participate in Drake's PALS (Partners at Lunch) club, exhibiting the compassion and caring they developed at St. Anselm while taking part in programs like the Bello Gardens visits, Seventh Grade Service Club, and more. With the PALS club, the relationship extends beyond a visit or a meeting, and has led to lasting friendships.

Tatum and Addison Bugas and Savannah Wondzilak take part in the monthly PALS meetings, where students get together at lunch, have pizza, announce events, and talk in small groups. It's not highly structured, focusing instead on just listening to and getting to know one another. These meetings have led to friendships that extend outside of school, as well participation in events like Unified Sports (run by the Special Olympics), movie nights, and a 5k race.

Senior Tatum Bugas says she joined the group because, "The kids in PALS were having a great time together, and it reminded me of when our seventh grade class went bowling with some adults from Cedars who had learning challenges. I remember being nervous and a little awkward but the important thing is that we were out together having fun. PALS gives us that same excuse to go out to lunch or plan a fun outing with a friend who might also feel awkward or nervous but has things to share."

Her sister, sophomore Addison, adds, "I don't even think of PALS as a club. It's more like a culture on campus. If you see someone alone, you should just say hi. You can include them or join them, especially at lunchtime when community is happening."

Savannah, also a senior, describes the connection she feels with her time at St. Anselm this way, "We used to walk to Bello Gardens from St. Anselm, to visit the elderly. Lots of them were lonely. Some kids are lonely too, so PALS makes it easy to share a smile or create a memory with someone who may not know how to ask for attention."

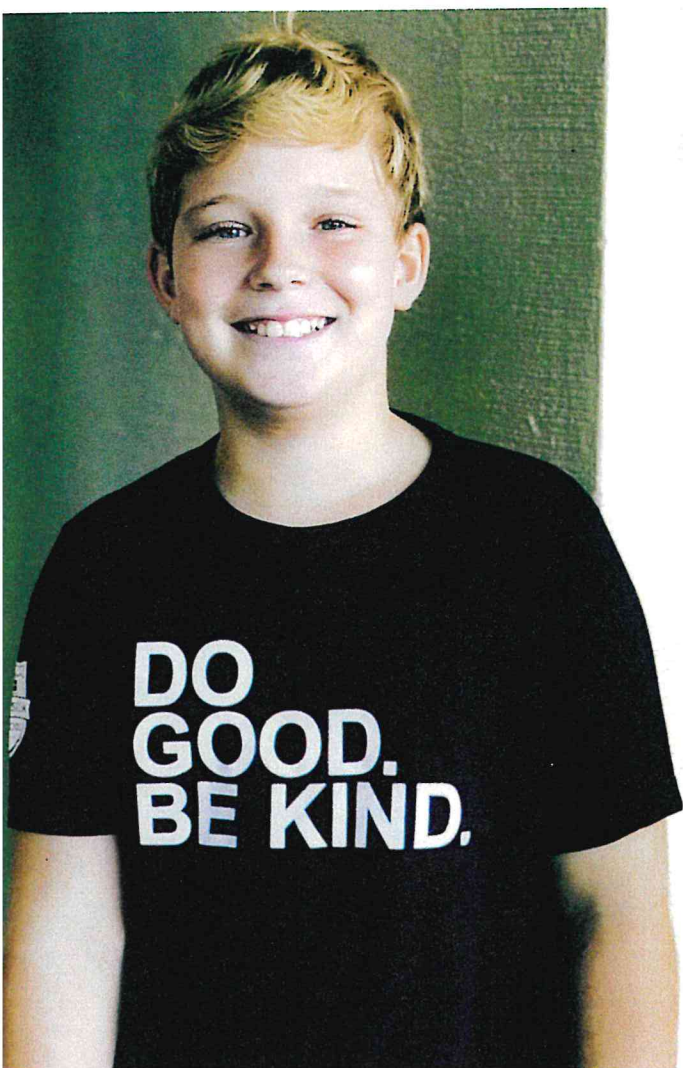
And we can all relate to Tatum's feeling that, "The kids I have met through PALS are sensitive, funny, smart, and kind. Who wouldn't want more friends like that?"

Do Good. Be Kind.

turns a simple message into broad change in the community.

By Danielle Machotka-Farley

By now you've probably done more than a few loads of laundry that included your child's Do Good. Be Kind. t-shirt. They're cool-looking shirts, but the program behind them is even cooler—a way of re-introducing kindness and accountability to students, and flipping the script on traditional anti-bullying messages by simplifying the motivations behind each individual's daily interactions with others.



