2014-15
Kindergarten Curriculum Report
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OUR GROUP

"Why do people make/have rules?" I asked our kindergartners during our very first class meeting. We took a few moments to think about this big question. Here are the some of the kindergartners' original responses:

- Marshall: It might not be safe. It could be dangerous without rules.
- Harry: We might break something if we don't have rules.
- Arden: So we don't take off our seat belts or hurt fingers in the mixer … Rules help keep us safe.
- Sebastian: So people can't push you around
- Nieve: So people don't get hurt … People don't like getting hurt.
- Felix: So nobody does the wrong thing - so they don't do things they're not supposed to do.
- Will: To make sure everyone has fun!

There seemed to be a general consensus in the group that rules are meant to keep us safe. There was also interest in Will's idea that rules could ensure that everyone would have fun. So - over the ensuing weeks, as we worked and played together, we thought about which guidelines would support our goal of creating a kindergarten environment in which everyone could feel safe and happy. Our kindergartners were very good at coming up with rules - they were quite prolific actually! As a matter of fact, they developed so many important rules that it quickly became apparent that they would never remember them let alone internalize them. We settled on three overarching guidelines which encompassed their many ideas. *We take care of ourselves. We take care of each other. We take care of our environment.*

I wrote all of their ideas on separate index cards for sorting purposes. In small batches, we collectively thought about each rule and decided which overarching guideline it matched. For example: it was decided that "Don't throw anything into the pond." would go into the *We take care of our environment* category. Simple, right? Well, things quickly got a bit more complicated and a lot more interesting … "Include everyone in your games." Straightforward enough - "Let's put that one into the *We take care of each other* pile." "Wait! If you include everyone, aren't you taking care of yourself too?" After some debate, they all agreed. So, I created another card and "Include everyone" was placed into both categories. Once the kindergartners discovered that they could consider more than one guideline, they routinely thought about the possible connections across all three. Sometimes it actually worked. "Clean up. Put classroom materials back where they belong." *We take care of our environment,* of course. "But we should also put it in *We take care of ourselves* and *We take care of each other* because if we put things in the right place, we'll be able to find them when we need them again." The kindergartners actually enjoyed the lengthy process of thinking carefully about their ideas and classifying them. Once the sorting process was complete, they also illustrated their rules. Finally, I posted them in our classroom so we could easily refer to them.

The kindergartners spent a good portion of the fall, developing and refining their classroom guidelines. This was done intentionally. It took time, collaborative focus and energy, and a great deal of thought to define what was important to them. This process had clearly become one of the formative elements of our nascent kindergarten community.

Sherry and I have truly enjoyed the privilege and challenge of working with this extraordinary group of kindergartners. Our group was a dynamic mix of nine girls and thirteen boys: eleven children were newcomers to Miquon and eleven were already seasoned Miquon kids. We were sad to have two of our boys leave in the fall due to family relocations on the west coast.

Clearly, the group of children moving on from Marisa and Celia's nursery had formed comfortable relationships

during their previous years together. In September, they happily reunited, quickly renewing old ties. Of course, they were also eager to develop new relationships. While our newcomers joined the group exhibiting a mix of curiosity, excitement and trepidation, it was not long before they too seemed at home in the Miquon kindergarten.

The children, Sherry, and I worked hard to build a sense of community within our group. Our mutual goal was to create a safe, supportive environment for each group member. We consistently worked within the framework of the class guidelines that the children had developed: *We take care of ourselves. We take care of each other. We take care of our environment*. Throughout the year, recognizing, developing, and maintaining positive social skills continued to be an important piece of our work together. The children grew tremendously in their ability to state their needs directly and calmly, listen to each other and respond appropriately, and be flexible and welcoming in their play. They seriously considered issues such as teasing, taking responsibility for one's actions, trying to see someone else's perspective, showing respect for each group member, treating one another fairly in work and play, and learning to be a good friend.

It was a deeply satisfying experience to observe and guide the collective effort and wisdom of these children as they raised complex social issues and thoughtfully worked through them. Over the course of the year, the children developed an appreciation and understanding of each other and gradually coalesced into a strong, vital community.

OUR DAY

Since play is the work of this age group, it was essential to have an extensive supply of open-ended materials and activities that promote cognitive, social and physical development, both indoors and out.

Each morning began with a short period of Inside Choice followed by Morning Circle. During Circle, we reviewed the daily schedule and updated the calendar and clip counter. (We were keeping track of the number of school days.) Another regular feature of Circle Time was the Mystery Bag. Each day a child chose an object to place in the Mystery Bag. He/she then created three clues to help the kindergartners guess the contents of the bag. Once the mystery was solved, the child would share a bit more information and field a few questions.

We often varied the activities which occurred during Circle. We shared big books and followed up our readings with a variety of activities geared to encourage familiarity with concepts of print, phonemic awareness, phonics and comprehension. Many Circles were devoted to math games and explorations. We frequently played games (Twenty Questions, I'm Thinking of a Number and Detective were favorites.), enjoyed a rich variety of children's literature, and held wonderful discussions on all sorts of things.

We then moved into Choice Time. For about an hour, children were free to make a variety of choices within the room or on the playground. They might also choose to work more intensively on a particular project. Choice Time was always lively!

The block area was always a busy place. Vivid imaginations and dramatic flair transformed it into a marketplace, a racetrack, a cozy house, a maze for Marigold and Squeaks, and an owl's nest. The dramatic play which evolved along with each structure was as rich and involved as the building process.

