



## **2017-18 Curriculum Report**

**June 2018 Entry**

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### **The Group**

Our community continued to be built and supported by routines and annual events from December onward -- some across the building and some involving just our group.

#### *5th/6th Sing*

It was important to all of us to continue this Wednesday morning tradition after last year's retirement of Lynn Hughes. With accompaniment from Mark on standing bass, Mike Batchelor on guitar, Diane backing him up on the same, and joined by the occasional ukulele, pennywhistle, or guitar of children or other staff, we enjoyed our now established repertoire of sing-alongs and expanded it to include some music specific to this year's theme studies.

#### *Buddies*

Our continued buddy relationship with Celia and Ben's 1st and 2nd grade included: play, planting, reading to and being the audience for, and joint lunches and treats. We attempted some work on creating games together during the winter months, but found that time restraints did not allow the idea to develop fully.

#### *Candle-making*

Candle-making with the kindergarten group. Although they are not our buddy class, our group takes great pleasure in assisting these younger kids in enjoying this favorite December event in the art room.

#### *Good of the School*

Sixth grade facilitation of the Good of the School assemblies, which this winter included the facilitation of a discussion of the ramifications of the name of the play space across the creek, and the eventual shift of the moniker from Monkeyland to Creekwood Hollow. We have used this model for conversation in Good of the Building meetings as well, where we tackle the challenges that arise specific to the community in our building. This year those challenges included some struggles with fair play and "sportsmanship" at Choice time, in particular.

### *Other Important 5th/6th Traditions*

Weekly check-in and regular birthday celebrations that include word presents let the people in our group (adult and child) know what matters to each of us and allow us to offer specific appreciations to one another. We also held an across the building pollyanna as we left for winter break, sharing that same spirit across the whole 5th/6th grade.

- Welcome Back Breakfast, prepared by the teachers, to celebrate our return from winter break.
- Soon-to-be-graduate run pretzel and water ice sales, the proceeds from which allow the graduates to make a gift of their choosing to the school upon their departure, something they feel fills a need or wish of the community. This year the graduates raised \$290, and after much discussion, decided to gift it to the school for the purpose of providing school pet(s). As children get older and leave nursery and kindergarten, they miss the presence of animals in their classrooms. The graduates will be happy for the animals to live outside (think guinea fowl) or inside, but more animals there shall be!
- Pizza sales, held roughly every other week, became a smooth operation, as pairs of children gained practice with attending to detail and managing a fairly complex 12 item menu.
- The famous Miquon lemon stick stand -- the contribution to the annual Spring Fair from our side of the building since time immemorial -- run by the children in the group, rain or shine.

Establishing a community is most directly done in our individual classroom. From the beginning of the year, we set certain boundaries and expectations for one another (some adult-suggested, most child-suggested). For example, sarcasm is almost always fun for the creator and rarely for the receiver, so we promised to avoid using it. We agree that other people's cubbies are off limits without explicit permission for an explicit and limited purpose. We are stalwart advocates of encouraging comments and specific, constructive feedback (often in the form of balanced responses), and *not* of "put-downs" -- be they of ourselves or others. Much of this and countless other items not mentioned is a straightforward continuation of expectations and boundaries from previous years.

In fifth and sixth grade, not only is the need for expanded physical boundaries developmentally appropriate, the need to push against and to shift the specificity of social/emotional boundaries is appropriate as well. We partnered *with* our children in meeting these emerging needs. The gathering of their collective wisdom on any given topic and the occasional sense of humor (i.e. insults must be Shakespearean) are often all that is required. Every single one of us fails to live up to our own expectations -- regularly and occasionally spectacularly. Then it is time to be accountable and take steps to remedy any damage caused, intentionally or not. We learn. And we grow.

On a more individual level, every child in our group evaluated their own strengths and set goals for themselves socially, as learners, and in various academic disciplines. We revisited these goals in January, and children worked with a peer (usually not an especially close friend) to

discuss their progress and to brainstorm techniques they might use to develop further. Some children, feeling they had accomplished one or more goals, set a new one or two. In the last week of school, we evaluated our progress again. Each child identified at least one goal they felt they had met, and then thought about one goal for the near future, be that sixth or seventh(!) grade.

