



**2017-18 Kindergarten Curriculum Report  
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**A Story! A Story! Tell Me A Story ...**

Kindergartners love to tell stories, listen to them, imagine them, act them out, compare and contrast them, illustrate them, think deeply about them, connect with them, learn from them, and of course, create their own. Hence, story is a natural choice and overarching structure which connects our children's explorations throughout this year.

The essential questions listed below are the guiding principles on which our year long explorations are based.

- What is my story?
- How do I connect with others? How do I share my story and hear their stories?
- What is a community? How do I belong? How can I help to create our community? How do we develop our collective story? How do I create and strengthen my connections to other communities?
- How do I connect with the natural world outside our door? Do I hear its stories?

**... and so the story begins!**

**Our Group**

Sherry and I are truly enjoying the privilege and challenge of working with this extraordinary group of kindergartners. Our group is a dynamic mix of eleven girls and eight boys: ten children arrived in the kindergarten as newcomers to Miquon and nine were already seasoned Miquon kids.

Clearly, the group of children moving on from Celia and Erin's nursery had formed comfortable relationships during their previous years together. In September, they happily reunited, quickly renewing old ties. Of course, they were also eager to develop new relationships. While our newcomers joined the group exhibiting a mix of curiosity, excitement, and trepidation, it was not long before they too seemed at home in the Miquon kindergarten.

The children, Sherry, and I have worked hard to build a sense of community within our group. Our mutual goal is to create a safe, supportive, and joyful environment for each and every group member. We consistently work within the framework of the class guidelines that our

kindergartners have developed: *We take care of ourselves. We take care of each other. We take care of our environment.* Initial focus has centered on getting to know one another, examining and celebrating our differences and similarities, creating class guidelines for all to live by, and holding “good of the group” meetings to consider and discuss important issues. As we share who we are by “telling our stories”, we explore, discover, create, and learn together.

Naturally, major emphasis is placed on supporting our kindergartners socially and emotionally as they work and play each day. Sherry and I strive daily to create a safe environment where children are respected and valued so that they in turn feel empowered to pursue their interests, express their ideas, create their learning, and be themselves.

Some basic social/emotional goals that our kindergartners are striving to develop and refine:

- learning to be a friend
- learning to be respectful of one another
- choosing to be inclusive
- learning to be “in charge” - responsible for his/her choices and behavior
- learning to resolve disagreements peacefully
- striving for independence
- developing confidence, stamina, and resilience
- respecting and caring for our classroom and playground - as well as all available materials

Adult modeling, lots of communication (both scheduled class meetings as well as the many conversations which develop when needs arise), games, stories, role playing, and other activities give our kindergartners opportunities to reflect, share ideas, and practice friendly and kind behavior.

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

## **Our Schedule**

Our kindergartners appreciate a relatively consistent daily/weekly schedule. They feel competent and confident when they know what’s coming next. Conversely, they also enjoy the variety provided by the specialist schedule. It’s always exciting to head off to the specialist of the day.

Our weekly schedule reflects these important goals:

- It is necessary to develop a schedule which successfully creates a balance between child initiated work/play and teacher led experiential activities. Choice should be an important component of each child’s day. Through self directed play, children imagine, explore, invent, experiment, create and learn.

- Young children learn with their whole bodies. They need to move. Therefore frequent opportunities to engage in physical activity promotes learning.
- Children learn through play. “If problem solving, communication, innovation, and creative thinking are to remain part of our legacy as a species, then play must be restored to (or in our case - remain in) its rightful place at the heart of childhood.”
- Flexibility: There is a built in assumption that the schedule can change whenever it suits our needs.

## Our Curriculum

We strive to integrate the various components of our kindergartners’ learning. We want their experience to be authentic and engaging. Our Social Studies and Science units provide the umbrella for our integrated curriculum. Although somewhat artificial to do so, I will describe the individual strands of our kindergarten curriculum.

## Language Arts

Language Arts activities are integrated into our entire day, as we think of Language Arts as relating to all aspects of language – speaking, listening, reading and writing. From the jokes and riddles gleefully told at the lunch table to the beautifully written and illustrated books created throughout the year, our kindergartners constantly develop and refine their facility with the various components of language.

