

Where Dragons Come From

Every year, first-graders discover and explore their roots, a learning journey that culminates, in the spring, in the Heritage Festival celebration for parents, classmates, and teachers.

The celebration features homemade dishes that each student chooses, something special to her family and often representing her life story. Culturally significant decorations play a part, too, and the highlight is student presentations about family lore learned through research.

The festival has a long tradition at Kent Place, extending more than two decades.

First-grade teacher Jennison Lee says it prompts the children to ask family about their background. "It's always interesting," she says, "because students learn at least one thing they hadn't known."

When a student brings that information back to class, she becomes the expert about it, so the children learn from one another.

"We love to compare and contrast the things we have in common and the things that are different — fascinating information that doesn't always come up in a classroom," Ms. Lee says.

Last year, her 13 students spoke 10 different languages at home.

"At the Heritage Festival, I learned about different religions, cultures, and the family traditions of my classmates," says first-grader Anna Obalde. "My favorite part was trying everyone's food. The best were the chocolate chip pancakes."

"What I always find so awesome about this age group is that *different* doesn't mean 'bad.' There's no negative association," Ms. Lee says. "*Different* simply means I need to learn from you and you need to learn from me."



Eden Ferguson '33 presents her family history in front of classmates, parents, and her family during the annual Heritage Festival.



Language Lessons Take Root

Hands-on learning in the Primary School took on a different shape in the spring, as World Language classes stepped outside to create their garden.

Four beds just outside the Annex are devoted to plants connected to Spanish- and French-speaking countries. Last year, one grew marigolds, a flower with significance during Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebrations; another contained flowers that bloom in the tricolors of the French flag.

The other beds tempted the tongue as well as the eye: Students grew tomatoes, onions, cilantro, and peppers in a salsa garden and zucchini, eggplant, tomatoes, and herbs for a ratatouille garden.

This fall, says Primary School Spanish teacher Dora Gragg, the culinary harvest will go to the McDermott-Wight Dining Hall for a special addition to the school's menu.

Spring and fall, students manage the gardens: "Some plant, some water, others do some signs," says Sra. Gragg. "At some point, everyone participates." This enables French and Spanish teachers to introduce the words for seeds (*las semillas* in Spanish; *les grains* in French), planting, and harvest, and to discuss the cultural significance of agriculture. The lessons extend into math and science classes, too, with units about measurements and plant biology.

The Language Garden project has been a tradition for six years, which means Primary School students get to return to the beds year after year.

"They love it," says Sra. Gragg, "and, of course, they really look forward to the salsa."

Kent Place and the Berkhamsted School are united by their passion for lacrosse.



BRILLIANT CONNECTIONS

An International Game Years in the Making

On April 5, 2022, Pat Conley Field looked like the site of a championship lacrosse game. The stands were full of excited fans, with Chumley leading the cheering. The field itself was bedecked with colorful streamers and flags. Over the PA, each player was individually introduced, then came the national anthems.

First, “God Save the Queen,” followed by “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

This was, after all, not a playoff game but rather an exhibition match between Kent Place and Berkhamsted, of Hertfordshire, England. Kent Place was the last stop on the visitors’ tour, which also took them to Washington, D.C.; Philadelphia; and New York City.

Berkhamsted first planned to visit Kent Place in March 2020, but COVID-19 put a halt to that trip. The idea never faded, though, and the teams finally came together on to play varsity, junior varsity, and Middle School games.

Lacrosse Coach Ashley Quinn P ’24 ’26 ’28 called it “a great way to begin our 2022 season,” then said, “We set out to create a community event that would help our student-athletes understand the value of connecting through our passion for lacrosse and of being part of something much greater than ourselves.”

More than 100 athletes, coaches, faculty, staff, and parents made the arrangements, from Kent Place gifts for Dragon players to exchange with their guests to lots of hot chocolate on the unseasonably cold day. Nicole Rusas P ’17 ’22, president of the Dragon Athletic Club parent organization, provided particularly invaluable support by decorating the fields and printing rosters for the fans.

“It was the best place we were hosted,” says Berkhamsted Coach Charlotte Baker. “We hadn’t experienced anything like that before. There was a real atmosphere to the day.”

Kent Place even arranged to broadcast the matches online so parents in England could

watch their children compete across the Atlantic. KPS won the varsity and Middle School games; Berkhamsted took the junior varsity.

On the field, Gabriella DePlasco ’22 noticed that the English players pursued a different game plan from what the Dragons typically see. “Their defense pressured us attackers a lot more than I was used to,” she says. During a break in play, Gabriella learned something from one of the visitors: “Their team practiced only about twice a week, compared to our six. I found it an interesting insight into how high school sports are conducted in different countries,” she says.

Afterward, over pizza, says Coach Baker, “we had a lot of socializing, which the girls probably enjoyed more than the playing. It’s just about the experience, which was fab.”

“We’d do it again in a heartbeat,” says Coach Quinn. “Playing an international game helps us broaden our communities and see that a shared passion exists on and off the field.”

BUILDING A SPORTS TEAM, FUNDAMENTALLY

Seventh grade is when our students first join a school athletic team. But if you haven't been playing club sports since you were very young, is it too late, at the age of 12 or 13 to become an athlete?

Not at all: KPS coaches blend those discovering the game with veteran players in a way that makes the experience fun and challenging for everyone.

Last spring, for example, Middle School softball drew 30 players. "For some reason," says Coach Philip Wolstenholme, laughing, "they all wanted to play."

The coach met the challenge by arranging practices so that veteran players led small groups, helping the newcomers build fundamental skills through practice. The setup, he says, "enabled everyone to get what she needed."

"The club players in eighth grade work on their leadership skills, plus they're getting their club-team practices during the week. And the seventh-graders get more hands-on training," the coach says.

As the time for games approached, the coach divided the big group into game-ready and practice squads. "Softball's a game where you make a mistake and you could get really hurt," he says, so new players were introduced to game situations slowly. By the end of the season, everybody had played for Kent Place in at least one game.



Quinn Sartorius '26