

The Nova Herald

Volume 3, Issue 1

schoolnova.com

Spring 2014

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- SchoolNova Logo and Video Competitions. Details can be found on page 2. All entries are due on Sunday, May 4th, 2014.
- SigmaCamp registration deadline is April 20. For details see page 4.

REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING - MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Shajuan Jackson, English Teacher

This year Long Island has seen plenty of winter. Week after week, we have been pummeled by snow, and then by ice, and then by even more snow and ice. The snow and ice turned into massive mounds that clutter the streets, sidewalks and parking lots. And just when we believed we had seen the last of the storms, the weathercasters would predict a new storm heading our way. In February alone, LI has probably endured six weeks' worth of snow! However, this weather should not come as a total surprise. After All, Philadelphians in Punxsutawney did report that the groundhog Phil saw his shadow on the Super Bowl Sunday. I do not know about the rest of Long Island, but I have had my full share of shoveling snow, scraping ice off car windows, and salting sidewalks.

Each time storms strike, school and college administrators have to make that crucial decision: continue as normal, delay, or cancel classes.

Do not get me wrong. As a graduate student at Hofstra University, I enjoy an occasional snow day —extra time to complete an assignment or a chance to drink hot cocoa and relax by the fireplace.

But as a teacher, I look forward to getting back to work because of the goals I set and the opportunity to fulfill my mission at SchoolNova. We, teachers, have a chance to give our students that extra slice of knowledge we wish we had at their age. We aspire for them to develop into creative, logical and innovative students. We give them the knowledge they will need to shine in the classroom, get into college, nail their future job interviews and ultimately prosper in life.

Thus, when the storms have passed and the snow has stopped, I usually mumble and grumble at the labor waiting for me outside. Then I take my shovel, scoop out the snow dumped on my driveway, scrape the ice off the car window and drive off to the Physics Building at Stony Brook University—a forty five minute drive for me. The labor and the drive are worth it all in the end. As teachers, and even as parents, we have the responsibility to teach our students and children as much as we can. After all, when the youth come of age, every investment we make to build this world will be in their hands. This island, this state, this country, and the world will one day depend on each of them. I am honored to have the opportunity to share my knowledge and experience with my students, and am privileged to witness what they do with that knowledge.

And who are these youths? I am fortunate to have met a few of them at SchoolNova. Together, we have assembled this issue of *The Herald*. In it, **David Bershadsky**, a chemistry and technology enthusiast, revisits his take on video games and brings new insight to the subject. **Ivanka Tkachenko**, who performed in SchoolNova's rendition of the play "Doctor *Ouchithurts*", recounts the school's winter celebration and her experiences at the event. And **Carolyn Liu**, the youngest contributor with a vibrant imagination, submits an exciting excerpt of her fantasy story, *Kona*.

STUDENTS WELCOME TO THE FOLLOWING EVENTS, HOSTED BY STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY:

- Public lectures at the Simons Center for Geometry and Physics. given by leading scientists coming to the campus. The lectures are announced on the Center's web site <http://www.scgp.stonybrook.edu/> and also by posters.
- Lectures on Astronomy, Physics, Geosciences, Ecology and Evolution are given almost every Friday night during school year. These lectures are targeted to the general audience and are given by faculty of the University on topics related to their research. Schedules and information can be found at: <http://www.astro.sunysb.edu/openight/opennite.html>

SCHOOLNOVA LOGO AND VIDEO COMPETITIONS —RULES AND PRIZES

We are happy to announce two very exciting competitions for students:

1. SCHOOLNOVA LOGO COMPETITION:

Logo has to include name "SchoolNova" and represent our philosophy and spirit.

The winning entry will be permanently featured on our website and all future school pictures and activities.

The winner of this competition will receive a special plaque and a gift certificate for \$40.

2. SCHOOLNOVA VIDEO COMPETITION:

Any genre (short story, comedy, horror, animation, drama, musical, fantasy – the list is endless).

The video has to be short, 2 minutes or less.

The story has to center around SchoolNova life (classes, parties, Olympiads, doing homework, waking up on Sunday, etc.)

