

Toni and Sherry's Group

Kindergarten

2013-2014 Curriculum Report

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OUR GROUP

As part of our study of West Africa, the kindergartners learned to play the traditional Akan rock passing game, Oboo Asi Me Nsa. The children sat in a circle and passed their stones counterclockwise in a particular rhythmic pattern. They practiced placing the stones carefully in front of the next child in the circle while maintaining a steady beat. Once the rhythmic passing pattern was comfortably in place, the children also sang the lyrics.

Oboo Asi Me Nsa is a game of precision and accuracy in rhythm and motion. The children quickly surmised that group focus and cooperation were vital in order to master this game. They rehearsed the various components of the game, noticing and describing actions which brought them closer to their goal. As they incorporated their observations into their practice, the kindergartners increased their level of coordination and skill.

On Market Day, the culminating event for our study of West Africa, the children shared Oboo Asi Me Nsa (along with a few other West African songs and games) with their families. Needless to say, they performed beautifully. The audience was most appreciative and more importantly, the kindergartners were thoroughly pleased with their collective effort. They recognized that together they had mastered complex material and created a truly enjoyable experience for themselves.

I chose to share this vignette because it illustrates so beautifully the thoughtfulness, creativity and cooperation which the kindergartners brought to their work and play. The ability to set aside individual and competitive concerns and unite for a common purpose was a real strength of this kindergarten group.

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 ten girls and nine boys: nine children were newcomers to Miquon and ten were already seasoned Miquon kids.

Clearly, the large 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 our kindergartners had developed: *We take care of ourselves. We take care of each other. We take care of our environment.* The children grew tremendously as they grappled with the important work of building a healthy community. 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 for and understanding of each other and happily coalesced into a strong, vital community.

This group loved to play together and we were pleased to see a great deal of inclusive friendly play. Communal play, ever changing combinations of children, and a general feeling of social success seemed to permeate the lives of the kindergartners each day.

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 promoted 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, What's My Rule? 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 hot dog stand, a maze for Marigold and Squeaks, a rocket ship, a fort, a cozy home for stuffies, and a royal castle. 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, Knife and Fork, Vampire Tag, Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich, Santy Claus and Brothers Beyond, and The Mudball Company 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, bird houses 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 PE, Music, Science, Art and Library. 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 West African folk tales we read, especially those told about Kwaku Ananse, the spider/man from Ghana. The kindergartners also happily anticipated story time on Friday mornings because they knew that Julia would arrive with the most hilarious stories. She read with great comic flair sending them into paroxysms of laughter. Thank you Julia!

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, A Forest of Stories – Magical Tree Tales from Around the World* and our collection of *Anna Hibiscus* stories.

Definitely one of the most exciting developments in our classroom this year was our relationship with Sarah and Sara's group as Reading Buddies. Each kindergartner was matched with a third/fourth grade child who was his/her buddy for the entire school year. On Tuesday afternoons just as Rest Time ended, each older child joined his/her kindergarten buddy to share some good books. It was gratifying to watch the buddies respond to each other with such pleasure. The kindergarten children were attentive listeners obviously enjoying both a fine story and the company of their good friends. Throughout the year, the kindergartners and their buddies worked and played together in many ways ... pumpkin decorating, holiday celebrating (in general), author/illustrator sharing, playground frolicking, and curriculum sharing. The kindergartners 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 multi-sensory 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 uppercase 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 direction skills.

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! During National Poetry Month (April), Tammy inspired the kindergartners to write a collaborative poem. They had noticed that she had posted a poem about fish near our pond. After reading it, they wanted to post one too. Amy and the fifth and sixth graders also began to place poems in unexpected places. Poems were popping up everywhere! The kindergartners decided to write about Marigold and Squeaks. After composing the verses, they hung their poem on the huge maple tree in the red playground. The kindergartners also shared their original poem during our Poetry Assembly.

Guinea Pigs

Cute and cuddly,
little and furry.
So hairy, they shed,
and run into their houses
when scared.

