

Rich, Elisa and Ted's Group

**first / second grade**

**Group Teacher: Rich Murray (September - January)**

**Elisa Rosenwinkel (February - June)**

**Assistant Teacher: Elisa Rosenwinkel (September - January)  
and Ted Boughter-Dornfeld**

## **THEMATIC STUDIES and SPECIAL HAPPENINGS**

Throughout the school year we have an approach that we employ with our group to introduce the equipment we use in the classroom, as well as to introduce our regular classroom routines. We call it the HOW Approach. Before the children use any tools or activities from the shelves for the first time, they ask us first, "May we use it?", and then, "How do we use it?" This gives us a chance to explain how to properly use an activity or tool, as well as how to use it properly with a large group in a room, and how to appropriately clean up and leave the area for the next person.

We put much effort into the development of a well-operating classroom, one that features appropriate structure and procedures, and at the same time affords the flexibility and freedom for children to explore and to express themselves within that structure. The children are the main operators of their own space. They are aware of where to get supplies, and how to use them. They are aware of how to act among a large group of children within their space. They are aware of the responsibility for taking care of themselves, their peers, and their environment.

### **Classroom Community**

Each week, children were assigned a new classroom job with a new partner, so that every day together they could see and act out their important contribution in the daily functioning of the classroom group. Children had a responsibility to be a contributing member in the daily Morning Meeting. There are a variety of ways they could take part, all of which build our classroom culture. We observed how different children approach these opportunities differently as the year progresses. A typical morning meeting included a handshake around the circle, reviewing the agenda for the day, making any important announcements affecting the day, job reports from all of the job pairs, and sharing by up to five children. Children would share something every day if they had the opportunity, so we had a chart where five children could share, and children were able to share one time each week, so everyone had a chance if they chose to share.

Another tool that helped foster community was our learning partners. We paired children together at the beginning of the year and these pairs worked together in a variety of ways throughout the year. They solved math problems, created pasta playgrounds, and designed their spring fair booth together as well as countless other activities.

When there was a birthday celebration, we connected it to the calendar (a classroom job), of course, and also to a larger sense of the passage of time and the passage of Earth through space. We have a small

sun surrounded by the path of the earth with the months of the year listed. We place a small earth sticker on the path and move it along as the year progresses. We also read the story On the Day You Were Born, by Debra Frasier, to each child who was having a birthday.

Community and building our community are always very important to our group each year. We started our year reading several titles to illustrate some aspects of community building, such as; Marley Goes to School by John Grogan, Splat the Cat by Rob Scotten, The Okay Book by Todd Parr and We Are All Alike...We Are All Different. We talked often about being ourselves and following what we like, and how to express our feelings. Some great titles we read on these subjects were: The Skin You Live In by Michael Tyler, All the Colors We Are by Katie Kissinger, Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes and ish by Peter Reynolds. The children completed several responses and projects related to these books. They created self portraits using using paint, craypas and torn paper. As a complement to their self portraits, each child wrote an acrostic poem to describe themselves. They also wrote a class version of The Okay Book describing all of the things that it's okay to do in our classroom. We talked often about making one's own decisions and to think about our actions before we act. A very funny book with a great message is If Everybody Did, by Jo Ann Stover. We read it to illustrate how our classroom might be if we did not think about our actions, at least a little bit.

We also shared Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst, and talked about how sometimes we can just be having a bad day, and sometimes we just need some time for ourselves. We have an area of our classroom called Australia, since Alexander always wanted to go to Australia, where children can go for a few minutes on their own if they need some time to regroup or to have some quiet time. Australia is located near our Peace Corner, and has some books, pillows, a couple of koala bear stuffies, and some pictures from Australia.

The Peace Corner was a very warm and inviting place for the children and visitors to our classroom. This area of our room has many books and stories about how to live in peace. Some of the titles include the following:

The Golden Rule by Ilene Cooper  
My Mouth is a Volcano by Julia Cook  
Nobody Knew What to Do by Becky Ray McCain  
How Are You Peeling by Saxton Freymann and Joost Elffers

Beside the collection of books, there were pictures of finger labyrinths that the children could follow, a mini Japanese sand garden and rake, a set of small dolls from Central America, and our collection of stuffies, all things that make the Peace corner comfortable and inviting. The peace corner is an area of the classroom that reflects and respects this important aspect of learning.

When conflicts arose between children, we used a tool that has worked very well over the past several years. Love and Logic is an approach that provides educators and parents with easy-to-learn skills that create

respect, responsibility, and good-decision making in children. Some basic principles of Love and Logic:

Adults set limits without anger, lecture, threats, or repeated warnings. We describe what we will do or allow rather than telling a child what he or she should or shouldn't do.

When children cause a problem, adults hand the problem back in loving ways.

