Bringing It All Together
Third Grade Thanksgiving Food and Arts Evening

 Probably one of the most cherished traditions at Cedar Springs Waldorf was the Third Grade Thanksgiving Family Feast. We believe the first one was held in 1993 by Joyce Weisman and her third grade class. Each time we hosted one of these evenings the students’ parents left, blown away by what their children were capable of doing… and of course, the students left very excited about their accomplishments.

Below is a compilation of notes reflecting how we helped the students prepare for this wonderful gift for their families:

We began in the spring of 2nd grade when we planted the wheat we would harvest in the fall- we then winnowed, thrashed, ground and used the flour to make our pie crusts.

During the first week of school we went on a field trip to pick blackberries (fully ripe in the foothills at that time). Upon return to the school, we made blackberry jam that we stored. Each family got to take home a jar as a “Thanksgiving party favor” (though you could save them and give them out as Christmas presents).

We also spent September and October planting herbs and vegetables that we could use in our salad and soup (both important parts of our feast).

During the months that preceded our event, we learned many harvesting songs and autumn poems, some of which we performed that evening.
But, the major entertainment of the evening was the students’ performance of Arnold Logan’s cantata “Johnny Hears the Call.” It is an absolutely delightful musical play (made up of 6 songs) based on the life of Johnny Appleseed. The staging is minimal, the costumes easy to put together, and the music is not difficult to teach—but deeply satisfying for the 9 year old. We also performed this cantata for the school’s thanksgiving assembly. (Cantata info below.)

Speaking of apples! In the fall we also went to an apple orchard and picked lots of apples. We put some through our cider press and refrigerated it to serve at the feast. The rest of the apples we sliced up, placed in bags and then mixed in sugar and cinnamon. We then froze this apple preparation for future use in our pies for the feast.

During a modeling class, we made pinch pots (about 3-4 inches in diameter) that were then fired and used as vases on the tables. In another class we dipped candles and used those as part of the table decorations.

Two more field trips rounded out our travel: one was to Bale Grist Mill State Park in Napa Valley where we learned about their water-wheel powered mill. We brought with us a brought a sack of organic corn kernels and watched our corn being “stone ground” and turned into meal. We took this back to school and stored it to make corn bread for our feast. Our final trip was to a local pumpkin patch where we picked pumpkins for carving and for the pumpkin pies for our feast!

(Fun fact: the young boy on the left is Ian Wilson. He is now owner of Formative Studios and the designer of our Waldorf Inspirations website!) 

Two weeks before the event, the students made invitations to our feast and hand-delivered them to their families.
A week before the event, the students wrote out the recipes for the soup, pies, cornbread, and salad dressing we would be making into their “Recipe” books.

All of the above was in preparation for the big week (You will need several parent volunteers to help you put on this event.) Each day leading up to Thursday evening (We typically hold the feast on the Thursday before Thanksgiving break.) has its tasks- and of course each day we practiced the Cantata. Below is an example of how we managed:

**Monday**
Each student made place cards for each member of her family (who was attending), the students made butter by taking turns shaking several mason jars full of cream (with a pinch of salt) until it solidified.

**Tuesday**
Students made salad dressing using a recipe that incorporated some of the herbs from the garden. They also ironed table cloths and napkins.

**Wednesday**
The vegetables were harvested from the school garden and chopped up for the soup (Supplement with store-bought veggies, as needed), and the soup was made using as many items from our garden as we could. We chose a minestrone soup recipe that included beans and noodles, these were bought and cooked. (This type of soup is always better the second day.) The main consideration is to plan for lots of refrigerator space to store the pots of soup!

**Thursday- THE BIG DAY!**
The class was divided into four groups- each one had a parent guide.
1. Group 1 went to the home of a parent, who had two ovens and a large enough kitchen to accommodate the group. They made the pies.
2. Group 2 made the corn bread and the wheat bread.
3. Group 3 gathered the salad vegetables from the garden, added them to other organic salad greens that a parent had brought and made the salad- lots of dicing of bell peppers, cucumbers, etc. They also grated parmesan cheese for the soup.
4. Group 4 went to the venue we rented for the occasion and set up the tables in the room with: table cloths, napkins, place cards, candles, and centerpieces they created from gathered flowers, leaves, etc.
**MENU:**

*Minestrone soup with parmesan cheese*

*Corn bread and wheat bread with fresh butter and black berry jam*

*Veggie Salad with homemade balsamic dressing*

*Pumpkin and Apple Pies*

*Apple Cider or Water*

The festivities began at 6 pm and went until 7:30 pm. First we sang a blessing and then everyone served themselves dinner (no dessert, yet) buffet style (pitchers of cider, water, cruets of salad dressing and the breads and butter were already on the tables.

Once everyone was close to finishing eating (about 30 minutes later), the teacher officially welcomed the guests and shared with them what they were seeing and eating- that the students had helped grow many of the herbs and vegetables in the salad and soup, they had “churned the butter”, harvested and prepared the wheat (for the pies), blackberries, apples and pumpkins, that they had taken the corn to be ground, had made the place cards, vases and candles used on the tables, which they had decorated.

Of course, those parents that had helped make it possible were acknowledged and thanked. While the teacher was addressing the parents, the students were getting into the final pieces of their costumes, getting their props, and taking their places for the cantata.
Once they were ready, everyone was asked to move their chairs so that they could see the “stage area” and the play began. After the cantata was done, the student put out the desserts. We finalized the evening with several seasonal poems and songs. All in all it was a truly memorable evening.

A few notes:
1. We asked a parent (good writer) to write up an article from her perspective, which was then put in the school paper.
2. We didn’t allow picture taking or filming of the cantata, but made sure there was ample time afterwards for parents to take photos of their children- we even “staged” a few shots!
3. Part of the volunteer help was in the clean-up of the tables, chairs, big pots, etc. We lined this up a month in advance at an earlier class parent meeting. The next morning, the students swept and put the final clean up touches on the space.
4. You could do this event without the cantata (since it seems to currently be out of print) and just do a generous selection of poems and songs (flute and singing.
5. Don’t be afraid to take this on, just do it little pieces at a time and it’s very doable…
6. This event can be used for math skills practice in many ways: Since we had completed our linear measurement block, we had the students figure out how many people could sit at their table given that each chair would need 8 inches of space on either side, we added and subtracted the cost of things and did a lot of converting recipes to accommodate the large quantities we were making. Great real life problems to solve! (You could mention this in your introduction, as well.)
7. When the classes at the school were very small, friends were also invited to this event. However, as the size of the 3rd grades grew, there were so many immediate family members that we had to limit the evening to parents and siblings…be sure to get this base count early on and then decide if others can come.
Johnny Hears the Call, by Arnold Logan, published by Anthroposophic Press (1994) unfortunately, this play is currently out of print. Check with the Press to see how you could get a copy.