



2017-18 Kindergarten Curriculum Report

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Our Group

On our last day together, the children, Sherry, and I gathered on the rug for our final Morning Meeting. As usual, we sat in a circle so that each group member could be clearly seen, heard and acknowledged by all. We talked about connections ... the kind of connections that are formed when a group joins together and makes a concerted effort to be a community. As my gaze shifted from one earnest face to another, I experienced a rush of great warmth and pride, for this particular group of children had worked hard and well to coalesce.

In final celebration of our community, we joined hands to cooperatively create a pulse, a friendly squeeze of the hand from one group member to another which travelled uninterrupted around the circle. This gesture, though simple, was a powerful symbol of our group's connectedness and commitment to one another. It also provided a real sense of closure to this deeply satisfying year.

The children, Sherry, and I worked every single day to build a sense of community within our group. Our mutual goal was to create a safe, supportive environment for each group member. We consistently worked within the framework of the class guidelines that our kindergartners had developed: *We take care of ourselves. We take care of each other. We take care of our environment.*

The children grew tremendously as they grappled with the important work of building a healthy community. They seriously considered issues such as teasing, taking responsibility for one's actions, trying to see someone else's perspective, showing respect for each group member, treating one another fairly in work and play, and learning to be a good friend.

It was a deeply satisfying experience to observe and guide the collective effort and wisdom of these children as they raised complex social issues and thoughtfully worked through them. Sherry and I have truly enjoyed the privilege and challenge of working with this extraordinary group of kindergartners.

Our Day

Since play is the work of this age group, it was essential to have an extensive supply of open-ended materials and activities that supported cognitive, social and physical development, both indoors and out.

Each morning began with a short period of Inside Choice followed by Morning Meeting. The first activity during our meeting was always Morning Greeting, an opportunity to acknowledge, greet and check in with each other. We also reviewed the daily schedule and updated the calendar and clip counter. (We were keeping track of the number of school days.) Another regular feature of Morning Meeting was Sharing. One of the children's favorite methods for sharing was the Mystery Bag. A child chose an object to place in the Mystery Bag. He/she then created three clues to help the kindergartners guess the contents of the bag. Once the mystery was solved, the child would share a bit more information and field a few questions.

We often varied the activities which occurred during Morning Meeting.

We shared big books and followed up our readings with a variety of activities geared to encourage familiarity with concepts of print, phonemic awareness, phonics and comprehension. Many meetings were devoted to math games and explorations.

We frequently played games (Twenty Questions, I'm Thinking of a Number, What's My Rule? and Detective were favorites.), enjoyed a rich variety of children's literature, and held wonderful discussions on all sorts of things.

We then moved into Choice Time. For about an hour, children were free to make a variety of choices within the room or on the playground. They might also choose to work more intensively on a particular project. Choice Time was always lively!

The block area was always a busy place. Vivid imaginations and dramatic flair transformed it into a racetrack, a maze for Nibbles and Squeakie, a fort, a cozy home for stuffies, a royal castle, and the site of an alien invasion. The dramatic play which evolved along with each structure was as rich and involved as the building process.

Choice time also provided plentiful opportunities for children to explore the many materials in the art area. Lovely sketches, dramatic easel paintings, whimsical puppets, props and costumes for dramatic play, origami, jewelry, informative signs, colorful weavings, gifts, maps, greeting cards, masks, beautiful junk constructions and much more were created. Special art activities and cooking projects happened several times each month under the guidance of a teacher or visiting adult.

Legos, pattern blocks, sorting collections, puzzles, geoboards, board games, and playing cards were popular choices. You could often find a child or two curled up on our pillows deeply engrossed in a good book. Many children wrote their own books, recording their words in kid writing and carefully matching their illustrations to the text. Our guinea pigs, Squeaks, Nibbles and Squeakie were the recipients of much love and attention. A few children would spend great chunks of their Choice Time observing, handling and caring for our many pets. Dance parties were an absolute favorite choice activity for many of our kindergartners.

For many of our children, Choice Time was synonymous with the outdoors. The creek, sandbox, "twirly slide", and other play equipment were frequent play destinations. Many of the children enjoyed fast-paced chase games such as Freeze Tag. Mariama Monster, Football, Pirate Kitties, Stuffielandia, and Family were also favorite Choice Time games. Tree climbing

was a popular activity, as well as serious gymnastic practice on the monkey bars. In the sandbox, pies and cakes were baked, volcanoes erupted, rivers were carved through steep mountains, and delicate fairy houses were built. Many song and dance routines were performed on our kindergarten playbarn.

