

ASSEMBLY

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One of the most unique aspects of our school week is Thursday assemblies. Each Thursday afternoon the entire school gathers in the multipurpose Room for a "school meeting". At this family gathering of our learning community, work is celebrated, information is shared, announcements are made, issues are raised and we sing together. Children have opportunities to be presenters, careful listeners and appreciative audience members.

Each teacher is responsible for organizing assemblies during the school year. They may have a theme or recognize some current event, holiday, season or famous personality. Different classrooms are invited on a regular rotating basis to share work they feel is special or particularly interesting. This might include the strategy and solution for a math problem, a classroom graph, personal writing, a class book, project work, a science demonstration, a book review or dramatic presentation. Principal Janet Yuse often shares some special news and presents book ribbons to new authors. During our yearlong study of Africa last year, she read an African folk tale during many assemblies.

This year our assemblies have been enriched with more diverse sharing including performance and music. Children's writing is regularly "word jazzed" and a drama group has interpreted student writing in mime form. Word jazz is a musical and vocal interpretation of a short piece or poem by an adult reader and musician. Pieces are selected from Literary Board submissions and presented with piano, guitar or rhythm instrument accompaniment. The student author is invited to come to the front of the assembly and enjoy this new reading of his/her work. The appreciative student audience applauds shared work in different ways. We choose finger snapping, hand waving, clapping, knee slapping and other interesting ways to applaud a class share or word jazz selection.

The benefits and positive learning aspects of assembly are multifaceted. Students are introduced to new and exciting information and different ways to share and make it public. Topics for discussion and study are presented to wide audience. Project experts are identified as future resources. After hearing from student authors, more poems and stories are written in classrooms to be shared and word jazzed at future assemblies. Opportunities to practice public speaking are available to all students. Everyone is excited when a first grader shares for the first time. It's a big step that is supported by the whole school. Assembly is a wonderful vehicle for the John Lyman family to celebrate individual and class accomplishments and work.