Marigold and Squeaks like to eat apple cores.
They make so much noise all of the time.
They squeak and squeal and squeak and squeal,
especially Squeaks.
They scatter their food
whenever they eat.
They are so cute.

I wonder if they like it when we pet them?

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 Adire resist drawings were exceptional examples of their proficiency with pattern. We spent quite a bit of time examining and exploring patterns as we studied West Africa. We marveled at the intricate designs created in their textiles – Kente cloth, Adire cloth and mud cloth to name a few. Some children also tried replicating patterns similar to those found on the colorfully painted mud houses of West and South Africa. 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 Dogs and the Birds (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 nineteen 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

Story, our yearlong thematic study has been the thread that tied together the various strands of our work and play.

A Story! A Story! Tell me a story ...

Five and six year olds are storytellers. They understand that everyone and everything has a story. They understand that stories can teach powerful lessons. They understand that stories have value in connecting people to one another.

Five and six year olds are incredibly curious about their world. They have many questions. They are eager to investigate, make hypotheses, and experiment with their ideas. The Miquon campus provided our kindergartners with endless opportunities to observe, wonder, play, discover, and create their stories.

What did the kindergartners discover? What stories did they create? They turned over rocks and logs to find pill bugs, spiders, earwigs, velvet mites, beetles, ants, newts and garter snakes. They sat quietly at

the Walbridge pond watching the goldfish and frogs that live there. They caught salamanders and crayfish in the creek. They searched for caterpillars on the underside of leaves. The kindergartners delighted in watching the goldfinches, cardinals, chickadees, sparrows, tufted titmice, mourning doves and woodpeckers that routinely visited our feeders. They were thrilled to occasionally sight a chipmunk scurrying among the rocks.

They sorted fall leaves and tried to identify them. They made leaf rubbings. They collected seeds of all kinds. They climbed trees and rested in their leafy branches. They planted milkweed seeds in our garden. They built dams in the creek. They learned about stinging nettle and its antidote jewelweed. They gathered goldenrod, poke berries and walnuts to produce natural dyes for wool yarn. They made snow angels and built snowmen - snow forts too. 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 planted a vegetable garden in our raised beds. Our group looked closely at the variety of insects they captured on the playground. They planted pine trees, crabapple trees, and red dogwood bushes with Paco. They built dams in the creek. They sipped sweet honeysuckle nectar. They also created mud pies, sand structures and delicate fairy homes.

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.

To complement the children's many outdoor investigations, we also brought Miquon's natural environment into our classroom.

Tree Study

In September, we began a year-long study of trees. We were fortunate to have a large selection of non-fiction books and children's literature to support our tree investigations. (Thanks Amy!) We also had the Miquon campus at our doorstep, and of course, it was our most valuable resource. As a first step, we paid close attention to the many trees within our boundaries. The kindergartners collected interesting specimens to bring back to the classroom for further investigation. They generated a list of questions to guide us as we embarked on our tree study.

Perhaps for many kindergartners, the most engaging aspect of our look at trees was the opportunity to choose a tree for a year-long observation. Each child selected a tree which was located either on the kindergarten playground or in nearby Monkeyland. Through sketches, their writing, and actual specimens, the children recorded their observations in their tree journals. They sketched their trees in the fall, winter, early spring, and just at the end of the school year. They collected seeds from their trees, made leaf and bark rubbings, measured the circumference of the trunk, and sketched the buds. They searched for evidence of animal and insect life on and around their trees. They checked on their trees regularly and excitedly shared any changes they had discovered. Many a parent has made the trek into Monkeyland to meet his/her child's tree.

Apples

We delved into a study of apples and apple trees. We prepared for our trip to Peace Valley Orchards by reading a variety of non-fiction books on apples. On a lovely morning in late September, we traveled to the orchard 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 kindergarten had picked 170 pounds of apples!