The top three entrees will each get a special plaque,

1st place – gift certificate for \$75

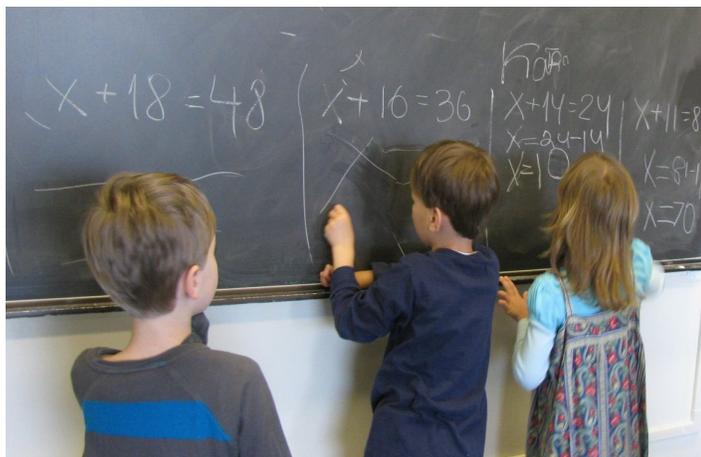
2nd place – gift certificate for \$50

3rd place – gift certificate for \$25

You need to have consent of all the "actors" who are featured in the video, as it will be played at the celebration and the winning videos will be posted on the school website (minors will need their parents' consent).

Ask school administration for consent form.

All entries are due on Sunday, May 4.



FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Elena Sadov, Chairwoman of the Board

Many professional educators agree that the most difficult students to teach are their own children. A parent who teaches must not be permissive or overbearing. It is always hard to tell whether a child is genuinely interested in the subject or is just humoring you to get your approval. The education process is an arduous one, fraught with potential for emotional conflict.

A group of educators and scientists from Stony Brook University and the Brookhaven National Lab found it was much easier and more effective to teach their own children when they were learning along with others. The positive group dynamics of children in a classroom counteracts the intensity of the parent-child relationship and improves the learning environment.

This kernel of parent-educators grew to become the present day School Nova. Nurtured by parental and teacher enthusiasm, School Nova has developed into a major asset for our area. We offer a wide array of subjects in mathematics, sciences, languages and art. The student body reflects the international diversity of our community. Throughout our expansion, we were able to maintain some of the hallmarks of good parenting:

- **Acceptance:** We admit all new students on a first-come, first-serve basis.
- **Encouragement:** We encourage our students to explore new subjects without the pressure of being graded.
- **High Expectations:** We expect our students to engage their intelligence and apply their full effort to master the subjects. Many of our students choose to participate in Olympiads that we administer. The outstanding results that our students have received over the years are a testament to their high level of achievement.

School Nova has developed an excellent reputation. Our affordable tuition rates and an open admission policy make enrichment education available to all members of our community.

SCHOOLNOVA'S WINTER PARTY

By Ivanka Tkachenko, student

The SchoolNova's Winter Party took place on January 11, 2014. The party included a fun play about a doctor who is going to Africa to cure the sick monkeys and the evil Barmaley who is trying to stop them with dances, songs, fights and humor. The play was called "Doctor Ouchithurts". The doctor was played by Marina, Sophia and Nester. My role was a gullible little monkey that acted like a victim. After the play there was a huge food bar that ranged from donuts to watermelon and salads. Actors and little kids got in first. After eating the fun didn't stop. Actor or not, everyone was invited to play Russian Hide and Seek. Russian Hide and Seek is not actually Russian. It is when one person counts at a base that could be a vending machine, table, chair or much much more. The goal of the game is to touch the base without getting tagged. Also, you have to hide. It is against the rules to stand right next to the base. One time I was hiding in plain sight and no one found me. The reason why we had the party was because of New Year's, which is funny because the party took place 11 days after New Year's.

