

2016-2017 Kindergarten Curriculum Report
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Kindergarten Community

In the kindergarten classroom we witnessed the life cycle of monarch butterflies and ants. We documented the metamorphosis of 30 painted lady butterflies. Outside, by the pond and in the creek we saw countless frogs and toads spin through their life cycles. We followed the familiar path of the changing seasons in and around the kindergarten environment and we fell into step with the routine of kindergarten life. The kindergarten year has a life cycle of its own.

This year there were 20 children in our group, 12 traveled from the Miquon Nursery and 8 were new to the school. There were 5 boys and 15 girls. In September the nursery children happily reunited with old friends. In only a few days, we saw that many children were curious and ready to seek out new relationships. It was fascinating to watch and support this newest group of kindergartners as they ventured out from safe boundaries to test the waters and make new connections. We were on the way to forming this year's kindergarten community.

Creating bonds and the sensation of being welcome are both important to building a new community. During our first few weeks together, stories and class meetings focused on starting school and making new friends. Pair-share is an activity that partnered children for purpose of building social conversation skills and learning more about our classmates. Community is built in many ways. It is not surprising that the children first looked for friendship with people who had like-minded interests: *Do you like to go on the swings? Do you like to build with beautiful junk? Do you like to explore the bamboo forest? Do you like to imagine and pretend?*

Also during the first few weeks at Choice, the kindergartners formed several different clubs from the Animal Rescue Club, to the Bamboo Forest Club, and others. Early on joining groups helped to make the sensation of belonging more concrete. Of course this led to opportunities for discussions of leadership, cooperation, inclusion and exclusion. In due time, our budding kindergarten community had grown strong enough to support the children's sense of belonging without the mantel of a club.

At this point we were ready to take on another aspect of building community. We began to create the guidelines with which we live by everyday. Our goal was to create a safe, supportive environment for each group member. When we asked them, "What do we need to do to be safe and happy?" The children first fired off a large list of "don'ts" -- don't litter, don't hurt, don't tease, don't throw anything into the pond. With a little guidance and modeling they came up with a list of "do's" as well: Do help someone if they get hurts, do ask a friend to play with you, do include everyone, do take turns. These became our class guidelines. We wrote each do and don't on an index card. As typical of kindergartners, there were so many ideas that we used the framework of three big ideas to help keep track of them all:

We take care of ourselves

We take care of each other

We take care of our environment

The children sorted the cards through the lens of these three ideas and then they illustrated the cards. We posted the three groups of cards in the classroom. Throughout the year we routinely returned to the three big ideas, supporting the children to assess their own actions, make safe and considerate choices, solve disagreements and be stewards of our environment inside and outside.

Over the course of the year, the children developed an appreciation and understanding of each other and gradually coalesced into a strong, vital community. 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 when a problem needed to be addressed.

Our Day

During the first days of school, everything is new, but soon the flow of a kindergarten day began to take on a comforting routine cycle. We believe that play is the work of a kindergartner, so our day started with an inside Choice time. Upon arrival, children were invited to make play choices from the materials inside the classroom. Depending upon their arrival time, it could be as long as 45 minutes. Morning Meeting came next, starting with a greeting. We went around the circle with each person greeting his or her neighbor and then passing on the salutation. It started with a simple “good morning” and then we added an assortment of handshakes and hand signs. The children enjoyed sharing greetings in different languages. We made a list of all the languages we used during the greeting -- French, Chinese, Spanish, Hindi, Serbian, Japanese, English, Sign language, Russian, German and Swedish.

Calendar came next, along with the clip counter that kept track of the number of school days, followed by a review of our schedule for the day. Morning Meeting was a time when children could choose to share something they made, something they discovered or a special event. After their sharings, they called on two people to ask a question or make a comment about their sharing. Later in the year, the Mystery Bag became the new way to share. Children took turns -- in reverse alphabetical order -- to take the Mystery Bag home. The child chose an object to place in the Mystery Bag. He or 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. By this time we all need to take a movement break, so we stood up for a game of Simon Says, alphabet calisthenics, or yoga moves. Morning meeting continued with teacher-directed activities geared to encourage familiarity with concepts of print, phonemic awareness and phonics. We shared readings of big books and followed up our readings with activities to promote comprehension. Many meetings focused on mathematical and language arts explorations or games. Many more meetings were devoted to integrating literacy and mathematical understanding.

