

# THEME WEEK REDUX

## Student Initiative + Parent Vision + Community Talent =

Theme Week is a full week of school with no regular classes which takes place every year at Youth Initiative High School, and every year it feels like a *miracle*. And it is.



It's a miraculous combination of the constituent parts of the school: student initiative, parent vision, and community talent. Working together these three groups poll interest, write up schedules, seek out resources, eek out budgets, and ultimately create a full week of original experiential education: a miracle born of inspired, hard work. Theme Week is an essential part of the Youth Initiative experience; it stands as an example of taking control over one's education.

The first year of the school Theme Week did not take place. Matthew Winston, a visiting Waldorf teacher, offered

### YIHS Theme Week Timeline

- 08-09 Vulcan Week**
- 07-08 Multicultural Week**
- 06-07 Performance Art**
- 05-06 Folk Art**
- 04-05 Circus Arts**
- 03-04 Survival Skills/Radio**
- 02-03 Arts, Crafts, Martial Arts**
- 01-02 Conflict Resolution**
- 00-01 ?**
- 99-00 Movement**
- 98-99 Money & Economy**  
**Life Cycles: Birth to Death**
- 97-98 Movement**
- 96-97 *Not yet invented***

the idea for a themed week during his time here as a way to collaboratively create an intensive learning experience. And as the timeline (left) demonstrates, theme week has taken a range of forms: with varying topics and varying commitment to a unifying theme!

Theme Week has allowed for in depth study of topics outside of the normal curriculum (Money, Survival Skills, Vulcan Week), and for a deeper look at topics already within the curriculum (Life Cycles, Performance Art, Conflict Resolution). Theme Week has drawn in talented teachers from far away (Circus Arts, Money, and Multi-Cultural Week) and taken advantage of the abundance of local talent (Folk Art, Life Cycles, and Movement). Many of the teachers, local or out-of-towners, introduced to the school through this special week, have returned to join the faculty and community. For as much as Theme Week intensifies the school day and turns our attention inward, it also opens the doors to the broader community by reaching beyond our established network of teachers and our familiar circle of supporters.

This quarter the Kaleidoscope's theme is Theme Week: its past, present and future. Going through photo albums and the dusty halls of memory, this issue presents a rich tapestry of several of the past 12 Theme Weeks. As YIHS grows and evolves, so does Theme Week, and researching this issue has inspired much head-shaking about the school's early years. As this issue goes to press, this year's theme week, Vulcan Week, has just finished, and already, visions for next year's are arising. So take some time to appreciate this unique tradition of YIHS and the many forms it has taken.

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Performance Art	Conflict Resolution Economy	Vulcan Week	Circus Arts Folk Art	Survival Skills Movement	Thanks to Sponsors



## Performance Arts Week & *TWO SPOONS*

By AnnaJo Doerr and Shawn Lavoie, 2007 Theme Week Organizers



Friday's rehearsal: in the space and on the stage for the first time!



Stiltwalkers served the first course on tiny plates and then danced for the guests.



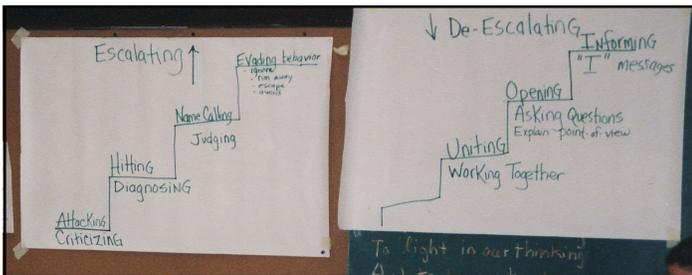
An overfull crowd sat on three sides of the stage, waiting for a mysterious show called *TWO SPOONS* to begin!

In spring of 2007 a week of massive collaboration (typical for Theme Week!) brought about the original performance of *TWO SPOONS*, an original circus/dinner/play. It was a fabulous assemblage of modern dance, instrumental music, singing, clowning, break dancing, juggling, swing dancing, acting, acrobatics, and performance cooking—all taught within the week. The script was written especially for the occasion, and the students learned their parts and created their acts (and everything else in the performance!) in the course of 5 school days. Saturday morning, everyone woke up sore, exhausted and dumbstruck by what they'd accomplished.

Perhaps some of you remember the “spoon duel,” the removal of all the chairs in the auditorium to facilitate a theatre-in-the-round experience, the 20 layer flambé crepe cake courtesy of Frank Wildingway, the crème pie in the face, the RidgeTones singing “At the Hop” while a dancehall-full of students jitterbugged, or the stilt-walking musicians playing ‘Putting on the Ritz’—a mix of the live band led by Tom Goulion with the stiltwalkers led by myself. Or maybe you remember eating a full gourmet meal at the end of the show along with the rest of the audience! Our memories of the event are laced with a sincere sense of awe at the ability of the students to hold the space and pull off the show with such focus and energy!

