



Alma Forest School

Summer Newsletter - August 2023

Visiting the Roman ruins at Bolonia

Summer Holidays



The summer holidays are a time when families come together, often engaging in travel or new experiences. This period of increased interaction can prompt reflection on our children's needs and our relationships with them. Such moments of introspection might occur spontaneously during shared activities or quiet moments, leading us to evaluate our communication with and understanding of our children.

Additionally, these holidays illuminate the intricacies of family dynamics and the various approaches to parenting. Observing our children's responses to different situations can provide insights, enabling us to refine our parenting styles. Hence, the summer holidays offer more than a break from routine; they serve as an invaluable opportunity for family growth and evolution.



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School News

New Staff Joining Alma Forest



Isabella

Isabella will be joining us as the Grade 4/5 teacher. She has been teaching for 11 years. Originally from Hong Kong, she has lived in various regions of the US from a young age, and her global teaching experience spans the US, India, Hong Kong, and Tanzania. Isabella's educational background is in Environmental Studies. She is a certified IB PYP teacher and has also undergone training courses on Rudolf Steiner education. Recently, in her role as a Year 5 class teacher, she incorporated elements of project-based learning and peer-led activities in her classroom.



Sophia

Sophia is joining the Escuela Bosque team where she will be the lead for the 5-year-olds. She is originally from the United States but had the unique experience of growing up in Singapore and pursuing further education in the Welsh countryside. After a five-year tenure at a small international school in Singapore, she embarked on a year-long European adventure, living in a camper van with her partner and their newborn. Their journey led them to Spain, where they discovered Alma Forest School and decided to make it their home. Sophia has a qualification in Early Childhood Education, experience in inquiry/play-based learning and also holds a Forest School Leader qualification.

A Growing School

We eagerly anticipate welcoming 31 new students this September, filling all our age groups to their 15-student capacity. Our growth continues with the addition of our final Primary School class this year, and our expansion into Middle School in September 2024 (see page 4). With valuable new members joining our teaching team, we're poised for an exciting year that will strengthen our standing as the leading progressive international school in Southern Spain.



Embracing Robin Dunbar's social theory, our school will limit its size to 150 students once we reach the full 3-14 age range. This ensures a family-like atmosphere, enabling personalized attention and flexibility for our students. Dunbar's number suggests that humans can sustain approximately 150 stable relationships before needing hierarchies. By adhering to this, we negate the necessity for rigid structures, fostering an open, democratic learning environment. This intimate setting nurtures deep connections among students, faculty, and parents, augmenting the educational experience. So, while we limit our size, we cultivate an expansive learning community focusing on connection, empathy, and growth, proving that smaller can indeed be bigger.

Because of this Alma Forest radiates an exhilarating aura of boundless possibilities, which invigorates our learning environment. Students arrive brimming with ideas and a strong sense of agency towards their projects and learning journeys, fostering an atmosphere of intellectual curiosity. Moreover, our educators are granted the liberty to interweave their unique expertise and passions into the curriculum. This synergy between student enthusiasm and teacher creativity cultivates a vibrant, dynamic educational space where imagination and innovation naturally intertwine, sparking profound learning experiences.

Thoughts from the Principal

SCHOOL, CHILDHOOD, PARENTING



play:groundNYC an adventure playground in New York

Too Much Advice

It's only natural for us to want to protect our children and students, offering advice and solving problems on their behalf. However, it's essential to remember that children grow and learn through experiences, including overcoming challenges and making mistakes. Stepping in too soon or offering too much advice can **hinder their problem-solving abilities, independence, and resilience**. Our role isn't to provide all the answers, but rather to guide them in finding their own solutions. Empower them to take control of their actions, understand the consequences, and learn from their errors.

This approach helps cultivate confident, self-reliant individuals capable of navigating life's complexities. So, while it's hard to step back, remember that by not always rushing in to 'fix' things, you're equipping your children with one of the most valuable life skills – **the ability to problem-solve independently**.

This is a lesson every teacher at Alma Forest must learn. A lesson that is equally difficult for teachers and parents. It takes a huge amount of self-reflection to recognize moments when one should step back and even more **patience and courage** to watch a young person struggle and occasionally fail.