Visiting with the goldfish and frogs at the Walbridge Pond was a daily ritual for many of our kindergartners. Feeding them was a favorite kindergarten activity. The kindergartners also spent a great deal of time observing caterpillars and other insects, salamanders and crayfish, toads, tadpoles, and even a pair of mallard ducks. They observed and delighted in the various signs of the changing seasons. Imagination, creativity, and high drama were seamlessly woven into their explorations. It was always a pleasure to receive an invitation from the children to venture into their magical outside world and view its wonders through their eyes.

Snack was available during Choice Time so children could decide for themselves when to take a break from their activity to fill their grumbling tummies.

After an efficient clean-up, we gathered on the rug for a quick game or song before heading off to a specialist. Our kindergarten schedule accommodated itself around the specialties of Science with Kate Shapero, PE with Lisa Mann, Library with Amy Vaccarella, Art with Nicole Batchelor, and Music with Diego Maugeri.

We were able to feature one specialist each day, which lent our room a wonderful regularity. This gave diversity to our program and structure to our day.

In our classroom, Sherry and I worked with each half-group in turn on social studies/science, language arts, and/or mathematics activities (often integrated). This was a special time affording each teacher the opportunity of working with only a few children at a time.

While lunch was set up by our lunch setters, the rest of the group relaxed on the rug and listened to a story. We enjoyed many picture books written by a variety of authors. As the year progressed stories linked to class themes were shared as well. The children were captivated by the many West African folk tales we read, especially those told about Kwaku Ananse, the spider/man from Ghana.

Immediately following Story, our group shared a noontime meal and animated conversation. Once finished lunch, children would head outside for Lunch Break – an opportunity to enjoy our outdoor space before returning to the classroom for Rest. During Rest children quietly relaxed on their cots while reading books, drawing and/or writing in their cot journals, playing Dice Race, solving mazes and dot-to-dots, or weaving. They also listened to audiobooks or a teacher-read chapter book such as *My Father's Dragon*, *Gwinna*, *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*, and our collection of *Anna Hibiscus* stories.

Definitely one of the most exciting developments in our classroom this year was our relationship with Wendy and Sara's group as Reading Buddies. Each kindergartner was matched with a third/fourth grade child who was his/her buddy for the entire school year. On Thursday afternoons just as Rest Time ended, each older child joined his/her kindergarten buddy to share some good books. It was gratifying to watch the buddies respond to each other with such pleasure. The kindergarten children were attentive listeners obviously enjoying both a fine story

and the company of their good friends. Throughout the year, the kindergartners and their buddies worked and played together in many ways ... pumpkin decorating, holiday celebrating (in general), author/illustrator sharing, playground frolicking, and curriculum sharing. The kindergartners loved their buddies! These buddy relationships will continue to be important throughout their Miquon careers ... and perhaps, beyond.

The final hour of the day was a flexible time, used variously for outdoor play, continuation of work started earlier in the day, long term projects, handwriting practice, or additional Choice Time. On Wednesday afternoons, we joined Diego and our nursery friends for a sing-along. We gathered on the rug at the very end of the day for Afternoon Circle. We shared information about upcoming events, created our daily entry for the Kindergarten Newsletter, and sang our goodbye song.

Language Arts

Language Arts activities were 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 knock-knock jokes gleefully told during lunch to the beautifully written and illustrated books shared during our Authors' Tea, children constantly developed and refined their facility with the various components of language.

Our Language Arts program was based on a literacy rich environment.

The literacy rich environment emphasizes the importance of speaking, reading, and writing in the learning of all students. This involves the selection of materials that will facilitate language and literacy opportunities; reflection and thought regarding classroom design; and intentional instruction and facilitation by educators.

Literature of all kinds was displayed on our classroom bookshelves including picture books, how-to books, magazines, wordless books, big books which we had read as a group numerous times, non-fiction (some of which was related to the social studies/science topics we were exploring), maps, alphabet books, poetry, children's dictionaries, class books (Each child contributed a page which was based on a particular topic or joint experience, such as *Guess Who, I Am Thankful*, or *What's for Lunch?*), and of course child-made books. We also had a wonderful collection of pre-reading and early emergent books for children to read successfully.