KONA

(AN EXCERPT)

By Carolyn Liu, student

My first name was Acacia, and I was the daughter of Helena, the renowned healer in our clan, and Darian, the hardy hunter and fighter. My brother hunter was three years older than me, and a favorite of everybody. He had brown hair, and his eyes were blue. My hair was a light soft black and my eyes were a blue gray. I was tall for my age, and everyone said I was pretty. On one of many fateful days, I was supposed to be helping with the weaving, but that just wasn't me. I gazed longingly at the hunters shooting at the old animal pelts as they all barely hit the pelts, much less kill the real animal! I wished to shoot, and honestly I thought I would do better with a bow than all of them! Cecilia looked at me, shooting me a glance that said *you are so in trouble. So what?* I glanced back to her. Looking down, I tried to weave the pelts into a fairly decent rug, but everything looked like a huge mess! I sighed, knowing I would be stuck with this life forever. Then I heard a scream. Icy fear coursed through me, gripping my heart like a cold steel hand. I knew that scream! It was Rita, one of the crop planters! I rushed outside, pushing

through the crowd. Rita was not just a crop planter to me. She was a childhood friend, taking care of me when my mother was busy with other patients. She was kind, but fair. She could show love through her eyes. I called up distant memories: Her cradling me, blond hair brushing across my cheek, blue eyes showing love. I drew a sharp breath, knowing it could be taken away in a moment.

"Rita!" I called, now in front of the crowd. She passed out, but from what, I could not tell. I scanned the area, mountains and trees looming in the distance. My eyes landed on a dog, a Jaonia dog bred for hunting. A proud golden-white Akita stood at the edge of the Forest of the Gods. It was rumored that each and every god and goddess came from that forest. Then my ears adjusted, and I understood: she hadn't passed out from fear, but from excitement. Everyone was cheering, not screaming. The Akita was a sacred animal in our clan, yet this was not any Akita. This was Kona, the Akita from the legends. You could tell by the way she held herself, the golden white fur, the deep brown eyes like a lake filled with deep understanding, and more. But even as she neared, and as everyone backed away, I stepped forward. I tried to stop, but suddenly all my mind could do was watch. I was willing myself to step back in respect, but then I realized: Kona was willing me forward. I didn't understand. Why me, out of my whole clan? Then Kona came forward, as regal as a princess, and I stepped forward, again against my will. I reached out my arm and I traced around her neck. A flash of light shone brightly, enveloping both of us, and we rose into the air, spiraling around each other. As the light faded, I saw an amulet of silver around her neck, and when I touched it, it momentarily glowed. I saw my name carved into the cold metal. My mother said, "The time has come, just as the prophecy predicted." My mother's voice became somber, "Acacia, now you must travel the world and unite everybody against the forces of evil throughout the land, as you have bonded with the great Kona. But you must train, so Rider will teach you how to hunt and fend for yourself." Shocked silence prevailed throughout the room. "You will learn how to use the bow and sword, and we will hope for the best." My mother finished, and walked out. Everyone stared at me. This should have been the best day of my life, right? Wrong. This was my worst nightmare.

SIGMACAMP

By Elena Yakubovskaya and Danya Lukin

The summer is around the corner: SigmaCamp welcomes new and returning students.

This year is the 3rd year of our SigmaCamp - Science and Math one-week residential camp for students from 12 to 16 years old. In 2014 SigmaCamp takes place from August 17 - 24 at Silver Lake Camp and Conference Center (Sharon, CT). All SigmaCamp staff members are professors and researchers from Stony Brook University, Brookhaven National Lab, Harvard University, and MIT. Many of the staff members are SchoolNova faculty our students are familiar with.

The SigmaCamp week will be full of various tournaments, math, programming, and robotic competitions, as well as Physics, Biology and Chemistry experiments, and captivating lectures. And, of course, there will be a lot of sports, music, art and evening trivia games, which always are a source of good memories for the whole year for all of us – both student and faculty of SigmaCamp.

To be enrolled in the camp, please, visit SigmaCamp web site – sigmacamp.org, fill up the application form and solve Qualification Quiz by April 20, 2014. Admission decision will be made by May 1, 2014.

21 students already have been accepted to the SigmaCamp based on the results of PoM 2013/2014 Contest.