The downside of ignoring this simple truth is that children grow up in an environment, both at school and at home, in which their incompetencies and mistakes are continuously pointed out and dwelt on. Such an environment no doubt has immense effects on a young person's **self-image and confidence**.

When They Get it Wrong

Punishment doesn't teach kids to do better. It teaches them to be better at avoiding detection.

Alfie Kohn

When a child has made a mistake, it's a crucial moment for teaching and growth. However, responding to such situations with anger can significantly impact the child's willingness to be open and confide in the future.

When a child is met with an angry response to their mistakes, they often experience **fear, guilt, and shame**. This negative emotional reaction can become associated with the act of sharing information or admitting to their actions. They may begin to avoid these negative experiences by withholding information or not admitting their mistakes. This **hinders their moral development** as they focus more on avoiding anger than understanding the implications of their actions.

Additionally, an angry response fails to provide the child with strategies to rectify their wrongdoings or make better choices in the future. Instead, they learn to associate anger with authority and may develop a fear of authority figures, further discouraging open communication.

Constructive responses, such as calm conversation and understanding, promote an atmosphere where children feel safe to admit their mistakes. **This supportive environment fosters trust and open communication**, encouraging the child to share their problems and seek guidance when they've messed up.



Summer Camp 2023



Pink Treehouse

Throughout the summer camp, children collaboratively constructed a tree house, which was whimsically painted pink, simply for the joy of it. Campers contributed small and large items, many even bringing personal touches from home to embellish the tree house. This unique structure became a bustling hub of activity during the camp weeks, transitioning fluidly between a construction site and a play area. Campers not only got hands-on experience using power tools, but they also explored the thrills of working and playing at lofty heights. Crucially, they learned to find compromises and build upon previous campers' ideas, embodying the spirit of cooperative teamwork.

Rave Reviews

"The last three weeks have been transformative for him. He is more himself and happier."

"The kids felt welcomed and at home from day one, were exposed to many new things, and were inspired and creative during our whole stay."

"She had one of the best weeks ever. She was so relaxed, happy and in tune the whole week."

"He absolutely adores it. He is so upset that it is his last day today, he has made so many friends and learnt so much in the space of a week!"



Setting up the tents before the summer camp sleepover.

Sleepover Nights

One of the standout features of our summer camp were the exhilarating weekly sleepovers. Every Thursday, campers were given the opportunity to sleep over at the camp, providing a thrilling adventure, especially for those not regularly attending Alma Forest School. These occasions allowed children as young as four to experience their first night away from home, a transformative encounter that left no room for homesickness.

Witnessing the confidence boost that children gain from simply spending one night away from home is truly remarkable. While many parents might have spent the night tossing and turning, the campers themselves enjoyed a peaceful sleep. One enthusiastic 4-year-old camper was so inspired by the experience that he passionately declared he would be sleeping over indefinitely, not quite grasping that this was not an everyday possibility. Such innocent proclamations were endearing reminders of the profound impact of these memorable sleepovers.

Curriculum Explained

Middle School Preview

Starting from September 2024, Alma Forest will proudly welcome its inaugural Middle School Grade 6 cohort. This represents another significant milestone in our school's evolution. After successfully establishing a reputable Pre-School and subsequently developing a flourishing Primary School, we are fully prepared to embark on our exciting Middle School journey.

The Middle School will be recognizably a part of Alma Forest, embracing the ethos and applying it to an education suited to 11-14-year-olds.

At the heart of the Middle School experience will be the **personal research projects that students will choose, design, complete and present.** These research projects could be based on gaining knowledge and understanding or aimed at creating change in the school and local community. A robust research framework and research methods tutorials will enable our Middle School students to succeed and teach their peers about the things they discovered.

To support our students with the **acquisition of skills and subject knowledge** necessary to navigate their research projects, there will be time allocated to teacher-supported self study in English, Maths and Science based on IB MYP resources and standards.