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 have also chosen to work more intensively on a particular project. The block area was always a busy place. Vivid imaginations and dramatic flair transformed it into racetrack, a cozy house, a maze for the class guinea pigs, and a royal castle. The children knew their structures could stay up for several days and invested much thought and energy in the construction. The dramatic play which evolved along with each structure was as rich and involved as the building process. We saw the Wolf Spider Restaurant built time and time again. The builders incorporated the animals and pretend food also housed in the block area into their structure to serve meat and occasionally poisoned wolf spider soup. The Animal and Baby Care Place was constructed in counterpoint to the restaurant. The dual structures created an opportunity for the children to participate in cooperative, parallel and at times, contentious play. Here, they had the opportunity to practice their negotiating and problem solving skills (using our classroom guidelines).

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, collages, maps, greeting cards and masks. Beautiful junk constructions were a constant Choice time activity throughout the year for many children. Special art activities and cooking projects happened several times each month under the guidance of a teacher.

Pattern blocks, pattern puzzles, 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 them. Sadly, Marigold died over spring break. They made a sign for her grave and a memorial poster for the class. Then they vowed to pay more attention to Squeaks so she would not get lonely.

For many of our children, Choice Time was synonymous with the outdoors. The swings, sandbox, twirly slide, tree house and other play equipment were frequent play destinations. Many of the children enjoyed fast paced chase games. 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 from *Annie* and *Hamilton* were performed on our kindergarten play barn. Children spent a great deal of time observing caterpillars and other insects. After the creek renovations, the kindergarten's part of the creek was not as accessible as it had been in the past. Later in the spring when the rocky bottom and silt had

settled, they spent much time investigating, catching and releasing the creatures that had taken up residence in our creek. The 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, so that children could decide for themselves when to take a break from their activity to get a bite to eat. The children were responsible for a variety of classroom jobs, some of which were done during Choice. Setting up snack, taking the attendance for the kindergarten and the nursery to Connie, caring for the classroom pets and noting the temperature and weather conditions all happened during Choice.

After an efficient cleanup, we gathered briefly to make the transition to half groups. Depending on the time of the year, we used this time to get to know each other better, sing or recite poems. Monday gatherings were reserved for our weekly Class Meetings.

So much happened during our half group time, when half of the group excitedly went off to see the specialist of the day and the remaining half stayed in the classroom. In 45 minutes the children switched. Our specialists were Science, PE, Art, Music and Library. With just 10 children and two teachers in the classroom, we were able to work in small groups. At times, we met individually with students. The projects and explorations varied from language arts to social studies to math -- and in many cases, this is the time when we tackled the integrated curricular studies that combined language arts with math and/or social studies.

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. The stories were read for the joy of listening and engagement. They spoke to the issues of childhood: of sharing, friendship and empathy. Some stories made the children ponder a new idea or question an old idea in a new light. Some stories linked to our class themes and some were just for laughing out loud.

Immediately following Story, our group shared had lunch and animated conversation. Once finished, the 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 or weaving. They also listened to audio stories or a teacher read aloud from a chapter book such as *My Father's Dragon*, *Gwinna*, or *The School Mouse*. As the year progressed and their stamina for a long day of school increased, we added DEAR time to the beginning of Rest. For three to five minutes everyone had to Drop Everything And Read from self-selected books on their cots. When the timer went off we began the read aloud. We also used this quiet time for some individual time with children or for competing works in progress.