Choice time also provided plentiful opportunities for children to explore the many materials in the art area. Lovely sketches, dramatic easel paintings, whimsical puppets, props for dramatic play, origami, jewelry, informative signs, colorful weavings, gifts, maps, greeting cards, masks, beautiful junk constructions and much more were created. Special art activities and cooking projects happened several times each month under the guidance of a teacher or visiting adult.

Lego, pattern blocks, sorting collections, puzzles, geoboards, board games, and playing cards were popular choices. You could often find a child or two curled up on our pillows deeply engrossed in a good book. Many children wrote their own books recording their words in "kid writing" and carefully matching their illustrations to the text. Our guinea pigs, Marigold and Squeaks, were the recipients of much love and attention. A few children would

spend great chunks of their choice time observing, handling and caring for our many pets.

For many of our children, Choice Time was synonymous with the outdoors. The creek, sandbox, "twirly slide", tree house and other play equipment were frequent play destinations. Many of the children enjoyed fast paced chase games such as Tag. Cops and Robbers, Puppies, Family, Wild Kratts, and Old Grandpa were also favorite choice time games. Tree climbing was a popular activity, as well as serious gymnastic practice on the monkey bars. Learning to jump rope was the activity of choice for many children this spring. In the sandbox, pies and cakes were baked, volcanoes erupted, rivers were carved through steep mountains, and delicate fairy houses were built. Many song and dance routines were performed on our kindergarten play barn.

Children designed and built signs, birdhouses and planes at the workbench. They also spent a great deal of time observing caterpillars and other insects, salamanders and crayfish, frogs and toads. They observed and delighted in the various signs of the changing seasons. Imagination, creativity, and high drama were seamlessly woven into their explorations. It was always a pleasure to receive an invitation from the children to venture into their magical outside world and view its wonders through their eyes.

Snack was available during Choice Time so children could decide for themselves when to take a break from their activity to fill their grumbling tummies.

After an efficient clean-up, we gathered on the rug for a quick game or song before heading off to a specialist. Our kindergarten schedule accommodated itself around the specialties of Science, PE, Library, Art and Music. We were able to feature one specialist each day, which lent our room a wonderful regularity. This gave diversity to our program and structure to our day. In our classroom Sherry and I worked with each half-group in turn on social studies, language arts, and/or mathematics activities (often integrated). This was a special time affording each teacher the opportunity of working with only a few children at a time.

While lunch was set up by our lunch setters, the rest of the group relaxed on the rug and listened to a story. We enjoyed many picture books written by a variety of authors. As the year progressed stories linked to class themes were shared as well. The children were captivated by the many Mexican folk tales we read, especially those told about the tricksters, Coyote and Rabbit.

Immediately following Story, our group shared a noontime meal and animated conversation. Once finished lunch, children would head outside for Lunch Break – an opportunity to enjoy our outdoor space before returning to the classroom for Rest. During Rest children quietly relaxed on their cots while reading books, drawing and/or writing in their cot journals, playing Dice Race, solving mazes and dot-to-dots, sewing or weaving, doing puzzles, or playing with any of our math manipulatives. They also listened to story tapes or a teacher-read chapter book such as *My Father's Dragon, Gwinna,* or *The School Mouse.*

Definitely one of the most exciting developments in the kindergarten this school year was our relationship with Wendy and Sara's group as Reading Buddies. Each kindergartner was matched with a fourth grader who was his/her buddy for the entire school year. On Thursday afternoons immediately following Rest Time, each older child joined his/her reading buddy to share a good book. It was gratifying to watch the buddies respond to each other with such pleasure. The older children had thought carefully about their book selections and had practiced reading for fluency and expression. The kindergarten children were attentive listeners clearly enjoying both a fine story and the company of their new friends. Throughout the year, the kindergartners and their buddies worked and played together in many ways… decorating pumpkins, celebrating holidays (in general), sharing and celebrating their original stories with an Authors' Tea, frolicking in the playground, sharing curriculum highlights, playing games, and of course, eating together. The kindergarteners loved their buddies! These buddy relationships will continue to be important throughout their Miquon careers … and perhaps, beyond.

The final hour of the day was a flexible time, used variously for outdoor play, continuation of work started earlier in the day, long term projects, handwriting practice, or additional choice time. We gathered on the rug at the very end of the day for Afternoon Circle. We shared information about upcoming events, created our daily entry for the

Kindergarten Newsletter, and sang our good-bye song.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Language Arts activities were integrated into our entire day, as we think of Language Arts as relating to all aspects of language – speaking, listening, reading and writing. From the knock-knock jokes gleefully told during lunch to the beautifully written and illustrated books shared during our Authors' Tea, children constantly developed and refined their facility with the various components of language.

Our Language Arts program was based on a language rich environment. Literature of all kinds was displayed on our classroom bookshelves including picture books, how-to books, magazines, wordless books, big books which we had read as a group numerous times, non-fiction (some of which was related to the social studies/science topics we were exploring), maps, alphabet books, poetry, children's dictionaries, class books (Each child contributed a page which was based on a particular topic or joint experience, such as *Guess Who*, *I Am Thankful*, or *What's for Lunch?)*, and of course child-made books. We also had a wonderful collection of pre-reading and early emergent books for children to read successfully.

