



2017-18 First and Second Grade Curriculum Report

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Community and Daily Routines

While our daily routines remained largely the same, the second half of the year saw us building on concepts and expanding the individual routines. We continued, of course, our Social Studies theme work on perspectives, our Social and Emotional Learning, as well as our subject work in Language Arts and Mathematics.

Social Emotional Learning

In the Spring we began work using the Zones of Regulation with the help of our resident Doctoral student Maria Laverghetta. Zones is a framework to help us better develop our self-regulation as well as emotional awareness and control. Ben used this in previous classrooms and has appreciated it for its clearness, children's buy-in, and the emotional literacy that has resulted. Briefly, children check in with themselves to determine the zone they are in at the moment:

- The *Red Zone* is used to describe extremely heightened states of alertness and intense emotions. A person may be experiencing anger, rage, explosive behavior, devastation, or terror when in the Red Zone.
- The *Yellow Zone* is also used to describe a heightened state of alertness and elevated emotions, however one has more control when they are in the Yellow Zone. A person may be experiencing stress, frustration, anxiety, excitement, silliness, the wiggles, or nervousness when in the Yellow Zone.
- The *Green Zone* is used to describe a calm state of alertness. A person may be described as happy, focused, content, or ready to learn when in the Green Zone. This is the zone where optimal learning occurs.
- The *Blue Zone* is used to describe low states of alertness and down feelings such as when one feels sad, tired, sick, or bored.

While the Green Zone is the optimal learning zone, it is not given primacy. We emphasize that ALL zones are normal and that everyone should expect to experience each of them over time and often several over the course of the day. We created a visual display that hung at our meeting area and the children used it to indicate their current zone. We also combined this work with lessons on “size of the problem”, where children determined how large a given problem

was to them and we then shared out why. We then discussed how the Zones might help us to find our way out of a problem. We decided that the zone could help to let us know how we were feeling and then, once we calmed down a bit we could assess how to solve the problem. We agreed that the size of a problem should usually be related to how long it takes to solve, how many people it affects, and how lasting the effects of having the problem in the first place was.

Good of the Group meetings

Modeled on the Good of the School assemblies, our class would take up more 'local' problems in the classroom and work to solve them. The meetings had a consistent format: We would open the circle to any concerns that involved members of the class; after hearing several, teachers would choose one to address for that session; students then took turns describing the issues and we always solicited multiple perspectives. Once we had clearly identified the problems, students proposed solutions and we settled on a way forward. Problems ranged from children "taking over" other children's forts to how to deal with players who will not get out of the Gaga pit. The following session would begin by revisiting the previous and assessing whether and how things might have changed.

Kindness Jar

To promote empathy and appreciation, we begun filling a Kindness Jar, where a random act of kindness in our group is recorded on a clipboard by the recipient and bestower of kindness, and then a stone is added to the jar. For example, "E. helped M. carry her recycled art down to dismissal." "I. gave R. great tips in baseball." We filled it and celebrated with a scavenger hunt that led the children to a special ice cream treat on the second to last day of school.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Writing Workshop

Poetry

We wrapped up our poetry unit in January and held a publishing party. During our poetry unit we looked closely at published poems and learned how poets write poems. Some of the things we noticed:

- Poets see objects in the world in a new, fresh way
- Poets play with line breaks to find the music in poems
- Poets write about things that give them strong feelings (these can be positive, negative, or a combination)
- Poets find something (an object or experience) to hold that strong feeling. "I love to eat pizza" is a strong feeling but for that feeling to make a good poem it needs something concrete to house it. We also stressed that we are poets all the time, not just when we are writing.

Small Moments

As we shared with our students, "A story that has many moments is a cake, and a small moment story is a slice of that cake!" With the help of mentor texts, such as *A Chair for My Mother*, *In My Momma's Kitchen*, and *A River*, lots of mini-lessons, guided practice ("Writers, let's tell and write story together. How would that story go if you were going to tell it across your fingers?"), and illustrated checklists and anchor charts, the children were able to use tools to self-assess as they practiced stretching out small moments and experiences and making them come alive. In each session the children zoomed in on an experience and extracted details. As they planned, drafted, revised, and edited their narrative, our writers conferenced with us in small groups, worked independently, shared feedback in partnerships, and published and celebrated their work. The writing process for this grade band helps our children develop their identity as writers. Additionally, through practice, they focus on *structure* (e.g., making a great beginning), *development* (e.g., adding details, talk, and actions), and *language conventions* (e.g., spelling and punctuation).