One of the most favorite times of the week in the kindergarten was our relationship with Wendy and Sara's group as Reading Buddies. Each kindergartner was matched with a third/ fourth grader who was his/her buddy for the entire school year. One day each week they joined with their older buddy to share a good book. It was gratifying to watch the buddies respond to each other with pleasure. The older children thought carefully about their book selections and practiced reading for fluency and expression. The kindergarten children were attentive listeners clearly enjoying both a fine story and the company of their buddy friends. Throughout the year, the kindergartners and their buddies worked and played together in many ways in addition to reading, such as pumpkin decorating, holiday celebrating (in general), author/illustrator sharing, playground frolicking, curriculum sharing, and sitting together during Friday morning Assemblies. They even joined together to create the big big book, *Crazy Creatures of the World*. The kindergartners loved their buddies! These buddy relationships often continue to be important throughout their Miquon careers . . . and perhaps, beyond.

The final hour of the day was a flexible time, used 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 goodbye song.

Language Arts

Our Language Arts program takes a balanced approach to literacy. That is to say, Language Arts activities were integrated into our entire day, balancing all the 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. Engagement with literacy was always for a purpose authentic to the children.

Our Language Arts program was based on a language and print-rich environment. Literature of all kinds was displayed all over our classroom including picture books, how-to books, wordless books, big books which we had read as a group numerous times, nonfiction (some of which was related to the social studies/science topics we were exploring), maps, alphabet books, poetry, class books (where each child contributed a page which was based on a particular topic or joint experience, including *Guess Who, I Am Thankful, Painted Lady Observations, or What's for Lunch?*), individual project books (*Monarch Journal, Walking Book*) and of course many child-made books. We also had a wonderful collection of prereading and early emergent books for children to read successfully.

The children's engagement with books was an all day affair. In the morning, a teacher who was reading a book to a child would soon find an extra few listeners snuggled close by. We could never read long enough to suit this group of story lovers! They would sit well past their lunch time just to hear the end of the picture book and then they would want to discuss the book before going to lunch. They frequently referred to our wide selection of nonfiction books to further their knowledge on topics that were of deep interest to them. Big books and emergent readers 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, as was Mo Willems' Elephant and Piggy books. Class books and the children's individual works of fiction/nonfiction (such as their Miqon Grass stories, Little Red Hen stories, and chick journals) were also highly sought after.

In our room, there were many opportunities for children to create written language. There were magnetic letters, chalk boards, paper of every shape and color, as well as pens, markers, crayons, and pencils -- even outside sidewalk chalk. Children often chose to label their drawings, write messages to each other or family members, or create letters and greeting cards. They designed their own mazes and dot-to-dots to share with the class and wrote numbers so large, we had to use the laptop to find the answer on Google to the question, "What comes after septillion?" They produced signs to share important information, designed props for their dramatic play, and made self-initiated books. More formally, the children labeled everything they could see in our classroom. They 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 premise behind Writing Workshop is that children will learn to read and write most successfully by reading and writing for themselves. Done during our half-group time, teachers would begin Writing Workshop by inviting the 10 children to help us work in our journal (large chart paper). We would model how to come up with an idea and proceed with a shared writing experience on the chart paper. Each time we would focus on one concept of print and/or one phonics or print convention. Then it was time for the kindergartners to fill 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). Teachers would then transcribe the kid writing into "book writing". This was a perfect opportunity to give mini-lessons pulled from a child's current writings, 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. Over the span of the year, the goal was for children to become independent kid writers and progress along the broad continuum of written expression as well as transfer and apply all of this phonics practice to become "reading ready."

Our handwriting program, Handwriting Without Tears, is a developmentally-based program. The multisensory lessons teach to all learning styles -- visual, auditory, manipulative, tactile and kinesthetic. The purpose of our work is to make handwriting available to our children as an automatic, natural skill. The children began with pre-pencil readiness activities for learning upper case letters and numbers. They used unique materials such as the upper case wood pieces and the "smiley face" slates. They practiced using good posture, a good pencil grip, and good strokes for letter formation before they even pick up a pencil to write in their workbooks. Not ones to pass up a teaching opportunity, we matched each letter we practice to its name and its sound(s).

Oral language development was highly encouraged throughout the day. We talked all the time, telling stories and jokes, brainstorming, discussing problems and strategies to solve those problems, singing, reciting poetry, and sharing information and important personal news. We also played numerous games involving riddles, phonemic awareness skills, listening skills and following directions. We discussed the fiction and nonfiction books we read. The children retold,

summarized and thought about story elements and genre. They made personal and text to text connections with the books we read.