The children's engagement with books was an all-day affair. In the morning, a parent who was reading a book to his/her child would soon find an extra few listeners snuggled close by. Sherry and I could never read long enough to suit this group of story lovers! Echoes of "one more page" or "just a few more minutes" would often follow an attempt to end a story time. Children frequently referred to our wide selection of non-fiction books to further their knowledge on topics that were of deep interest to them. Big books (with their highly repetitive text, reasonable amount of print on each page, and strong correlation between the illustrations and text) were favorite choices for rest time reading. Class books and the children's individual works of fiction/non-fiction (such as their Miquon Grass stories, walking books, and chick journals) were also highly sought after.

In our room, there were many opportunities for children to create written language for themselves. There were ink stamp letters, magnetic letters, chalk boards, paper of every shape and color, as well as pens, markers, crayons, and pencils. Children often chose to label their drawings, write messages to each other or family members, or create letters or greeting cards. They produced signs to share important information, designed props for their dramatic play (such as surveys taken or lists made during play), and made self-initiated books. More formally, the children labeled everything they could see in our classroom … and then accepted the challenge to find even more objects to label! They dictated many letters and thank you notes to Miquon families and friends, brainstormed lists to help us remember ideas or develop plans, and created fabulous birthday cards for each member of the kindergarten community. They contributed pages to class books, published individual stories, and participated regularly in an approach to literacy instruction called Writing Workshop.

The basic premise behind Writing Workshop is that children will learn to read and write most successfully by reading and writing for themselves. The kindergartners filled their writing journals with colorful illustrations and labels or sentences that described their drawings. They wrote in "kid writing" (recording any sounds they could hear and recognize in a word). Sherry and I would then transcribe their kid writing into "book writing". This was a perfect opportunity to give mini-lessons on individual letter sounds, spacing between words, punctuation, etc., as well as a wonderful chance to celebrate a child's progress and suggest a goal for future writing.

Our handwriting program, Handwriting without Tears, is a developmentally based program. The multisensory lessons teach to all learning styles – visual, auditory, manipulative, tactile and kinesthetic. The purpose of our work is to make handwriting available to our children as an automatic, natural skill. The children began with pre-pencil readiness activities for learning upper case letters and numbers. They used unique materials such as the upper case wood pieces and the "smiley face" slates. They practiced using good posture, a good pencil grip, and good patterns for letter formation. In their workbooks, they first practiced letter formation in grey blocks (pictures of smiley face slates) before moving to actual lines for writing.

Oral language development was highly encouraged throughout the day. We talked all the time, telling stories and

jokes, discussing problems, reading and reciting poetry, and sharing information and important personal news at Circle. We also played numerous games involving riddles, phonemic awareness skills, listening skills and following directions.

The children always looked forward to our weekly visits from Tammy Davis, our Reading and Writing Specialist. They loved the marvelous stories she dramatically read to them. They especially enjoyed the opportunity to retell a story, poem or nursery rhyme by acting it out. They also appreciated the wonderful variety of listening and reading readiness activities Tammy shared with them. Thanks, Tammy!

MATHEMATICS

Our math program is based on the belief that children will learn best by creating their own understanding of mathematical concepts. They need to identify, solve, and develop mathematics problems relating to their environment. To meet this goal for our five and six year olds,we used concrete manipulatives extensively as the basis for formal instruction. Materials such as unifix cubes, tiles, Cuisenaire rods, dominoes, marbles, pattern blocks, geoboards, and number boards were used to actively involve the children in making discoveries. We also dealt with quantities of shells, buttons, pumpkin seeds, goldfish crackers, cups, napkins, and other objects in daily use. The children used these items in their studies of relationships. We sorted and classified groups of objects and looked at the relationships between groups.

We worked to develop a clear concept of one-to-one correspondence as we counted things at every opportunity. We introduced the idea of place value as we worked with quantities and learned to write numerals to represent numbers. We estimated larger quantities in our estimating jar, recording everyone's estimate of the number of objects before we spilled out the contents of the jar to count the wood cubes, Crayola markers, teddy bear counters, etc. contained within. The children's estimates became increasingly more accurate as the year progressed. They were able to base their guesses on the information accumulated from previous counts.

Continuing their numeral work, the children made monthly calendars. In the fall, they pasted prepared numeral cards on their calendar blanks, concentrating on matching the correct sequence of the numbers on the grid. As the year progressed, the students began to write their own numerals.

The children also became quite proficient at making and detecting patterns. We used beads, unifix cubes, tiles, pattern blocks, geoboards, and our calendars in our studies. We looked for patterns in the natural world. The children created beautiful patterns in their artwork. Their weavings and their god's eyes were exceptional examples of their proficiency with pattern.

At the early childhood level, children can identify, solve, and create math problems relating to their environment. We found plenty of real life situations that gave us practice with problem solving:

- The Monarchs and the Wolves (quarter groups) are in this half group. How many children should be on the rug?
- There are 100 goldfish crackers in the bowl. There are five of us. How many goldfish do each of us get if we share the total amount equally?
- We have twenty children. Two are absent today. How many cots do we need to set up?

When is your birthday? What is your favorite dish at Thanksgiving dinner? How many people are in your family? The children enjoyed collecting data for these questions (and many others), building graphs to record their results, and reading/explaining the information gleaned from their graphs. Throughout the year, many children chose to conduct surveys to generate data. They recorded responses to their questions and independently organized their information.

Game playing was also a cornerstone of our math program. Games support children's developing number sense, including place value and computational skills. As they repeatedly played games, children recognized number relationships created by the visual models. Games also provided time to rehearse and develop strategies,

opportunities for social interaction, and feedback from peers.