SchoolNova students have \$100 discount toward tuition fee.

sigmacamp.org

MINECRAFT FOR SCHOOLS

(MINECRAFTEDU)

By David Bershadsky, SchoolNova videogame reporter, student

Minecraft is a fun sandbox video game in which a player can roam freely through a virtual world. This game has several modes. They are Survival, Hardcore, and Creative. In Survival there are monsters that attack, and you need to find resources to survive. To survive you must find food and shelter, but if you die you can respawn. Hardcore mode is Survival except you only live once. In Creative you have the power to do anything your imagination allows.

Some schools are incorporating Minecraft in their lessons. You might ask what is MinecraftEDU? MinecraftEDU is the collaboration of a small team of educators and programmers from the United States and Finland. They are working with Mojang, the creators of Minecraft, to make the game affordable and accessible to schools everywhere to make education more engaging. They are also making KerbalEDU, which is an educational version of Kerbal Space Program, which is a game where you build rockets and spacecraft and go the other planets.

Some ways to use Minecraft in class are: make a giant diagram of a cell, put students in an ancient city, and determine volume area, perimeter, patterns, and more. There is a wiki on which you can write informational text. Using Minecraft in schools encourages kids to do their work because they think they are playing a game so work becomes a game.

From the information above you see that more schools should use MinecraftEDU. This can be very beneficial for education. This will also relieve stress on kids because they can relax while learning.



Smart solution for better education – academic enrichment programs

By Marina Polonskaia, SchoolNova Director

From his great-grandfather, Lucius Catilus Severus, Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius learned “to avoid the public schools, to hire good private teachers, and to accept the resulting costs as money well-spent.” And that was 1,800 years ago. A lot has changed, but some things seem to stay the same...

If you google “educational system” you will learn that the US public school system is in deep crisis, as well as Britain’s, India’s, and so on. In every crisis there are opportunities to make a positive difference.

It turns out that even a small group of parents can make a big difference in the education of their children. They can open an academic enrichment program and successfully run it for more than 10 years. Of course it helps if in addition to being enthusiastic and dedicated to the task, these parents are educators and scientists. Most of them went through a similar experience in their youth and value the importance of creating an excellent learning environment for children.

Even in a great educational system, there are always children who want and can do more than regular schools can offer. An academic enrichment program is a good way to help many children learn things above and beyond their school’s curriculum.

We have a luxury to look at children’s education from many different angles: as scientists, we have received a good education ourselves, as parents, we can see the “problems” from within, and as teachers and researchers, we work with undergraduate and graduate students and can observe the “gaps” in today’s school education.

When many years ago we started the program, we defined some important principals of how we will run the school and we still try to follow them:

- Everyone who is motivated enough to come to school on Sundays to study math, sciences and languages is welcome to our school – we admit all new students on the first-come, first-served basis without any entrance tests.
- Our classes are taught by highly educated researchers and teachers who are passionate about their subject.
- All materials we use for teaching are open to the public and are posted on the school’s web site.

- We consider university campus to be the best location for our program. It helps to create right atmosphere.
- We do not concentrate on any particular age group: we teach children from 3 to 16 years old. We believe that all students benefit from it. It’s also very convenient for parents – they can bring siblings of different ages to one place.
- We do not concentrate on one particular subject (math or art), we teach math and science along with visual arts and foreign languages.
- We administer several Math and Language National and International Olympiads every year.
- We try to keep tuition fee as low as possible.

The great advantage of our program is that it’s “dynamic”. What do I mean by that?

- Ten years ago we chose a certain list of subjects: Mathematics, Physics, Russian, Visual Arts and program for preschool children. Since then we added Chemistry, General Science, French, Italian, Spanish, and IT. Every time we feel that children might benefit from some class, we add it to our roster.
- We developed a curriculum for most of our subjects but we keep adjusting it annually. We add or remove topics, we transfer some of them from level to level, we supplement curriculum with more advanced topics for more advanced classes.
- We vary class sizes: sometimes a class works better with 10-15 students; sometimes 5-8 students is optimal.

When we began, we had 7 teachers and 62 students. Now the school is a big enterprise with 27 teachers and almost 300 students. Some parents loved our philosophy and approach so much that after sitting inside the classroom with their children, they decided to join the program as teachers. We cherish this as a great recognition of our achievement.