The children always looked forward to our weekly Thursday half group time visits from Jen Curyto, 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 or making their own versions of the books she read. In a spin off of Eric Carle's, *The Very Quiet Cricket*, Jen and the class made the book *Insect Sounds*, highlighting the sounds that insects make like "WwwShshsh" goes the lunar moth and "Tzzzzz" says the mosquito.

Mathematics

Our math program is based on the belief that children will learn best by constructing their own understanding of mathematical concepts as they identify, solve, and apply mathematical relationships to their environment. They need to be personally connected to the problem for it to have sustainable meaning. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) calls this *Mathematizing*:

To mathematize is to focus on the mathematical aspects of a situation and then to formulate that situation in mathematical terms; it is a means for children to deepen, extend, elaborate and refine their thinking as they explore ideas and lines of reasoning. (NCTM, 2009)

To meet this goal, our five and six year-olds used concrete manipulatives extensively as the basis for formal and exploratory instruction. Classroom materials such as unifix cubes, Cuisenaire rods and pattern blocks, as well as objects from daily life such as buttons, pumpkin seeds, cups, napkins and even their own bodies were used in their studies of attributes, sorting, classifying, patterning, counting and noticing mathematical relationships.

We worked to develop a clear concept of one-to-one correspondence as we counted *things* at every opportunity. The children touched each unifix cube in the train and each Fruity Cheerio on their day 100 necklaces as the counted. We introduced the idea of place value as we worked with larger quantities and develop a sense of numeracy. Using the estimation jar, we thought about how many items were inside. In the very beginning of the year the children would make quantity guesses, but mostly it was about relationships. If the jar held 72 dominos would it hold more or less teddy bear counters. The bears were shorter than the dominos but much wider. In the "math talk" that followed children shared their reasoning about if there would be more bears than or less bears than the number of dominos in the jar and why they thought that. Then we dumped the jar and counted the bears.

The classroom calendar was favorite activity for the group. It included so much of our curriculum in the guise of an ordinary calendar. Counting for sure, but they were also opportunities for skip counting, backwards counting, patterning, learning the days of the week, vocabulary, time (yesterday, tomorrow) and reading numerals. We noted each day we were in kindergarten using strings of paper clips and skip counted by tens to keep track of the number (place value). The children continued their understanding of how a calendar works and their numeral recognition work when they made their own monthly calendars.

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

We found plenty of everyday life situations that gave us practice with problem solving and talking about math. For instance, "*The Guinea Pigs and the Flowers (quarter groups) are in this half group. How many children should be on the rug?*" Or, "*There are 100 crackers in the bowl. There are five of us. How many crackers will each of us get if we share the total amount equally? How can we figure it out?*"

We also posed plenty of high interest queries that had the children integrating their math and language arts skills to solve the problems. Data collection and analysis activities were a favorite of the class. The graphed the information for such questions as, "*When is your birthday? How many people are in your family?*" and "*Which apple do you prefer?*" When the children became proficient in building group graphs they set out to design their own survey. They needed to write their question, for example, "*Do you prefer pizza or hamburgers?*" The children enjoyed asking and collecting the data for these

questions. They had to ask each child and teacher in the class (and keep track of who they asked) their question. They built their own bar graphs to record their results, and in turn, they shared their information with the class.

The study of measurement in the kindergarten also integrated kid writing and math work. The children selected objects from around the room to use as measuring tools to see how tall they were. They learned how to select tools that were the same size, and how to line them up end to end to accurately measure their height. They counted the number of steps from the kindergarten threshold to several places around the upper Miquon campus and documented their counts in personal Walking Books. A related activity of the Walking Book posed the question: *“If we all started at the same threshold and walked to the same small wood bridge, should we have all taken the same number of steps?”* This inspired three days of conversation, theories and trials to figure out that it is hard for 20 people to take exactly the same size steps.