### **Social Studies - Integrated Curriculum**

The important questions we address in fifth and sixth grade are:

- *What gives a person or group of people their worldview, and how are those worldviews revealed in culture and through group identity?*
- *How do big changes in the world affect and challenge worldviews and create conflict, and how do humans try to resolve those conflicts?*

#### *Fall Study: Baseball (final notes)*

Our thematic study of play continued up to winter break, as we brought our study of baseball and its place in American history and identity to a close. Exploring our personal identities, we collaborated with Nicole Batchelor in the art room to create giant baseball cards. On the front was a copy of the stunning self-portraits drawn by our children (and on display at the Art and Science show). On the reverse side was a list of self and group-selected personal statistics -- snapshots into the identities of these 10-12 year-old young people.

We also prepared and performed a baseball assembly for the whole school. The group mimed the story underlying the famous poem, "Casey at the Bat," while members of the group recited it. Two members of the group (selected by their classmates on the strength of their rehearsals) performed Abbott and Costello's skit, "Who's on First" with wonderful timing and straight faces.

This group has been especially taken with learning songs connected to our studies, and the big new number for our baseball study was "Talkin' Baseball," a 1981 song written and recorded by Terry Cashman. The song reviews some of the greats in baseball from the 50s through the 70s. Matt Linden, our Progressive Education Lab (PEL) fellow, researched the lyrics in detail and regaled us with his findings through a slideshow, which helped the song make sense to those for whom the topic was very new and which delighted the several ball fans in the room. We rounded out the performance with a performance of a second song, "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," about which we had also learned the history.

Other baseball-related events later in the study included researching the "Faces in Baseball" -- famous names and faces in the history of baseball -- and a visit from Mikyeil El Mekki, a local friend who shared with us his passion for the Negro Leagues.

#### *Spring Study*

In mid-December, not too far before winter break, we visited The Mercer Museum in Doylestown with an eye toward making a transition from the *play* piece of our theme work toward *work*. The

exhibits at The Mercer could not have matched our goals better. First, we were delighted to find a room full of miniature houses (all decorated for Christmas, given the timing). They were enchanting, and a close view of work done by people who clearly take “playing” with dollhouses quite seriously.

The next exhibit was a look at play across time, culture, and condition in the United States. The group jumped right into a lengthy period of imaginative and interactive play as they explored the exhibit. Finally, we transitioned to the permanent exhibit at The Mercer, which is a remarkable collection of some 40,000 objects and tools that document the lives of 18th and 19th century Americans and illustrate how work was accomplished prior to the Industrial Revolution. The young people each chose several occupations to focus upon, and described tools used in that occupation in words and images, to be used later in researching the nature of work *before* the Industrial Revolution.

When we started reading *Cheaper by the Dozen* aloud, we were exposed to another view of work, namely the move toward assembly line production (and eventually automation) that came with the Industrial Revolution. Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, important characters in the memoir, were prominent early advocates of scientific management and a pioneer of time and motion study (as well as the parents of 12 children).

The story, published in 1948 but recounting life in the teens and 20s, is a funny and poignant story of family as well as changes in the working world. (Reflecting its time, it also contains a number of references that hit our ears very differently today -- something we discussed often.) Among the work-related topics was the idea of *therbligs*, units of motion, the close observation and optimization of which builds efficiency. We experimented with it ourselves in the classroom, lifting chairs onto tables and adjusting our motions and interactions to improve time and increase ease. While on this topic, we also watched sections of the Charlie Chaplin film, *Modern Times*, a satire about factory work.

Moving closer to modern day, we introduced the group to Studs Terkel, author, historian, actor, and broadcaster, who is remembered for his oral histories of ordinary Americans. We used this as a model to prepare for interviews of our own. The children learned the process in three steps: asking good questions, listening closely, and taking notes. They practiced one new step with each subsequent interview -- of Mark, then of PEL fellow Ruth Bagley, then of Diane -- interviewing each of us about early jobs we held. They combined the three steps in interviews with people outside of school, typically in their own family.

### *The Industrial Revolution*

Finally, we turned our attention to the Industrial Revolution itself, beginning in Britain and spreading eventually to the United States. Early on, we focused on fundamental shifts in work (and consequently in life) that define this period of time. We used 1760 - 1860 as a rough time frame, but from the very beginning (as we played the game *Timeline*, for example), we knew that this was only rough and a matter of defining terms. **The fundamental shifts we addressed**

were: the move from cottage industry to assembly line work, the effects of new technologies and of the pace of new inventions, the change from an economy based on agriculture to one based on manufacturing (and the subsequent move from rural areas to cities), the move from using biomass to using fossil fuels, and the resulting population explosion. It was great fun to experience the difference between a “cottage industry” and an assembly line by making star shaped whirligigs in the different methods and comparing results.

