



Mushroom Family Learning Center
*An independent, secular,
nonprofit preschool since 1973*

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mushroomfamily.org

MARCH 2014

A Big Thank-You to...

- All our parent volunteers who helped with the Valentine parties.
- Sheri Reddy for coordinating our Chik-Fil-A fundraiser.
- Diane Rattay for her help with registration.
- Ms. Theresa for keeping our fish healthy and their home sparkling.
- A belated thank-you to Erica Metting for her help making the students' holiday ceramic gifts.
- Kelly Lotter, our newsletter editor, who makes this newsletter possible.
- The Board of Directors for their dedication to our school.

News & Notes

TUITION DUE MARCH 1

SCHOOL PICTURES WILL BE TAKEN MARCH 4, 5, AND 6

STAFF MEETING MARCH 12 IS CANCELLED

Classes will follow normal time schedule including lunch.

SILVER GRAPHICS ARTWORK FUNDRAISER ORDERS DUE MARCH 17

IN-SERVICE DAY MARCH 25
No classes for students.

CONFERENCES WILL BE HELD APRIL 3 AND 4
Look for info in your classroom toward the end of this month.

ILLNESS POLICY
Many "bugs" are going around. Children need to be fever-free or vomit/diarrhea-free for 24 hours and able to benefit fully from being at school in order to attend.

MFLC ENRICHMENT CLASSES AVAILABLE
For info, contact Ms. Jamie, jamie_geisler@comcast.net.

WAYS TO HELP MUSHROOM
- United Way agency # is 885339.
- Giant Eagle Apples for the Students program # is 5245.
- Save Labels for Education and Tyson frozen product labels (bin in the stairwell).

Help Mushroom Families Through the MFLC Scholarship Fund

Initiated by Mushroom's founders Margaret Lee and Fred Doscher in 1995, it helps support families faced with trying circumstances. Many have been in need during these difficult economic times. Please consider giving. Make checks payable to MFLC.

From the director...

In Oprah's magazine there is a column called "One thing I know for sure." One thing I definitely know for sure is that we are all ready for spring to arrive. I would like to thank all of you for your patience during the school delays, cancellations and snowy parking lot conditions. Because of the delays and closures we have cancelled the staff meeting scheduled for March 12 so there will be regular class times that day and lunch will be held.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

When I hear the word RESPECT it makes me think of the 1967 Aretha Franklin hit record. I realize that most, if not all, of you reading this article were not even born when this record topped the charts.

A friend of mine recently made the comment, "To receive respect you must also give respect." How true. We want our children to respect us, but we must also respect them. We demonstrate this by using statements that are objective, like "There's a wet towel on the bed" rather than blaming with words such as, "You left a towel on the bed again." Engage them in solutions and they will become your partners.

Teaching children to respect their things encourages them to value what they have and be responsible for picking up after themselves. Respecting siblings means taking turns and sharing. Respecting teachers makes for a positive learning environment where they can thrive. Allowing your children to help you create "house rules" helps them buy in and accept responsibility for their actions.

Our world can do with a little more respect. Respect for children, parents, colleagues, siblings, teachers, the earth and ourselves. This is one of the most important lessons you can teach your children. Help them to practice respect and reap the benefits of empathy, better relationships, and a peaceful existence.

School RESPECT...

If parents would like to chat a bit while the children play on the grass (or in the snow) on a beautiful day, we highly encourage you to do so. But please make it within the fenced playground and away from moving traffic. And of course, even on the playground area and on the playground equipment, your supervision is ABSOLUTELY A MUST. Please RESPECT our playground. Please leave the playground equipment neatly stored away when you are finished. We work hard to encourage children to put away their materials properly when finished using them. Also please RESPECT the church's "Big Room" — this room is not available for play. Thank you for your cooperation.

Think Spring!

Joan

Joan Harrison



News & Notes

From the president of the board...

Did you know that March is Optimism Month? It's the perfect time of the year to think happy thoughts. The minute I could see the grass again, I felt like spring was here. Many preschoolers are thinking the same thing. My four-year-old doesn't think he needs his heavy coat anymore and the other day came downstairs with shorts and a t-shirt.

Sunshine will do that to you!