SCIENCE/SOCIAL STUDIES

Looking through my Window

"All the windows of my heart (and mind) I open to the day."
John Greenleaf Whittier

Five and six year olds are incredibly curious about their world. They have so many questions! They are eager to investigate, make hypotheses, and experiment with their ideas. They have a captivating interest in interacting with others and creating strong interpersonal connections. Given ample opportunity to observe and wonder, work and play, they are engaged and responsible advocates for their own learning.

As our kindergartners "looked through their windows" (both actual and metaphorical), they experienced their world through these lenses: the natural world, our kindergarten community, me and my family, and the country and people of Mexico – an exploration of a different cultural community.

In the fall, we totally immersed ourselves in one particular facet of our study – an exploration of the natural world beyond our classroom windows. The Miquon campus provided our kindergartners with endless opportunities to discover, imagine, dream and create.

What did the kindergartners discover? They turned over rocks and logs to find pillbugs, spiders, earwigs, snails, velvet mites, beetles, millipedes, slugs, daddy long legs, ants and newts. They spotted a garter snake sunning itself on a grassy stretch of our playground. They searched for caterpillars on the underside of leaves. They delighted in watching the goldfinches, chickadees, sparrows, tufted titmice, mourning doves, cardinals and woodpeckers that routinely visited our feeders. They were thrilled to occasionally sight a chipmunk scurrying among the rocks.

They climbed our evergreen tree and nestled in its springy branches. They planted milkweed seeds in our garden. They learned about stinging nettle and its antidote jewelweed. They gathered goldenrod to produce a natural dye for wool yarn. They planted tulip and narcissus bulbs. They made snow angels, built snow forts, and went snow tubing. They discovered and followed animal tracks. They strung popcorn, Cheerios, raisins, apples and cranberries for hungry critters.

They listened for the call of the red winged blackbird. They watched for the first signs of spring. They cared for our butterfly garden. They sipped sweet honeysuckle nectar. Our group looked closely at the variety of insects they had captured on the playground. They sat quietly by the pond observing the goldfish, frogs, and red eared slider. They built dams in the creek. They scattered wildflower seeds in our raised beds. They also created mud pies, sand structures and delicate fairy homes.

To complement the children's many outdoor investigations, we also brought Miquon's natural environment into our classroom. We began the year by observing the many insects that have taken up residence on our science shelf - monarch, swallowtail and painted lady caterpillars, imperial and polyphemus moth caterpillars, and of course, the ever changing collection of visiting insects which were captured on the playground by our quick-handed kindergartners.

Insect Study

In September, as the children entered the classroom each morning, they would pause at the red shelf to check on the progress of our monarch caterpillars. The children marveled at the quantity of milkweed leaves the caterpillars consumed. They were amazed by the caterpillars' rapid growth. They watched as the caterpillars prepared to form their chrysalides by hanging upside down from a twig in the characteristic "J" formation. The children waited impatiently for the monarchs to emerge from the smooth green chrysalides dotted with gold. Finally two of the chrysalides split open and the butterflies slipped out. Everyone watched intently as each butterfly unfurled its wings (pumping fluid into the wing veins and making them expand to their full extent). It was a wonderful sight! After observing and enjoying our adult monarchs for a day or so, we released them to the exuberant chant of "Gotta go,

gotta go, gotta go to Mexico!"

We read *The Travels of Monarch X*, the story of a monarch butterfly's experience as it made its way from Canada to Mexico. We charted its route on a map of North America as we read of its adventures. In response to this reading, the children created Monarch Butterfly Journals. They first described the four stages of the metamorphosis of our monarchs. Then they imagined and recorded the experiences our monarchs might have as they made their way to Mexico.

We also participated in Journey South/Journey North – an educational website that engages students in a global study of wildlife migration and seasonal change. As citizen scientists, our kindergartners shared their own field observations with classmates across North America. Our group tracked the migration of our monarch butterflies. We reported the release of our two monarchs as well as a few monarch sightings (specific to the Conshohocken area).

As part of our Journey South/Journey North work, we also joined the "Symbolic Monarch Butterfly Migration" with students across North America. We created 22 life-sized symbolic monarch butterflies and sent them to Mexico for the winter. At the monarch sanctuaries in Mexico, children protected the butterflies and sent them north again in the spring. Our kindergartners were very excited to receive a packet of 22 monarch butterflies created by children throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico.

We also kept a group journal of the painted ladies' metamorphosis. Each day two children dictated their observations of the caterpillars' development. They also drew detailed illustrations to complement their story of the painted ladies. Release day was very exciting. The children were amazingly patient as they watched and waited for the first painted lady to take wing. They jumped and danced about as they enjoyed the sight of one butterfly after another making its first attempt at flight.

Bees/Apples

The beehive in the Library sparked a great interest in honey bees. The children never tired of watching the busy bees as they went about their work. They were especially interested in pollination and the bees' role in this process - hence our interest in apple trees. On a lovely morning in mid September, we visited Peace Valley Orchards to pick apples. After learning the proper method of picking an apple, we began our work. In what seemed like a very short time, our baskets were full and we returned to the weighing station. Believe it or not, the kindergartners had picked 185 pounds of apples!