To get more deeply into the topic, we asked each child their preference, then divided the class into two study groups -- one studying coal and the other studying textiles. These two industries were central to the Industrial Revolution and were intertwined with one another as well. As facilitators of groups like these, the teachers often find themselves delving into the topic far beyond what is directly shared with the children. For example, Diane (who led the coal group) read *Coal: A Human History* (Barbara Freese, 2016 edition). Mark (leading the textile group) read a lot of material provided by the Lowell National Historical Park, which led him to even more research about the local history of the textile industry.

#### *Coal Study*

The group studying coal learned about the process used to create charcoal and the move from charcoal to coal in Britain. They handled and compared various types of coal and learned about the special role of the anthracite region of Pennsylvania in U.S. and global coal production. They also visited Hopewell Furnace, and read excerpts from *Breaker Boys* (Michael Burgan) and *Growing Up in Coal Country* (Susan Campbell Bartoletti). A lot of note-taking took place.

Loving to learn with music, they were especially fascinated by “Tennessee” Ernie Ford’s recording of “Sixteen Tons,” which we brought to 5th/6th Sing, and by “The Molly Maguires” and “Avondale Mine Disaster.” The latter is a locally famous song about an early mine disaster that was close to the route of our spring trip! On the spring trip, the whole class enjoyed a visit to the small but fascinating Anthracite Museum in Ashland, PA as well as a visit to the Pioneer Coal Mine. Bernie Zahren, Theo’s grandfather, joined the whole 5th/6th grades to share his enthusiasm and knowledge of sustainable energy, a topic that connected well with our work.

#### *Textile Study*

The textile group tackled the Industrial Revolution with a focus on textiles. They began in the 1700s with industrial developments in England, the world’s leading producer of woolen fabric, which led to the revolution in the western hemisphere. They learned how the newest technologies of the time -- like the workings of a water-powered mill -- brought dramatic change, not only in commerce and the economy but in the everyday life of people in this country. They constructed their own mills and learned what made rivers and other waterways attractive power sources.

They then turned their attention to Lowell, Massachusetts’ historical significance in the story of the Industrial Revolution, and some of the factors that fostered the development of large-scale textile manufacturing there. They investigated why people, especially young women, left New

England farms in the nineteenth century to live and work in factory villages. They talked about how inventions like the carding machine and the flying shuttle made sped up the process of spinning and weaving thread altering the social and economic fabric of America.

### *Whole Group Connections*

The whole group connected to the textile study through listening to *Audacity*, by Melanie Crowder, through which we learned about Clara Lemlich, and the historical role of immigrants, particularly females, in the U.S. garment industry and in sweatshops, as well as about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire and about unionization.

As our study wound down, we had fun watching an episode of John Green's famous Youtube history series, *CrashCourse*, which covered -- in delightful depth and complexity -- many of the things we had been learning, and tied a lot of ideas together. It also gave us yet another note-taking opportunity! We also discussed the notions of blue and white collar work (and the fact that color categories have greatly expanded), and listened to a podcast (*Hidden Brain*) that offered insights into what makes a job good, or meaningful. This was followed by a brief, but somewhat profound conversation.

### *Current Events*

Our series of conversation about symbols seems to have continued all year, often symbols of America, but more generally the power of symbols and the (sometimes surprisingly) strong responses they evoke. In an academic sense, this has created a context for discussions about symbolic language -- metaphors -- in which an object (i.e. birds of many varieties) symbolizes an idea (freedom, fragility, independence), as it did in the book, *Audacity*.

Our talking about issues like "taking a knee" in professional sports, and incidents that have flared into violence over the ideas behind symbols (i.e., July in Charlottesville, VA), were revived in March as we discussed the walkout initiated by the students of Parkland High School and our symbolic responses to it via posters and actions. (Thanks also to parent, Katie Eyer for helping to shape and lead the conversation about the issues at stake that resulted in the walkout.) This conversation, as predicted earlier, did extend to discussion about events in Jerusalem, as so many lives were lost and harmed there this spring.