There are a few sure signs that spring is upon us at school. Our parent committee is working hard on the **Mushroom Family Learning Center 40th Anniversary Celebration** coming up on **May 7**. Thank you to *Jemma Premus, Nina Unitas, Judit Andrews, Rachna Jain, Chang Shu, and Megan Millman* for your creativity and dedication in the planning process. It is going to be an evening to remember.

Also blooming this month...our Spring Fundraiser. We found a unique way to raise money for our school while giving you a chance to turn your child's artwork into a work of art. **Silver Graphics** can transform your child's unique artwork into a travel mug, an iPhone cover, or even a pillowcase. Order forms will be distributed soon and **orders are due by Monday, March 17**. Your finished products will be ready by the end of April. This is the perfect Mother's Day gift for any special woman in your life (or yourself!). If you have any questions, please let me know. We can all work together to make this a huge success.

I know that the snowflakes will fly again this month, but the flowers may start to bloom too. The playground will be open for business once again and maybe, just maybe, my preschooler and yours really won't need to wear a coat. Optimism. ☺

Susan

Susan Sarkis

Does Your Child Want More Mushroom Time? Sign him/her up for enrichment!

The children will have fun making crafts, cooking, learning Spanish and reading new stories. Classes are available for those 4 and older on Mondays and/or Fridays each month; \$14 per class.

Sign-up happens at the beginning of each month. Contact Ms. Jamie for more info at jamie_geisler@comcast.net.



Say "Cheese!"

School pictures will be taken **March 4, 5 and 6**. Look for details from your child's teacher.

COMING SOON!

A Slice of Summer



Slice of Summer, a 5-week summer program, will be offered at Mushroom Family Learning Center for children ages 3-6. The children will be placed in age appropriate classes by the camp coordinator (any child presently enrolled in the Early Learners class may sign up for the 3-year-old summer class). The summer program is taught by our regular staff with the additional assistance of college and high school students.

MFLC's summer program is similar to a regular class day but also includes a time for the children to eat a lunch brought from home. The children engage in free play time, work on a project that will focus on the theme of the day, eat their lunch picnic-style outside and enjoy lots of outside play. The day begins at 9:30 and ends at noon.

The cost is \$15.00 a day with a non-refundable registration fee of \$15.00. Parents may choose between any of the five days for their child to attend. All classes will have the option of a five-day program including K-Too.

Slice of Summer will start June 9 for our preschoolers. The K-Too children will begin June 17, due to the public school schedule and snow make-up days. Slice of Summer will end July 11. Registration forms and information will be placed in the cubbies in March.

Spaces are limited so please register early. Registration for the public will begin in April.

Please note again that K-Too will meet Monday through Friday.

If you have any questions, please see Theresa Rosenberg in the Early Learners class.

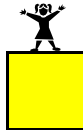


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News from the Early Learners classes from Theresa, Marlene, and Debbie...

February may have been the month of the winter blues but we brightened it up with all the love in our room. The children were busy making the color pink and painting some hearts their favorite shades. We discovered that not everyone likes red or pink hearts. Hallmark should take a lesson from us and add some blue and orange ones too! The children had their first experience with a Valentine's party and we are pretty certain that they can't wait until that kind of day comes around again! Sharing valentines with your friends is fun and one can even get a special treat.

February also found us welcoming our shape friends. Harry Heart came just in time for Valentine's Day and we welcomed Cynthia Circle as well. Finding the different shapes in our world has been our concentration this month. We are beginning to discover that the letters in our names have shapes too. We have been working with the children on recognizing the first letter in their names and helping them match it with those on our cubbies.



The most wonderful activity that happened this month, however, was the explosion of language and the communication with friends. This never ceases to amaze us! The children are doing more than just parallel play now. They are choosing to play with a friend. They are using their words to resolve conflicts (these attempts can be quite comical)—and thinking up ways to enjoy getting crazy with a friend. They help each other do puzzles, build trains and castles and engage in so much more imaginary play together. You can tell how much they care about each other when they help get a tissue for a friend or come over to comfort a friend who is sad. February is truly our most magical month!