We counted them the following day – 587 apples. Well … We held a taste test to determine which variety of apple was each child's favorite. We graphed the results. We munched on apples for snack for days on end. We shared a basket of apples with our reading buddies. We made delicious applesauce and two delectable apple cakes. (We shared them with our buddies.) We baked the most scrumptious apple crisp as well as a luscious apple pie. We shared apples with the local wildlife. We compared apples to bananas and recorded our results as Venn diagrams. We made spicy apple butter and homemade English muffin bread for Grandparents' and Special Friends' Day. Our guests gobbled it up! We pressed the remainder of the apples to produce three pitchers of fresh cider (YUM!). And believe it or not – we never tired of apples!

The kindergartners investigated symmetry, camouflage, insect adaptations and habitats as we explored the world of insects. They also enjoyed the many insect related games and activities in the classroom such as matching games, sorting and graphing activities with insect models, jigsaw and sequencing puzzles, etc.

We traveled to the Insectarium in late November to get a close-up look at insects from all around the globe. The Insectarium is the largest insect museum in the nation. We saw thousands of live and mounted insects, checked out a range of interactive displays, and watched a very funny but also informative film about arthropods. Joe, our educator, gave a small presentation using live specimens. He also invited us to pet a hissing cockroach and a vinegaroon. Knowing that in different parts of the world insects are a part of people's diets, some of the children were also interested in trying the edible insects offered.

Dyeing Wool
In early fall, we hiked throughout the Miquon campus to gather pokeberries and goldenrod to make natural dyes. We also tried turmeric and onion skins. Upon returning to the classroom, we dyed wool yarn which we then used for weaving. Weaving was such a popular activity with this group that we could barely keep up with the demand for newly strung looms. The children created breathtaking patterns with the subtle shades produced by the natural dyes and the brighter hues of our store bought yarn.

Woodland Habitat
The children were quite interested in Monkeyland, the wooded area on the other side of our creek. They were eager to explore this hillside which stretched just beyond the boundaries of our playground. They were particularly interested in the creatures which inhabited this place.

We read a wonderful book – *In the Woods: Who's Been Here?* as an introduction to our study of the woodland habitat. The kindergartners enjoyed piecing together the clues on each page to guess the animals featured in the story. We were inspired to conduct a bit of research on our own. What did we want to know about the woodland critters that inhabit Miquon? We brainstormed a list of questions to focus our research. Each quarter group chose one woodland animal to study –opossum, raccoon, bat, or skunk. With teacher support, the quarter groups gathered information on their animal's physical characteristics, its home, food preferences, adaptations etc. Based on Joy Cowley's book *What's for Lunch?,* the quarter groups then wrote and illustrated their particular animal's stories using information gleaned from their research.

Bird Watching
Over the course of the year, our group became quite proficient at recognizing the bird species that nested in the trees just beyond our classroom and regularly visited the feeders hanging just outside our classroom windows. They watched the feeders intently, eagerly sharing their observations as birds alighted. I loved to hear a child exclaim, "I just saw a tufted titmouse!" or "Toni, we need to fill the feeders again. The birds will be hungry, if we don't." Throughout the winter/spring, the children kept a running count of our bird sightings on charts affixed just below our windows. They used tally marks to record the number of sightings per species.

Leigh (former Miquon teacher and avid birder) joined Sherry and the children during our November Conference Week. Of course, birds were the topic of interest for the week. The children thought about how to observe birds and notice what is special about them. They focused on color, size, and how they fly. They pretended to be birds and flapped their wings as fast as a pigeon, a chickadee, and a hummingbird. They thought about what birds like to eat and how they find their food. They used different kinds of tweezers and chopsticks to simulate birds eating various types of food. They hiked to the bird blind to fill the feeders with different kinds of bird seed. They also put out dried corn on the cob for the squirrels. While there, they saw chickadees, a white breasted nuthatch, a squirrel, and tufted titmice. They also heard a hawk as they were hiking. Later, while watching the classroom feeders through our windows, they observed blue jays, chickadees, tufted titmice and even a woodpecker.

The children were delighted to learn so much about birds. They were on their way to becoming avian experts. Here is a small sampling of what they discovered this week. Did you know?

- You can identify birds by their size, color and sound.
- You can tell what they eat by the size of their beak.
- Peregrine falcons have sharp beaks and sharp talons.
- Peregrine falcons can fly at 240 mph.
- Blue jays are cousins of crows and ravens.
- Chickadees are cousins of tufted titmice.
- The spine of a feather is hollow.

As part of the Miquon community, the kindergartners share the important responsibility of caring for the Miquon environment. Happily, the kindergartners are charged with the duty of filling the feeders during the school year. Our group was more than eager to take on the responsibility of keeping the birds that live at Miquon well fed.

Through their daily experiences, the kindergartners became more aware of the world around them. They were in touch with the earth; its natural rhythms, its beauty and mystery. They built personal memories and stories that they will cherish for years to come. Hopefully, their experiences have also nourished a beginning understanding of their place in our dynamic, interconnected world.

Our Community Story
In September, as we began our year- long study based on the theme "looking through the window", we also set our gaze inward focusing on our newly formed kindergarten community. Of course, we spent a great deal of time and energy getting to know one another and Miquon. We shared information about ourselves through self- portraits, games, interviews, surveys and graphs, class books, and lots of conversation. We learned to read each other's names. We examined and celebrated our differences as well as our similarities. The fall and winter holidays provided opportunities to share and enjoy each other's family traditions and celebrations.

