

Bree and Marie's Group: Second/Third Grade 2015-2016 Curriculum Report

Building a Classroom Home

This year, our learning community consisted of twenty students: eleven second graders and nine third graders. It was our third graders' first year as the older group in a mixed age group and our second graders' first time in a mixed age group since nursery. We also had two new students in our group this year and one new teacher! With all of this change, we thought it was important to devote the first six weeks of our school year to creating a strong classroom community where everyone could feel safe to form bonds, express themselves, and take learning risks throughout the rest of the year.

One way that we started to build our community was through discussions generated from read alouds. We read a variety of books in the fall that focused on how to fit into a new space, form your own identity, express yourself freely, and find the beauty in difference, such as:

- *Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun*, by Maria Dismondy
- *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress*, by Christine Baldachinno
- *Chrysanthemum*, by Kevin Henkes
- *First Day Jitters*, by Julie Danneberg
- *The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes*, by Gary Rubinstein
- *Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon*, by Patty Lovell
- *A Bad Case of the Stripes*, by David Shannon
- *Ira Sleeps Over*, by Bernard Waber
- *The Story of Ferdinand*, by Munro Leaf

These read alouds fostered rich discussion. We asked and answered: *How are these characters acting as good friends to each other? If you were a character in this story, how would you help include this friend? How do we help people who are new? How do we maintain our friendships? How do we resolve conflict? How do we react when we meet someone different from ourselves? How do we celebrate difference? How are we unique? How can we be an upstander instead of a bystander? How do we express ourselves when we feel different emotions?*

With the foundations of our classroom community taking shape, we set classroom expectations through the lens of student hopes and dreams. Students created their own "hope and dream" to accomplish by the end of their year. After presenting our hopes and dreams, we asked ourselves how we could help each other achieve these goals. This started a week-long discussion of our classroom expectations, which culminated with the student-led creation of our Classroom Constitution. Through journaling and small group activities, students went on the route of creating classroom rules. In whole group time, we took the students' many good ideas and categorized them into the following guidelines: (1) Take care of and be kind to yourself, others, and our classroom; (2) Have fun; (3) Make safe choices. Our students signed our constitution, and it stood proudly in our room for the rest of the year.

Our Daily Routine

Morning Check In

Just as we found comfort in our new friendships and the ability to express ourselves, we found comfort in our daily routine. Students began each day at 8:25, learning to enter our room, place their belongings in their cubby, put chairs at table spots, and check in. A number of our friends had morning jobs that they had to complete, such as updating our daily calendar, helping with attendance, and preparing snack. By 8:30, we met on the carpet for a brief check-in to explain our morning work options. The options generally included choosing a just right book for that night's at-home reading, writing an entry in our journals, playing a math game with a buddy, finishing catch-up work from the day before, or challenging ourselves with brain puzzles. Students were given choices to build, read, write, or draw during this time, as well.

Morning Meeting

At 9:00, we rang a bell and met in a circle on the carpet for Morning Meeting. Our meeting consisted of a daily greeting, share time, group activity, and a morning message. Our weekly greeters picked the way we would greet each other that day. Greetings varied from songs, such as *Circle 'Round the Zero* to a ball toss to placing our shoes in the circle and finding the rightful owner! Regardless of the greeting, students learned to look everyone in the eye, confidently greet in a friendly tone, and make every presence feel significant. Our daily share time evolved from teacher-led "all shares", where students all shared each day on the same topic, to "free share", where four students signed up each morning to talk about any topic of their choosing. For our daily group activity, we played a five-minute game to get students energized, reinforce a learning skill, and/or navigate working together as a team. Sometimes these games were as simple as Simon Says. Other times, students were given three digit number cards or sight word cards and had to put themselves in numerical or alphabetical order. Every Morning Meeting ended with a morning message. The intention of these messages varied from finding words of a particular vowel pattern to finding spelling or grammar errors to solving a math story problem. They served as an interactive mini-lesson on a skill we wanted to introduce that day or reinforce. Often times, they led directly into the word work or in guided reading group period that followed Morning Meeting.