Through regular experiences with authentic literacy activities, the kindergartners are developing necessary skills;

- **Concepts of Print** refers to the ability of a child to know and recognize the ways in which print “works” for the purposes of reading, particularly with regard to books. Print awareness is the understanding that words on a page have meaning and that they are related to spoken language.
- **Knowledge of the alphabet:** Letter knowledge enables a child to recognize all the letters of the alphabet, in both uppercase and lowercase form, and to know the names and sounds of each.
- **Phonics:** Children's reading development is dependent on their understanding of the alphabetic principle — the idea that letters and letter patterns represent the sounds of spoken language.
- **Phonemic Awareness** is a subset of phonological awareness in which listeners are able to hear, identify and manipulate phonemes, the smallest units of sound that can differentiate meaning. Phonological Awareness is the ability to hear and recognize the various sounds in spoken words.
- **Listening Comprehension** is more than just hearing what is said; rather, it is a child’s ability to understand the meaning of the words he/she hears and to relate to them in some way. When children hear a story, for instance, good listening comprehension enables them to understand it, remember it, discuss it, and even retell it in their own

words.

- **Comprehension** is the understanding and interpretation of what is read. To be able to accurately understand written material, children need to be able to (1) decode what they read; (2) make connections between what they read and what they already know; and (3) think deeply about what they have read. (as children become fluent readers)
- **Vocabulary development** is the process by which people acquire new words. Building a rich vocabulary is an essential skill that students need to improve reading performance. In fact, there is strong evidence to support providing vocabulary instruction not only to improve students' reading comprehension and writing quality, but also their listening vocabulary and their speaking vocabulary.
- **Expressive language** is a broad term that describes how a person communicates their wants and needs. ... Expressive language skills include: facial expressions, gestures, intentionality, vocabulary, semantics (word/sentence meaning), and syntax (grammar rules).
- **Receptive language** means the ability to understand information. It involves understanding the words, sentences and meaning of what others say or what is read.
- **Motivation to read and write:** taking real pleasure in reading and writing

Reading big books, solving riddles, acting out stories, playing games, making predictions, recording observations, illustrating and writing books, creating dramatic play, listening to / engaging in a good story, writing recipes, making lists, telling stories, sharing poetry and singing songs ... There are so many delightful ways to immerse ourselves in our literacy work.

## **Mathematics**

Our math program is based on the belief that children will learn best by creating their own understanding of mathematical concepts. To meet this goal, we use concrete manipulatives extensively as the basis for formal instruction. Our kindergartners need to identify, solve, and develop mathematical problems related to their environment.

Miquon's math program is also based on The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' *Curriculum Focal Points* - important mathematical topics for each grade level, Pre-K - 8. The topics are central to mathematics: they convey knowledge and skills that are essential to educated citizens, and they provide the foundations for further mathematical learning. They are core structures that lay a conceptual foundation - indispensable elements in developing problem solving, reasoning, and critical thinking skills, which are important to all mathematical thinking.

Kindergarten Curriculum Focal Points:

The set of three focal points and related connections for mathematics in kindergarten follow. As mentioned above, it is essential that these focal points be addressed in contexts that promote problem solving, reasoning, communication, making connections, and designing and analyzing representations.

- *Number and Operations:* Representing, comparing, and ordering whole numbers and joining and separating sets. Children use numbers, including written numerals, to represent quantities and to solve quantitative problems, such as counting objects in a set. Creating a set with a given number of objects, comparing and ordering sets or numerals by using both cardinal and ordinal meanings, and modeling simple joining and separating situations with objects. They choose, combine, and apply effective strategies for answering quantitative questions, including quickly recognizing the number in a small set, counting and producing sets of given sizes, counting the number in combined sets, and counting backward.
- *Geometry:* Describing shapes and space. Children interpret the physical world with geometric ideas (e.g. shape, orientation, spatial relations) and describe it with corresponding vocabulary. They identify, name, and describe a variety of shapes presented in a variety of ways. They use basic shapes and spatial reasoning to model objects in their environment and to construct more complex shapes.
- *Measurement:* Ordering objects by measurable attributes. Children use measurable attributes, such as length or weight, to solve problems by comparing and ordering objects. They compare the length of two objects both directly (by comparing them with each other) and indirectly (by comparing both with a third object), and they order several objects according to length.