As stated in December, in my (Diane's) approximately 30 years of teaching, this has been the most difficult period of time I have ever had the privilege and challenge of living through with the care of children on my mind. I suspect many feel this way as teachers, parents, and adults who care about children. Responding to this challenge, while there is no intention to deny children the important conversations and understanding that learning about current events provides and we remain committed to that work, for the coming school year we are considering setting aside the *Junior Scholastic* magazine in favor of a related publication that covers current events in science and the arts as well. The heaviness of our times weighs upon these children and we feel moved to intervene on their behalf for the time being.

### **Conference Week**

Thanks to Jeri and Mark for taking the lead in organizing both conference weeks and incorporating input from the others who add their inspiration and ideas. The following describes the spring conference week.

During spring conference week, the two 5th/6th grade classes worked with Jeri, Mark, Gabi Isaac-Herzog and Mariama Koroma O'Brien. The theme for conference week this spring was "Creating Utopia." We explored the idea of cities, their components, and their design. What is it about a particular city that draws us? What are the important components of a city we need to sustain us in the future? Planning a city is an act of community participation which hopefully promotes economic development, enhances human services, improves educational opportunities, assures safety, provides access to transportation, and preserves human dignity and quality of life.

In groups of 4-5 students, we dared to create utopian cities of our own design, and in the process, learn about where we live now and how we could cultivate them into something better and sustainable for future generations. As prime inspiration for our city planning project, we watched sections of "*A Convenient Truth - Urban Solutions from Curitiba, Brazil*," a documentary about a city that made major changes in transportation, trash and recycling, housing, and parks to better serve their citizens and become more eco-friendly and sustainable. Because of our shortened, snow-enhanced week, we only watched parts one and two, which focused on revising their transportation and trash and recycling systems. The students used what they learned to revise and incorporate some of those ideas into their own city plans. With lessons in geography and government under their belts, students produced plans for seven cities by the end of the week!

One of the favorite activities that we try to do every conference week is a trip to the SHARE Food Bank in Hunting Park. Our local SHARE is "part of a national network of Shares dedicated to expanding community access to wholesome, affordable food." These trips always make the teachers so proud of our students. They take this activity seriously and work collaboratively to complete the assigned tasks. And so on Monday morning of Conference Week, we headed out to SHARE with both 5th/6th groups. While there, the children organized themselves into four teams and proceeded to pack boxes of food for families. As instructed, they weighed and filled 289 boxes with individual bags of white potatoes and onions -- all in 35 minutes!

### **Personal Projects**

Increasing independence and developing tangible problem-solving skills is a core goal in fifth and sixth grade. Twice a year, first in the fall and again in the spring, we ask students to take three or four weeks to explore a topic, develop a skill, or pursue an interest of their choosing outside of school, and then to present and celebrate their learning with the group as a whole. In the spring, we lengthen the project to four weeks instead of three, and the "practical and helpful" boundary of the fall project is removed, broadening the possibilities even further.

Each child keeps a journal that includes the project plan and a written reflection on the project as it develops, as well as tracking time spent on the project. Afterward, projects are shared with classmates. This spring's projects included: quilting, learning about astronomy, building a model house, designing a board game, gardening, learning hairstyling techniques, photography, artwork, creating and analyzing surveys, and developing a fitness routine.

### **Changes and Choices**

Again this year in mid-February, the entire fifth and sixth grade took a four-day break from its regularly scheduled activities and curriculum, including work with specialists, and focused on personal development, or "The Story of You." The week had three components, and each child spent time with at least two of them each day.

1. Digital Citizenship: the place of digital media in a balanced life, cyberbullying, safe online talk, presenting yourself to a bigger world, being an upstander, the idea of a digital footprint
2. Healthy Choices: healthy eating and exercise, body image, substance use and abuse, recognizing pressure from peers and from media (positive and negative), the nature of healthy relationships
3. Human Development: Human development from conception through old age to include physical, emotional, cognitive, and social growth, using Erikson's stages of development as a framework.

We also spent time bringing the ideas together, looking at the underlying messages that popular media conveys about sexuality and about making choices.

### **Mathematical Thinking**

#### *January Study*

In January, we took a month long break from the small math groups to work in our own classrooms doing math work that had many entry points, accommodating learners with different skill sets and strengths. We focused on time, finding within the topic many opportunities to integrate across disciplines and to expand thinking about what constitutes mathematics. The first thing we did was distinguish between the concept of human-created measurements of time and periods of time observed in nature. (Think season vs. week.) Creating these categories was the source of lots of debate and interesting discussion, as was finding and categorizing instruments and tools that measure time. (This is a much longer list than you might first imagine!)