Game playing was another 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 practice and develop strategies, opportunities for social interaction, and feedback from peers. Dice Race afforded kindergartners infinite practice with numeral recognition, numeral formation, counting objects in a set and sums to twelve. It inspired the kindergartners’ questions: *“Why do you never roll a one when you play with two dice?”* and *“Why does seven win more than any other number?”*

Science/Social Studies

Five and six year-olds are incredibly curious about their world. They have so many questions! They are eager to investigate, make hypotheses, and experiment with their ideas. They have a captivating interest to interact with others and create strong interpersonal connections. Given ample opportunity to observe and wonder, work and play, they are engaged and responsible advocates for their own learning. We accessed their innate sense of wonder and presented them with several integrated thematic studies. While each study could stand on its own, the curriculum was designed to pick up threads from previous studies and put out trailers to be picked up as we cycled through to the next.

The beginning of the year was dedicated to building community and learning how kindergarten works both inside and out. We explored the environment of the campus around us and wondered what might live out there. Their knowledge allowed them to become caretakers of campus flora and fauna and to feel confident enough to travel out of Miquon to study the culture of Mexico.

Insect Study

In the fall, we began an exploration of the natural world, particularly the insect world. Even before the first day of school we had several monarch caterpillars inside the kindergarten. Many children got to see them before they began to form their chrysalids and go through metamorphosis at the work party. As the children entered the classroom each morning, they would pause at the red shelf to check on the remaining monarch caterpillars and the chrysalids. The children waited for the monarchs to emerge from the smooth green chrysalids dotted with gold. Finally the first one came out and then all but one emerged. They got to see the chrysalids split open and the butterflies slip out. Everyone watched intently as each butterfly unfurled its wings (pumping fluid into the wing veins and making them expand to their full extent). It was a wonderful sight! After observing and enjoying our adult monarchs for a day or so, we released them to the exuberant chant of *“Gotta go, gotta go, gotta go to Mexico!”*

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

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

As part of our Journey South/Journey North work, we also joined the “Symbolic Monarch Butterfly Migration” with students across North America. We created 20 life sized symbolic monarch butterflies and one very large monarch butterfly. We mailed them to Mexico for the winter. At the monarch sanctuaries in Mexico, school children protected the real and the paper butterflies. In the spring the live butterflies returned on their own and the paper butterflies were mailed across North America to symbolized the migration. In May, our kindergartners were very excited to receive a packet of 20 monarch butterflies created by children throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico, one large butterfly, and a note from student in Mexico who took care of our paper butterflies. After we translated his letter into English, we found out that he thanked us for learning about and caring for the monarch butterflies. We went to back to the Symbolic Migration website to document that we received a large butterfly from the Flint Hill School in Oakton, Virginia, and we also found out that our large butterfly flew to the Metairie Park Country Day School, in Metairie, Louisiana.

Early in October we received 30 first instar (about ¼ inch) painted lady caterpillars. We kept a group journal of the painted ladies’ metamorphosis. Each day two children dictated their observations of the caterpillars’ development. They also drew detailed illustrations to complement their story of the painted ladies. After they were all in the chrysalid stage we checked the butterfly habitat daily waiting for them to emerge. Eventually they did and we released them the next sunny and warm day. The children were amazingly patient as they watched and waited for the first painted lady to take wing. They jumped and danced about as they enjoyed the sight of one butterfly after another making its first attempt at flight.

Also in the fall, Eli and Felix found a large moth caterpillar on the path leading up to our building. They brought it into the class to see if they could identify it. It looked like a polyphemus caterpillar. So the class created a habitat for it with several inches of soil, a stick, and a variety of leaves. (They feed on leaves of broadleaved trees and shrubs.) We thought it would burrow under the soil to form its black cocoon, but to our surprise it climbed to the top of its habitat and began to weave a soft looking white casing. And there it stayed all winter. We were all surprised again in May, when the moth did emerge from the cocoon. It was lovely and quite large – with a wingspan of about five inches. When it opened its wings, we could see the eye spot markings which protect the moth by tricking predators into thinking it was a large and dangerous creature. We released the moth the next day. Shortly after that, Eli spotted two more polyphemus moths under the trees. We wondered if one of them was from the kindergarten.