We hand the problem back by replacing anger and lectures with a strong dose of empathy followed by the logical consequence.

The following guidelines are posted in our classroom:

*We will treat you with respect so you'll know how to treat us and everyone else.*

*Feel free to behave in a way that does not cause a problem for you, Rich and Elisa, or anyone else on the planet.*

*If you create a problem, we'll expect you to solve that problem in a way that doesn't create a problem for anyone else on the planet.*

*If you cannot or are unwilling to solve the problem, we will do something. it will depend on the unique individual and situation.*

*If we have acted in a way that you feel is unjust, please whisper, "I'm not sure that's fair" to one of us and we'll talk privately about it later (This may not change our course of action, but we are always open to calm, rational discussion of any matter.)*

Using these guidelines, we see the children really engaging in the thought process, which helps them to grow in responsibility and independence.

## **Snow**

In a year where there are 7 snow days and record levels of snow, it is almost impossible not to add snow to the curriculum. We read several winter books such as Winter Wood by David Spohn, Snowflake Bentley by Jacqueline Briggs Martin, Stranger in the Woods by Carl R. Sams II and Jean Stoick, and Owl Moon by Jane Yolen. While making paper snowflakes, we explored geometry. The children started with a piece of paper shaped like a hexagon, then through a series of folds, they changed the paper into a trapezoid, then a rhombus and finally a triangle. At that point, they started cutting patterns into their papers to create snowflakes, which we then used to decorate our windows. After reading the poem *What I Like About Winter* by Douglas Florian, we decided to build upon an adjective lesson and create some of our own snow poetry. While the children were in groups of 2 or 3, we gave them objects such as rocks or pine cones and asked them to

describe the objects without using its name. We asked them to think about how the objects, felt, sounded, smelled, and looked. After sharing their observations, we read the beautiful book, Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening, illustrated by Susan Jeffers. Then the children went outside to explore the snow and think of words or phrases to describe it. When they came back inside, they each wrote their observations on note cards, "crunchy, sparkly, like cotton balls" and then gathered in a circle to read them out loud. They quickly realized that their words created a poem, and they had fun changing their places in the circle and then rereading their words to change the poem. We then displayed the finished poem, *Snow*, as well as the children's illustrations of their words or phrases in our room.

### **Stories About Friendship**

Each year, the two first and second grade classrooms collaborate on a large project near the end of the year, very often a play. This year we performed Stories About Friendship, adaptations of beloved stories: Winnie the Pooh by A.A. Milne, Elephant and Piggie by Mo Willems, Frog and Toad by Arnold Lobel and George and Martha by James Marshall. In addition to learning their skits, the children all sang, *Count on Me* by Bruno Mars, *Three Little Birds* by Bob Marley and *Lean on Me* by Bill Withers. The children also dramatized Yo! Yes! by Chris Raschka and ended the performance with an original dance to *Nothing to Worry About* by Peter Bjorn. Our play preparation began with readings of all the lines by different children on different days allowing the children to hear all of the lines and to think about what role they might like to perform. Then the children make three choices of roles that they would feel comfortable with, and the teachers put together the cast. Everyone had at least one speaking line in the performance. Then we begin the work of rehearsing, blocking out how we will move on stage, learning songs and dances, and creating props, costumes, and backdrops. The culmination of all of this work was a wonderful show before a packed house in the Moore Building on March 11th. It was a really special night and the children were quite proud of their hard work!

### **Mythological Creatures**

The children had a strong interest in dragons and fairies, and the mythological creatures theme really grew out of their own interests. In the fall, we began reading the wonderful chapter book My Father's Dragon by Ruth Stiles Gannett. As the year progressed, we also read the next two books in the trilogy: Elmer and the Dragon and The Dragons of Blueland. When we returned from Spring Break, we began reading Igraine the Brave by Cornelia Funke. After reading a series of books where the main character was a boy, we thought that it was important to read a book where the hero was a girl. Igraine is a young girl who longs to be a knight and bravely sets out on an adventure in order to help her parents. The children have really enjoyed all of these read alouds and look forward to when we read them each day!

We also read many wonderful pictures books such as:

Finding Fairies Secrets For Attracting Little People From Around The World

by Michelle Roehm McCann & Marianne Monson-Burton

Everyone Knows What a Dragon Looks Like by Jay Williams

The Dragon and the Unicorn by Lynne Cherry

The Knight and the Dragon by Tomie De Paola

Argus by Michelle Knudsen

The Paper Bag Princess by Robert Munsch

Kate and the Beanstalk by Mary Pope Osborne

The Princess Knight by Cornelia Funke.