Snack and Lunch Choice Time

Our students enjoyed two Choice periods per day. Snack Choice started at 10:00 and if we were even thirty seconds late, our students kindly reminded us of the time, as they all learned to read the analog clock this year! They ate a quick snack that our snack helpers prepared on their way out the door and then, they were off. In fall and winter, our friends built and maintained Monkey Land forts, played tag on the Red Playground, and created a Monkey Bar Circus. By spring, they became interested in Magic: The Gathering and Vanguard cards, paper fortune tellers, folding origami, and playing some classic outdoor games, such as wall ball, four square, and jump rope.

At 12:15 each day, we were ready for our second half hour Choice Time. Students explored in many of the same ways that they did during Snack Choice, but were also able to visit specialists. Some favorite activities were to visit library to read or draw; venture to science to play on computers or make goo; or go to the art room to finger weave. Lunch Choice also gave students an opportunity to play with older students. You could find our students on the basketball

court playing with fifth graders, learning how to play wall ball from the sixth graders, or working in the Lenape Village with the fourth graders. Our children frequently asked to visit the Nursery playground at this time to assist and play with our youngest Miquon students.

As a new Miquon teacher, I learned quickly that Choice Time is not a break from learning. Instead, it is a time of rich learning that is completely child-led and initiated. I found that through daily, unstructured play, students formed close cross-grade bonds, took on leadership roles, and learned to make safe, independent choices. In the spirit of wanting to have fun, students quickly gained the important social skills of how to include others in a game, start their own game, or ask to join an existing game. Most days were filled with joy, but when there was conflict, we learned to negotiate those moments, as well. Students grew in their ability to calmly state their feelings, listen to the perspective of others, and talk to find a solution. These discussions often ended with a handshake, a pat on the back, or someone asking to do a “redo” and begin again. When conflicts were too big to solve independently, students appropriately sought out teacher support. Sometimes, they asked if they could present their problem in a “Good of the Class” meeting, which consisted of the students presenting their problem to the class and the class voicing possible solutions.

After Choice Time, we often met on the carpet to debrief with a “Fist of Five”, where students ranked their Choice experience on a scale of 1 to 5 with their fingers. A few volunteers were called on each day to explain their rankings. Afterwards, we would settle back into the classroom by listening to a chapter book read aloud.

Learning Blocks

Our group had two 90-minute learning blocks after each Choice period this year. Some blocks were “half group time”. Ten students would attend P.E., art, library, music, or science for 45 minutes, while the other half of the group would stay in our classroom to work in math, language arts, or writing small groups for 45 minutes. Then, the students would switch to experience both learning opportunities. Other days, we had “whole group time”, which was a 90-minute period with all twenty students in our room. This large block of time enabled us to delve deeply into math, language arts, and writing through play, small group work, or projects.

Language Arts

Language Arts was one of our learning blocks this year, but engagement in reading, writing, listening and speaking was laced through our entire day. We taught reading through the balanced literacy approach, which engaged students with text in a multitude of ways. Students were given the chance to read text in partners, alone, and in a whole group each day. They were not only encouraged to read text, but listen, question, and discuss it with others. The ultimate goal was to create a community of readers who felt secure enough in reading that they could use it in their lives outside the confines of a reading block, to explore interests, acquire knowledge, and have fun!

Read Alouds

Most days after Snack Choice, students gathered on the carpet to listen to a chapter book read aloud. These texts were well above most students’ reading levels, but were of high interest to the students, exposed them to high level vocabulary, and fostered enthusiasm for the rich

stories that books can provide readers with. Students built their listening endurance and learned to visualize without the presence of pictures. These read alouds lasted for weeks and were a time of day that all students looked forward to.