The Story of One Classroom

By Anya Cartwright, Art Teacher

When the doors open on early Sunday, one could hear the chalk dust falling - it's that quiet. Before long, a few girls, the first arrivals, enter. Like a gentle morning breeze they bring the awakening into this place. The room, that shortly ago was colorless and mute is transforming into vibrant and increasingly dynamic. The silence is broken by their bird-like chirping and lively giggles. The "color wheel" starts spinning, as they bring their visions to life with lines and strokes. The crayons and pastels are happily warming up in their little hands after a week in a closet.

The classroom has no windows and is lit by the ceiling lights. You lose the feeling of missing sunlight very quickly, once the kids are in. There is something very "sunny" about kids. Their presence revives all the best instincts: to nurture, to watch them grow and blossom, just like the sunlight does.

An hour later the room is a busy hive. There are workers of all kinds: intense and passionate, scrupulous and serious, humorous and mischievous. All eager, all driven. Each is a visionary in a unique way. Some come in following their scientific and mathematical endeavors - warmed up for any creative problem solving, up for any challenge, while others come leaving everything else aside - to relax their minds and explore their aesthetic senses.

This room is an Art classroom, where no matter how closely we follow the steps, not one piece created resembles the other, not one idea is old, not one solution is wrong. Each Sunday offers another unexpected journey.

... With the last oil pastel crumb scraped of the floor, I return the room back to its quiet beige sleep, to dream of the colors it witnessed and wait for the following Sunday to come.



From Computer Consumerism to Information Technology Creativeness

By Serge Baduk, IT Teacher

Frankly, what do our children do most of their free time? I noticed. Netflix or YouTube, Facebook or Twitter, PlayStation or Nintendo, and even if it's a book, it's in digital format. Children spend more than 7.5 hours a day interacting with various computer devices, according to New York Times. If nothing can distract children from computer screens, should we even bother trying?

Can we make our children create something using these expensive MacBooks and ThinkPads? Can we channel their energy away from consuming the computer-generated content into creating it? They will still spend most of their free time in front of a computer screen, but possibly end up with enhanced creativity, a sense of accomplishment, a mastered practical skill or even with a new Google idea, you never know!

It appears that in many countries that's exactly what the schools pursue by establishing Information and Communication Technologies as a compulsory subject in high school curriculum. NY State Department of Education still lags behind. Hence the idea for the School Nova to open a new IT101 class emerged.

A typical Sunday afternoon 45-minute class consists of roughly 15-20 minutes of theory (me talking) and the remaining time is spent on hands-on exercises (them typing). New Google idea is still "work in progress", but we have had a few accomplishments: Nestor and Julia have created working prototypes for School Nova's online surveys, and Dylan came close to converting 5th grade math practice sheets into interactive digital format. I plan to grow out of the classroom exercises and into real life projects. Got any ideas?

Problem of the Month

Congratulations to 2013/2014 PoM winners.

1st Prize - the \$100 Amazon gift card goes to **Christopher Hayes** – 250 points.

2nd Prize - the \$75 Amazon gift card goes to **Nestor Tkachenko** – 204 points.

3rd Prizes – the \$50 Amazon gift cards go to **Andrew Gritsevskiy** (183 points) and **Albert Gerovitch** (179 points)

Problem of the Month (PoM) is an online problem-solving competition open to all students in grade 10 and below, regardless of what state/country they live in.
sigmacamp.org/problem-of-the-month

An amazing Journey in 30 Days

By Nadya Shavarina, Enrichment Classes Teacher

Each year with a new class is like a new life that lasts thirty Sundays. Somewhere along the road I must take a light-speed moment to memorize the names, the faces, the personalities... to convince the students that our time together will be wonderful! We definitely need to trust each other, because we create a three-person coalition: the students, their parents, and I. Our life at SchoolNova thus begins!

Neither the parents, nor the students – not even I can imagine, during the first few classes, the advanced level of the assignments that we will be completing at the end of the year. How quickly «playing school» becomes «school», and how we will begin to play less and work more.

Every year is different, everything depends on the students: the speed at which material is presented, as well as the difficulty gradient. Classes that went easily last year may tread along this year, or vice versa. Therefore I always alter some details of my curriculum.