Well ... We counted the actual number of apples that we picked – 563. We held a taste test to determine which variety of apple was our favorite. We graphed the results. We munched on apples for snack for days on end. We made delicious apple sauce. We shared a basket or two of apples with the Nursery. We ate apples with honey. We baked the most scrumptious apple crisp. And we still had apples! We sent a basket of apples to the staff room. We made spicy apple butter and home-made English muffin bread to share with our Reading Buddies. We baked a luscious apple pie and delectable apple muffins. Finally, we were down to one basket of apples – enough to share with the animals that live here at Miquon. We wondered who might gobble them up - maybe some raccoons, skunks, groundhogs, mice or perhaps, rabbits, opossums, squirrels, deer or chipmunks. Although we will never know who enjoyed our apples, we do know that they disappeared overnight!

Dyeing Wool

In early fall, we hiked throughout the Miquon campus to gather walnuts, pokeberries and goldenrod. We used these ingredients to create 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?* by Lindsay Barrett George to introduce 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?*, each quarter group then created and illustrated their particular animal's story using information gleaned from their research.

Tapping Sugar Maples

In late winter, we learned about tapping maple trees and making maple syrup. We read Native American legends that explained how sweet maple sap was discovered and maple syrup produced. We also read picture books and non-fiction books to round out our maple sap to syrup know-how.

We tapped the two large sugar maples that border the wood chip field. The kindergartners were thrilled to see the first trickle of sap dripping from the spile into the empty bucket. They were amazed by the large quantity of sap collected over a week's time. They helped to strain the sap to ready it for sugaring off. It was incredibly exciting to watch the sap boiling down and slowly transforming into syrup. We filled our mason jars with the golden syrup and happily refrigerated them in anticipation of our pancake celebration.

The day before our joint nursery/kindergarten pancake party, we held a maple syrup comparison test. We compared our pure maple syrup (sample A) with store bought pancake syrup (sample B). The children compared their samples noting the differences in color, aroma and taste. They recorded their observations and hypothesized about which sample was our pure maple syrup.

Together with the Nursery, we whipped up a batch of scrumptious buttermilk pancakes. We all helped to make the huge stack of pancakes sweetened with our pure maple syrup quickly disappear ...

YUM! Luckily, we had syrup left over - so the following week, we made and enjoyed french toast sweetened with Miquon maple syrup. Finally, we made fried matzoh and drizzled the last of our syrup on top. It was scrumptious!

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 three feeders hanging just outside our 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.

Author Study of Leo Lionni

With prose and pictures, author-illustrator Leo Lionni speaks to the heart, mind, and conscience of the child. Woven in a rich tapestry of color and design, his stories amuse, educate and inspire. More than a simple picture book, each of Lionni's tales is a work of art with a message and a mission for young readers. These lines found in the forward of *Teaching with Favorite Leo Lionni Books* confirmed my thoughts about his work. As I often do, I returned to Leo Lionni and his brilliant stories as an avenue for our important work with social/emotional development. So – upon our return from winter break, we embarked upon an author study of Leo Lionni.

While enjoying wonderful fables such as *Little Blue and Little Yellow*, *Swimmy*, *Frederick*, *The Biggest House in the World*, *Fish is Fish*, and *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse*, the kindergartners were challenged to take what they could and apply it to their lives. We provided extension activities to further engage the children in Lionni's tales and to promote additional opportunities for work with problem solving, conflict resolution, and handling emotions. The kindergartners also employed familiar skills such as graphing, writing and critical thinking as they delved into the vibrant world of Leo Lionni's tales.

“You may have asked yourselves, when you saw my books: birds, worms, fish, flowers, pebbles ... what about people? Of course my books, like all fables, are about people ... My characters are humans in disguise and their problems and situations are human problems, human situations. The game of identifying, of finding ourselves in the things around us is as old as history. We understand things only in terms of ourselves and in reference to ourselves.” - Leo Lionni

The children thoroughly immersed themselves in Lionni's deceptively simple fables. By reflecting on their own interpretations and creating ways to communicate their thoughts and feelings effectively, they discovered themselves in his characters. Through *Swimmy*, *Pezzetino*, *Tico*, *Frederick* and other characters, the kindergartners explored themes of identity, friendship, conflict resolution, and the essential human needs to create and to belong.