After reading Everyone Knows What a Dragon Looks Like, we used the same questioning technique from the fall conference week, but this time our statement was “No one knows what dragons look like.” The children worked within their table groups and generated questions such as: Do dragons have designs?, Do dragons have more than 2 wings?, and Do dragons have feathers? After they came up with a list of questions each child in the group put a sticker next to the question that they thought was the most important. These questions helped them as they designed their sketches of what they thought a dragon would look like. The final step in the project was to build a dragon with a wide variety of recycled materials based on their sketches. After weeks of preparation the children were thrilled to finally begin building and the room was filled with excitement. It was wonderful to watch them as they worked together to incorporate each other’s ideas. Their dragons have become welcome additions to our classroom!

One of the highlights of each week was when Ted read segments from Finding Fairy Secrets. After completing their dragons, the children started sketching their designs for their fairy houses. For this project, they chose to work alone or with a partner. After their designs were complete, they set out to build their fairy houses using natural materials in various places around our campus. Many happy mornings were spent hard at work building structures, making furniture and finding food for the fairies. The children were thrilled when their buddies joined them one afternoon to help them build. We’re sure that the fairies are quite happy with their new homes!

The children also carried our classroom theme into our booth for the Spring Fair. After deciding that we would have a ring toss for our booth, we decided that it should be a Mythological Creatures Ring Toss. The children worked with their learning partners to decorate the signs for our booth and to create unicorns, dragons and fairies that would decorate the cones for the ring toss. They were quite proud of their work and the booth proved to be quite popular!

## **Various Observances**

### ***Halloween***

Halloween is always a big day at Miquon! During Morning Meeting, we greeted each other with a “spooky greeting” and then we read the story The Ghost Eye Tree by Bill Martin and John Archambault, where a young boy and his older sister are sent to the end of town to get a bucket of milk, but as they walk down the lonely road, bathed in eerie moonlight, all the boy can think about is the ghost-eye tree. Of course, the highlight of the day is the costume

parade and the non-play performed by the teachers and staff. The children seemed to enjoy watching the performance of *Aesop's Fables* which even included singing and dancing!

### ***Thanksgiving***

For the short Thanksgiving week, we read several stories about the holiday. The first was Thank You, Sarah by Laura Halse Anderson, which follows the progress of Sarah Hale, whose relentless letters and 38 years of petitioning presidents, secured Thanksgiving's status as a national holiday. We also read, A Turkey for Thanksgiving by Eve Bunting, where Mr. and Mrs. Moose invite all their animal friends for Thanksgiving dinner and the only one missing is Turkey, and when they set out to find him, Turkey is quaking with fear because he doesn't realize that his hosts want him at their table, not on it. We also had our academic buffet, which included several math and language arts related activities the children can work on. This year we created thankful turkeys, and talked about things for which we were thankful at Thanksgiving.

### ***Valentine's Day***

For Valentine's Day, the children enjoyed making Valentines for their buddies and then getting together with them to exchange Valentine's. It was really wonderful to see how hard they all worked to create something special for their buddies. When they were finished, we read Mr. Nick's Knitting by Margaret Wild, which is a lovely story about two friends. We also read Chester's Way by Kevin Henkes. It's a great book about friendship and how challenging it can sometimes be to make new friends. After reading the book, we talked about the different ways that we could describe friends, and we explained the activity in which each child would write a compliment on each other's paper. We talked about how we weren't complimenting someone's appearance, but complimenting what makes someone special. Ted also generated a list of 100 adjectives that could describe friends and many children enjoyed matching words to their friends. The goal of the activity was to build on our friendship theme and to continue to build our classroom community.

### ***100th Day of School***

The 100th Day of School is always a favorite day for the children, and a great milestone in the school year. In the morning, each table of children collaborated on a 100 piece pattern block structure. Then they enjoyed working on a packet of activities that Ted compiled. Some of the choices included writing a list of 100 words, showing different ways to make 100 cents, writing about what you would buy with \$100 and thinking of things that are a part of our lives today that weren't around 100 years ago. And if that was not enough, we ran the annual obstacle course set up by Sherry. It was a great day!

### ***Buddies***

Again this year, we enjoyed getting to know our buddies in Lynn and Mark's group. Each Friday, we sit with our buddies during the assembly in the Moore Building, which the children just love. Throughout the year, the children enjoyed many different and interesting activities such as reading books, playing games, building with blocks, and even building fairy houses. We had a very special time with our buddies this year.

Not only were we buddies with Lynn and Mark's group, but this year we were also reading buddies with the three-year-old group at the Cooperative Nursery School in Mt. Airy. We traveled to their lovely school twice and had a wonderful time reading and playing together. It was wonderful for our developing readers to have an opportunity to read to younger children. Our children thought carefully about what books they choose to read. Not only did they have to choose a book that they could independently read, but they also wanted it to be interesting to a three year old. It was a really nice experience for all of the children.