There are, sometimes, very difficult classes, when the students have trouble concentrating – this is upsetting, since it is the responsibility of the teacher to overcome the students' hardships. However, there definitely comes a time afterwards, when the students and I have so much fun, that it is fantastic to see the smiles of everyone who attended – even the parents.

Gradually, we reach the end of the year. The little ones do not lose their enthusiasm or desire to learn; on the contrary, they begin to love learning!

Our last class is always a tour of SchoolNova. The students are always a little intimidated by the multitude of older kids, who sometimes snicker – although they were in the young ones' shoes only a few years back. The tour is a surprising, vivid and invigorating experience: it is great to take a look into the future!

Another school year is almost over, and I am proud of all parents and students. For thirty Sundays, they managed to get up early and arrive at SchoolNova, they completed thirty sets of homework and many more of classwork.

I really hope to see everyone back in Autumn, because this is just the beginning!



Our Definition of Going Back to School

By *Natasha Zaliznyak, SchoolNova Alumnus*

The SchoolNova community has been a large part of my life for as long as I can remember: I was still very young when the idea of this enrichment program began taking root within a group of my family's friends. I was one of the first students to attend this school, along with some of my closest friends, and it has been wonderful to see how much the program has grown and prospered. We have been here from the start — collectively, my class attended the original BNL-based enrichment program and Stony Brook – based SchoolPlus throughout most of its lifespan, and then finished up the last few years of our extracurricular education in what came to be the non-profit organization we know today as SchoolNova. During this time period, the school evolved and developed, acquiring even more wonderful faculty members and accepting many new driven, talented, and curious students from across the region.

This year, having graduated as the SchoolNova class of 2013, my classmates and I have all returned to the school as either teachers or volunteer classroom assistants. I am currently a teacher's assistant in three second-grade math classes, and it is amazing to have such a new perspective on the learning experience that I benefited so greatly from. I remember how fascinated I, as a student, was by the plethora of concepts — mathematical, scientific, linguistic, and artistic — that were introduced to me in this program. I now feel lucky to be an aid in that very same educational process that is working to help children learn and grow, cultivating their skills and inspiring them to pursue their interests. As put by SchoolNova graduate Andrey Lukin, who now assists in a chemistry class: "SchoolNova is a place that helps students who are not feeding their brains enough knowledge to finally feel full."

As an enrichment program, SchoolNova helped us, the former students who have come back even after graduation, to learn difficult subjects in more depth than we could have in our respective schools. It sparked our curiosity in science, mathematics, and linguistics; it inspired us to retain our native language and to learn new ones; it introduced us into a warm and welcoming community; and it brought us, as a group, close together.

Now, we've returned to help this place flourish, so that it may provide for others what it did for us. "In my experience in SchoolNova, I met some of my closest friends. I am fortunate enough to be in a situation where I can both spread my knowledge onto younger generations of students, as well as continue seeing the people I have gotten so close to over the years," says Ilya Yurchenko, another returning graduate. We hope that SchoolNova will continue on in its mission of creating an environment where the arts and sciences can flourish side by side, and where curiosity, stimulating discussion, and understanding are valued above test scores and shallow curriculums.



Simple Recipe for a Great Holiday Party

By Olga Maslova

Every year right after Halloween SchoolNova students and parents get a letter. It has a date, a time and asks for money. Not a lot, \$5 in the 2005, \$7 in the 2011, \$10 in 2014. And believe it or not, the following Sunday there is a line of parents to give this money to a proper hands. Because it is not just five, seven or ten dollars. This is an assurance of a little miracle, of delicious Russian candies of all colors and shapes falling out of a colorful bag that will be open on that certain day. This day and time is the day and time of the party. The New Year Party. This is the party we cannot imagine our school without. As long as SchoolNova has existed in December or January we host a party for our students and their parents. The recipe is simple and family like. We have a holiday theater performance by theater studio “Dragonfly” with simultaneous English translation, every family brings a dish to share, Father Frost and Snow Maiden come over and play and dance with the children, we show New Year themed cartoons, grownups and children dance together, and we strike the whole show down.