The beehive in the Library sparked a great interest in honey bees and as part of our insect study the children observed the hive with the eye of a scientist. They documented their observations by drawing what they noticed. The kindergartners were especially interested in pollination and the bees’ role in this process, hence our interest in apple trees. How perfect that the library hive is located next to the crab apple orchard. The local deer and other wildlife eat the Miquon apples, so on a lovely morning in late September, we visited Peace Valley Orchards to pick apples. After learning the proper method of picking an apple, we began our work. In what seemed like a very short time, our baskets were full and we returned to the weighing station. Believe it or not, the kindergartners had picked 166 pounds of apples!

We counted them the following day – 498 apples. We held a taste test to determine which variety of apple was each child’s favorite. We graphed the results. We munched on apples for snack for days on end. We shared a basket of apples with our reading buddies. We made delicious applesauce. We baked the most scrumptious apple crisp. We shared apples with the local wildlife. We compared apples to bananas and recorded our results as Venn diagrams. We made spicy apple butter and homemade English muffin bread as well as a luscious apple pie. We pressed the remainder of the apples to produce fresh cider.

The kindergarten also explored books and other live species to learn about what makes an insect special, how the life cycles of other insects are different than butterflies or moths, what kind of habitats they need and what kind of sounds they make. We read fiction and more nonfiction books to learn about to what they eat and what they look like. We read the big book “*What’s for Lunch?*” by Joy Cowley and found out that birds may want to eat insects but sometimes they have to be satisfied with a fruit treat instead. The kindergartner also created four insect poems patterned after the original *I like Bugs* poem.

Dyeing Wool

The gathering of natural materials growing around Miquon is an extension of the children’s interest in the animal habitats outside their classroom. This year the kindergartners gathered a big crop of goldenrod, pokeberry and walnuts. In turn, they picked off the flowers, berries and hulls and boiled them in water and mordant to make three different dye baths.

They prepared natural wool yarns to take the dye and produced a beautiful array of pale yellow, magenta and brown hued yarn. We made an orange dye from turmeric (from the grocery store) to round out the color range. With a basket full of colorful yarn the kindergartners began to weave. They used their love of pattern to create striking designs, at first just using “their yarns” and then mixing in the bolder colors of store-bought yarn.

Woodland Habitat

In November we began the study of woodland animals of Miquon. We started with a wonderful book, *In the Woods: Who's Been Here?* by Lindsay Barrett George, as an introduction to our study of the woodland habitat. The kindergartners enjoyed piecing together the clues on each page to guess the animals featured in the story. We were inspired to conduct a bit of research on our own. What did we want to know about the woodland critters that inhabit Miquon? We brainstormed a list of questions to focus our research. Each quarter group chose one woodland animal to study – opossum, raccoon, owl, or skunk. With teacher support, the quarter groups gathered information on their animal's physical characteristics, home, food preferences, adaptations, babies, etc. The children's research included looking at books themselves, teachers reading aloud, looking online to gather more information like the sounds that the animals make and watching videos of the animals in the wild. Based on Joy Cowley's book, *What's for Lunch?*, the quarter groups then wrote and illustrated their group's animal's story using information gleaned from their research. We also published all of their research in the back of their *What's for Lunch?* books. We went on a class trip to the Schuylkill Center to use our woodland animal knowledge to look for signs that our designated critters were there.

Toni found this wonderful book entitled, *Over in the Forest*, by Marianne Berkes. It was a new version of the children's song, *Over in the Meadow*, featuring woodland animals -- some that we had even just researched. With a few tweaks, to highlight the woodland animals at Miquon, it was just perfect to sing at Winter Assembly and share our study with the larger community.

All year long frogs, toads and tadpoles were of high interest in the kindergarten. The children saw them in the fish pond and the creek. They observed the frog lifecycle from mating to the eruption of tadpoles, to the first shout of “I see leg buds!” and “I see a froglet.” They caught tadpoles by the bucketful and released them before the end of Choice.