We began the process of building a strong and safe community by creating class guidelines that we all agreed to live by. We continued to work on these guidelines – examining and refining our ideas as our joint experiences dictated. Always, we strove to maintain our sense of community as we worked and played together. The children certainly grew in their ability to be flexible, inclusive and safe in their play.

Our Family Study
In late winter, we continued self- explorations through our family study. The children made new and exciting discoveries about themselves and their families as they peered through their "home windows". We began our investigations by thinking carefully about what makes a family:

Giovanna: People that you love are your family.
Ben: People that you know really well are your family.
Nieve: Families will give you presents on holidays and that's nice!
Pax: People you love the most are your family.
Sebastian: Cousins are part of your family. The people you live with are part of your family. Grandparents … Dempsey too!
Henry: You play with your family. Dad and I play Wild Kratts together in our Wild Kratts suits.
Camille: There's love that your whole family shares.
Nieve: Family is your aunts (like Brie), uncles, cousins. I have a step-great-grandpa that is 92.
Calvin: I have an auntie, an uncle, a grandpa, a grandma, a sister, a mom and a dad.
Zaden: Not everyone has a mom and a dad. Some people have two dads. Some people have two moms.
Giovanna: I have two dads and two moms.
Ali: I have a lot of people in my family. I have two homes. Dad has an apartment that he shares with Tito and Buddy. Leah and I live in that apartment too. Mom and Bells and some pet fish that we haven't named yet and a new dog that we haven't gotten yet and Leah and I live together.
Giovanna: I also live in an apartment with my dad and stepmom Alison and a house with mom, my stepdad Josh, Eden and Coors.
Marshall: There can be all kinds of families. Some families have different skin colors.
Lucas: Animals can have families too.
Harry: Family is someone you live with your whole life. An example would be my dad and mom, Bayleigh, Will and me … also two cats and six chickens.
Gio: Me and Daddy went to the pet store to get the biggest leopard gecko.
Gio: I take care of my sister. Mom and Dad give me directions and I have to do it! I like to watch TV with my family.
Marshall: People that you like to live with are your family. I live with Grace, Mommy and Daddy. When I am at home, I play in the basement with Grace.
Madison: Me and my sister Gracie have responsibilities to take care of my fish and dig. We take care of each other. That's being part of a family.
Jasper: When my daddy needs to go out, I go with him most of the time. I play with my brother Milo. Sometimes we all eat together.

Zoë: We have dinner as a group on Monday and Wednesday. There are special things I like to do - bake with my mommy (like cookies), go to museums together, take swimming lessons with Milo and Jasper.
Arden: Family is when people care about each other and love each other.
Lucas: Family is people who like and care about each other. They live in the same house and bring each other with them when they go out. If I want to go with my mother, she lets me.
Felix: Family is people who are related and care for each other. If one of them is sick, the others will try to keep him/her healthy. If you are not related, you can choose to be part of a family.
Zoë: If you are adopted, you may not get to choose your family. A way for a family to grow is to adopt a child.
Zoë: Some families are the same color and some are not.
Arden: You should always be proud of your family no matter what they do.
Giovanna: Help your family be strong. When they are sad, make them feel better.
Marshall: Stand up for your family. Give them courage if they need it.

We read a wonderful book entitled *When Jo Louis Won the Title.* It is the story of a small girl who is uncomfortable with her unusual name. When her grandfather tells her the history of her name, however, not only does she learn about the famous boxer Joe Louis, but a whole lot more about her family's past. Inspired by Jo Louis' story, the kindergartners gathered information from their parents about the unique stories behind their names. The children were quite excited to share the origins of their names. They were also very curious to learn the story of each other's name.

Each child also made a blank book, titled *When I Was Your Age*, to bring home to his/her family. Any family member who was older than the child (parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins) was invited to write down memories of his/her 5th or 6th year. The kindergartners listened with great interest to these family anecdotes. They enjoyed comparing their family stories to themselves – "My nana played hopscotch too – just like me." or to each other's stories – "Your daddy grew up on a farm and so did my mom."

Each child created a companion piece to *When I Was Your Age*. With kid-writing and detailed illustrations, each kindergartner described herself/himself in an *All about Me* book.

We read *When I Was Young in the Mountains*. This book is based on Cynthia Rylant's memories of her childhood spent in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia. Each child also told the story of a favorite family memory and illustrated it with care. With Sherry's help, the children created a paper quilt of their family stories.

On a Saturday afternoon in late April, we celebrated our important family work by hosting a Family Museum and Potluck. Each child's work – *When I Was Your Age* book, *All about Me* book, visual representation of his/her family, and framed portrait was beautifully displayed in our classroom. Each family was also invited to add photos, maps, memorabilia, etc. – anything that would help to tell the story of their family. The kindergartners and their families also drew themselves on blank pieces of our Family Jigsaw Puzzle, worked on our kindergarten family weaving, marked where they live and where their family originally comes from on a world map, and enjoyed our incredibly delicious potluck supper.

Mexico

In order to understand the complexities of another culture, a child must start with him/herself and work outwards. Each child comes to kindergarten with different experiences, background, and information. S)he must examine what it is that makes him/her unique, and what s)he shares in common with those around him/her.

Cynthia Adams – former Miquon kindergarten teacher

By spring, having spent much of the year in self exploration and community building, the kindergartners were ready to look outward. They were eager to learn about life in Mexico. What would a Mexican child see as s)he looked through a window?