Our kindergartners listened to Lionni's tales with open hearts and open minds. They wondered, questioned, debated and absorbed the important ideas which emanate from the pages of his books. Through their deep connections to Lionni's fables, our children created and experimented with their own important ideas. One of the themes that emerged as the kindergartners explored Lionni's fables was the idea that many of his characters are heroic. The children delighted in discovering the hero in each story and describing the characteristics which define his/her heroism. Coincidentally, we received an invitation from the fourth grade class of Plymouth Meeting Friends School to attend their circus performance. The theme of this particular performance was Heroes. We could not resist! Off we went ... and we were very glad that we did. The storyline of their performance mirrored the important messages that the kindergartners were already exploring. (The circus itself was quite magical too.)

Leo Lionni was a great source of inspiration for our quarter groups as they developed their fictional stories about the bat, raccoon, opossum and skunk – the woodland animals they had researched earlier in the year. Each quarter group developed a plan for their story, brainstorming the characters, setting, problem, and possible outcomes. They took turns building the story; working from each other's ideas and checking in occasionally with their original plan. This was challenging work and each group worked through the process a little differently. We ended up with four unique and amazing stories; *Those Darn Raccoons*, *The Story of Mama's Good Save*, *The Bat's Adventures*, and *Lost*. The children in each quarter group shared the job of illustrating their text. We bound their stories into four accordion books. We invited kindergarten parents and our Reading Buddies to help us celebrate the storyteller in each of our children by attending an Author's Tea. We thoroughly enjoyed sharing the four stories, and then celebrated with an afternoon tea – (actually kindergarten-made lemonade, fresh mango, and tea biscuits). It was a deeply satisfying and delicious ending to our study of Leo Lionni.

Our Community Story

In September, as we began our year long study based on the theme A Story! A Story! Tell me a story ... we focused on our newly formed kindergarten community. We spent a great deal of time and energy getting to know one another and Miquon. We shared our individual stories through self-portraits, games,

interviews, surveys and graphs, class books, and lots of conversation. We learned to read each other's names. We worked to build a strong and safe community by creating class guidelines that we agreed to live by. We examined and celebrated our differences as well as our similarities. The fall and winter holidays provided opportunities to learn and enjoy each other's personal ways of celebrating. As we worked and played and celebrated together each day, we created our dynamic communal story.

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

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 West Africa. They were eager to hear its stories.

West Africa

Our study of West Africa began shortly after our return from spring break. As we poured over our large collection of fiction and nonfiction books about West Africa, the kindergartners thought carefully about the many similarities and differences between their lives and the lives of West African children. We focused on the important role of community and family in the life of African children.

We read many, many folktales. The children were especially fond of the roguish trickster, Ananse the spider. They were also fascinated by the many *pourquoi* (how and why) tales from African mythology which explained why animals have particular characteristics or behaviors. Inspired by the African storytelling tradition, each kindergartner created an original story. S/he then added accompanying illustrations and an appropriate title. These fabulous stories appeared in this year's edition of Miquon Grass.

The kindergartners learned to play a few African games—Oware (Mancala), Achi and Da Ga. They made their own Mancala and Achi boards to share with their families. The kindergartners discovered that West African kids play lots of the same games they do (or variations) such as hot potato, cat's cradle, hopscotch, jacks, and checkers. They also play a different version of duck, duck, goose. They do gymnastics, jump rope, and play with bottle caps. Just as our kindergartners love to build and create things with beautiful junk and lots of natural materials, West African children also repurpose available materials to create their own kind of fun.

The kindergartners learned about musical instruments, singing games, and drumming. They tried their hand at *adire*; a technique for resist/dyeing fabric. They returned to their weavings with renewed fervor after examining the exquisite patterns in Kente cloth. They created West African inspired bowls in art class. The children also constructed stools after noticing that it is a common piece of furniture in West African homes. The kindergartners were interested to learn that in some African villages, children carry their stools to school each day.