The weather in late winter was very erratic, first warm and then unseasonably cold. During that time some frogs came out of their winter hidings and got surprised by a sudden freeze. One frog did not make make it back to its mud home in time and got stuck above the ice on the fish pond. Leigh rescued the frog, bringing it into the kindergarten and put in in with the polyphemus cocoon. The children were so fascinated by the frog in the classroom that frogs and toads became the theme for March Conference week. Leigh and the class cared for the frog until the ice thawed and it was safe to be released into the fish pond.

The kindergarten has the responsibility to care for the Miquon bird blind. This winter, we made sure that there was a supply of different bird foods available and something for the squirrels to eat, too. Children took turns walking to the blind to fill the feeder weekly throughout the wintery months. We kept three feeders in the kindergarten too and soon the children were spotting and naming several local species that came to our windows to grab a bite to eat.

The Little Red Hen

In a departure from the woodland habitat, the kindergarten began a literary unit based on the The Little Red Hen folk tale. In the traditional story the Little Red Hen finds some wheat and asks her friends to help her make it into bread. But her friends are too lazy so she does it herself. The moral is that one must do the work if one wants to share the rewards. There are a multitude of versions based on the original story, from the most traditional stories by Jerry Pinkney and Paul Galdone to the fun and fanciful renditions like the *Little Red Hen Makes a Pizza* and *Cook-a-Doodle-Do*, where a rooster finds a cookbook and makes a strawberry short cake. After reading many of these versions, acting some out, and comparing the characters, what was found, what was made and whether the Little Red Hen character shared the bread (some did and some did not) -- the children had an understanding of how the story line flowed. Working in quarter groups, each group created their own version of the folk tale. -- *The Fuzzy White Bunny*, *The Little Red Fairy*, *The Big Buzzy Bumble Bee*, and the one the children loved to read to lonely Squeaks, *The Little Golden Guinea Pig*.

Mexico

In the spring the kindergartners were ready to leave their boundaries and explore more of the world. Although we officially started our Mexico study shortly after spring break, we had really been thinking about Mexico for some time. In the fall, we released the monarchs both real and imaginary and hoped some of them would truly get to Mexico. Then we learned about Day of the Dead and made the dead bread. In December we read *The Legend of the Poinsettia* when thinking about the holidays. We even read *Manana Iguana* by Ann Paul, about friends would not help the Little Red character get ready for a fiesta. So, as we waited for the monarchs to return in the spring, it felt natural to start our study of Mexico.

We started by transforming the room into an explosion of Mexican art, artifacts, textiles, musical instruments, toys, dolls and music. There were books about Mexico everywhere, fiction and nonfiction, books about Mexican children, culture, the land, Spanish vocabulary, artists and their art, cooking, native animals, and so many stories. Over the next five weeks we explored many aspects of traditional and modern Mexican culture. We read about and imagined what it might be like to be a child in Mexico; to go to school there, to play there and to live there. We learned new songs and games, created art and artifacts, tried on traditional clothing, celebrated Mexican holidays, and ate some Mexican foods.

We introduced the unit by giving the children time to investigate all the new materials in the room and look at the books. They shared what they knew and what they were curious about. One of the first books we read was *Dream Carver*, by Diana Cohn. It was the story of Mateo, a young boy who came from a family of natural wood carvers, but he dreamed of carving and painting exotically colored and patterned toy animals. In his dreams the animals came to life. While this story was fictional, it mirrored the life of artist Manuel Jiménez, a carver and painter from Oaxaca, Mexico, who is credited with originating Mexican *alebrijes* -- carved creatures painted in bright colors and imaginative patterns. The next day, we learned more about how Manuel Jiménez first looked at the wood and imagined the creature that lived inside before he turned it into one of his *alebrijes*. Then the children went outside and found pieces of wood or sticks and painted their own.