The children's engagement with books was an all-day affair. In the morning, a parent who was reading a book to his/her child would soon find an extra few listeners snuggled close by. Sherry and I could never read long enough to suit this group of story lovers! Echoes of "one more page" or "just a few more minutes" would often follow an attempt to end a story time.

Children frequently referred to our wide selection of non-fiction books to further their knowledge on topics that were of deep interest to them. Big books (with their highly repetitive text, reasonable amount of print on each page, and strong correlation between the illustrations and text) were favorite choices for rest time reading. Class books and the children's individual works of fiction/non-fiction (such as their Miquon *Grass* stories, walking books, and tree journals) were also highly sought after.

In our room, there were many opportunities for children to create written language for

themselves. There were ink stamp letters, magnetic letters, chalk boards, paper of every shape and color, as well as pens, markers, crayons, and pencils. Children often chose to label their drawings, write messages to each other or family members, or create letters or greeting cards. They produced signs to share important information, designed props for their dramatic play (such as surveys taken or lists made during play), and made self-initiated books.

More formally, the children labeled everything they could see in our classroom ... and then accepted the challenge to find even more objects to label! They dictated many letters and thank you notes to Miquon families and friends, brainstormed lists to help us remember ideas or develop plans, and created fabulous birthday cards for each member of the kindergarten community. They contributed pages to class books, published individual stories, and participated regularly in an approach to literacy instruction called Writing Workshop.

The basic premise behind Writing Workshop is that children will learn to read and write most successfully by reading and writing for themselves.

The kindergartners filled their writing journals with colorful illustrations and labels or sentences that described their drawings. They wrote in “kid writing” (recording any sounds they could hear and recognize in a word). Sherry and I would then transcribe their kid writing into “book writing.” This was a perfect opportunity to give mini-lessons on individual letter sounds, spacing between words, punctuation, etc., as well as a wonderful chance to celebrate a child’s progress and suggest a goal for future writing.

Our handwriting program, Handwriting Without Tears, is a developmentally-based program. The multi-sensory lessons teach to all learning styles – visual, auditory, manipulative, tactile and kinesthetic. The purpose of our work is to make handwriting available to our children as an automatic, natural skill. The children began with pre-pencil readiness activities for learning uppercase letters and numbers. They used unique materials such as the upper case wood pieces and the “smiley face” slates. They practiced using good posture, a good pencil grip, and good patterns for letter formation. In their workbooks, they first practiced letter formation in grey blocks (pictures of smiley face slates) before moving to actual lines for writing.

Oral language development was highly encouraged throughout the day. We talked all the time, telling stories and jokes, discussing problems, formulating ideas and plans, reading and reciting poetry, and sharing information and important personal news at Circle. We also played numerous games involving riddles, phonemic awareness skills, listening skills and following direction skills.

The children always looked forward to our weekly visits from Jen Curyto, our Language Arts and Learning Support Coordinator. They loved the marvelous stories she dramatically read to them. They especially enjoyed the opportunity to share their observations and personal connections about each story. They also appreciated the wonderful variety of listening and reading readiness activities Jen shared with them. Thanks Jen!

Mathematics

Our math program is based on the belief that children will learn best by creating their own understanding of mathematical concepts.

They do this by identifying, solving, and developing mathematics problems relating to their environment. To meet this goal for our five and six year-olds, we used concrete manipulatives extensively as the basis for formal instruction.

Materials such as unifix cubes, tiles, Cuisenaire rods, dominoes, marbles, pattern blocks, geoboards, and number boards were used to actively involve the children in making discoveries. We also dealt with quantities of buttons, pumpkin seeds, goldfish crackers, cups, napkins, and other objects in daily use. The children used these items in their studies of relationships. We sorted and classified groups of objects and looked at the relationships between groups.

We worked to develop a clear concept of one-to-one correspondence as we counted things at every opportunity. We introduced the idea of place value as we worked with quantities and learned to write numerals to represent numbers.

We estimated larger quantities in our estimating jar, recording everyone's estimate of the number of objects before we spilled out the contents of the jar to count the wood cubes, Crayola markers, teddy bear counters, etc. contained within. The children's estimates became increasingly more accurate as the year progressed. They were able to base their guesses on the information accumulated from previous counts.

Continuing their numeral work, the children made monthly calendars. In the fall, they pasted prepared numeral cards on their calendar blanks, concentrating on matching the correct sequence of the numbers on the grid. As the year progressed, their speed and accuracy in doing so revealed their growing numeral recognition skills and further understanding of how a calendar works.