Connections to the Focal Points:

- *Data Analysis:* Children sort objects and use one or more attributes to solve problems or they might collect data and use counting to answer questions.
- *Geometry:* Children integrate their understanding of geometry, measurement, and number.
- *Algebra:* Children identify, duplicate, and extend simple number patterns and sequential and growing patterns ( e.g. patterns made with shapes) as preparation for creating rules that describe relationships.

*Curriculum Focal Points for Prekindergarten through Grade 8 Mathematics A Quest for Coherence (2006)*

An Example of our Integrated Curriculum:

Our study of apples provided our kindergartners with some interesting mathematical opportunities. They counted and recorded the actual number of apples picked at Solebury - 384. They participated in a taste test of four varieties of apples; topaz, honeycrisp, gala and granny smith. They compared the four types and described their attributes before sketching the apple which they preferred. They used their sketches to create a pictograph as an answer to the question - *Which apple do you prefer?* They thought about fractions as we halved and quartered the apples. They compared and contrasted a topaz apple and a banana. They recorded their results on a venn diagram.

Of course, the kindergartners followed many directions and measured many ingredients as we cooked our way through the last six weeks. They made applesauce, apple butter and bread,

apple pie, apple crisp, “fried apples”, and apple cider. They thought carefully about the steps they had taken to make apple cider and created their own “how to make apple cider” recipe to share with their families.

- Pick apples.
- Wash the apples.
- Put three apples on a cloth.
- Fold the cloth into a bundle.
- Put on goggles and get a hammer.
- MASH the apples.
- Put the apple mash into the cider press bucket.
- Watch Sherry struggle to set up the machine.
- Push the lever of the cider press.
- Pull the lever back.
- Watch the topaz cider drip into the pitcher.
- Drink it!

## **Social Studies/Science**

**Story**, our year long thematic study is the thread that ties together the various strands of our work and play.

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

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

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

What have the kindergartners discovered? What stories have they created? They’ve turned over rocks and logs to find pillbugs, spiders, earwigs, velvet mites, beetles, ants, newts and garter snakes. They’ve sat quietly at the Walbridge pond watching the goldfish and frogs that live there. They’ve caught tadpoles in the creek. They’ve searched for caterpillars on the underside of leaves. The kindergartners have delighted in watching the goldfinches, cardinals, chickadees, sparrows, tufted titmice, mourning doves and woodpeckers that routinely visit our feeders. They are thrilled to occasionally sight a chipmunk scurrying among the rocks.

They’ve sorted fall leaves and tried to identify them. They’ve made leaf rubbings. They’ve collected seeds of all kinds. They’ve climbed trees and rested in their leafy branches. They’ve planted milkweed seeds in our garden. They’ve built dams in the creek. They’ve learned about

stinging nettle and its antidote jewelweed. They've gathered goldenrod and poke berries to produce natural dyes for wool yarn. They've discovered and followed animal tracks. They've strung popcorn, Cheerios, raisins, apples and cranberries for hungry critters. They've also created mud pies, sand structures and delicate fairy homes.

Through their daily experiences, the kindergartners are becoming more aware of the world around them. They are in touch with the earth; its natural rhythms, its beauty and mystery. They are building personal memories and stories that they will cherish for years to come. Hopefully, their experiences are nourishing a beginning understanding of their place in our dynamic, interconnected world.

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

### **Monarch Butterflies**

Although we had not originally planned to study monarchs this fall, we could not resist collecting the many caterpillars that we found on the milkweed growing in our garden.

As the children entered the classroom each morning, they would pause at the red shelf to check on the progress of our monarch caterpillars. The children marveled at the quantity of milkweed leaves the caterpillars consumed. They were amazed by the caterpillars' rapid growth. They watched as the caterpillars prepared to form their chrysalides by hanging upside down from a twig in the characteristic "J" formation. The children waited impatiently for the monarchs to emerge from the smooth green chrysalides dotted with gold. Finally two of the chrysalides split open and the butterflies slipped 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!" Over the course of ten days or so, we actually released a total of ten monarchs.