It was helpful for some of them to plumb their previous news writing for inspiration. By reflecting on and revisiting their news experiences they often realized that there was much more to describe. During this unit we really saw the children develop writing independence and watched their all-around investment in writing grow.

Opinion Writing

As we listened to, read, and compared stories in our fairy tales unit of study, we engaged in dialogue about characters, setting, and plot. During Writing Workshop, we worked on opinion pieces that responded to one of the following questions, "Who do you think was the villain in *Jack and the Beanstalk* and why?" and "When would you stop making wishes in *The Fisherman and His Wife* and why?"

Each opinion piece included one or two reasons to support the writer's argument, using new and important Word Wall words such as "because," "also," "in addition," "furthermore," and more. We moved this unit beyond fairy tale response and asked the children to develop opinions on a number of other topics near (and usually dear) to them. While they are not yet writing 5 paragraph essays we *are* asking them to defend their opinions and to think about what they think and even, at times, why they think it. Through guided practice, shared writing, and conferencing, the children began to internalize the expectation of including at least two or three reasons to support their thinking.

Word Wall

The Word Wall was a resource we used all year. The goal of the Word Wall was to introduce a variety of words to support and supplement the other spelling and word building strategies. Through these words we explored phonological awareness, spelling patterns, spelling sound relationships and sight vocabulary. Each week five new high frequency words were introduced. After the words were introduced the children wrote the new words in a number of sensorily

unique ways: outside on the sidewalk in chalk, in watercolor on paper, in chalk, with their fingers, etc.

But later in the year as the number of words grew we were able to expand the Word Wall routine by playing games like Word Wall Detective, where the teacher has a mystery word in mind and gives five clues. The children guessed a word that fit each clue and then refined their choice after each successive clue about the features of the word. Another favorite was Word Wall Train where children attempted to string together the longest “train” of words they could. It gave them practice reading words but also in thinking logically and mathematically as they, in their heads, walked through the non-deterministic algorithm that would make the longest train. We encouraged the children to use the word wall as a resource for spelling throughout the week.

Reading

Reading Groups

Later in the winter we launched reading groups that took place during Reader’s Workshop. These were a supplement to our regular 1-on-1 conferences with children which continued throughout the year. These small literature circles were ability-based student groupings. Each group met with a teacher to read and talk about an assigned book. These were not “just right books,” but books that were typically pitched just above a student’s reading level or if not, provided ample opportunity to develop comprehension skills. The children used reading journals to write and draw their predictions, their opinions, and even character descriptions.

Foundations

This year we continued using *Foundations*, which is part of the Wilson Literacy program. This is a phonics-based program that helped the children with the building blocks of reading. Even our more experienced readers benefited from this instruction by filling in any blanks that may have existed in the child’s skill set.

The key areas we worked in this year began with phonological awareness – the understanding that spoken language consists of parts: a spoken sentence consists of words, a spoken word consists of separate syllables, and a syllable consists of separate sounds, or phonemes. We learned to blend, segment, and manipulate sounds in words with up to six sounds in a syllable. There are six main syllable types that are included in most words – closed (cat), vowel-consonant-e (lake), open (me), r-controlled, (car), vowel digraph/diphthong (town), and consonant-le (table). We covered the first syllable types, the closed syllables, in first grade *Foundations* and the next two in second grade *Foundations*.

The words that the children learned to decode became more complex as we added different types of sounds. We became very adept at recognizing and distinguishing between digraphs (ch, sh, th, wh, ck), and blends (bl, pr, st, etc.). Our main method for helping us decode was our finger tapping procedure – one tap for each phoneme or sound in a syllable. We worked with

several tools including magnetic letter boards, wipe-off boards for dictation of words and sentences, and letter/sound cards for blending sounds. This program is designed to employ explicit and systematic instruction in these areas, with a lot of repetition of the skill we are learning, and quick feedback for both correct responses, as well as errors, during lessons.

Read Aloud Stories

Our read aloud of picture books and chapter books, selected either for our social studies theme, Expanding Our Perspective, as mentor texts for writing workshop, or sometimes just because it's a great piece of literature, invites our learners to respond to story as text participants and critical analysts. The children shared predictions, made inferences from the illustrations, asked meaningful questions, and developed empathy for characters. Our lively dialogic read aloud time gave our students space for making a variety of intertextual, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections.