To be repeated again next year, with whole day devoted to decorating the room, whole month given to preparing presents, and whole three months filled with rehearsals and costumes and sets being created and build. Why do we do it? This has no educational goal and exists for pure entertainment. Same group of volunteers spend their days and evenings to make sure everything runs smoothly, and muttering under their breath cleaning up everything for good three hours while school parents and kids at home enjoying the taste of “Squirrel”, “Clumsy Bear”, “Inspiration” and “Bird’s milk”. And that is the answer. For some of those parents and kids this is the taste they know from childhood, when our own parents would spend four hours in the old USSR standing in queue to bring these candies for the holidays. For others who have never been to Moscow and grew up on “Milky Way’s and “M&M”s this is a new taste that marks the new experience, the new friendships and new traditions. Because the main reason these parties are so popular and beloved is that they bring all the cultures and layers of our multicultural school together in one warm setting.

The music of many languages is here to dance to, Russian and English, French, Spanish and Italian, Hebrew and Bengali, Ukrainian, Korean and Mandarin (we used the songs on all of these languages in the past years). Just as the food of many kitchens end up on the long rows of potluck table. That is where I tried my first samosas, and my American friends tried their first pickled herring. And the dance floor is the place where all the children and grownups together learned the communal dance “The Brook”, where pairs are broken by one person, creating a constant stream of new pairs. And that is the place where my children learned and danced Cotton Eye Joe. Because nothing unites more than shared fun and joy, especially if it is a tradition you can look forward to, just as you can look forward to seeing a tall bearded man in a beautiful long red embroidered coat (three straight days of sewing in December 2005). Even if the Snow Maiden sound suspiciously like a French teacher Dasha Shavarina, the children will tell her next day in class that they finally get to see a real Russian Snow Maiden and Father Frost flying from the Great Ustyug.



Theater Studio “Dragonfly”

By Dasha Shavarina and Sergey Suchalkin

It is difficult to describe to a five-year-old why, amidst a happy crowd of English speakers, he hears a silly sentence jumble that haunts his family like an ancestral curse. Why he must avoid the cool language of his classmates and join in on the parents’ word game. Preserving a native language when living in a foreign verbal environment is an act of bravery that, despite a strong desire, few parents dare to undertake. In such a feat of courage emerged *Dragonfly*, SchoolNova’s resident theater studio.

Nadezda Shavarina, *Dragonfly*’s valiant founder, realized early that, similarly to an intrusive species, English could demolish the ecosystem of her daughter’s cultural roots. Of course, every species has benefits, especially when working in synthesis with others. Biodiversity becomes their collaborative effort. Invasiveness, though, is solely a threat; it arises from the intrusive species’ immense advantages. English is everywhere - there could unlikely be a greater advantage than the status of national language. When the intruder has already been incorporated into an environment, one may only look to strengthening the latter’s original members, so Nadezda began to gather ammunition: with a group of Russian children, she began to stage little skits based on popular Russian poems.

Thus came to life “The King’s Sandwich” - beautiful first and third-graders dressed in royal garments, hilariously exaggerating the astonishment of a picky ruler at the sight of a haphazardly improvised snack. Once the young actors began their career, they were unstoppable. Ironically, most of the works they brought to life were European fairytales long translated into Russian and adored by Russian folk: “Thumbelina”, “Musicians of Bremen”, “Cinderella”.

Dragonfly’s career culminated in 2008, when Russian Bostonians invited the theater over to perform. The exhilaration of bringing Russian to more Russians in the magical form of living, vibrant words uttered, cried and sang from the stage encouraged the actors to return in the years to come, and even to travel to Washington, D.C. in the spring of 2013. There, *Dragonfly* was awarded “Best Theatrical Ensemble” at the second Russian-American Theater Festival. It was a prize well deserved, since only the incredible cooperation of the performers allowed them to put on “Marriage” of Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol, with actresses playing male parts and actors playing the female ones.

Although *Dragonfly*’s participants are growing up and gradually dispersing around the world, they maintain a close connection to the spirit of their theatrical days. *Dragonfly* has given them the talent of stress-free public speaking, marvelous bonds of friendship and a love for their language and culture. These values continue to be the greatest goal of the theater.