March will find us marching of course. Patrick, our leprechaun, arrives and does his mischief making. He is a little prankster and we never know just what he will do. We know a parade is always a favorite in March so we will have our annual McMushroom Day parade with all our little leprechauns. **Our parades will be March 13 and 14 as we celebrate the wearing o' the green and the coming of spring.** We hope we will finally be able to get outside to play this



Just a Reminder...

STAFF MEETING WED., MARCH 12 IS CANCELLED
Classes will follow normal time schedule.

THERE'S AN IN-SERVICE DAY TUES., MARCH 25
No classes for students.

Save the date!! MFLC 40th Anniversary Celebration Ice Cream Social — **Wednesday, May 7, 6 - 8pm, at MFLC.**

month. Please bring boots or old shoes for those days when we can get out. It stays muddy until May!

Thank you all for the delicious snacks and juice. It is so nice to have such nourishing snacks and such wonderful parents.

News from the 3s class from Jamie, Debbie, and Tori...

A child's imagination is a wonderful thing to watch develop. He/she may start with simple play scenarios like the role of a mother or father. This role might involve taking care of a baby or working in an office. Once the imagination has time to grow, the play scenarios take on a whole new level of creative play. There are new roles such as a princess and a dragon. The dragon is chasing the princess but, never fear, Superman flies in to save the day. The imaginary play becomes very specific and the creative ideas are endless.

The three-year-olds class challenged their imaginations in February when following the theme "Fairy Tales and Make-Believe." We learned that Fairy Tales often start with "Once upon a time." They typically have characters who portray "good guys" and "bad guys." Fairy Tales are also stories that are not true. The students loved learning about the Three Little Pigs and Goldilocks. They were concerned when the bad guys displayed mean behavior but felt relief when the good guys won. The students even wrote their own stories about three little bears and the mean old troll. Our class loves to dress up and take on different roles — pirates, knights, princesses and kings. We even pretended to be fire-breathing dragons. This unit gave the students the opportunity to be heroes and to create their own happy endings.

In February we practiced our gross motor skills by participating in obstacle courses during gym class. We walked on balance beams, crawled through tunnels and even jumped onto blocks. The students also practiced throwing, catching and kicking balls. We even demonstrated our favorite tricks for our classmates, making sure to take a bow once we were finished. Since the weather kept us inside for many days, these inside exercises were a welcome treat.





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Time to change the clocks!
Daylight Saving Time begins Sunday, March 9. Have your clocks "spring forward" one hour **Saturday night, March 8.**

Our Valentine's Party was filled with red hearts, delicious strawberry shortcake and special valentines. The students enjoyed making red and pink necklaces for their families and decorating Valentine cards for even more loved ones.

I can't believe we are heading toward the end of the school year. The growth that has taken place in our classroom is amazing. We are becoming better communicators and peace-makers. We are encouraging our friends to join in our play and are becoming empathic with regard to our friends' feelings. The students can recognize the students who are absent and call each one by name. Fine motor skills are getting stronger and the confidence level is growing each moment. It will be sad to see this class move on. But by the end of the school year, they will be ready to move forward to the next chapter in their learning destination. Debbie, Tori and I feel very fortunate to have been part of that exciting journey.

News from the 3/4s class from Liz and Sheila...

Imaginative play is such an integral part of early childhood education that it is virtually inconceivable to come up with an appropriate educational theme that does not involve imagination. Whatever the topic, children learn through play. Pretend play is essential for the development of cognitive, emotional and social skills, including self-regulation, empathy, creativity, problem solving, cognitive flexibility, and working memory, to name a few. In February we thought it would be interesting to highlight the very idea of imagination.

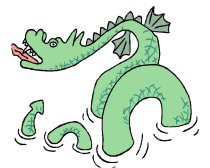
We began by reading Antoinette Portis' *Not a Stick*. Just like the character in the book, we had fun imagining many different things a stick could become. The children loved the power of holding up an everyday object and declaring, "This is not a _____!" We extended the idea to ourselves. Their faces showed the liberation and empowerment they felt as they declared, "I am not a kid!" We were honored that one of the most popular roles they chose was that of teacher. It was so much fun that we made "teacher of the day" a regular classroom job. They love having the chance to use the pointer to read the question of the day and tally the results. We followed up with *Not a Box* and had fun decorating a giant



"not-a-box" to use in our play.