We moved from this to a look at base 60 systems -- versus our more commonly used base 10 system -- and learned a bit of its history as well as its use in measuring time. Then we looked at

what happens when human-created time units have to contend with observed time elements, and looked at the nature of our calendar year, solar years, and lunar months.

Each person in the group -- adult and child -- took the challenge to design a 365 ¼ day year of their own! We created our calendars conceptually and then visually, which led to some fascinating and creative solutions. In connection to our conversation on measuring time (and inspired by emerging interest in various occupations) we visited a clock shop (Hugh's) in Turnersville, New Jersey, where owner Mark Egizi, showed us clocks of many types as well as the tools and materials he used. When he asked whether the kids knew where the name, grandfather clock, they were delighted to say that they did -- from yet another one of their now beloved songs, "My Grandfather's Clock."

Of course, time and space are deeply related, so we connected the two with a study of the work of John Harrison (*The Man Who Made Time Travel*) and the discovery/invention of longitude. This meant understanding the idea of the Cartesian coordinate system and how helpful it can be in describing location. It also meant working with maps, negative and positive numbers (north, south, east, and west), and solving "around the world" challenges we set up for one another by describing places by their coordinates rather than their names. All of which took us right back to time -- and time zones.

### *Trip Planning*

The real work we do around our pizza lunch sales provides context for so much mathematical thinking. However, the end result of our pizza sales was an extended trip this spring and the opportunity to plan it. This meant estimating time and distances in order to create an itinerary, as well as budgeting the approximate \$3000 that we raised so that food, lodgings, admissions, etc. were all taken into account. This ongoing project began in late January/early February and continued until just before the trip itself in late May. The last trip-related math work we did before our departure was working with the fifth graders (and reviewing with the sixths) the idea of percentages and tips, discovering how to quickly find 10%, for example, and use that to calculate 20%, and 15%, etc. This was knowledge that was immediately relevant.

### *Small Math Groups*

The majority of our math curriculum is experienced in the context of small math groups that are mixed from children in both 5th/6th groups and facilitated by one of the four teachers in the building. The groups met from early October through mid-December, then went on hiatus (as described above for about a month), reconvening in early February. The arrangement of groups is decided by pace and learning style as well as by skill level. The specific make-up of the groups can also shift during the year, both in terms of the children and the teacher facilitating it. Such groups are not always strictly separated by grade, though this was the case this year.

### *Fifth Grade Groups*

Fifth grade groups tackled a wide range of topics. After spending time developing and solidifying conceptual understandings of multiplication and division, and applying these operations to solve complex problems in context, most went on to working with fractions. For some, establishing a clear understanding of fractions was the primary goal, and decimals and percentages were mostly visited in practical application. Others explored the connection between the ideas of fraction/decimal/percent much more closely.

Groups also did work in geometry, exploring properties of parallel and perpendicular lines, polygons, perimeter, area, and angles as fractions of circles. Some fifth graders applied those ideas as well as the idea of volume to design and measure space for a future project in Louis and Jeri's classroom.

#### *Sixth Grade Groups*

In sixth grade, having applied their understanding of multiplication and division to solve multi-step problems following the order of operations, most sixth graders worked this winter or spring with Hands-on Equations, an excellent program that introduces balancing and solving equations -- first concretely, then symbolically, and also in connection to word problems.

Geometry was an important part of the year as well, and included work in two and three dimensions, manually constructing shapes and forms with nets and with compasses. Some sixth graders applied those ideas to design and measure space for a future project in Louis and Jeri's classroom as well.

#### *Skills and Concepts*

What follows are the key points of the goals described for 5th and 6th grade programs by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' (NCTM) *Focal Points*. In end of year reports about individual children, aspects of the 6th grade list might have been studied by a fifth grader, and some things on the fifth grade list were not fully explored by all children in that grade. We teach the children where they are. Likewise, children who are in a position to move beyond the topics addressed below do so as well, often more deeply exploring connections between ideas and the history of mathematical concepts as well as material more commonly taught in later grades.