Leo was a 6 year old (like many of our kindergartners), who came from a family of weavers. Mateo wanted to weave beautiful *tapetes* (rugs) just like the rest of his family. In the book, *Beneath the Stone: A Mexican Zapotec Tale* by Bernard Wolf, we met Leo's family at home as he got ready for school, we saw him go to class and then have some time to play with friends. He went to the market with his father to sell their *tapetes*. Through Leo's eyes we saw what customs and daily life was like for a family in a small Oaxacan village; Leo was the inspiration for the kindergarten to return to their passion for weaving. The children also had the opportunity to compare the culturally traditional life with the urban and more modern lifestyles of Mexico City.

Early on in our Mexican study, young Esperanza traveled from Mexico to learn what it is like to be a child at Miquon. The children were so enamored by her and glad to take turns hosting her in their homes at night, that they almost forgot she was a cuddly, soft replica of a nine banded armadillo. Each night the hosts would help Esperanza write to her mama about what she did and what she learned that day.

The children learned their first Spanish song, *El Chocolate!*, to sing as they used the *molinillo* to make Mexican hot chocolate. Over the course of our study the kindergarten learned three more songs to sing at the upcoming Fiesta; *Dos Manitas*, a children's counting song, *Los Pollitos*, a lullaby, and *De Colores*, a song that praised the beautiful colors of Mexico.

The kindergartners played *La Vibora de la Mar* (The Serpent of the Sea), a Spanish version of London Bridge, *Loteria*, a bingo-like game that focuses on Spanish vocabulary, and they made *Baleros*, a ball and stick toy, as an end-of-year parting gift for their reading buddies.

We learned about and celebrated Day of the Dead in the fall and Cinco de Mayo in the spring. The next celebration (and culmination of the study) was the Fiesta. To get ready for the Fiesta the children made paper flowers and planted marigolds (because they noticed that marigolds were used in many Mexican celebrations and it would honor our past guinea pig friend). They made *papel picado* (cut paper) banners and many *ojos de dios* (god's eyes) for decoration. They wrote invitations to the staff, menu cards for the tables and they baked cookies for the desert. They helped their parents cook and decorate and had a grand time all the way to the smashing of the pinatas they made.

Chickens

There was one more study to pick up threads from previous studies before we cycled to the end of this kindergarten year. I often shared the poultry antics that occurred in my backyard, we had studied many Little Red Hen

stories and sung *Los Pollitos*, a lullaby about a mama hen who takes care of her chicks. The mama fed them and kept them warm until they went to bed. Now it was time to raise some chicks in the kindergarten. After the fiesta, the kindergartners became mama hens of 12 chicken eggs. They had to keep them warm at the perfect temperature in the incubator, with just the right amount of water, and turn the eggs three times every day. It was with great excitement when we came in on the 21st day to see the first two chicks had hatched. During the day, students got to observe the hatching of more eggs. By the next morning all of the eggs had hatched. When the chicks were dry and fluffy, we moved them to the brooder box and soon they were ready to be held and cuddled by some very capable mama hens. Throughout the process the children documented their observations and their knowledge of the developing birds using kid writing in their chick journals. We took our last class trip to my backyard to see my chickens and find out where their new chicks would live at the end of the year.

Final Thoughts

The children and I were so fortunate to have Toni McDonnell with us for the first half of the year until her sabbatical time. She modeled and used her infinite understandings to build a kindergarten community, she knew each child deeply and she sowed the seeds for meaningful relationships. We all benefited from her time in the kindergarten this year. The children loved her and were sad to see her leave. Thank you for always being my teaching partner.

From the very first days of school, Leigh Ashbrook became a familiar adult in the kindergarten. She used every opportunity to build relationships and share her special connections to the natural world with the children. She let them know she was ready and happy to help them investigate any scientific wonder they could dream up and that she knew more fascinating information about birds than anyone could imagine. Leigh was an established member of our kindergarten community when Toni left for her sabbatical in January. We all missed Toni's presence very much, but Leigh's familiarity with the children helped to make the transition smooth. Thank you for being my teaching partner, too.

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 Mexican costumes, shared family traditions, kept the lines of communication open, and 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, Kate, Nicole and Amy for a terrific year!

This group of kindergarten children grew into a real community. They played, explored, and learned together. They truly enjoyed one another. I am pleased and proud to have worked with such an amazing group of children.