Patterns

The children also became quite proficient at making and detecting patterns. Patterns allow us to see relationships and develop generalizations. When children explore and learn about patterns, they are building important foundations for later number work.

Creating, extending, naming, and talking about patterns prepares children for learning complex number concepts and mathematical operations.

We used beads, unifix cubes, tiles, pattern blocks, geoboards, and our calendars in our studies. We looked for patterns in the natural world. The children created beautiful patterns in their artwork. Their weavings and their Adire resist drawings were exceptional examples of their proficiency with pattern. We spent quite a bit of time examining and exploring patterns as we studied West Africa. We marveled at the intricate designs created in their textiles – Kente cloth, Adire cloth and mud cloth to name a few. Some children also tried replicating patterns similar to those found on the colorfully painted mud houses of West and South Africa.

At the early childhood level, children can identify, solve, and create math problems relating to their environment. We found plenty of real life situations that gave us practice with problem solving:

- The Chipmunks and the Foxes (quarter groups) are in this half group. How many children should be on the rug?
- There are 100 bunny crackers in the bowl. There are five of us. How many bunnies do each of us get if we share the total amount equally?
- We have 19 children. Two are absent today. How many cots will we need to set out for Rest Time?

Data Work

The children collected data for their questions (and many others), created graphs to record their results, and read/expained the information gleaned from their graphs. Throughout the year, many children chose to conduct surveys to generate data, asking questions such as, When is your birthday? What is your favorite dish at Thanksgiving dinner? How many people are in your family?

They recorded responses to their questions and independently organized their information.

Games

Game playing was also a cornerstone of our math program. Games support children's developing number sense, including place value and computational skills. As they repeatedly played games, children recognized number relationships created by the visual models. Games also provided time to rehearse and develop strategies, opportunities for social interaction, and feedback from peers.

Measurement

Much of our math work is integrated into our social studies/science explorations. Here is an example of our kindergartners creating their own understanding of the mathematical concept of measurement: As part of our author study of Leo Lionni, we read *Inch by Inch*. As the story begins, a little green inchworm finds himself in quite a predicament. A hungry robin is planning to eat him for breakfast. To save himself, the inchworm offers to measure the robin's tail. The robin is so pleased that he brings the inchworm to many other birds who need to be measured. When a nightingale threatens to eat him unless he can measure her song, the inchworm calls on his craft and skill to creatively solve his problem.

Of course, after reading about the adventures of the little green inchworm in *Inch by Inch*, we embarked on our own exploration of measurement. We began just like the inchworm by inviting the children to use their bodies as their measuring tool. They searched for something taller, the same as, and shorter than the height of their bodies and recorded their findings. We discussed the fact that before people used tools to measure things, they used their bodies. A person might use his/her hand, foot, or pace to figure out the length of something.

We decided to experiment with using pace as our standard of measure. We asked the children to start at the threshold of our front door and walk to the rain garden. As they walked, they counted their steps. When they returned to the classroom, they recorded the number of steps they had taken to reach the garden. They repeated this process four more times, choosing a different destination each time.

We compared the number of steps each child had taken to the rain garden. The children were interested and surprised to see that their total number of steps varied widely. We agreed that when we measure something, we should come up with the same amount. We thought about why their total number of steps to the rain garden differed. The children had many thoughts to share. They suggested that:

- Their feet were different sizes.
- The length of their stride might be different.
- They didn't necessarily stop at the same spot.
- They may have taken different paths to get to the garden.
- They walked at different speeds.

The children experimented with correcting the above issues. They tried walking heel to toe. They chose an exact location in the rain garden to stop. They worked to keep an accurate count of the steps they had taken. After each new attempt, they learned that their total number of steps still differed. Finally, Adelaide offered her foot as the standard of measure. Her boot was traced and multiple copies were created. The children worked together to place her "footprints" on a path to the rain garden. It took 61 "Adelaide steps" to reach the rain garden.

What did the children discover by working through this process? They realized that they needed a standard unit of measurement as well as a clear understanding of exactly what they were measuring (in this instance, the same path).

