

2016-2017 Library Curriculum Report
Specialist: Amy Vaccarella

Philosophy and Approach

The mission of the library program is to support students in their growth by developing an appreciation of literature and the skills to seek information. The goals that support the mission are:

- Promote and encourage students to be critical thinkers and effective users of information
- Support students as they become lifelong readers and learners
- Provide a supportive environment that is rich with learning materials — print, digital, and visual/tactile
- Collaborate across classrooms and disciplines in efforts to build connections and enrich the learning experience
- Reflect the mission of the Miquon School
- Connect with the physical environment and the community

One of my priorities this school year was to evaluate the library collection and the library program to gauge its effectiveness and currency. Does the collection, and the stories that I read or offer to students, reflect the diversity of the school and the larger community? Primarily, are the students able to see themselves in the stories and books made available to them in the library? Do we have an ample supply of great picture books that portray people of color, a variety of family structures, and representations of the non-dominant, majority, experience and/or point of view? Do the books that portray African Americans, for example, tell stories that are multidimensional, funny, mysterious, and magical? Do the books show a counterstory that shakes up stereotypes and common perceptions? Counterstory is defined as “a method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Hughes-Hassell). Do all students feel at home and welcome in the library?

These are tough questions, and for the most part, the answer is, “yes, but not enough”. While I have added wonderfully diverse new books to the collection, there is always more to be done. Here are a few initiatives that I led that support this work:

- Weeded older, outdated and damaged books from the collection
- Re-envisioned the Book Fair - the books chosen to sell to families were predominantly books that portrayed characters of color and/or diverse representations, or were written or illustrated by people of color
- Organized a “Cozy Read-In” to highlight African American authors (see below for more information)
- Worked with fifth and sixth grade students on a project where we examined issues of race, gender and representation in books and book covers, and critically analysed the library’s collection (see below for more information)
- Prepared book displays around the library that highlighted or reflected the diversity in the collection

Below you will find more information about the library program, organized by grade band.

Nursery & Kindergarten

Young students became acclimated to the library space. They began to learn what’s available in the library and to seek out stories and information that interests them. There was a focus on smooth transitions: classroom to library, story to browsing and check-out, library to classroom. Our routine does not change from week to week.

We follow a typical library storytime format. We settle together on the story rug, share a song or two, read a story together, and take movement breaks if needed. The songs and stories are usually connected to a topic. Common topics covered are friendship, transportation, animal stories, silly stories, the changing of the seasons, and

pattern stories. I choose books for their read-aloud quality - they are engaging, include a pattern for students to follow along, and/or engage the students in a response and elicit great conversation.

During read-alouds the students are building important literacy skills. They recognize patterns, make inferences and predictions, connect story elements to their lives or to other texts, and learn to share the space with their peers. They are growing their base of knowledge around children's literature, and connecting with new and familiar stories.

The students browse the library and check out books. I pre-select a variety of picture books, nonfiction titles, and beginning readers for the students to choose from, considering their interests and tastes. They are beginning the process of becoming responsible library users by caring for their checked out books and returning them on time.

Here is a sample of the read-alouds the Nursery and Kindergarten enjoyed in library class this year:

Oh, No! by Candace Fleming

A Visitor for Bear by Bonny Becker

We're Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen

Guji Guji by Chih-Yuan Chen

The Not-So Quiet Library by Zachariah O'Hora

How to Find Gold by Viviane Schwarz

We Found a Hat by Jon Klassen

Muncha, Muncha, Muncha by Candace Fleming

Boot and Shoe by Marla Frazee

Lizard from the Park by Mark Pett

Red Cat, Blue Cat by Jenni Desmond

Have you Seen Elephant? by David Barrow

First & Second Grades

We began this year with discussions around care: How do we care for ourselves? Each other? The Library? And specifically, how can we take care of library books? We also explored the differences between fiction and nonfiction books.

Here are some texts used for this work:

The Not-So Quiet Library by Zachariah O'Hora

Library Lion by Michelle Knudsen

The Jacket by Kirsten Hall

I also held several "book tastings," where students have a few minutes and a list of tasks to preview/sample individual books. They are looking at the title, cover art, examining a few pages to see if the text is "just-right," and considering the length of a book. The goal is to give students the tools and time to practice browsing successfully to find what they need.

In November and December, we enjoyed stories about teeth, discussed our family traditions for lost teeth, and studied some tooth traditions from other places in the world. We also talked about how to care for your teeth, what happens when you lose a tooth and a new one comes in, and what it's like to go to the dentist. We used videos from BrainPop Jr., an educational site the school subscribes to, to find out more about teeth.