### **Grandparents' Day**

This year, we had an excellent turnout for Grandparents' Day. This was a chance for the children to show off to their grandparents and special friends a lot of what we do in the classroom. This year, we gave the grandparents a menu of almost 100 items of interesting things about our room. The menu included sections on Daily Life, Fine Motor/Sensory/Spatial, Language, Nature/Science, Math, and the Peace Corner. Grandparents and children selected something off the menu that seemed interesting, and the children took them to it, or brought it over to them. The grandparents and the children had a wonderful time playing games, reading journals, seeing the children's work, and touring all of the many nooks and activities we have in the classroom. A highlight this year was Rich performing the word wall Opera Cheer!

### **The Block Area**

This group of children are builders and they loved the block area! The block area is clearly organized and labeled, allowing the children to take a greater responsibility of managing the block area. We were so impressed by the structures that were created collaboratively by the children.. We also found a book called First Shapes in Buildings by Penny Ann Lane, which illustrated how many famous buildings from around the world use basic geometric shapes in their construction. This provided an excellent backdrop for the children to get ideas for structures they might like to build. They built roads and garages for cars and houses for their stuffies. They embellished their structures with rocks, sea glass and sea shells. They also built amazing castles using special castle blocks and even a dragon and a unicorn!

### **The Loft**

This is the second year that the loft has been open for use from the very beginning of the school year. In the loft space we have a small couch, a rug, some blocks, several games and activities, and a white board and markers. The children each have two sticks that they can put on a chart to let

us know that they are up in the loft. So each child has two chances each week to go to the loft. The view from the loft gives a different perspective to the campus, particularly in winter. The children can see all the way to monkeyland, down to the lower field, and can even see the top of the office. The loft has proven to be a well used and fun space in our classroom.

### **Field Trip to Maple Acres Farm**

On Halloween morning, we took a trip to Maple Acres Farm with Sue, our science teacher, to cut zinnias from their wonderful garden. Unfortunately, an early frost killed the zinnias the day before we arrived. The children didn't seem to mind though! They had fun feeding the koi and they really enjoyed taking a hayride around the farm. At the end of the hayride, we fed the chickens and saw their cows and pigs.

### **Field Trip to the Arts Bank Theater**

As a lovely follow-up to our magic theme from conference week, in December, we saw the Enchantment Theatre Company's performance of *Aladdin and other Enchanting Tales* with Rossana and Marie's group. The performance was really interesting because the actors didn't speak. They told their stories through large puppets as well as the use of music and light. At the end of the performance, they answered the children's questions and explained how the puppets worked. It was a fun morning!

### **Field Trip to the Andorra Acme and "Waste-less lunches"**

At our winter in-service, the staff along with several board members had a charrette where we talked and dreamed about our vision for Miquon. One of the more practical things that was mentioned, was the idea of "waste-less" lunches. When we shared the idea with our children, they immediately became excited and started sharing ideas about how their lunches could be "waste-less". We had several great conversations where we thought about what we could compost, what we could recycle or what we could reuse. We also discussed the fact that different things are recyclable in different areas. For example, juice boxes can be recycled in Philadelphia, but not at Miquon. The children immediately suggested that we collect the juice boxes separately and then recycle them in Philadelphia. We started weighing our trash from lunch to see how much waste we generated and created several math problems in the process. One child said that they "were the best word problems ever"! In order to weigh the trash, we first put it in a bowl and the children quickly realized that we had to know how much the bowl weighed before we could know how much our trash weighed. Our goal was to have "Waste-less Wednesdays". While we never actually achieved our goal, our new awareness helped us to greatly reduce the amount of waste from our lunches. Both of the one/two groups were involved in this project and it may be introduced to the rest of Miquon in the future.

As part of our "waste-less" Wednesday lunches, we took a quick trip to the Acme in Andorra with Sue, our science teacher. The children noticed that the pudding containers from the hoagie sales were not recyclable and the point of our trip was to see if there are other puddings for sale that come in

recyclable containers. We were thinking that if we found another pudding for sale that was at a comparable price that we would ask Lynn and Mark's group to switch brands. We discovered that while there is pudding in recyclable containers, it is twice as expensive as the other pudding. We then followed up with letters to one pudding company asking them to explain why their recyclable containers were so expensive, and to the other asking them if they could switch the plastic in their containers to recyclable plastic.

### **Field Trip to the Philadelphia Museum of Art**

As part of our study of knights and mythological creatures we took a wonderful trip to the art museum. We spent an hour at the museum, and our tour guide led us on an "Around the World Trip". Our first stop was to the armor room where we saw armor that was from Germany. The children learned about the different pieces of armor and how a knight would wear them. Then they engraved symbols onto golden metal paper as if they were designing their own chest plates. We also saw some really exciting swords! Our next stop was to India where we saw a 1000 year old statue of Ganesha. However, the highlight of the trip was China. We visited a wonderful room filled with Chinese antique furniture, pottery and rugs that were decorated with dragons. The children had a great time on their dragon scavenger hunt! Our final stop was France, where we studied a painting by Henri Rousseau. It was a really lovely morning!