To further foster a sense of fascination and wonder Middle School students will also be able to enjoy **expert seminars** on a range of subjects, giving them inspiration for research projects and broadening their world view. These provocations, which will come from all disciplines, will enable their study of English, Maths and Science come alive.

This is just a glimpse of the exciting things in store for our Middle Schoolers; trips abroad, maker projects, programming, and a portfolio website also await.



Schooling the Emotions

"The knack of our species lies in our capacity to transmit our accumulated knowledge down the generations. The slowest among us can, in a few hours, pick up ideas that it took a few rare geniuses a lifetime to acquire.

Yet what is distinctive is just how selective we are about the topics we deem it possible to educate ourselves in. Our energies are overwhelmingly directed toward material, scientific, and technical subjects and away from psychological and emotional ones. Much anxiety surrounds the question of how good the next generation will be at math; very little around their abilities at marriage or kindness. We devote inordinate hours to learning about tectonic plates and cloud formations, and relatively few fathoming shame and rage.

The assumption is that emotional insight might be either unnecessary or in essence unteachable, lying beyond reason or method, an unreproducible phenomenon best abandoned to individual instinct and intuition. We are left to find our own path around our unfeasibly complicated minds – a move as striking (and as wise) as suggesting that each generation should rediscover the laws of physics by themselves."

~Alain de Botton

Once stated, this seems to be self-evident but society is blinded by a view of education, so old and entrenched, that this comes as a surprise to many. At Alma Forest we have not only made space and time for emotional development, we see it as one of the main enterprises of childhood to develop a strong sense and knowledge of the self. This is the foundation that all learning is based on.

The World of Education

IDEAS AND INSPIRATION



Age-Mixed Play

"Age-mixed play is less competitive, more creative, and more conducive to experimentation than is age-segregated play. In short, age-mixed play is more fully playful than age-segregated play."

- Peter Gray

Age-mixed play enhances learning, social development, creativity, and reduces competitiveness. Children playing with others of different ages are more focused on fun and experimentation than winning. This environment allows for creative rule modifications and allows experienced players to test new strategies. The energy and creativity of younger children can also inspire older ones to engage in imaginative and artistic play, often reviving their own interest in activities they had abandoned. Age mixing can match abilities, letting players ahead or behind their peers find equally skilled partners among older or younger children.

At Alma Forest we witness this every day. One aspect of our ethos is that we do not compare children and having students work and play in mixed-age groups enables students to escape this trap as well.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Doing things Badly

"Anything worth doing is worth doing badly."

- GK Chesterton

One strategy we're encouraging is to "do it badly". This concept emphasizes that moving into action, rather than being stalled by the quest for perfection, can alleviate stress and promote productivity.

We often see students striving for perfection, which can result in procrastination and anxiety. On the other hand, if they start a project accepting potential imperfections, they can complete tasks more swiftly and often with satisfactory results. Any necessary improvements can be made as they progress.

This "do it badly" approach encourages students to embrace new learning opportunities, adding a fun element to their tasks. It minimizes outcome-related worries and fosters a spirit of continuous improvement. Ultimately, it's a strategy that contributes to a more relaxed and productive learning environment for our students.



The World of Education cont.

IDEAS AND INSPIRATION

The Confidence Trap

"Has someone close to you – such as a parent, a teacher or a manager – ever urged you to try to be more self-confident? They likely had good intentions, thinking that being more confident would help you get on in life. But did you find that it actually made you feel frustrated and helpless? After all, it's not as if you can just fake yourself into self-confidence. If so, you've experienced what we call 'the confidence trap': the popular but misguided belief that simply telling people to be more self-confident will improve their lives."

This insightful piece suggests self-confidence is not only an individual concern but heavily influenced by surrounding environments. It emphasizes a shared responsibility to create spaces conducive to boosting confidence, particularly for marginalized individuals. Crucial roles are placed on teachers, parents, and managers to aid in nurturing self-assurance. It discourages the notion of imposing the burden of enhancing self-confidence solely on individuals. This calls for a shift towards cultivating environments that allow everyone to realize their potential, facilitating natural growth in self-confidence.

[Read the full article here.](#)



Rewards & Punishments?