*TWO SPOONS* was a love story set in a restaurant where the courses were served by acrobats, jugglers, stiltwalkers, and break dancers. Along with the performance, the sets and lighting were also built in a week under the direction of Chris Cox and John Tully. The dance portion of the week was taught by Maree Ramalia, a dear friend of ours who flew in from Cleveland for the week. And we taught clowning, juggling, swing dance, stilt-walking and acting. There were several more specialty teachers who came in that week, which was non-stop motion and excitement.

Our goals for the week were to have every student fully engaged with ample opportunities to express themselves in familiar and new ways. Our goals were definitely achieved, and were complimented by a side-goal building community: the whole community was involved in creating (and consuming) the show. It's an experience we'll never forget.



## Conflict Resolution Week

In the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, YIHS students and parents wanted to delve further in different methods of conflict resolution. So what better way to respond to strife and virulent misunderstanding in the world than to get at the heart of conflict within individuals and our communities. Students spent the week engaging in role plays, participating in community building activities, and learning healthy communication techniques.



## Money & Economy Week

In the 1998-99 school year YIHS coordinated its second Theme Week in conjunction with a conference of Associative Economics (<http://www.cfae.biz>) that was being held in Viroqua. After attending several lectures and workshops, YIHS students were given the task of creating images and diagrams of a “new economy.” The adult conference participants from Europe and the US and other community members came to the final gallery showing and discussion. YIHS alumna, Rose Hendricks recalled: “We all designed an economy individually that week and then presented them to the community...I'm surprised Timothy Geithner hasn't asked for those yet.”



Tamara Slayton (below) and Christopher Houghton Budd (above) were the main presenters at the conference.





# VULCAN

## Playing with Fire

By Eva Pitsch, YIHS Senior

The 2009 Theme Week was devoted to the Roman god of fire, Vulcan. Vulcan represented both craftsmanship and destruction. Accordingly, the students burnt structures to the ground, and built structures up from the ground with fire as an aid. The week was infused with the energy of fire: a short burst of liveliness after an interminable winter.



YIHS Faculty Akira Kobayashi

The first day students launched into Vulcan Week with a Tai Chi session with Monty McPheron. The students moved in sync like flames in slow motion. After kindling our internal flames, we flocked to the kitchen to prepare meat, potatoes, and onions for our supper later. After chopping, talking and laughing we departed for Jane Siemon's farm.

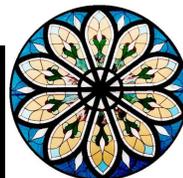
Once in Newton Valley, the students enjoyed observing demonstrations of fire-bomb making and glass blowing. We watched (through protective glasses) a marble being formed out of molten glass. And then, black powder being turned into a volatile firework. The students observed creation and a method of destruction.

Meanwhile, shish kabobs were being skewered, and potatoes, onions and butter roasted in "hobo-pies". After the demonstrations, we gathered to watch Shawn Lavoie juggle flaming pins. Exciting! Afterward, the group made its way to a campfire dinner. Next the group huddled against the dropping temperature to watch the explosions from the fireworks made earlier. They lit up with the drama of miniature atomic bombs.



In the final stage of the opening day, the group hiked up the hill in the dark to perform a fire ceremony led by Bill Humphrey. The fire was set, and each chose an offering (a stick, a piece of grass) and a rattle. While all shook ourselves into a meditative state and thought on what the fire could bring to our lives and what it could take away, we offered the fire the essentials of life: foodstuffs, oil, sage, pinches of tobacco. As we





# WEEK

closed, people breathed their thoughts, dreams and wishes into the offering. In turn, each knelt before the fire as another stepped behind them with arms spread in protection. Gratitude welled within the circle, and the meaning of community was found.



As a flourish to the day, we warmed up with hot chocolate, and watched Cedar Rose Siemon dance with flaming poi. Fully content, we headed home.

In subsequent days of Vulcan week, the students split off into different fire related art intensives. A handful did stained glass; others jewelry making, ceramics, blacksmithing, or welding. At the end of the two days, the products of the classes began showing up in school: 'junk art' welded sculptures of strange animals, bronze earrings, and soldered stained glass mosaics. Creations built with fire (see examples below).



Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School's mud-oven helped bake 16 pizzas and 8 (minus 2 burnt) loaves of bread.

The final day was devoted to the warming and soothing properties of fire. We opened the morning by again kindling the inner flame with yoga lead by Kumari Sky. Afterward the students were thoroughly spoiled by hot rock massages from Sarah Caldwell, acupuncture and Chinese medicine with Ellen Arndorfer, chiropractic adjustments from Paul and Paula Grenier, and saunas! And, to top it off, wood baked sourdough pizzas and bread for lunch. AnnaJo Doerr kindly mixed up the dough, fed the monster starter, and acquisitioned and organized the rest to make the pizza possible.