### **Fall Conference Week**

This fall, we joined with Marie and Diego for conference week and shared the theme of Magic. Before conference week began, we had all of the children generate a list of possible themes and then vote on them. Magic was the clear winner! Marie had recently traveled to the Progressive Educators Conference and learned about a wonderful questioning technique that can be used to build curriculum. We started by giving the children the statement "Magic is everywhere." They then generated a list of questions about magic that we used to decide which aspects of magic that we would explore during the week. We read many books about magic, sang magical songs, created our own spells and did several experiments. We enjoyed magical games of tag (Giants, Wizards and Elves) and we played some fun mathematical games, including a fun and challenging game of magic squares. We read Sylvester and the Magic Pebble, and Probuti and laughed and learned alongside Anansi, the tricky spider of West African folklore who used magic (or perceived magic) to make his way in the world. The highlight of the week, was a performance by professional magician, Steve Friedberg! On the last day, we had a magical scavenger hunt, and finished with some classic selected scenes from *Fantasia*, including the beloved Sorcerer's Apprentice. What a week!

### **Spring Conference Week**

For our spring conference week, our theme was building. We thought about what it means to build - what people build, who builds (people, kids,

adults, animals....) and started the week with an inquiry-based approach and a general question - What is building?

We were inspired by the books Building Up, My Dream Playground and First Shapes in Buildings - to get our minds thinking about how building with smaller materials in childhood can translate to building bigger things in adulthood (Building Up), or how dreaming up your own neighborhood vacant lot can actually come true (based on a true story - My Dream Playground). We also looked at how shapes play different roles in building, and how architects think about their design process with shapes (First Shapes in Building) .

Children worked with learning partners to draw their own playground design (a follow up to the charrette the week prior). They then used their design to build a playground out of pasta (uncooked!), wood and glue. They needed to develop skill working with the new material and the glue. At first, it felt difficult or impossible, but they stuck with it and soon solved many building challenges. They were very proud of what they created!

We thought about shapes in design, and looked for shapes in our Miquon buildings. We discussed how different shapes and formations are good for building different things. We also took a walk to see an interesting "octagon house" near Miquon on Harts Ridge. We enjoyed working with a visiting artist named Sarah Kolker who helped us to use 'beautiful junk' to build animals and animal habitats. We had conversations about where trash goes, and what we can do to recycle old materials that might end up in a landfill or floating in the middle of the ocean. We also spent time building with the Kindergarten, using a variety of different materials to create a huge collaborative project.

We learned the rhyme "this is the house that Jack built" which builds from one sentence to a long string of 12 sentences, which the kids memorized. The kids then created their own versions of the poem.

Finally, at different points throughout the week, we looked at a number of short videos or media that aimed to inspire our collective imaginations about building, and just how far humans have come in accomplishing creative design:

## **THE SCHOOL DAY**

Our typical school day started with the children writing a page in their daily journal and choosing their Just Right Book for homework, after which the children had shelf choice, where they could choose an activity from the shelves to work on. Next we had Morning Meeting, and then a whole group activity, which ranged from reading a story related to one of our studies or working with clocks, to correcting and editing the morning message or making a fact family with the date. Then we had snack and choice time, a favorite part of the day. After choice was community circle, where we discussed issues from choice, learned a new song, read a great story, or just chatted. Then we moved on to half-groups, where we would have small group language arts or math lessons. After choice and lunch, we settled down with some quiet time, which involved the students reading, writing, or drawing, or

doing some kind of quiet activity. Then we had writing workshop or math groups in the afternoons. We ended each day with Independent Reading Time (IRT). Learning for our various themes was interwoven into all parts of the day.

## **Language Arts**

### *Writing Workshop*

Children wrote daily during writing workshop, as well as in personal journals and in prompted writing tasks. Children followed a process writing format, which includes brainstorming a story idea by using visual tools such as a drawing or story frame, writing a rough draft related to the chosen topic and containing an appropriate amount of detail, revising and rewriting the rough draft to add more interest and details, asking a peer to edit our work, asking a teacher to edit our work, publishing our work by typing it up, creating a book, or writing the story in our best handwriting, and illustrating our final draft. We put our published pieces in our writing binders to be kept as an anthology of our writing for the year. It was a wonderful keepsake for the children at the end of the school year.

Our writing program is built around the following enduring understandings – those ideas we would like the children to take away from their writing workshop experience:

What I think or say can be written down.