<b>5th Grade</b>
<i>Number and Operations, Algebra</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Develop understanding and fluency with division, using understanding of place value and the relationship of multiplication to division</li><li>&gt; Use the context of the problem to determine the most appropriate form for the quotient (including the remainder)</li><li>&gt; Develop understanding and fluency with addition and subtraction of fractions and decimals, including problems involving measurement</li></ul>

### *Geometry, Measurement, and Algebra*

- >Develop understanding of 2dimensional shapes, including formulae for perimeter and area
- >Develop understanding of 3dimensional shapes, including concepts of volume and surface area
- >Explore data analysis, including graphing and ordered pairs on coordinate grids

### **6th Grade**

#### *Number and Operations, Algebra*

- > Develop fluency with multiplication and division of decimals, multiplication and division of mixed numbers and fractions, and addition and subtraction of mixed numbers and fractions with unlike denominators
- > Understand the proportional nature of ratio and rate
- > Write, understand, and use mathematical expressions and equations

#### *Geometry and Measurement*

- > Identify, describe, and construct 3dimensional shapes, extending the 5th grade work in this area
- > Analyze their properties, including surface area and volume
- > Find and justify formulae for area, perimeter of 2D shapes, and surface area and volume of polyhedra and prisms.

### **Language and Literature**

#### *Book Groups and Other Literature Studies*

The second set of book groups this year were organized across the building and included children in both 5th/6th grade classes, and Diane, Mark, Louis, Jeri, Rossana Zapf, our Language Arts and Learning Support Coordinator, and Amy Vaccarella, our librarian, as facilitators. Matt Linden, who was a PEL fellow in our group at the time, also helped to lead a group. The books we read were not tied to any particular theme other than wonderful literature. They were:

- *A Monster Calls*, by Patrick Ness (inspired by an idea of the late author, Siobhan Dowd)
- *Holes*, by Louis Sachar
- *A Wrinkle in Time*, by Madeleine L'Engle
- *Hatchet*, by Gary Paulsen
- *The Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963*, by Christopher Paul Curtis
- *Once Upon a Marigold*, by Jean Ferris.

The groups met weekly, reading a set portion in between, often negotiated by the group, and supported by activities to help scaffold the reading, such as noting interesting words, planning discussion questions, mapping the setting, or noticing twists or character traits.

The children in the group who also participate voluntarily in a monthly book club run by Amy for fifth and sixth graders, read *York: The Shadow Cipher* by Laura Ruby, *Hello Universe* (2018 Newbery Medal Winner) by Erin Entrada Kelly, and *Bob* by Wendy Mass and Rebecca Stead.

The availability of activities like book club, where adults and children get together over their love of reading and discuss a particular book, is a key factor in the high numbers of enthusiastic book lovers we see here at Miquon.

### *Author Studies*

In late winter, we decided to have each child tackle the work of one author via an author study. Children read multiple works (between two and six or so) by a single writer, over just more than a month, learned something of that author's personal life and history as a writer, then prepared a presentation for their classmates. One goal of the project was to expose the children to a lot of potentially interesting authors and books, ones they might consider adding to their own "must read" lists. Another goal was to allow children to read books of their own choosing at their own pace, without the more artificial stopping points that book groups require.

### *Individual Reading*

Later in the spring, when the group decided to tackle a play (on top of planning their own spring trip), we shifted plans to run another book group, and instead created a month of theme reading. This meant that we chose six great novels, all connected in some way to our theme of work -- immigrant labor, child labor, work in repressive society, apprenticeships, organized labor, etc. -- and after giving a brief book talk about each, invited children to choose and begin reading. The novels children read were:

- *Esperanza Rising* (Pam Munoz Ryan)
- *Lyddie* (Katherine Paterson)
- *The Breadwinner* (Deborah Ellis)
- *The Apprenticeship of Lucas Whitaker* (Cynthia DeFelice)
- *Bread and Roses, Too* (Katherine Paterson)
- *The Midwife's Apprentice* (Karen Cushman)

### *Storytime*

We continued listening to literature read aloud, and after enjoying Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* and Kadir Nelson's *We are the Ship* this fall, turned to two books more related to our spring theme study.

The first was *Cheaper by the Dozen*. Written by Ernestine Gilbreth (Carey) and her brother, Frank, Jr., it is a memoir of the famous Gilbreth family, led by industrial efficiency experts Frank and Lillian Gilbreth. It's very funny, poignant in parts, and in other parts challenging to our more modern sensibilities. It was an opportunity to explore the beginnings of the role of efficiency in production, to look at how our social mores have shifted, and to know something of a family

worth knowing. Afterward, we watched the 1950 film by the same name. As usual, most thought the book was better.