After experimenting with transforming things that were already there, we moved on to creating things out of thin air and representing them by drawing. We were inspired by *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, a classic story of imagination and drawing. Just like in the book, we used our problem-solving skills to draw Harold out of sticky situations.

Next, we turned our attention to the dark side of imagination. As children's imaginations develop, they begin to create scary images such as monsters. It can be difficult for young children to separate fantasy from reality. We read *Go Away, Big Green Monster!* We felt so empowered when we could tell those sharp, white teeth to go away! We recreated the story with a felt monster, then had fun creating new monsters. We practiced our descriptive language skills and listening skills in a game with silly monster cards. We took turns drawing a card and describing what we saw as completely as possible, while our friends tried to find the matching monster.



Castle life was another make-believe play theme we touched on. Throughout the month, we enjoyed playing in our castle in the sky, thanks to the enrichment class, who transformed our loft. We met Scorch the dragon, who, along with Mushroom Mouse, taught us a little about modulating our voices and movements to match the setting and our friends. We practiced using our big dragon voices and our quiet mouse voices.

Pirate play was a big hit, too. We sailed the seven seas in our homemade pirate ship and searched for treasure. We walked the plank and dove for letters. We made treasure maps and took turns hiding our treasure chest. We practiced 1:1 correspondence as we played Pirate Dice to divvy up the treasure, and created our own treasure chests to take home.

We finished the month by exploring the world of superheroes. Young children are naturally drawn to superhero play. It is wonderful to feel invincible! We stressed the positive aspects of superheroes and attempted to expose them to a world beyond the Marvel and DC heroes. We met Princess Super Kitty, Traction Man, Ladybug Girl and Bumblebee Boy and imagined our own super identities.



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**March is
NATIONAL READING MONTH...**
*Take the opportunity to
read to your child today —
and every day!*

We added another activity to our daily routine. Each day, we target a different “letter of the day.” We look at how it is formed and listen to the sound it makes. We then try to guess the secret word, which usually relates to something we are talking about that day. In the meantime, we try to generate words that begin with the target sound.

Valentine’s Day turned our attention to love and friendship. This group already has established a tradition of creating drawings and cards for each other on any given day, so Valentine’s Day brought even more opportunities to show each other that we care. They are a very loving bunch!

Next month our theme will be “The People in Your Neighborhood.” We will learn about the jobs people do to help their community.

News from the 4s class from Liz, Kim, and Amy...

When is a stick not a stick? We began our exploration of imagination by asking this question. Through the lens of imagination, a stick can be a magic wand, a flagpole, a sword, a fishing pole—the possibilities are limitless. Imagination is the superpower we all possess that allows us to create new things, transform everyday objects, and make magic happen. This superpower emerges in early childhood, and it is the driving force for learning during this period.

Perhaps someday these children will use their superpowers to discover new energy sources, write brilliant stories, design bridges, solve complicated social problems, or compose symphonies. Every moment spent exercising their creative muscles now adds to their future capabilities. It all begins with the ability to see what is not there, to imagine something not as it is, but as it could be.

Our first letter of the week was N, in honor of the “not.” We read Antoinette Portis’ *Not a Stick* and thought of alternate realities for a variety of everyday objects. We also read *Skippyjon Jones*, the story of an imaginative little guy who is sure that he is not a Siamese cat, but rather a brave Chihuahua.

We turned our attention to love and Valentine’s Day mid-month. We stressed the concepts of inclusion and belonging,

which are the cornerstones of our program. Since its inception, Mushroom’s number-one rule has been, “You can’t say you can’t play.” We read Kathryn Otoshi’s brilliant *One*, which explores bullying and appreciation for differences through beautiful but spare illustrations employing colors and numbers as characters. As illustrated in the book, “sometimes it takes just one” to stand up and make sure everyone counts. We followed up our reading by creating friendship bracelets with a different colored bead representing each student, to reinforce the idea that each one counts. We pledged to be kind and look out for all our school sisters and brothers.

Although bullying is a very important topic to discuss with preschoolers, it is vital to separate the behavior from the person. Young children have a hard time taking different perspectives, and they easily adopt stereotypes. Unfortunately, much of the material targeted to children regarding bullying reinforces those stereotypes. There is a difference between conflict, which is inevitable and necessary in every relationship, and bullying, which involves a sustained effort to make another person feel “less than.”