What I write can be read and understood by someone else.

People communicate through writing.

I can develop skills that let people clearly understand my writing.

Writers use strategies to develop and organize their thinking.

Writers craft their writing to make it engaging and memorable.

I can use other writers as mentors for my own developing writing ability.

Through the year, we helped the children to know that writing conveys meaning, to generate writing topics independently, to demonstrate a growing knowledge of the concepts of print (left to right, top to bottom, margins, etc.), and to see themselves as authors. We started with a basic sentence that contains a noun and a verb. We then modeled how the sentence could be expanded with more detail and how the sentence could be made more interesting through the use of descriptive words. We encouraged the children to always be thinking like a reporter, and asking themselves who, what, where, when, why, and how as they were writing. We helped the children to sequence events in their writing, to use simple transitions such as first, next, after, and then, and to write in a way that allows the reader to experience the unfolding sequence of events.

In the spring, we followed a writing curriculum by Lucy Calkins and Abby Oxenhorn in order to implement writing the genres of Small Moments and Poetry. For our small moment memoirs, we began by reading mentor

texts such as A Chair for my Mother by Vera B. Williams and Owl Moon by Jane Yolen. The children used these texts as guides to help them as they choose a topic from their own life to write about. They then thought about how the author focused on specific details in an event and then how the author also stretched those details out in order to make their stories more interesting. Other mentor texts that we read included: Knuffle Bunny by Mo Willems and The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn. After writing stories for several weeks, the children were thrilled to invite their families to a publishing party where they proudly shared their books.

After reading many wonderful poems and writing several group poems it seemed quite natural for the children to begin writing their own poetry. At the beginning of the unit, the children spent time studying several objects and thinking of creative ways to describe them. They then used their descriptions to begin writing poems. They spent many days rewriting their poems as they thought about line breaks or the rhythm of the words. The children were quite invested in their writing and enjoyed sharing their poems with each other.

During the school year we also practiced our handwriting, with the Handwriting Without Tears program. There are various types of letters that we cover - the descending letters (the letters that go below the line) are g, j, y, p, and q; the magic c letters (starting with a c) are a, d, g, o, and q; and the diver letters (dive down, swim up, and over) are b, m, n, p, r, and h. We practiced handwriting one to two times each week, and this year handwriting was an integral part of our writers' workshop.

### *Poetry*

Poetry played a large role in our language arts program this year. Each week or so we would chose a poem, write it on a large piece of paper and read it out loud as a group. We would discuss the words in the poem: Did they rhyme? Were any of them word wall words? Did we notice any spelling patterns? And we would also close our eyes and listen careful to the words, letting them create images in our minds. The children loved when we would also dramatize the poems! Finally after analyzing the poems, the children would glue a copy of the poem into their poetry journals and then illustrate it. They would then take their poetry journals home that night instead of their Just Right Book. We discovered that we really liked the rhythm and style of Douglas Florian's poems and most of the poems that we studied this year were written by him. Most of the poems that we chose were from these books: Autumblings, Monster Motel, Handsprings, and Poem Runs. The children also really enjoyed Shel Silverstein and we read many of the poems from Where the Sidewalk Ends.

In the spring, the school had a poetry assembly and our group proudly recited their original poem *Choice Time*. Over the course of many morning meetings, Ted helped the children to really think about their favorite aspects of choice time. They created lists and much like the process of writing *Snow*, the changed and moved the words to get them just write. Ted has a wonderful way of writing poetry and the children enjoyed the process of

creating the poem as well as the final poem itself. After performing it at assembly, they also added it to their poetry journals.

### *Wilson Foundations*

We continued using the Foundations program, which is part of the Wilson Literacy program. This is a phonics based program that helped the children with the building blocks of reading. Even our more experienced readers benefited from this instruction by filling in any blanks they may have existed in a child's skill set. The key areas we worked in this year were Phonological Awareness – the understanding that spoken language consists of parts: a spoken sentence consists of words, a spoken word consists of separate syllables, and syllable consists of separate sounds, or phonemes. We learned to blend, segment, and manipulate sounds in words with up to six sounds in a syllable. There are six main syllable types that are included in most words – closed (cat), vowel-consonant-e (lake), open (me), r-controlled, (car), vowel digraph/diphthong (town), and consonant-le (table). We cover four of the syllable types in first and second grade. We begin with closed syllables, then move on to vowel-consonant-e syllables, then to open syllables, then to r-controlled syllables. The words the children learn to decode become more complex as we add the various syllable types. We also become very adept at recognizing and distinguishing between digraphs (ch, sh, th, wh, ck), and blends (bl, pr, st, etc.). Our main method of helping us decode is our finger tapping procedure – one tap for each phoneme or sound in a syllable. We work with several tools including magnetic letter boards, wipe off boards for dictation of words and sentences, and letter/sound cards for blending sounds. This program is designed to employ explicit and systematic instruction in these areas, with lots of repetition of the skill we are learning, and quick feedback for both correct responses, as well as errors, during lessons.