The official beginning of our study began shortly after our return from spring break. However, we had really been thinking and talking about Mexico since early fall. Our first introduction to Mexico coincided with our study of the annual migration of the monarch butterflies. We learned that the eastern-central population of North American

monarch butterflies flies south into the mountains of Central Mexico. In the mountains, the monarchs congregate by the millions in forests, where they hang in huge orange clusters on the branches of sheltered conifer trees.

In early November, the kindergartners baked "dead bread" in celebration of el Dia de los Muertos. Meaning Day of the Dead, the holiday honors deceased loved ones. The Day of the Dead is one of Mexico's many holidays and fiestas that celebrate its rich cultural heritage. It is not a time of sadness, but a day to rejoice.

In December, we learned a bit more about Mexican culture as we read *The Legend of the Poinsettia* and *Nine Days to Christmas* (as part of our celebration of the winter holidays).

As we poured over our large collection of fiction and non-fiction books about Mexico, the kindergartners thought carefully about the many similarities and differences between their lives and the lives of Mexican children. We read many, many folktales. The children were especially fond of the tricksters Coyote and Rabbit. They also got a glimpse of the great Mayan and Aztec cultures through their creation myths and legends.

They learned to play a few games that Mexican children enjoy. Loteria, a game that is very similar to Bingo was great fun! On Loteria boards, there are pictures of everyday objects with labels in Spanish. Rather than calling out the actual name for the chosen object, the caller must give a clue. In preparation for playing Loteria, the kindergartners devised clues for the given objects and designed their Loteria boards. They enjoyed solving each other's clues in order to cover the pictures on their boards.

La Vibora de la Mar (the Serpent of the Sea) is similar to London Bridge Is Falling Down. Two children held hands to form the bridge. The rest of the group formed a line with each person holding the waist of the person in front. As they sang the sea serpent song, they wove around the playground and under the bridge. On the last line of the song, the children forming the bridge dropped their arms and captured a child.

Each child constructed his/her own balero, a traditional (and favorite) toy of Mexican children. It is a very simple toy consisting of a stick and cup which are connected by a string. The object of the toy is to catch the cup-like part on the end of the stick. We found the authentic balero from our collection to be quite a challenge (for older children and adults too!). While the kindergartners' version with a larger cup opening was still challenging, with practice it was actually doable and quite a bit of fun.

Esperanza was a special highlight of our studies. A cuddly stuffed replica of a young armadillo, Esperanza spent time with each child both at home and school. Each child and his/her family recorded the day's events in Esperanza's travel journal (as requested by Mama who eagerly awaited her return to Mexico).

The kindergartners delved into a study of traditional Mexican arts/crafts. They learned about the artistic techniques for many different art forms and perhaps more importantly, they learned the stories, beliefs, and traditions which fuel the artistic expression.

The Huichol people of Mexico live a life of magic and sacred mythology. They believe themselves to be that part of creation which entertains the gods. The Huichols express these feelings through their art. They are known world-wide for their yarn paintings. They melt beeswax in the sun and spread it over a piece of wood. Then they push brightly colored yarn into the wax to create images. We looked carefully at a few traditional Huichol yarn paintings. We wondered about the dream stories of the artist who created them. The kindergartners experimented with their own version of yarn painting using glue sticks, cardstock and various colors and thicknesses of yarn. They shared the stories of their yarn paintings with each other.

The Huichol Indians consider the Ojo de Dios or god's eye to be a talisman associated with the sun, rain and food. Fathers dedicate god's eyes to the gods in behalf of their children. Traditionally, just the "eye" or center is made when the child is born. Then with each successive birthday (up to age five), a section of yarn in a different color is added – a beautiful reminder of each year's celebration. The kindergartners quickly mastered the skills needed to create their own Ojo de Dios.

They also returned to their weavings with renewed fervor after listening to *Beneath the Stone,* the story of Leo, a young Zapotec child who learns to weave. Leo's weavings are sold at the market to help support his family. Many of the kindergartners' weavings became treasured gifts for family members and friends.

With Sherry's guidance, the children tried their hands at papel picado (pierced paper) – colorful banners made from cut tissue paper. They actually used metallic paper which was easier to handle. They made tissue paper flowers too. We used these beautiful decorations for our fiesta. In art class, the children worked with Anne to create four brightly colored papier mache piñatas.

We discovered the delightful story *Dream Carver* by Diana Cohn. *Like his father and his father's father before him, Mateo carves juguetes, the small wooden toys his family sells at fiestas. But secretly, Mateo dreams of magnificent goats as pink as bougainvillea with cactus green speckles, jackrabbits in orange capes with red and white flames and purple cats with corn yellow spots. When he tells his father how he wants to carve, his father disapproves. This is not the tradition Mateo had been taught. But Mateo cannot stop dreaming. And on the day of the next fiesta, Mateo brings his dreams to life for all to see.* Inspired by the story of Oaxacan woodcarver Manuel Jimenez, *Dream Carver* offers a simple message: follow your dreams.

We wondered how Manuel Jimenez carved his magical animal figures. We thought about the vivid colors and intricate patterns found on his beautiful woodcarvings. We also read *AbeCedarios: Mexican Folk Art ABCs in English and Spanish* and *Opuestos Mexican Folk Art: Opposites in English and Spanish.* The animals in these books are represented by the beautifully carved wooden sculptures of Manuel's grandsons, Armando and Moises Jimenez. Their wives Antonia Carrillo and Oralia Cardenas painted the glorious patterns and colors which adorn each piece.