All young children are capable of both kind and unkind behavior, and they don’t always know the difference. We should not encourage them to pigeonhole others based on their immature efforts to navigate the social world. We strive to teach them how to protect themselves assertively, stand up for others, and seek help from adults when they need to, all while seeking reconciliation. Throughout this process, they will need to use their superpower of imagination, as it is crucial to the development of empathy.

We had another opportunity to reinforce inclusion through our participation in a disability awareness program. We met dolls who used a variety of assistive devices, including wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, braces and glasses. We learned some new vocabulary and some pointers for welcoming friends with different abilities.

During X week, we imagined we were pirates. We explored the concept of mapping in several ways. We made our own creative treasure maps, complete with an X marking the spot. This play theme was such a hit that no one needed coaxing to practice writing the letter of the week! We also made a map of our upstairs classroom, adding as many features as we could think



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of. We played a game in which we hid a treasure chest, then marked the hiding spot on the map with an X. Instead of randomly searching, we figured out where to look by reading the map. We divvied up the loot in a game of Pirate Dice, practicing 1:1 correspondence and making comparisons.

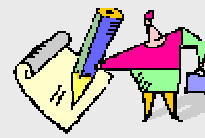
We finished the month (C week) using our imagination superpowers to create our own superheroes. Although superhero play is sometimes discouraged in preschool because it can lead to rough play, it is an important natural theme in children's spontaneous imaginative play. We decided to take on the challenge, highlighting the pro-social qualities of superheroes. We created our own super-identities, designed our own super insignias, wore capes, attempted to sight-read comic book exclamations, and wrote superhero stories. We attempted to move beyond the commercialized heroes ever-present in the media and often associated with violence, instead focusing on the heroic qualities to which we can all aspire.

In March our theme will be "Our Town." We will learn about the important ways people contribute to the function and well-being of the community.

News from the Pre-K classes from Cara, Jane, and Melanie...

What does one do with several large boxes and some imagination? Well, our class made a dragon for at least 20 small children to dance with to celebrate the Chinese New Year! We painted the boxes and then added details to make teeth, large eyes, a tail and orange yarn to depict fire breathing from the dragon.

The Chinese New Year begins with the New Moon on the first day of the new year and ends on the full moon 15 days later. The 15th day is called the Lantern Festival, which is celebrated at night with lantern displays and children carrying lanterns in a parade. The highlight of the festival is also the dragon dance. So, we didn't dance at nighttime, but our class made red paper lanterns along with our dragon. We visited our friends downstairs in Ms. Liz's and Ms. Jamie's classes, paraded our dragon and lanterns for them and at the end



Have you registered for the 2014-2015 school year?

If not, please stop by the office and talk to Joan. Also, the very best compliment you can pay us is to recommend Mushroom Family Learning Center to family, friends or neighbors. *We thank you for your continued commitment and support!*

exclaimed to all "Gung hai fat choy!" This means "happy new year" in Chinese.

After ringing in the new year, we then turned to the celebration of love and friendship, Valentine's Day. The dragon became a symbol of continuity as we moved from the dragon as part of Chinese culture to the dragon as part of fairytales and royalty. We read a poem:

*The Queen of Hearts, she made some tarts on a winter's day;
The Knave of Hearts, he stole the tarts and took them clean away.
The King of Hearts called for the tarts
and scolded the Knave full sore.
The Knave of Hearts brought back the tarts
and vowed he'd steal no more.*

We discussed how it takes a brave heart to realize when we've not made a good choice and then to make a better one. This poem was also the basis for our Queen and King of Hearts bakery that the dramatic play room became. The children used salt bread dough to make their creations for the bakery and used paint and glitter to decorate them for the bakery. We enjoyed some wonderful tasty treats in the bakery and the prices were pretty reasonable! We topped off our celebration of love with a Queen and King of Hearts tea party. The children made their own red capes and crowns, and had a grand time exchanging valentines with each other in their decorated bags!