"It is easy to see why. Interventions using rewards and punishment are effective at changing behaviour, at least in the short term. But what research in psychology suggests is that this may come with a baggage of unintended consequences, in particular when it comes to the reasons children engage in learning."

While these strategies can effectively change behavior short term, research suggests potential negative long-term impacts. Rewards linked explicitly to performance, or "contingent rewards", can undermine intrinsic motivation. A study involving drawing activities in preschool shows children promised rewards showed less interest over time. Moreover, the use of rewards may shift learning from an enjoyable activity to a work-oriented one. Rewards might impair children's self-regulation skills and decrease prosocial behaviors. This article makes a strong argument for environments such as Alma Forest that foster intrinsic motivation and an unhurried education.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Noteworthy

Podcast Recommendation



Aiming for a slightly older audience than Primary School students, this podcast is full of wonder and amazement sprinkled with a little bit of disgust and awe.

If you ever wanted to find out about Human Refrigerators, Poop Knives, Parrot Social Media, Cockroach Chocolate, Sleepy Epidemics, Disappearing Eels or Bug Pee than this is the place you will find all those things.

[Click here to go to the podcast website.](#)

Kapla - For All Ages

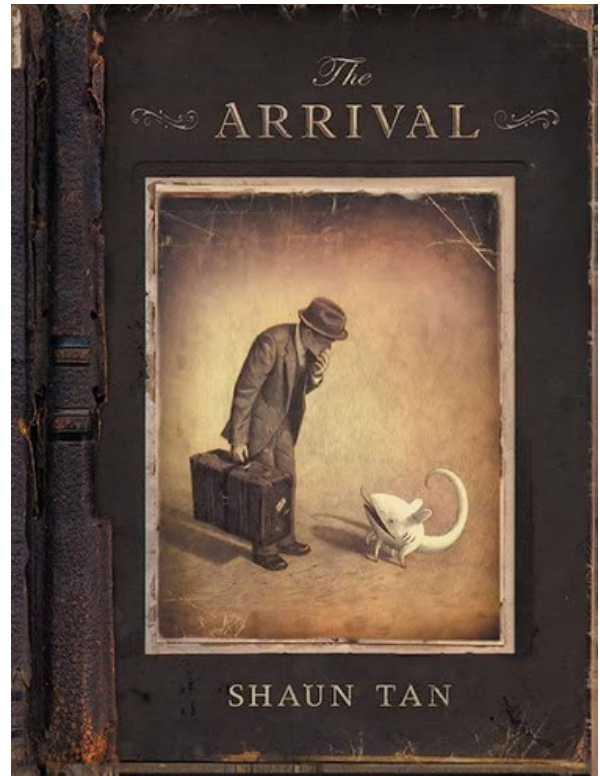
We have spent a lot of time playing with Kapla, with or without children being involved. These simple wooden blocks offer endless opportunities to build and create. They are precision made to ensure that even large structures are possible. The boxes come with some basic ideas to get started but looking Kapla up on Youtube open a whole universe of extravagant creations.

[Get inspired by this world record Kapla build.](#)

[Visit the website for more information.](#)



Books on our Horizon



Arrival by Shaun Tan

Gorgeous sepia illustrations frame this poignant peek into the experiences of a foreigner in an unknown territory. The artwork elicits emotions that enable you to understand the immigrant's feelings as the visuals transition you from the comfort of home to an unfamiliar environment where everything is alien - the cuisine, the language, the money, even the fauna, and most notably, the cultures. However, beneath these layers of unfamiliarity, the immigrant starts to discover fundamental human bonds that gradually transform the new territory into a place they can call home.

We have 'read' this book without words with students many times and new layers of meaning are discovered every time. Each page easily leads to deep discussions on the human condition. And while this book can be read slowly with many discussion breaks, it is also accessible to very young children because of its wonderful illustrations. Recommended for ages 3-103.

Summer Camp Photo Roundup





Some things you must always be unable to bear. Some things you must never stop refusing to bear. Injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame. No matter how young you are or how old you have got. Not for kudos and not for cash: your picture in the paper nor money in the bank either. Just refuse to bear them.

~William Faulkner