Four times per week, students also circled on the carpet for *interactive* read alouds. This is a different experience as it features a teacher reading a picture book just a few levels above most readers' levels in the class. As we read these picture books, we stopped much more often and modeled how good readers think as they read. We often paused to make predictions or summarize what we just read. Also different from our chapter book read alouds, was that we read these books in small groups, because we wanted to hear more voices answering the questions we prepared to ask throughout the story. The questions were scaled up and down Bloom's Taxonomy to reach all learning levels. If we were studying characters, for example, questions might build in this order:

- Who are the main characters?
- What are the characters' traits?
- Compare and contrast the two main characters.
- Explain how the character felt at this point in the story.
- Can you justify why the character acted in this way?
- Can you propose an alternative action the character could have taken?
- Do you agree or disagree with the characters' actions?

In read aloud time this year, we studied story elements (i.e. characters, setting, plot); we practiced retelling stories; made predictions and inferences; and we learned to make connections with our lives, other texts, and the world. We also studied words by discussing tenses, affixes, synonyms, antonyms, homophones, rhyming words, adjectives, verbs, and tips for how to decode polysyllabic words. In nonfiction read alouds, we learned about text and graphic features; found text evidence; and named the main idea and relevant details. Interactive read aloud time was not a time for students to zone out, but a time for them to tune in and engage with stories in a meaningful way.

Shared Reading

Our daily shared reading experiences provided a middle ground between read alouds and independent reading. In shared reading, everyone is able to read from the same text. Students participate more in the actual reading of a text at this time, but there is still a lot of teacher involvement. One daily example of shared reading experience was the morning message in Morning Meeting. With all students able to see the text, we could read it together to decode large words and reread it to work on fluency and expression. We also used shared reading during our Readers' Workshop mini-lessons. Marie or I would copy a bit of text from one of our read alouds and put it on a large poster for all to see. We would read it and reread it with students to work on different skills, such as using context to find the meaning of an unknown word, finding vowel patterns, or noting descriptive adjectives a professional author uses. The goal of these lessons was to develop good reader skills in the comfort of a group in the hopes that students would use them when reading independently.

Shared reading experiences also happened in small, guided reading groups on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. In guided reading time, groups of five students met with Rachel, Rich, Marie, Rossana, or I to read from the same text. These groups were built based on student need. Some groups read through texts to practice decoding or building sight word vocabulary. Others met for Readers Theater to practice fluency and expression. Some groups read magazine articles to find text evidence and research nonfiction. Others met for book club time to read through and discuss chapter books with one another.

Shared reading experiences were also seen through partner reading. During our biography study, for example, students worked in pairs to help each other confidently decode the many proper nouns they encountered. In our poetry unit, student pairs read together to find the rhythm of each poem and performed the poems multiple times to increase fluency. With the texts we chose to read our Cooperative Nursery School buddies, student partners practiced reading multiple times in advance to create “stop and think questions” they could ask their young buddies as they read.

Overall, the comfort that shared reading experiences provides granted our students confidence to develop good reading skills that they could use when they read independently.

Independent Reading

Independent reading time was many students’ favorite time of day. We often had to pry our students away from their books to transition to the next activity. Luckily for them, there were three independent reading opportunities scheduled into our daily routine. During the morning’s “read, write, or draw” time and immediately following lunch, students independently chose books to read based on interest. The more structured time that our group read independently was during Readers’ Workshop. During workshop time, Marie or I started by teaching a brief mini-lesson of what we wanted our readers to think about as they read. Immediately following this lesson, students read on their just right levels, so they could practice the daily “reading and thinking” skill. It was important to read on our level at this time to be able to implement the thinking skill rather than focus on decoding the words. As students read, Marie and I conferenced with readers to talk about the book. Later, students met with each other to discuss what they were reading. In the fall, we used “conversation sticks” to help students prompt each other with appropriate questions, such as “What was your favorite part of the story?” or “What was the problem in your story?” By the end of the year, students were able to create their own questions for each other.