### *Self-Selected Reading*

The children chose what they would like to read and various ways in which they could respond to their reading. We introduced the children to all kinds of literature through read alouds. We have our library sorted by topics so the children can choose what they would like to read about. We helped them to determine which books are just right for them, so the reading is enjoyable and can be done independently. Teacher conferences were held in order to discuss the reading with the child and help to make future selections. We had two self-selected reading activities called IRT (Independent Reading Time, which is silent reading alone with a just right book), IRT Any Book (Independent Reading with the child's choice of book, and ShRT (Shared Reading Time, which is sharing a book with a friend or small group). This year we added some homework to the self-selected reading time. The children chose a just right book that they would like to read at home. They would note the date and the title of the book in their Just Right Book journal. We would ask the child to read a little of the book aloud for us, and then we would give them a comprehension question to think about and answer after they read at home.

### *Word Wall*

The goal of the word wall work was to introduce a variety of words to support and supplement the other spelling and word building strategies that explore phonological awareness, spelling patterns, spelling-sound relationships and sight vocabulary. Each week five new high frequency words were introduced. The children attended to the visual cues of the words by finger spelling and discussing the letter patterns and then recording the words in their literacy journals. From there, students found and highlighted the words from the master list at the back of their journals. Finally, children had repeated exposure to the words from the previous weeks using the word jar, playing word wall detective, rainbow writing, word train, sentence building, body spelling, etc. The "words of the week" were also integrated throughout the week for reinforcement. Near the end of the year, we added cheers for the words when new words were introduced. We would introduce a new word, and then have a movement and cheer to go with it. Some of the favorite cheers were the fireworks cheer, the roller coaster cheer, the clam cheer, and the opera cheer. This added a different modality to the learning of our word wall words each week.

### *Guided Reading*

In small groups of four to six, children met with Rich, Elisa or Ted weekly to read texts at their instructional reading level, in other words, reading material that could be read with some teacher guidance and support. The instructional focus varied according to the collective needs of the group. Some readers focused on building sight vocabulary and phonics skills, while others, who needed to hone fluency, regularly engaged in reader's theater. The more experienced readers often read the same text independently but then came together, much like an adult book group, to share interpretations, make predictions and connections, while being encouraged to provide evidence from the text to support their conjectures. In the very beginning, the emergent readers learned to take "picture walks" as we previewed the book to access prior knowledge while becoming familiar with new vocabulary. Our early readers benefited from repeated exposure as it helped them become more confident and competent. With many groups, we previewed potentially challenging vocabulary, while attending to letter patterns, prefixes and suffixes. Different groups experienced different books, varying from non-fiction to fiction (from Fountas and Pinnell), multicultural literature (Bebop Publishers), short folk tales and a myriad of poetry. With all groups, we focused on the construction of meaning, while building upon the discrete reading skills.

### **Mathematics**

Math in Focus Singapore Math was the mathematics program we based our work on this year, and we followed this program as our scope and sequence. We also used materials and lessons from various sources, including the Everyday Math Program, Harcourt Math, McGraw-Hill Math, and

Investigations. We integrated lessons from both the first and second grade manuals to meet the various needs of the group. The main thrust of our instruction this year involved number sense skills in the following areas: comparison, skip counting, place value, money, addition and subtraction, geometry, measurement, data and very early algebra concepts. Number sense skills included reading and writing numbers, ordering and comparing numbers, place value, skip counting by 2's, 5's and 10's, and determining whether a number is even or odd. Money skills included recognizing coin values, making change, and calculating money amounts. Addition and subtraction skills included knowing basic facts, two digit addition and subtraction, addition of three single digit numbers, and fact families. Many of our math centers were related to addition and subtraction. Geometry skills included recognizing symmetry and knowing the names and shapes of various polygons. Measurement skills included measuring using rulers and other objects, time on an analog clock, and calendar information – days, weeks, and months. From time to time, we practice making graphs by having data day, where we created a pool of data, maybe favorite ice creams, then built a bar graph and analyzed the data on the graph. We even dabbled in some probability, mainly by discussing the chance of something happening given a set of data. We used a bag with colored beads to see what was likely or not likely, to be chosen on each pick.

We would often play games with the children as a fun way to reinforce skills. Wake Up Giants was very popular, where the children rolled two dice, added them, and then lifted tabs (giants) for the digits to make the total rolled. Tenner is another game where we practiced making tens using a standard deck of playing cards. One child chooses a card, if it is a ten or face card, it is kept, if not, it is placed on the board. Play continues, and if a card can be combined with a card already on the board to make a ten, the cards are kept, and the game ends when no more cards can be used. Set is another popular card game. It uses 4 different characteristics in three different ways to create sets. Even though it is quite challenging, the children really enjoyed playing and would yell out "Set!" when they thought that they had found a set!