During this month, we also finished reading *The Snow Queen*. They loved the story and it was wonderful seeing them engaged in a story that had six chapters, which we read over the course of several days. Last month, I had read the story *Frozen* to the children so we were able to discuss what was the same and different between the two stories. Their ability to recall facts and make connections between small details in the stories was wonderful. Comprehension is such an important part of the reading process. Upon hearing that "Frozen" was based on the story *The Snow Queen* written by Hans Christian Andersen, several children pointed out that one of the movie characters is named Hans. I learn something new every day too!

Through the discussion, it was discovered that stories can inspire movies we see in the theater. One child then asked, "What does inspire mean?" I gave an example, then another child then raised his hand and said, "I was inspired by my



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neighbor to build a bigger snowman after I saw theirs." I absolutely love these discussions where the material is igniting questions, which then ignites applications of the new information learned. I also explained that the movie "Frozen" looked to the country of Norway as inspiration for the clothing, setting and some of the vocabulary. I showed the children a picture of the current royal Norwegian family and also several pictures of castles that still stand in Norway. It was a great time to bring in the globe to show them where Norway is located, which is close to the North Pole, as many guessed it might be. ☺

This inquiry led us into our investigation of castles and life inside a castle. I've been bringing in different building materials, and will continue to do so to encourage our young architects and engineers to look closely at how a castle is built. We will learn about the tools, food and clothing during the medieval times during our investigation.

We are always trying to engage the whole child as the students continue to see themselves as learners, engage in dramatic and creative play with each other and, throughout it all, learn their ABCs and 123s. Within the context of their play, we are always looking for opportunities to have them expand their capabilities and abilities.

For instance, I had a group of children recently who were intrigued by the recent Olympic games and more specifically the skiing and snowboarding. They wanted to create a ski run as well as a trick park. They discussed what materials they could use and how they could engineer the materials. As the teacher, I try to guide them, ask questions and give suggestions of materials that are available and could be brought out. The craft sticks became the skis and snowboards and the children had to use their fine motor skills to cut the tape and then apply it. They worked together and shared ideas of how to continue their creations. Other children would come in during the process with new ideas, which might include making signs or "buying" materials from the pretend store located in the room. There were so many deep and rich things that were happening during this play, which my small description just touches upon. I love the quote by early childhood author Lisa Murphy, "The child is the curriculum."

SNACK TIME!

We appreciate the contribution our families make by providing snacks and we are all interested in providing healthy, nutritious ones. Please keep in mind: they need to be nut free; remain attentive to your class's restrictions and read food labels; try to avoid extremely colorful processed foods with lots of food dye; snacks must be in original packaging with a complete ingredient list and expiration date; and consider fruits, vegetables and foods low in sugar (no cutting the fruits/veggies at home). *Simple is great!*



We will kick off the month of March by celebrating Dr. Seuss's birthday and Read Across America on March 3. We will then move into our investigation of things we find in the sky: rainbows, clouds, airplanes, birds and the moon!

News from the K-Too classes from Marilyn...

February was all too short, and therefore, a busy month. We started the month ending our world holiday studies with Chinese New Year. We made our own dragon with Miss Cara's class and paraded through the school. We made the red envelopes children receive for New Year's with pretend money inside.

The children wrote about their favorite world holiday: either Diwali, Ramadan, Hanukkah, Chinese New Year, or Kwanzaa. We also celebrated Valentine's Day with homemade valentine bags decorated with hearts of different sizes to make animals, wrote about what love is, and had class Valentine's Day parties. We also studied the different states of water, the water cycle, and geometric shapes we discovered in the children's homemade snowflakes. We concluded February with a study of Benjamin Franklin and his discovery of electricity.

March will be a continuation of our electricity unit: the sub-atomic world, the physics of electricity, electricity experiments, dismantling electric appliances, and the construction of a low-voltage (1.5v) home for a little Mushroom mouse. The children will do the wiring themselves and are very excited. Look for our houses to be on display at the end of the month!



SilverGraphics


Don't forget!

**Silver Graphics Student
Artwork Fundraiser Orders
Due March 17!**



Business Directory



<p>Reasonable Rates</p> <p>Pre-K to 8th Grade Reading & Math</p> <p>(412) 221-4174</p>  <p>Private Tutoring In My Home</p> <p>Jane Birris Experienced Teacher & Tutor</p>	
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