Here is a list of texts used for this project:

Throw Your Tooth on the Roof: Tooth Traditions From Around the World by Selby B. Beeler

I Lost My Tooth in Africa by Baba Wague Diakite

The Tooth Fairy Meets El Raton Perez by Rene Colato Lainez

Here Comes the Tooth Fairy Cat by Deborah Underwood

In January, we studied the Caldecott Medal (awarded to a children's book for exemplary illustrations). The students listened to and examined eleven book titles, using the committee's criteria. We look closely at illustration techniques, wondering how the illustrations support or tell the story. We then held a mock election, voting for our choice for best picture book of 2016.

Here is a sample of the texts used for this project:

Du Iz Tak? by Carson Ellis

Leave Me Alone! by Vera Brosgol

Maybe Something Beautiful by F. Isabel Campoy

They All Saw a Cat by Brendan Wenzel

Giant Squid by Candace Fleming

In March, we enjoyed food-related story read-alouds. Here are the texts used:

Seven Silly Eaters by Mary Ann Hoberman

Whopper Cake by Karma Wilson

Secret Pizza Party and *Dragons Love Tacos* by Adam Rubin

Clever Jack Takes the Cake by Candace Fleming

In April and May, we embarked on a study of the honeybee. Through fiction and nonfiction read-alouds, observation of the hive, discussions, and video, we learned more about the roles of honeybee castes, honeybee anatomy, and the life cycle of the honeybee from egg to adult bee. We ended this study with a honey tasting celebration, where the students got to sample five different varieties (or flavors) of honey.

Third & Fourth Grades

The year began with some great picture book read-alouds and lessons on using the online catalog, the order of books on the shelves, and refresher on locating books in the library. The students practice sorting and ordering actual books, creating book spines and call numbers, and playing online ordering games (which strengthens alphabetization skills). Throughout the year, we would revisit these topics, as well as explore literary genres.

We held "book tastings," where students have a few minutes and a list of tasks to preview/sample individual books. They are looking at the title, cover art, reading a synopsis of the book on the dust jacket, examining a few pages to see if the text is "just-right," and considering the length of a book. The goal is to give students the tools and time to practice browsing successfully to find what they need.

In November, we began a chapter book read-aloud of *Book Uncle and Me*, by Uma Krishnaswami. In the story, that takes place in a small city in India, the main character Yasmeen is faced with a dilemma/challenge after her favorite sidewalk lending library gets shut down unexpectedly. Yasmeen and her friends discover that there is corruption in the city Mayor's office and they go on a letter-writing and neighborhood canvassing campaign to support a different person for mayor. It is a realistic example of how one young person can make a difference, and our students were inspired.

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In February and March, the students began practicing using online databases to find facts and information. We used *SIRS Discoverer* and *Elementary Student Research*; two databases that are offered free through the AccessPA program. The students chose a topic (either an animal or an individual, initially) and found a relevant article. After reading the article, they wrote down three facts that they learned, in their own words. The students enjoyed this experience, and in many cases, came back during lunch choice to practice and explore the databases on their own. The databases have text/voice features where the students can read and listen to the text simultaneously, and many students found this extremely useful.

In April and May, we embarked on a study of the honeybee. This is an ideal time to study the honeybee, as there is so much activity and change in the observation hive. We began by generating questions about the honeybee. The students took those questions to a database, *SIRS Discoverer*, and were successful in finding answers to many of them. We also read passages from nonfiction and fiction texts and used the observation hive and other images to support our learning. We learned about the life cycle of a honeybee, the castes of the hive, the many different jobs honeybees have, and how a honeybee's anatomy helps it do its work. We tested our knowledge with a game of "Honeybee Jeopardy", and then celebrated the end of our study with a honey tasting party.

Fifth & Sixth Grades

The year began with some great picture book read-alouds and lessons on using the online catalog, the order of books on the shelves, and refresher on locating books in the library. The students practice sorting and ordering actual books, creating book spines and call numbers, and playing online ordering games (which strengthens alphabetization skills).

We held "book tastings," where students have a few minutes and a list of tasks to preview/sample individual books. They are looking at the title, cover art, reading a synopsis of the book on the dust jacket, examining a few pages to see if the text is "just-right," and considering the length of a book. The goal is to give students the tools and time to practice browsing successfully to find what they need.

Each student chooses one bookshelf in the library to take care of. They clean the shelves, weed out any damaged or outdated books (using specific criteria I give them), and make sure the books are in order. The students cared for these shelves throughout the year.