Word Study and Handwriting

Our group participated in word work activities five days per week. Marie taught sight words--those words that break phonics rules--on Mondays and Tuesdays. She played interactive games, such as word ladder and Word Wall hunt to reinforce these words. On Wednesdays, I introduced an explicit phonics rule that was practiced the rest of the week. Students would start by exploring, sorting, and discussing patterns in word cards related to the rule. Then, they would hunt for words in real books, create rhyming words for the rule words, play word bingo and word board games. Students who needed additional practice on letter patterns were sent home with weekly word rings that targeted that skill. Some children received additional small group instruction in word study and phonics through the Wilson Foundations program by visiting Beth or Rich.

Second and third graders used the Handwriting Without Tears program to practice print and cursive writing.

Writing

We explored writing through the Lucy Calkins Writers' Workshop model. It allowed us to connect our writing with our reading and explore five genres throughout the year. Our group was able to write small moment stories, letters, fiction stories, how to books, and poetry. Though our units changed through the year, the structure of the units was constant. In each unit, students were able to:

- Explore mentor texts to understand and implement what professional writers do well in our own writing
- Discuss sample work written by a teacher or a professional author
- Engage in interactive, whole group writing to successfully write in the comfort of a whole group before writing on their own
- Independently work through the entire writing process of idea generation, prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing
- Share work with peers and accept feedback

At the conclusion of each unit, students celebrated by having an in-class publishing party where they could read their friends' work. We also had three parent publishing parties where parents could read work and sit as audience members while authors read their work from the author's chair.

We started the year by writing small moment stories, or stories that stretch out a very small experience in the author's life. The brief nature of each story made it an accessible first unit for our writers and, as each was experience-based, it allowed us to share more about our lives in the beginning of the year. In this unit, we read the mentor small moment stories, *Joshua's Night Whispers*, *Fireflies*, *Knuffle Bunny*, *Roller Coaster*, and *My Dog is Lost*. With help from these professional authors and watching me write my own small moment story, our writers worked on crafting a memory with a beginning, middle, and end; replacing bland words with juicy words; adding sound words to create action; and starting stories with an attention-grabbing hook. The short nature of the writing allowed students to successfully draft many stories, feel accomplishment with each one, and build confidence to create another.

Next, we moved on to letter writing. We started by visiting the Merion Post Office to see what happens behind the scenes when we deliver our letters. Our mentor texts in this unit included: *I Wanna Iguana*, *Click, Clack, Moo*, *Dear Mrs. LaRue*, and *A Letter to Amy*. We wrote persuasive letters to our parents, thank you letters to postal workers Bob and Anjana for hosting us at the post office, friendly letters to our first grade buddies, and opinion letters to Mayor Kenney. Our most memorable letters were probably the opinion and advice letters that we wrote to Marc Brown, the author of the *Arthur* series. Brown wrote us back and there are more details about this in the power section of this report.

After winter break, we explored fiction writing. The students loved this unit, because they had license to take their stories in any direction they wanted. One of our writers was playing on

the Red Playground when it turned into Candy Land; another writer was playing with his Legos and turned into a Lego figure; and another student woke up in a land of clouds called Pillow Land. Our authors learned to begin their stories with exposition, quickly introduce a character problem, make their characters attempt to solve problems in multiple ways, and then finally come to a solution. The stories in this unit were much longer than the small moment stories, so students spent much more time prewriting than in the small moment unit. They relied on the “story mountain” graphic organizer to map out the rise and fall of their plots.

Our fourth unit of the year was the creation of how to books, where students were able to teach the class how to successfully complete a certain skill. The mentor texts we read included: *How to Make a Friend*, *Time to Pee!*, *How to Talk to Your Cat*, *10 Things I Can Do to Help My World*, and *Gloria and Officer Buckle*. The concise nature of this writing was a welcome break from our lengthy fiction stories. Students were able to quickly draft each how to book, but spend more time on the revising and editing parts of the writing process. By the time our unit was over, students taught each other how to make smoothies, graham cracker crunch, scrambled eggs, paper folding crafts, tea, and even how to get away with *not* cleaning your room!