Social Studies/Science

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

Dyeing Wool

In early fall, we hiked throughout the Miquon campus to gather pokeberries and goldenrod. We used these ingredients to create natural dyes. Upon returning to the classroom, we dyed wool yarn which we then used for weaving. We also created a beautiful golden-orange shade with turmeric and a lovely golden wheat color with apple cores and skin. Weaving was such a popular activity with this group that we could barely keep up with the demand for newly strung looms. The children created breathtaking patterns with the subtle shades produced by the natural dyes and the brighter hues of our store bought yarn.

Woodland Habitat

The children were quite interested in the wooded area on the other side of our creek. They were eager to explore this hillside which stretched just beyond the boundaries of our playground. They were particularly interested in the creatures which inhabited this place. We 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.

We were inspired to conduct a bit of research on our own. What did we want to know about the woodland critters that inhabit Miquon? We brainstormed a list of questions to focus our research. Each quarter group chose one woodland animal to study –opossum, raccoon, bat, or skunk. With teacher support, the quarter groups gathered 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 then created and illustrated their particular animal’s story using information gleaned from their research.

Tapping Sugar Maples

In late winter, we learned about tapping maple trees and making maple syrup. We read Native American legends that explained how sweet maple sap was discovered and maple syrup produced. We also read picture books and nonfiction books to round out our maple sap to syrup know-how.

We tapped the two large sugar maples that border the wood chip field. The kindergartners were thrilled to see the first trickle of sap dripping from the spile into the empty bucket. They were amazed by the large quantity of sap collected over a week’s time. They helped to strain the sap to ready it for sugaring off. It was incredibly exciting to watch the sap boiling down and slowly transforming into syrup. We filled our mason jars with the golden syrup and happily refrigerated them in anticipation of our pancake celebration.

The day before our joint kindergarten/Ben and Celia’s Group pancake party, we held a maple syrup comparison test. We compared our pure maple syrup (sample A) with store bought pancake syrup (sample B). The children compared their samples noting the differences in color, aroma and taste. They recorded their observations and hypothesized about which sample was our pure maple syrup.

Together with Ben and Celia’s Group, we whipped up a batch of scrumptious pancakes. We all helped to make the huge stack of pancakes sweetened with our pure maple syrup quickly disappear...YUM!

Bird Watching

Over the course of the year, our group became quite proficient at recognizing the bird species that nested in the trees just beyond our classroom and regularly visited the three feeders hanging just outside our windows. They watched the feeders intently eagerly sharing their observations as birds alighted. I loved to hear a child exclaim, “I just saw a tufted titmouse!” or “Toni, we need to fill the feeders again. The birds will be hungry if we don’t.”

During the November Conference Week, Sherry and Leigh (an avid birder) led the children on an exciting study of birds. A highlight of the weeklong study was the opening of the Bird Blind. A hike to the Bird Blind to observe the various species of birds which frequented the feeders was anticipated with great delight. During the coldest months, substitute teacher Leigh Ashbrook, science teacher Kate and the children took on the responsibility of caring for the bird blind by filling the feeders.

Author Study of Leo Lionni

With prose and pictures, author-illustrator Leo Lionni speaks to the heart, mind, and conscience

of the child. Woven in a rich tapestry of color and design, his stories amuse, educate and inspire. More than a simple picture book, each of Lionni's tales is a work of art with a message and a mission for young readers. These lines found in the forward of *Teaching with Favorite Leo Lionni Books* confirmed my thoughts about his work. As I often do, I returned to Leo Lionni and his brilliant stories as an avenue for our important work with social/emotional development. So – upon our return from winter break, we embarked upon an author study of Leo Lionni.

While enjoying wonderful fables such as *Little Blue and Little Yellow*, *Swimmy*, *Frederick*, *The Biggest House in the World*, *Fish is Fish*, and *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse*, the kindergartners were challenged to take what they could and apply it to their lives. **We provided extension activities to further engage the children in Lionni's tales and to promote additional opportunities for work with problem solving, conflict resolution, and handling emotions. The kindergartners also employed familiar skills such as graphing, writing and critical thinking as they delved into the vibrant world of Leo Lionni's tales.**

"You may have asked yourselves, when you saw my books: birds, worms, fish, flowers, pebbles...What about people? Of course my books, like all fables, are about people... My characters are humans in disguise and their problems and situations are human problems, human situations. The game of identifying, of finding ourselves in the things around us is as old as history. We understand things only in terms of ourselves and in reference to ourselves."