Early in the year, the students completed a technology survey that gauged their knowledge, awareness and interest of such topics as using online databases, understanding fair use/copyright, and plagiarism. I also asked them what technologies they were interested in learning more about or having more practice with.

I then led lessons that demonstrated:

- How does Google work?
- How to choose search terms that bring the most relevant results
- How to evaluate information on the web (looking for accuracy and authority)
- How to take information you read and put it into your own words
- How to choose photos that are available for student use
- What is an online database and how do you use it?
- How to cite online sources

The students practiced this by embarking on a short research project with a topic of their choice. The emphasis of this project to practice and develop these skills described above.

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In February, I led the students in an exploration of race, gender, and representation on the covers of middle grade and young adult novels. I was inspired by a year-long project led by librarian Allie Jane Bruce at the Bank Street School for Children, called [“Loudness in The Library”](#). We critically examined book covers; looking for bias, noticing who is highlighted, who is shaded, what the characters are doing or wearing, the colors used. We analyzed statistics about the publishing industry, and found that the overwhelming majority of characters in children’s books are white (71% in 2015, and more like 90% for books published in the past twenty years). The students audited their shelves, looking for covers that represented a multi-cultural world, and were quite disappointed to notice that most of their books had white male characters on the covers. They used their critical eyes to notice some books that had inappropriate or outdated representations on the covers, and the books were weeded from the collection. The students understand that it is my priority to work to making the collection more reflective of our student population and the greater community. They gave suggestions and will continue to be advocates for more diverse books and stories.

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The students also have time to browse and check books out each week. I promote books to them by giving book talks, putting recommended books out for browsing, doing read-alouds, and encouraging students to join book club.

Book Club

The fifth and sixth grade book club is a fun and rewarding experience for everyone who participates. We met for an hour once a month to have lunch and discuss a book. This is a voluntary activity and the participation varies from month to month. Jen Curyto, Learning Support Specialist, and I helped to facilitate, although the students don’t need much to generate and sustain great conversations about books. We usually run out of time! This is a safe and positive space to learn from one another and test out theories and interpretations of a story.

This year we read and discussed:

Three Times Lucky by Sheila Turnage

The Emerald Atlas by John Stephens

The Greenglass House by Kate Milford

The Girl Who Drank the Moon (2017 Newbery Medal Winner) by Kelly Barnhill

The Inquisitor's Tale (2017 Newbery Honor winner) by Adam Gidwitz

Every Soul a Star by Wendy Mass

Mini-Courses & Choice Time

Mini-courses are an excellent opportunity to build relationships with students and interact with them in new settings and ways. In the fall, I offered a movie-making mini-course to fifth and sixth graders. Using iMovie, the students worked independently and collaborated to create short videos. In the winter, I hosted a “Listening to Stories on the Turntable” mini-course. We gathered on beanbags in the library and explored the library’s collection of vintage stories and music on vinyl. This spring, I supported eight sixth graders in the design and construction of the annual Miquon Yearbook.

Throughout the year, the library was open to students during lunch choice. Many students use the library to read, play cards and other games, draw, write stories, practice using Google Docs and databases. They make small projects with found materials outside or some basic materials in the library. They are self-directed, productive and curious in their work. It’s a wonderful time and space for the students.

Assemblies & School-wide Events

One of my roles at Miquon is to organize the Friday all-school assembly. Stories, music, theater, and dance are incorporated into these events. The talent show is an opportunity for all students to share something they like to do, whether it be playing the piano, telling jokes, or building legos. Everyone is welcome and everyone who performs is applauded and supported. I also helped to organize an event we are calling “The Cozy Read-In”, inspired by the [African American Read-Ins](#) happening all over the country during the month of February. We showcased African American authors for this event. We selected 12 or so book titles, briefly introduced them to the children, and then the students picked the books they would like to read. The following week, students spread out all over campus to participate in teacher-led small group readings. It was a big success, and students and staff appreciated being mixed up by ages, and getting to visit new classrooms, and listening to wonderful stories. We plan to use the “Cozy Read-In” format again next year.

Conclusion

It has been a busy, productive, and fun year! As each year goes by, my relationships with the students grow and the library adapts and changes to better meet the needs of the students. It is not a fixed entity, but rather a growing and flexible space and idea. The students are actively engaged in this growth and expansion.

The students have grown as readers as well. There is so much to do during the summer, and one of the best things you can do is sit down and read with your child. Let them see you reading, and read some great stories together! Please take a look at the summer reading lists I sent home with students. They are also located [here](#). Public libraries have fabulous summer events, including summer reading programs. Have a wonderful summer, and happy reading!

Sources:

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