Besides our regular math groups, we completed other math lessons during our morning meeting time. A major job each day is learning about the day. Three classroom jobs were involved with our daily calendar activities – Calendar, Days of School and Money, and the Weather. The calendar job involved updating the date, and sliding our yesterday, today, and tomorrow cards to the correct days. The days of school and money job involved putting coins on the chart showing how many days we have been in school, adding to and counting the sticks for the day of school, and updating the sentences for Yesterday was \_\_, Today is \_\_, and Tomorrow will be \_\_. The weather job involved checking the sky and noting the weather, and reading the digital thermometer for the outside temperature, and the regular thermometer for the inside temperature. These three jobs are reported on during our morning meeting each day.

At least one day each week, during morning meeting, we work with clocks. We usually write a morning message that lists several parts of our day along with the digital times that we have those parts of the day. We use small

analog clocks to show the various times as we move through the school day. We also have data days from time to time. We start with a blank graph and a question with several possible choices for answers. A question was: What vowels are in your first name? Another question was: Which pet would you like to have, a troll, a dragon, a fairy or a unicorn? We built the graph from our collected data and then analyzed what we made. We talked about which choices had most, or which choices had the least, how many more did one choice have over another, and how many choices were made.

Usually one day each week we would have math centers to insure that these skills were not learned only once and then not regularly reinforced. These math centers were published by Marcy Cook Math and included twenty activity cards in each center covering a wide range of math concepts including addition, subtraction, missing addends, fact families, money, time, shapes, real world situations, and basic number sense. Here is how the math centers worked. The children had number tiles from 0 to 9, as well as tally sheets for the math centers on which they were working. The children survey the activity card and use each of the number tiles only once to make the entire card work. Then a teacher or parent helper check the work, and mark the tally sheet for the activity card. The children are usually working on from three to four centers at any given time. Besides the basic math skills, children were learning logic skills including trial and error and using known information to figure out the problem at hand. Often we had parent helpers come in to assist the children in the completion of the activities, if needed, and to keep the process of checking completed work moving along. We appreciated very much our parent helpers during math centers.

Literature also played a role in our math curriculum. We would often begin a math lesson by reading a related book such as: Candy Counters by Lisa McCourt, Only One by Marc Harshmann, A Place for 0 by Angeline Sparagna LoPresti, One Grain of Rice by Demi, or Elevator Magic by Stuart J. Murphy.

The focus of our math curriculum is for math lessons to be interesting, hands on with lots of manipulatives being used, and to be meaningful for the children. Our goal is that the children have a good sense of number by the end of their time with us to carry forward to their future math work.

## **IN CLOSING**

This was a wonderful year in large part to the wonderful group of children, but also because of the level of parent involvement in our classroom. Thank you all for your support throughout the year. We would like to thank our class parents, Danielle Stillman, Matt Utterback, Ariadne and Jon Green. We'd also like to thank Lisa Zahren for being an unofficial class parent after the Green family moved back to New York. Math centers and writing workshop are rich but busy parts of our day and we'd like to thank Lisa Zahren (Theo's Mom), Pam Heller (James's Mom) and Tammy van Steenburgh (Sasha's Mom) for often helping us out. A special thank you also goes out to Pam Heller and Meg Lewis (Angelo's Mom) for helping out the day that the children made their dragons. We had several parents come in

this year for a special activity, or to make some special presentations to the children. Danielle Stillman, (Leila's Mom) came in to talk about Hanukkah with the children, and Jessamyn Kear (Graelyn's Mom) came in to read a snowman story and share snowman treats with the children. We'd also like to thank Elena Casanova-Ghosh (Bella's Mom) for baking so many delicious batches of muffins for the children's snack. We had a lot of fun on our field trips this year and we'd like Elissa Koljonen (Niko's Mom), Leslie Cahill (Colin's Mom), Jen Bradley (Charlie's Mom) and Lisa Zahren for being drivers and chaperones. A special thank you goes out to Jen Bradley for organizing the wonderful Story Book Ball. The children had a wonderful time dressing up as beloved characters and then dancing the afternoon away in the Moore Building!

We would especially like to thank the children for their flexibility and good humor throughout the year. This was a special year because of Rich's sabbatical and while the children missed him, they handled the transition well. The weather added another element to the year, and our many snow days, often frigid temperatures, and several days without heat proved just what a flexible bunch these children are. They are also very caring and spent many community meetings listening to each other as they worked together to solve problems. They were a delight to learn with and we hope you have a wonderful summer!