The week captured the essence of the fire: fast, transient, and quintessentially Vulcan. We built, destroyed, and played with fire. What could be more fun?



Spa Day was a wonderful way to end the week!





YIHS Alumnus Guthry Knapp mastering the one-wheeler.

## Circus Arts Theme Week

In 2005 the five-member traveling circus, The Runaway Circus & the Loose Caboozes, flew in from California for a week-long intensive in circus arts ending with a public show. The well-attended show was called “The Free Range Circus.” Forest Gregg, Meghan Holtan, Eden Reinstein, Ingrid Johnson and Shawn Lavoie, the five Runaways, taught juggling, diabolo, clowning, unicycling, balance, and acrobatics. Juggling pins and unicycles became everyday YIHS paraphernalia for years afterwards.

### *Keep Leaping!?! A moment from the Free Range Circus*

By Ingrid Johnson, member of Runaway Circus

I really enjoy the memory of our show in Viroqua with the juggling and the diabolo crew—the Leaping Legumes Jugglers and the Dark Night Shade Diabolists (with the shades!).

They worked hours and hours on those jumping beans juggling tricks and their diabolo James Bond moves and, of course, come show time: the music locks up on us. So the Leaping Legumes are waiting on their cue to stop bouncing up and down after their juggling act, and, yup, the cue does not come. So, what do we do—well, we keep bouncing of course because the music will come....it will come...wait...just keep bouncing...keep leaping...uhh...nope.

In the end, Reinstein saved the day with a strange rendition of a different song (Mission Impossible, I think) and the crowd joined in. And on came the Night Shades, who did their act with the audience singing the melody of Mission Impossible.



Students and Runaway Circus doing a presentation for Pleasant Ridge assembly.

## Folk Art Theme Week



The full range of folk arts were surveyed in 2006. Jesse Van Tol, YIHS alumnus (pictured right), was the main organizer for the week. Drawing on the wealth of local artisans, students had the opportunity to carve, weld, solder, and perform in a jug band!





## Survival Skills Week

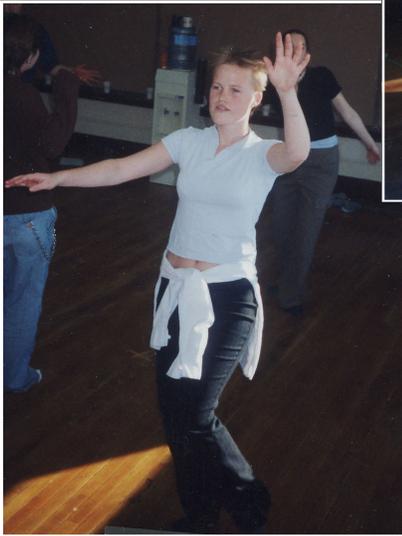
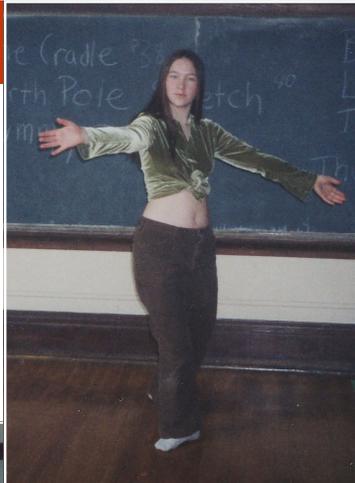
When in the course of a normal school week do you have time to set up camp in the cold and build make-shift shelter in the middle of the woods? In 2004 in the winter YIHS students learned how to set up a minimalist campsites and survive in the elements.

Focusing an entire week on a subject allows for an integrated wide-reaching exploration. Teachers can introduce new concepts and follow through with activities, discussions, and creative projects that bring the concepts to life.

## Movement Theme Week

Movement has twice been a Theme Week and there's really no question why: people love to move! Movement plays a central role in Waldorf education; from Kindergarten up through high school, Eurhythmy, Bothmer Gymnastics, Spatial Dynamics, dance, games, and, of course, recess provide an outlet for physical expression and social development. As high school work demands more of the intellect, movement compliments the sometimes tumultuous growth of the teenage mind. For from movement, one can better appreciate stillness.

These pictures come from the Movement Theme Week in 2000. The school was much smaller then, but students were still kept moving all week with teachers leading yoga, square dancing, belly dance, acrobatics, and creative movement. Several alumnae remember being sore from moving all week and





Special Thanks to all who attended our Valentine's Day Dinner. This was by all accounts the best one yet:: the food prepared by the 12th grade under the direction of Jane Siemon and Frank Wildingway was excellent, the silent auction was abundant, and the entertainment kept spirits high.



## Matching Gift Campaign

Below is a list of this year's Matching Gift Participants. These individuals and local businesses match a certain percentage of the student fundraising totals. This year every dollar the students raise is backed by \$2.30 in matching funds the community. Thank you!

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