Finally, we read *Audacity*, by Melanie Crowder. This 2015 Jewish Book Award finalist was based on a true story, in this case the story of young Clara Lemlich, whose fight for equal rights in the workplace led to the largest strike by women in American history. Written in vivid poetic verse, and using the metaphor of birds and flight, it also took us to the scene of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911.

### *Hamlet Who?*

The script provided an opportunity for a general introduction to Shakespeare and to the story of Hamlet, but in Seussian rhyme and with several plot twists, to call it an adaptation of the original would be...inaccurate. It was a hit from the read through of the sample script, so we moved forward. After a full read through (so that children could hear themselves and others reading a variety of parts), the children told us what roles they preferred, we made casting choices, and then we jumped into rehearsing.

Taking on the role of a character requires that an actor not only read the lines for their literal meaning and place in the plot, but that they read *between* the lines, something we are encouraging in the children all the time. How engaging, though, when the lines you are reading between are funny, and your fellow actors are thinking through your interpretation with you!

### *Writer's Workshops*

Writer's Workshops continued this winter, and included work in writing succinctly. The three genres were Writing Directions (led by Jen), Writing Captions and Cutlines (led by Diane) and Writing Liner Notes (led by Mark). Again, we observed mentor texts, practiced specific techniques, and received and offered feedback on our work.

### *Other Writing and Language Work*

The children continued to write posts for our blog ([dianeandmarksgroup.com](http://dianeandmarksgroup.com)). In addition to using those to offer their thoughts and opinions as well as the *who, what, where, when, why, and how* of all journalism, we used their entries to zero in on pieces of grammar and punctuation that each child needed to improve.

The group finished reaction essays, written in response to baseball-related quotations, and those essays also provided an opportunity for each child to be a peer editor and responder for classmates.

This spring, in preparation for the Art and Science Show, the children wrote reflections on their process for the science portion of the evening as well as directions for their creation. Science teacher Kate Shapero and PEL fellow Sarah Nelson provided scaffolding for the writing, and then the children completed and edited the work as part of their writing time in class.

This spring, we were offered a chance in the mail to participate in The Great American Mail Race. We divided the 50 states (after generating a list of what they were...) among the children in the group and each student used a (project provided) website to choose a school in their states. The school needed to include fifth grade, as those is the intended participants. In the end, the project was disappointing because we heard back from fewer schools than we received notices of addresses/school name that were no longer valid. We do, however, like the general idea, and may look to do something similar in the future. What we *did* discover, however, was how *very few* of our children knew how to address an envelope, or -- far more concerning -- knew their own addresses. That is a situation we intend to remedy.

We used *Vocabulary from Classical Roots* as the basis for focused word study, using it to learn Latin and Greek on root words, as well as prefixes and suffixes. And finally, we spent time weekly (and via homework) working on cursive and keyboarding skills.

Maria LaVerghetta, an occupational therapist working at Miquon for several months this year as part of her doctoral research, came into our classroom weekly and provided warm-up activities as well as body posture hints for that half of the class writing cursive. She presented posture information and support to the half who were working on keyboarding skills.

### ***Speaking***

Public speaking is an important focus throughout fifth and sixth grade. Informal speaking opportunities, like weekly check-ins continue through the year, as well as speaking to classes about sales and events. We also layer more prepared and formal speaking events into the year, like the school assembly we led about baseball, author study presentations, study group presentations, Personal Project presentations, and finally -- for the sixth graders -- graduation speeches.

Our explicit practice with voice volume and tone, eliminating filler words, using notes appropriately (*not* reading off of slides), rehearsing, and body position pays off handsomely, and takes many a graduate through to the end of their graduation speech, despite the emotions of the moment.

This year, due to an extraordinarily full last week or so of school, I (Diane) alone (and not classmate peers) wrote more formal balanced responses for the children regarding their Personal Project presentations. We regard these final project presentations as a summary look at the progress made by the children over the course of the year.

### **Culminating Experiences**

Culminating events bring together program goals like no other part of the year. All year long, the children have been developing their independence, practical skills, and their voices, as they make increasingly important decisions, accept responsibility, and experience the power of agency in ways that are developmentally appropriate. They have also been working academically, using skills in immediate and practical contexts. Two especially important

community-building events in the last months of this school year were the trip we funded (via pizza sales), planned collaboratively, and then enjoyed, and the play we performed.