We remembered a passage in *Dream Carver* which intrigued us. *When Mateo imagined a white-polka-dotted squirrel or an orange-striped gazelle gazing at the stars or a black and yellow-spotted frog bracing to spring, he could carve them all just like that! But what Mateo loved best of all was when he had no idea what to carve. He would sit and look at his woodpile until he sensed an animal waiting there for him.* So - we went searching throughout Monkeyland and our playgrounds for "the animals waiting there for us" . From our collection of branches, twigs, bark, and rocks, we created our own animal figures. They came alive with a little tempera and a lot of imagination! We hung them in the trees and bushes to dance in the breeze. They were a happy reminder to us to always follow our dreams!

We read *Frida* by Jonah Winter. *Frida enters the world. For little Frida, that world is Mexico. Her house is a blue house. It is in the town of Coyoacan.* So begins the story of Frida Kahlo's childhood and how it influenced her art. The kindergartners were quite taken with Frida's fierce determination and palpable artistic talent. They felt connected to her through the self-portrait studies they had completed earlier in the year. After looking carefully at a number of Kahlo's self-portraits, they enthusiastically began work on their third and final kindergarten self-portraits.

Cooking and eating Mexican cuisine was a favorite activity in the kindergarten this spring. Some of the foods we prepared were "dead bread", Mexican hot chocolate, guacamole, salsa, nachos, mole poblano, arroz con leche, Mexican wedding balls, and flan.

We celebrated Cinco de Mayo with games, stories, music, dancing and Mexican hot chocolate. A few weeks later, parents joined us for our fiesta. Together the children and their parents prepared a memorable meal, mid our festive decorations. After a quick change into their Mexican clothing, everyone joined Diego to enjoy some traditional songs and dances. Lunch followed – an authentic and delicious meal. Finally, it was time to break the piñatas - a joyous ending to a wonderful celebration.

Los Pollitos, one of our favorite traditional Mexican songs tells the story of a mother hen who takes good care of her baby chicks. Eager to take on the exciting responsibility of incubating a clutch of chicken eggs, we requested Sherry's assistance. "Farmer Sherry" introduced us to Welley the most docile of her hens. The children were amazed by her soft sleek feathers. Sherry also taught us all we needed to know in order to be good mother hens. She set us up with an incubator and one dozen eggs.

It was very exciting to anticipate the chicks' arrival into the world. The kindergartners were incredibly responsible "mother hens" turning the eggs three times a day, adding water to the trough when necessary, and periodically checking the thermometer. When we arrived at school on Monday morning, we discovered eight wet, exhausted chicks resting quietly in the incubator. Over the course of the day, four more chicks hatched. The kindergartners welcomed them into the world with numerous rounds of Los Pollitos. When we arrived at school on Tuesday morning, we were greeted by twelve fluffy yellow peeping chicks!

The children lovingly held the newly hatched chicks. They also eagerly advised visitors on the proper method for handling them. Each child kept a daily record of the chick hatching process in his/her Chick Journal. With illustrations rich in detail and observations recorded in kid-writing, the story of the chicks unfolded.

The morning after hatching day, we visited Sherry's backyard to meet her chickens. She has twelve hens living in a coop which she designed and built. She also has three black Spanish turkey chicks in an enclosure under an old shade tree. Once Sherry had given us a tour of her coops, she let the chickens out to search for insects in the grass. Each child also fed them a cupful or two of chicken scratch. We shared a quick snack and of course, a chicken story (*The Broody Hen)* before returning to our vans.

We enjoyed the enchanting folktale, *How Nanita Learned to Make Flan* and actually followed Nanita's recipe to make the traditional Mexican dessert. We all agreed that Nanita's flan was magically delicious! Luckily, the recipe called for twenty eggs - the exact number of eggshells needed to create a cascarone for each kindergartner.

Making cascarones is a springtime tradition in Mexico. The kindergartners made their cascarones by filling empty eggshells with confetti, sealing the ends with tissue paper, and painting the eggs with dabs of brightly colored tempera. During our final Morning Circle, the kindergartners gathered in a circle on the playground and on the count of three, gently cracked their eggs on each other's heads releasing a shower of confetti, a burst of good luck, and many wishes for a very happy summer.

ENDINGS

Amazingly the end of the year was upon us. We enjoyed our last days together, finishing projects, swimming in the pool, laughing and joking. We joined the Nursery for our end-of-year picnic, cleaned out those cubbies, and after saying our good-byes headed down the driveway for the beginning of summer vacation.

Not only have I enjoyed working with this remarkable group of children, I have also had the pleasure of working closely with the parents in our group. They came and worked in the classroom, accompanied us on field trips, shared family traditions and artifacts, made Mexican costumes, kept the lines of communication open, but most importantly, provided support at home for their children's interests and endeavors. Your efforts enriched us immensely. I extend a heartfelt thank you to all of you!

As always, our Miquon specialists enriched our learning and our lives. Half group times were often the highlights of our kindergartners' days thanks to their amazing creativity and skill. Thank you, Kate, Lisa, Amy, Anne and Diego for a terrific year!

This has been a full and exciting year. As always, I have felt truly blessed to have Sherry as my teaching partner. Her energy, creativity, and gentle spirit have been such a gift to our group. I am so glad that we will be working together again next year!

This group of kindergarten children grew into a real community. They chose to play, explore, and learn together. They truly enjoyed one another. I am pleased and proud to have worked with such a joyful, caring group of children.