Our final writing unit was poetry. Our mentor texts included: *Halibut Bones and Hail Stones*, *If Pigs Could Fly*, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, *Owl Moon*, *In Daddy’s Arms*, and *Honey, I Love You*. As the weather grew warm, we were able to sit outside with our poetry journals and observe what we saw, heard, and felt in our natural setting. Students sat quietly near the creek, in the bamboo forest, on our classroom steps, and high up in tree branches. They wrote with rhythm, rhyme, onomatopoeia, creative line breaks, simile, and metaphor. Most impressive was their ability to look at common objects or sights and describe them in a poetic way using powerful words. We were in awe of how natural poetry writing was to this group. We were thrilled to see sixteen of our poets perform at our end-of-year Poetry Slam!

Math

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Focal Points provided the framework for our math instruction this year. The Focal Points are the topics central to mathematics education at each grade level. We used Singapore Math, Investigations, Marcy Cook Math Centers, and the many works of Marilyn Burns to assist in creating lessons, activities, games, and projects that met the Focal Points standards.

In September and October, our second and third graders explored numbers. Second graders started work with two-digit numbers, while third graders started with three digit numbers. All students began working at a concrete level with place value blocks, building each number in multiple ways, discussing how many hundreds, tens, and ones were in each number, and figuring out the value of each digit. Students compared numbers, wrote them in expanded form, created number lines, skip counted, and played many games, such as Top It (similar to the card game “war”) and place value memory. Students began to rely less on the place value blocks and were able to discuss numbers abstractly. By the end of the unit, many third graders were working with numbers in the thousands and some second graders were working with hundreds.

Once students acquired greater number sense, we manipulated these numbers by adding and subtracting them through November and December. Again, we started in a concrete way by adding and subtracting with blocks only. We constantly emphasized the relation between

addition and subtraction while students worked. Later, we began to associate our operation work with more abstract number sentences. We even introduced algebra by creating tricky problems with unknowns in any position. A main focus during these two months was also solving story problems that required addition, subtraction, or use of both operations. We emphasized that there are many ways to solve a problem and gave students the lead in explaining their thinking each day. We rewarded the ability to discuss the computation method and use more than one method to solve over quickly finding the correct answer. Third graders were given the extra task of writing about their thinking in their math journals. In mixed-age groupings, students were placed together to solve complex tasks, such as adding up the student population and the number of books in our class library for a Miquon visitor guide. Third graders guided the second graders with adding larger numbers and figuring out how to regroup tens as hundreds. Of course, there were endless opportunities for addition and subtraction games through this unit, too! Students loved Race to 100 (or 1,000), Race to 0, Climb the Mountain, Fact Bingo, Domino Facts, and Dice Facts.

In January, we explored measurement by tying it to our work in literacy. We started by reading *How Tall, How Short, How Faraway?*, which taught us how to measure with our bodies in the ancient Egyptian way. Students measured many objects around campus and the classroom with cubits (i.e. distance from the tip of your middle finger to your elbow), palms, and digits. Next, we read *How Big is a Foot?* to help us explore the problems with measuring with our bodies. Similar to the story, we measured our classroom carpet with our feet to find that all the measurements were different. Eventually, the students realized that the standard measurement of a ruler was the best way to measure. Once we became comfortable measuring with customary and metric units, we held a Guinness Book of World Records Championship in our classroom. We happened to be reading this text in our nonfiction reading study, so we decided to tie it to our math study and measure how far we could jump, how far we could blow a block across a table; and how tall we could build a block tower. We also reinforced our addition and subtraction skills by taking inventories of our households and classroom to see how we compared to existing records (e.g. How do we compare to the existing record for amount of tea bags in your house?).