The Do Good. Be Kind. program has five pillars:

- Be accountable
- Do good
- Be kind to yourself
- Be kind to others
- Be kind to the world around you

St. Anselm held a Do Good. Be Kind. week at the beginning of the school year that involved daily assemblies with a different focus each day. Monday was the welcome assembly that introduced students to the core principles and values of the program. Tuesday's focus was be kind to yourself. Wednesday, be kind to others. Thursday covered being kind to the world around you, and Friday was a wrap-up assembly.

Students were invited to commit to the program by signing a pledge banner—which now hangs on a fence by the playground—and were given a pledge wrist band. As another fun visual, acts of kindness are marked with all-weather tags hung next to the pledge banner, reminding the entire community of our opportunity to make a difference through our actions at school (and beyond).



And the program didn't end there. It is active in daily life at the school, with students at Salutes talking about how they can be kind to themselves, others, the teachers, and the planet. In addition, a "Do-Good Crew" campaign has yielded a handful of middle-school students who have volunteered to lead the school as Kindness Ambassadors. They will meet once a month to brainstorm and lead various kindness activities at the classroom level, during school-families meetings, and schoolwide.

Principal Kim Orendorff notices that Do Good. Be Kind. has had a positive effect at school. "Do Good. Be Kind. has been a successful program that builds upon the principals that we teach our students as young Catholics called to serve one another in our community. The students have been recognized for their successes through the Fence of Kindness, recognition during Salutes, and in their classrooms."

Next time you're at school, take a look at the Fence of Kindness, and ask your students what acts of kindness they've seen, heard about, or been part of. Even the smallest good deeds contribute to a healthier community.

Roller coasters for marbles and flippers for hands

continued

St. Anselm seventh-graders also enjoy designing and building their own roller coaster for a small marble to travel through. Students' designs must include loops and drops that the marble must undergo without stopping its momentum. Shortly after they complete their design, the seventh-grade class takes a day-long field trip to California's Great America. At the theme park, students can ride several fast and exciting roller coasters and see how what they've learned in science relates to everyday life.

A lot of roller coasters have different loops and drops that relate to the motion concepts students learn about in science. It actually makes it more fun knowing facts such as when people are in a loop they are being pushed toward the center so that they do not fall out! Seventh-graders look forward to this field trip every year. According to middle-school science teacher, Mrs. Pisciotta, "This is definitely a class favorite."

In seventh grade, students also do a project about marine mammals. They learn about specific seals and sea lions who were negatively affected, even killed, by plastic or other human-caused ocean problems. They also do a presentation for the school using a video to teach the other students in the school about their seals and how to help with our world's environmental problems. While this project is very fun, it is also very inspiring for the students and an important issue to address.

Fun science labs don't come to a screeching halt in the eighth-grade year at St. Anselm. In that final year, students perform an experiment in which they test their pulse when they are at rest versus after running. This helps the students to learn that after exercising your heart rate rises. Students also do a project on the genetic characteristics they have inherited from their relatives such as the ability to curl their tongue, or their eye and hair color. These are not only interesting, but they also allow the students to learn something about one another that they may not have already known.

Although middle-school labs may contain more information and discuss harder areas of science than in the earlier years of elementary school, they still are still just as enjoyable. Science might seem intimidating to some people, but Mrs. Pisciotta and Mr. Reade make it interesting and relevant, helping to pave the way for science success in high school.

Thomas Nelson is an eighth-grader at St. Anselm School.

CLASS OF 2015 GOES TO COLLEGE

Five short years ago, these were the St. Anselm eighth graders, sporting their class sweatshirts and escorting their kindergartners to mass. Now they're all grown up and making their mark at these colleges and universities.



Cal Maritime
Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
College of Marin
CSU Chico
Embry-Riddle
Aeronautical University
Lehigh University
Loyola University, Chicago
Miami University, Ohio
Northeastern University

Purdue University
Santa Clara University
St. Joseph's University
St. Mary's College
Syracuse University
University of Alabama
University of California, Berkeley
University of California, Los Angeles
University of California, Santa Cruz

University of Colorado, Boulder
University of Hawaii
University of Oregon
University of San Diego
University of South Carolina
University of Wisconsin, Madison

GENERATIONS

PASTOR | Rev. Jose Shaji
PRINCIPAL | Kim Orendorff

EDITOR | Danielle Machotka-Farley
DESIGN | Blendbranding.com | Rob Mesarchik
PHOTO EDITOR | Emily Leonard
CONTRIBUTORS | Elise Brinck, Thomas Nelson, Julia Slane

Return Service Requested

St. Anselm School
40 Belle Avenue
San Anselmo, CA 94960-2892



Presorted STD
US Postage
PAID
Permit No. 470
Santa Rosa, CA