Chapter books

- *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*
- *End of the Beginning*

A sampling of picture books

- *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up By Sitting Down*
- *Gordon Parks: How the Photographer Captured Black and White America*
- *Windows*
- *The Way Home in the Night*
- *Will Allen's Vegetable Garden*
- *A River*
- *The Wave*
- *Mice Twice*
- *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*
- *My Name Is Yoon*

Numerous fairy tales (These and others, some read aloud, some told aloud.)

- *Clever Elsa, Rumpelstiltskin*
- *Hansel and Gretel*
- *Little Red Riding Hood*
- *Jack and the Beanstalk*
- *The Devil and His Three Golden Hairs*
- *The Fisherman and His Wife*
- *The Story of One Who Set Out to Study Fear*
- *The Goblins*
- *The Rabbit Bride*

MATHEMATICS

Our mathematics program is based on the *Focal Points* curriculum from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). It is implemented through the use of many different published materials, most notably, in our case, TERC *Investigations*. We also lean on teacher-created materials, games, and projects (both explicitly mathematical, such as our inventory; and cross disciplinary). We worked to provide contexts that promote problem solving, reasoning, communication, making connections, and designing and analyzing representations.

The main thrust of our instruction involved building the children's number sense, essentially, developing the child's fluidity and flexibility with numbers. The children spent the year working through what numbers mean and their relationship to one another, the ability to perform mental math, an understanding of symbolic representations, and using those numbers in real world situations.

In terms of skills, we addressed the following: comparing numbers; skip counting by 2's, 5's and 10's; place value to ones, tens, hundreds (or beyond depending on the individual child); determining whether a number is even or odd and why; addition and subtraction strategies (and developing greater automaticity in basic addition facts); geometry (recognizing symmetry, naming shapes and polygons, characteristics such as number of sides or corners.); measurement (measuring distance with non-standard and standard units, measuring time on an analog clock, and on their calendars, which the children made each month); and collection and manipulation of data. We were largely supported by the *Investigations* curriculum but drew one assorted best practices resources we have gathered over the years.

In addition to a great many games which promoted discrete skills as well as a higher level analysis of mathematics, we introduced math centers to help reinforce and extend children's thinking. These math centers were developed by Marcy Cook, an accomplished math educator. Each set includes 20 activity cards in each center covering a wide range of math concepts including addition, subtraction, missing addends, fact families, and basic number sense. Each child had number tiles from 0 to 9. The children surveyed the activity card and then began placing their tiles. Each number could only be placed once and but some cards were open-ended and tiles could go in multiple spots. Children loved using the accompanying progress sheets to track their progress through a set of cards.

We engaged in many estimation activities over the course of the year. We regularly filled our estimation jar and endeavored to guess (educatedly!) how many popsicles sticks, or rhinestones, or plastics bears were inside and we watched each others' sense of numerical magnitude grow in the process. Estimation is a valuable activity for in it we develop ways to make a smart guess. We learn that these best guesses aren't usually just a gestalt processes but rely on other mathematical skills, e.g. *I think there are 200 popsicles in this jar because there are ten on the bottom and there seem to be about 20 more layers, and twenty tens is 200.* In our discussions we encourage children to make visible their processes so that others can understand them, tussle with them, and use them when appropriate. In addition, estimation

activities help our children make meaningful comparisons as they collect, analyze, and visually represent data.

In addition to the basic math skills, children developed logic skills including trial and error and using known information to figure out a problem at hand. One of our abiding circle activities was the Slap Game which developed social skills, emotional regulation, perspective taking and a whole lot more, but is, at its heart a mathematical activity as children seek patterns and apply logic to solve the problem. We endeavor to make this kind of thinking a habit of mind that can be applied to all aspects of learning and problem solving, to encourage experimentation and a willingness to make mistakes and accept others' mistakes.

SOCIAL STUDIES

We continued to explore our overarching theme, *Expanding our Perspectives: What can we learn from taking the perspective of another living creature?* The minute we walked into the classroom this year we were excited to share things about ourselves ranging from what we did over the summer to our hopes and dreams for this year. Through their emergent pursuits and questions, our learners help set the framework for meaningful exploration.

Self-Portraits

Perspectives: Anatomy fiction self-portraits

Inspired by the workshop of Yuki Okumura, we asked our students to reflect on how we might want to express our inner selves as opposed to our "outside" appearance. We traced each other's upper bodies and depicted our identity, imagination, stories, and perspectives beyond our structural anatomy through pencil drawing and painting with acrylic. The children provided artist statements, which were added to our exhibit, that included self-reflection and descriptions of the self-portraits. Through this process, they could begin to understand and appreciate the multiplicity of perspectives.