In February and March, our second and third graders split up about three times per week in math. This gave the third graders a chance to really delve into multiplication and division, while second graders could explore two concepts that the thirds were already secure in: time and money. Third graders had been working on skip counting songs and games that required addition of equal groups since the beginning of the year. So, by the time we entered our multiplication and division units, they had familiarity with the topic. Through countless games, picture books (such as *Each Orange Had Eight Slices*, *Grapes of Math*, and *The Doorbell Rang*), Marcy Cook centers and brain puzzles, students developed an understanding of multiplication and division. They could explain each operation by drawing pictures of equal groups, creating arrays on grid paper, writing repeated addition or subtraction sentences, and eventually writing out the number sentence. The goal was not for students to memorize their facts in this unit, but to make meaning of what multiplication and division means. Meanwhile, the second graders learned how to tell time on an analog clock to the nearest minute using Judy clocks and create their own daily schedules. They also learned to count piles of mixed coins and work on their addition and subtraction facts by playing cashier and buying objects around the room.

In April, as the third graders continued to explore division through story problems, the second graders began their geometry unit. To connect their learning to literacy, we started by exploring two-dimensional shapes in *The Greedy Triangle*. We learned the many ways that you could describe a shape. For example, the students could name a square as a rectangle, parallelogram, and quadrilateral. They talked about how many points, angles, and sides each shape had, as well. With each new shape we discussed, we created each one on grid paper and rubber band boards; we hunted around the room, campus, and in magazines for real life examples of the shapes; built and deconstructed the shapes with pattern blocks; and created torn paper pictures with the shapes. We later explored symmetry and congruence. Geometry also served as a great way to review measurement, as students began to measure the perimeter, length, and height of shapes in inches and centimeters. By the time we were ready to explore three-dimensional figures, the third graders joined us. We learned the names of and sorted three-dimensional figures by the number of edges, vertices, and faces. We built shapes with blocks and paper. We measured the length, width, and height of shapes. Finally, the thirds used these shapes to explore multiplication and division.

In May, we moved into our work with fractions. Students first explored fractions as parts of a whole. We worked with brownies to take a whole and divide it into equal shares. Students partitioned the whole brownie into halves, thirds, quarters, fifths, sixths, and eighths. Each time students created fractional parts of the whole, we reinforced the fraction name (e.g. each piece is called $\frac{1}{5}$) and the idea that all parts combine to make a whole (e.g. all five fifths are one whole). From here, the second graders embarked on an international flag project where they had to sort flags by fractions. They found that many flags are divided into thirds, fourths, and sixths. Yet, many other flags, such as the American flag, are not divided into fractional parts. Students later designed their own flags to represent different fractional parts. Concurrently, our third graders delved deeper into their fraction exploration by comparing fractions and finding equivalent fractions. All students used fraction strips and fraction towers to start this work at a concrete level. Some students were able to begin work with multiplying and dividing numerators and denominators to find equivalence. All students enjoyed this hands-on unit and loved playing the many fraction games, including fraction bingo and fraction concentration.

In mid to late May, we studied fractions as part of a set. We started by looking at our classmates and finding which fractional part of us was, for example, wearing stripes. Students learned to identify “a part of the whole group” in fractional terms, saying $\frac{4}{20}$ are wearing stripes. Many third graders were able to move beyond this and reduce the fraction to $\frac{1}{5}$. Students began to survey each other and discuss the results of their surveys in fractional terms (e.g. $\frac{12}{20}$ of the class says that reading is their favorite subject, while $\frac{8}{20}$ of the class says that math is their favorite). Discussing fractions as part of a set was a great segue into our graphing unit. Students took their survey data and displayed it on bar and picture graphs. As we went further into our graphing unit, students were able to analyze their data with addition and subtraction questions. Eventually, they were able to craft their own questions and quiz friends.

Theme Studies: Power and California

Our main theme study this year was power. Power exists in nearly every facet of our society from our family structure to global policy. Recognizing power structures can help one

navigate the world with more understanding and purpose. This is something that we want for our young students.