#### *Group Trip*

This year's sixth graders were especially excited to have the kids plan the trip, having foregone that opportunity last year in favor of scripting and producing a play on their own. After preparing presentations about and debating three trip options, the group settled on its destination(s) for this year, and proceeded to plan routes, budget, a packing list, eating options, etc. We left early morning May 30th and returned the evening of June 1st. Those three days and two nights in the company of one another (and joined by Diane's husband, Scott, as a third chaperone) both create and celebrate the sense of community that is our goal and key to our work all year.

The trip included a ride in a creaky, bumpy mine car down 400 feet into an anthracite coal mine in Ashland, PA. We also took a "steam train" ride (the locomotive was in the shop for repairs, so we were propelled by a battery-run substitute) around the side of the hill, where we could see both Centralia -- home to what may be a 300 year underground mine fire -- and evidence of both strip mining and "bootleg" mining. Opportunity presented itself and we walked downhill just a bit to the Anthracite Museum, where we visited a small and very thorough exhibit on mining, much of which was familiar and especially fascinating to the group that had studied coal mining in depth. Leaving Ashland, we drove just half an hour to Knoebels, where, using the idea of 'challenge by invitation', we were all able to play together and gently expand our comfort zones.

#### *Play: Hamlet Hears a Who*

Having perhaps too well practiced the habit of saying "yes" wherever possible, we found that while we could not carve time for script-writing this year, and creating a production from scratch, we did make space for collaborating with one another to prepare and present a play, *Hamlet Hears a Who*. Much like a team sport, a theatrical experience encourages all involved to support one another, to sacrifice one's individual concerns on occasion for the good of the whole, and to practice, practice, practice! Our two June 6th performances were a demonstration of teamwork and an opportunity for the whole group to support and celebrate one another.

We were joined in this performance by Navid Nasserghodsi, our classmate for the first half of last year, after which he returned to his family in Dubai. He was able to join us for the last week and a half of school, which meant a role in our play as well as in skit night, which takes place the evening before graduation and gives the fifth graders a chance to lovingly (and humorously) send off their sixth grade friends -- just as they become sixth graders themselves.

#### **In Closing**

It's been an ambitious year! I am not sure we are capable of any other kind. This group has been more than up to the challenge, and we have to work together to balance our ambitions against getting too overwhelmed to enjoy and fully live each experience. The growth of the individuals in the room and of the class as a whole has been remarkable and exciting. It's why we, as adults, are here.

Speaking of adults, the two PEL fellows who joined our classroom over the winter months brought with them new ideas and energy. We will never forget the “big ole bowl of baked beans” -- ask any child in the group -- nor the (misplaced) devotion to the Red Sox shared with us by Matt Linden. Nor will we forget Ruth Bagley’s willingness to drill down into math puzzles and encourage us to do the same as well as the joy she brought is via our classroom piano. Thank you, Matt and Ruth!

However, it really is the children who form the core of who we are as a group. This year, their energy and creativity have been inspiring, as has their willingness to speak to one another directly and respectfully. They were led by a delightful group of sixth graders, each of them a veteran to the classroom. These sixth graders (now recent graduates) worked to model inclusivity and kindness, and they should know that their efforts were very much noticed by the now rising sixth grade, who plan to reflect what they learned as next year’s school leaders. Graduates, we invite and expect to see you next year. We love you and will miss you, and we envy the schools you will be attending. They do not know yet how lucky they are.

Thank you, families, for your partnership. It is the key to everything we do at Miquon. You remain your children’s most important educators, and we rely on your insights and knowledge of your children as well as your willingness to assume good intention on our part when you have questions or concerns.

Louis and Jeri, you have been great neighbors and friends. Thanks for the teamwork, the willingness to make a plan and then adjust it repeatedly, and the flexibility to try out new ideas.

Mark, you are a treasure to me and to every child in our group. You encourage sincerity and humility, and give all of us room to express our excitement, doubts, and strong feelings -- by modeling all of these things yourself. We hope you are energized and inspired by your sabbatical next year. You will be missed.

Have wonderful adventures, rest, and play this summer. Learning comes with living, in my experience, so no worries there.

Diane