### **Tree Study**

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

Perhaps for many kindergartners, the most engaging aspect of our look at trees thus far has been the opportunity to choose a tree for a year-long observation. Each child selected a tree which was located within our kindergarten boundaries, on the red playground, or along the path leading to the box elder tree. Through sketches, their writing, and actual specimens, the children have recorded their observations in their tree journals. They've sketched their trees in

the fall, and will continue to do so in the winter, early spring, and just at the end of the school year. They've collected seeds from their trees and made leaf and bark rubbings. They've searched for evidence of animal and insect life on and around their trees. They check on their trees regularly and excitedly share any changes they discover. Many a kindergarten parent has made the trek through our campus to meet his/her child's tree.

### **Apples**

We delved into a study of apples and apple trees. We prepared for our trip to Solebury Orchards by reading a variety of books on apples. On a lovely morning in early October, we traveled to the orchard to pick apples. After learning the proper method of picking an apple, we began our work. In what seemed like a very short time, our baskets were full and we returned to the weighing station. Believe it or not, the kindergarten had picked 141 pounds of apples!

Well ... We counted the actual number of apples that we picked – 384. We held a taste test to determine which variety of apple was our favorite. We graphed the results. We munched on apples for snack for days on end. We made delicious apple sauce. We ate apples with honey. We baked the most scrumptious apple crisp. And we still had apples! We made spicy apple butter and homemade bread to share with our guests on Grandparents' and Special Friends' Day. We baked a luscious apple pie and sauteed a basket full of apples in butter, cinnamon and sugar to make "fried apples". We compared apples to bananas and recorded our results as Venn diagrams. We pressed the remainder of our apples to produce fresh cider (YUM!). And believe it or not – we never tired of apples!

Over the weeks we have occasionally shared some of our apples with the animals that live here at Miquon. We wondered who might gobble them up - maybe some raccoons, skunks, groundhogs, mice, or perhaps, rabbits, opossums, squirrels, deer, or chipmunks. Although we will never know who enjoyed our apples, we do know that they always disappeared overnight!

### **Dyeing Wool**

In early fall, we hiked throughout the Miquon campus to gather pokeberries and goldenrod. We used these ingredients to create natural dyes. We also tried making apple dye. We placed the peels, cores and seeds from some of our apples into a pot of simmering water. We added our wool yarn and waited. After many hours, we were delighted to discover that our experiment had actually worked. The yarn had been dyed a lovely golden wheat color. We will use turmeric as well as onion skins in future dyeing projects. Once we have created an array of beautifully dyed wool yarn, we will begin weaving.

### **Woodland Habitat**

The children are quite interested in the wooded area on the other side of our creek. They are eager to explore this hillside which stretches just beyond the boundaries of our playground. They are particularly interested in the creatures which inhabit this place. We have just read a wonderful book – *In the Woods: Who's Been Here?* by Lindsay Barrett George to introduce our study of the woodland habitat. The kindergartners enjoyed piecing together the clues on each page to guess the animals featured in the story.

They are definitely ready to conduct a bit of research on their own. What do they want to know about the woodland critters that inhabit Miquon? Upon our return from Winter Break, they will brainstorm a list of questions to focus their research. Each quarter group will choose a Miquon woodland animal to study. With teacher support, the quarter groups will gather information on their animal's physical characteristics, its home, food preferences, adaptations etc. Based on Joy Cowley's book *What's for Lunch?*, each quarter group will then create and illustrate their particular animal's story using information gleaned from their research.

### **Bird Watching**

Over the course of the fall, our group has become quite proficient at recognizing the bird species that nest in the trees just beyond our classroom and regularly visit the three feeders hanging just outside our windows. They watch the feeders intently and eagerly share their observations as birds alight.

During the November Conference Week, Sherry and Leigh led the children on an exciting study of birds. The opening of the Bird Blind was one of the highlights of this study. A hike to the Bird Blind to observe the various species of birds which frequent the feeders is always anticipated with great delight. During the coldest months, the children (in quarter groups) will take on the responsibility of caring for the bird blind by filling the feeders on Friday afternoons.

### **To Be Continued ...**

As you may have noticed, we are still very much in the midst of our studies. Upon our return from Winter Break, we will happily pick up where we left off - observing trees, making natural dyes, becoming avid birders, researching Miquon's woodland animals ... Until then, I wish you and your dear families a wonderful winter break and a peaceful and joyous New Year.

Fondly,

Toni