In the very beginning of the year, we started by asking the students, “What is power?” They told us that power can come in the form of: body muscles, strength, electricity, being in control of things, royalty, bravery, magic, confidence, feeling on top of the world, and being able to do many things. While we had discussions about all of these forms of power, we steered our focus to the societal, formal, and interpersonal aspects of power, such as: voice, control, leadership, the collective, superiority/inferiority, and violence. To do this, we read many read aloud books, including: *The Librarian of Basra*, *The Paper Bag Princess*, *The Curious Garden*, *A Chair for My Mother*, *Grace for President*, *Something Beautiful*, *My Dog is Lost*, *The Story of Ferdinand*, and *Nana in the City*. Through reading these stories, we were able to focus on other essential questions, such as:

- Who has power and in what form?
- Who is powerless?
- Why is power distributed in this way and who decides?
- How can we resist oppressive power, build our own, and become agents of change?

Students began to realize the power of their own voices by November. After reading *Arthur's Thanksgiving* by Marc Brown, the students noticed that the book was filled with Thanksgiving stereotypes and did not give a proper, historical account of the holiday. Students wrote letters to Brown, alerting him of the inaccuracies they saw. They did not like, for instance, that the turkey was the most important part of the book's Thanksgiving play, the way that the pilgrim and Native Americans were dressed, the food they were eating, and the use of the word Indian instead of Native American. Brown wrote us back asking, “Where were you when I wrote this book? Better yet, where was my editor?” The students reveled in the opportunity of communicating with a professional author.

By winter, our focus in the power curriculum shifted from discussion of characters in picture books to studying historical figures. We learned about the Civil Rights Movement and segregation by reading *Sit In*, *Freedom on the Menu*, *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, *The Other Side*, *Martin's Big Words*, *Glory Be*, and *Let Freedom Sing*. We focused on the power of particular heroes, but also made sure to situate each hero within the larger movement he or she was a part of. From here, students naturally started to look at their world through a power lens. In-class conversations about the power dynamics in *Monkey Land* started to enter the classroom. In one discussion Nico said, “There are no bosses in our forts. No one is in charge. The power is shared.” This was quickly followed up by Cian who said, “There is not even an assistant in our fort. When you say assistant, that means you're not as powerful.” Students also began to bring discussions of Black Lives Matter into the classroom, discussing how power is distributed in our society and comparing the current movement to the Civil Rights Movement. Finally, students looked at their Philadelphia community and chose something that could be improved upon. They wrote letters to Mayor Kenney asking for more animal shelters in their neighborhoods, protection of green spaces, and ways to help homeless Philadelphians.

By early spring, we began work on our culminating power project, the creation of our play, *The Big Election: How Miquon Got Its First Kid Principal*. Our play was based on one of the students' favorite read alouds, *Grace for President*. The script, co-written by students and teachers, featured a young Miquon student questioning the existing school power structure in one of the very first lines, "Why has there never been a kid principal of Miquon?" Throughout the rest of the play, student candidates, Heidi and Donny, face off in an election cycle. The winner is Heidi, because she uses her power for good: she listens to her constituents and implements the changes on campus that they request. Leading up to the performance, students led the way and were quite invested in writing the script, painting props, memorizing lines, blocking, and learning the choreography for the dance numbers. Our April 28th performance was a shining moment for our students this year!

In late spring, we shifted gears from our study of power to study a region in our world, California. As our dear friend Milo is moving to California at the end of July, we wanted to understand more about our friend's new home and wanted Milo to feel more comfortable about starting life in a new place. We started our research by having students generate their own questions. Next, we categorized their many questions into seven main research groups: immigration, people, geography, weather, plants/animals, landmarks, and fun things to do in California. Our students were able to extract information from nonfiction texts and summarize it in their own words. The research teams created posters to showcase and present their work. At the conclusion of the study, all of the posters were bound together as a California travel guide for Milo to take with him.

In Closing

During the last few days of school, we swam in the pool, had a 2/3 picnic, held independent reading time outside, and took a group hike. We had fun right until the last five minutes of school, ending our time together with a few rounds of Detective, one of their favorite whole-group games.

As the final buzzer rang and we said our final "hug, handshake, or high five" goodbyes, we were sad to see the year come to an end. This was an amazing group of students who were unique, inventive, hard-working, positive, caring, and fun loving from September through June. We are confident that they are ready for and will excel in their 3/4 group next school year. We hope that everyone has a wonderful summer!