Kwame was a special highlight of our studies. A cuddly stuffed replica of a young African elephant, Kwame spent time with each child at school and at home. Each child and her/his family recorded the day's events in Kwame's travel journal (as requested by Maman, his mother who eagerly awaited his return to the preserve in Burkina Faso).

We read *Wangari's Trees of Peace*, a truly inspirational story about environmental activist, Wangari Maathai. She founded the Green Belt Movement to restore the forests which had been cut down in her native Kenya. She enlisted local women to help her plant indigenous trees. By 2004, thirty million trees had been planted in thirty African countries. Maathai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 because of her contribution to world peace through the Green Belt Movement. (In African traditions, a tree is a symbol of peace.) Our kindergartners were moved by this young woman who loved trees, mourned their loss, and helped to reforest her home. We agreed that we wanted to plant a tree in her honor. Happily, Paco had enough seedlings available so that each kindergartner was able to plant his/her own tree. They shared the privilege of planting pine trees, crabapple trees, and red dogwood bushes – nineteen in all - in the kindergarten playground and Monkeyland.

Our dear friend, Mariama Koroma visited us to share stories about her childhood in Liberia. She described her homeland so vividly that the children could visualize this beautiful faraway land. She spoke of her home life, the marketplace, favorite games and other pastimes. (Ask her to tell you about her encounter with a lion.) Mariama also brought her drum. The children were mesmerized by her drumming for a bit, but then they just had to get up and dance to the enticing beat.

Mimi, Tati's mom and an artisan baker worked with the kindergartners to make African flatbread for our Market Day celebration. The children rolled out the dough until it was very flat and thin. They sprinkled sesame seeds and a pinch of sea salt over the top. Mimi took it home to bake. Surprisingly, as the bread bakes it puffs up (sort of like a puffer fish). We enjoyed it with the rest of our meal on Market Day. It was so delicious!

The children, with Anne's guidance created brightly colored clay beads to wear with their bubus and dashikis for our West African Market Day. Market Day was held at the very end of May – and what a special day it was! Together, the kindergartners and their parents prepared a memorable West African meal mid festive marketplace decorations. The children with Diego's direction performed Oboo Asi Me Nsa, Sansa Kroma, Che Che Koolay, Funga Alafia and Sorida.

Did you know that if you lose your tooth in Mali and put it under a gourd, the African tooth fairy will bring you two chickens? After reading the very entertaining tale, *I Lost My Tooth in Africa* by Penda Diakite, we just had to have chicks! So - we agreed to share the exciting responsibility of incubating a clutch of chicken eggs. "Farmer Sherry" brought us an incubator and one dozen eggs. She taught us all we needed to know in order to be good mother hens. (We also met Sherry's hen, Wellie. The children were amazed by her soft, sleek feathers.)

It was very exciting to anticipate the chicks' arrival into the world. The children were incredibly responsible mother hens, turning the eggs three times a day, adding water to the trough when necessary, and periodically checking the thermometer. They watched the chicks hatch with pride for they had been an integral piece of the process. (Four chicks hatched during the actual school day. The remaining chicks hatched throughout the evening hours and into the night.) 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.

A few days later, we visited Sherry's backyard to meet her chickens. She had ten hens, three pullets, and two chicks living in a coop which she designed and built. She also had seven poults (young turkeys) situated in an enclosure in her dining room. She brought three poults out for observation. They were so incredibly soft. 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 feed. We shared a quick snack and of course, a very silly chicken story (*Chicken Little* written by Rebecca Emberley and illustrated by Ed Emberley) before returning to our vans.

ENDINGS

Amazingly the end of the year was upon us. We enjoyed our last days together, making one last visit to our trees, creating beautiful beaded key chains for our Reading Buddies, 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 goodbyes 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, made dashikis and bubus, kept the lines of communication open, but most importantly, provided at-home support 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, Lisa, Diego, Sue, Anne, and Amy 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. From origami, Little Red Hen stories and interpretations, gardening, and chicks (just to name a few of her many many contributions to our kindergarten year) Sherry has enlivened our days together. 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 developed 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, loving group of children.