Perspective portraits

Loosely inspired by Bryan Collier's picture book, *Uptown*, which depicts vibrant city imagery seen through a young boy's perspective, the children made perspective water color paintings of places (real or imagined) that are important and special to them. With a ruler, they extended lines from a vanishing point to add depth to their setting. On a separate piece of paper, children drew self-portraits with artist graphite pencils, cut them out and pasted them onto the painting.

Field trip to Bartram's Gardens

At Bartram's Gardens, for a study in physical perspective, we took in the panoramic views of the arboretum setting and the city skyline directly across the Schuylkill River. Mrs. Leslie, our tour guide, gave us some background on naturalist and botanical artist Billy Bartram and asked us to think about how we might learn about the past. Some of the children shared that people's writings and journals can give us information. To consider how a local habitat looks from an

animal's perspective, we sculpted wildlife and other creatures that use camouflage or warning colors in predator-prey relationships and placed them on top of pictures that allowed them to be very well-hidden!

Fairy tale/Folk tale unit and First/Second Grade play

In the Spring we began to saturate the children with fairy tales. We read some but also wanted them to experience some of these stories as children many generations removed might have--straight from the mouth of someone else. We looked at the structure of fairy tales and made efforts to distinguish them from folk tales (we learned that it is tricky to draw a hard line between the two), we discussed common plot elements, we looked at recurring character types, we identified typical settings and also turned a critical eye toward the gender positioning of the characters. While reading a version of *Thorn Rose*, a student asked, "*Why does a princess always have to be rescued by a prince in so many of these stories? A princess can rescue herself!*" This theme of the helpless princess prompted us to compare other stories we'd read. After developing an understanding of the fairy tale genre, we set to develop a play based on fairy tales. We created *The Jolly Letter Carrier* based on "The Jolly Postman," a children's picture book. In this tale, characters from different fairy tales and Mother Goose rhymes receive letters from a postal carrier.

Over the course of several weeks our students worked collaboratively with the other 1-2 classroom. In this work we sought to deepen the children's sense of story, provide them with an authentic purpose for rereading and developing fluency, help them develop confidence in front of an audience.

Both 1/2 rooms began to buzz with excitement the moment we announced that we were putting on a play and the buzz grew steadily louder as the performance date approached. We began rehearsing the scenes from our play during half group time and after approximately 1 week ran through it with all 43 children. It was wonderful to watch them take a script and move beyond it--suggesting prop ideas, blocking revisions, and ad-libbing dashes of 7 and 8-year-old humor--they really worked to make it their own. We found additional inspiration when we invited the improv and story-telling troupe StoryUp! to Miquon. Their work merged well with our theme of perspective taking by presenting stories from multiple character's perspective.

Our production also gave the children real world practice in helping to develop and manage a project. We all built executive functioning skills along the way as we made lists, gathered materials together, decided who would take up what technical aspects of the show, and weighed various priorities as the show fast approached. I think all the children would agree that it was 6 weeks meaningfully spent. Both classes celebrated the end of the year and our play with a field trip to the Castle Playground, Doylestown, PA! Blue skies, expansive green hills, a creek, and yes--a magnificent labyrinthine castle--made for the most wonderful play space for hours.

Minicourses

Each week the children return from their minicourses re-energized and excited to share what they explored or made. From dioramas to doodling, soccer to community service, it is always a pleasure to hear what's happening during this special hour where Miquon kids get to know their older and younger schoolmates better while pursuing a common interest.

CLOSING

Within the safe interactive space of our classroom, we learned to question and challenge assumptions, to be sensitive to the needs and differences of one another, to value new and alternative ideas, and to understand that there are many ways of looking at the world. The children learned to value and understand multiple perspectives and to apply the idea of looking through different lenses when encountering and resolving conflicts.

This past year marked a time of growth for all of our learners in diverse and countless ways. The children surprised, delighted, and impressed us at every turn--independent thinking, invention, singing and dancing, deep concentration, rich exchanges, tenacity, sensitivity, perspective taking, forgiveness, friendship, and play were the hallmarks of this year. The children worked hard and found fun in all things.

Thanks to all of the families for celebrating your children's work during our publishing parties, assisting when you could as chaperones, dropping in on Free Fridays, joining us for birthday parties, and for all the work you did with your children at home in supporting their learning journeys, as well as ours. It was an honor to teach, learn and play with your incredibly special children.