- Leo Lionni

The children thoroughly immersed themselves in Lionni's deceptively simple fables. By reflecting on their own interpretations and creating ways to communicate their thoughts and feelings effectively, they discovered themselves in his characters. Through *Swimmy*, *Pezzettino*, *Tico*, *Frederick* and other characters, the kindergartners explored themes of identity, friendship, conflict resolution, and the essential human needs to create and to belong.

Our kindergartners listened to Lionni's tales with open hearts and open minds. They wondered, questioned, debated and absorbed the important ideas which emanate from the pages of his books. Through their deep connections to Lionni's fables, our children created and experimented with their own important ideas.

Leo Lionni was also a great source of inspiration for our quarter groups as they developed their fictional stories about the bat, raccoon, opossum and skunk – the woodland animals they had researched earlier in the year. Each quarter group developed a plan for their story, brainstorming the characters, setting, problem, and possible outcomes.

They took turns building the story; working from each other's ideas and checking in occasionally with their original plan.

This was challenging work and each group worked through the process a little differently. We ended up with four unique and amazing stories; *The Opossum Family*, *Rosie Raccoon's Adventure*, *The Skunk's Adventure*, and *Jimmy's Adventures*. The children in each quarter group shared the job of illustrating their text. We bound their stories into four accordion books.

We invited our Reading Buddies to help us celebrate the storyteller in each of our children by attending an “Author’s Tea”. We thoroughly enjoyed sharing the four stories, and then celebrated with popsicles (rather than tea). It was a deeply satisfying and delicious ending to our study of Leo Lionni.

Our Community Story

In September, as we began our year long study based on the theme, A Story! A Story! Tell me a story...we focused on our newly formed kindergarten community. We spent a great deal of time and energy getting to know one another and Miquon. We shared our individual stories through self-portraits, games, interviews, surveys and graphs, class books, and lots of conversation. We learned to read each other’s names. We worked to build a strong and safe community by creating class guidelines that we agreed to live by. We examined and celebrated our differences as well as our similarities. The fall and winter holidays provided opportunities to learn and enjoy each other’s personal ways of celebrating. As we worked and played and celebrated together each day, we created our dynamic communal story.

*“In order to understand the complexities of another culture,
a child must start with him/herself and work outwards.*

*Each child comes to kindergarten with different experiences, background,
and information. S/he must examine what it is that makes him/her unique,
and what s/he shares in common with those around him/her.”*

- Cynthia Adams, former/beloved Miquon kindergarten teacher

Having spent much of the year in self exploration and community building, the kindergartners were ready to look outward. They were eager to learn about life in West Africa. They were eager to hear its stories.

West Africa

Our study of West Africa began shortly after our return from spring break. As we poured over our large collection of fiction and nonfiction books about West Africa, the kindergartners thought carefully about the many similarities and differences between their lives and the lives of West African children. We focused on the important role of community and family in the life of African children.

We read many, many folktales. The children were especially fond of the roguish trickster, Ananse the spider. They were also fascinated by the many *pourquoi* (how and why) tales from African mythology which explained why animals have particular characteristics or behaviors. Inspired by the African storytelling tradition, each kindergartner created an original story. S/he then added accompanying illustrations and an appropriate title. These fabulous stories appeared in this year’s edition of Miquon Grass.

The kindergartners learned to play a few African games—Oware (Mancala), Achi and Da Ga. They made their own Achi boards to share with their families. The kindergartners discovered that West African kids play lots of the same games they do (or variations) such as hot potato, cat’s cradle, hopscotch, jacks, and checkers. They also play a different version of duck, duck, goose. They do gymnastics, jump rope, and play with bottle caps. Just as our kindergartners love to build and create things with beautiful junk and lots of natural materials, West African children also repurpose available materials to create their own kind of fun.

The kindergartners learned about musical instruments, singing games, and drumming. They tried their hand at adire; a technique for resist/dyeing fabric. They returned to their weavings with renewed fervor after examining the exquisite patterns in Kente cloth. The children also constructed stools after noticing that it is a common piece of furniture in West African homes. The kindergartners were interested to learn that in some African villages, children carry their stools to school each day.

Kwame was a special highlight of our studies. A cuddly stuffed replica of a young African elephant, Kwame spent time with each child at school and at home. Each child and her/his family recorded the day's events in Kwame's travel journal (as requested by Maman, his mother who eagerly awaited his return to the preserve in Burkina Faso).

In celebration of Earth Day, we read *Wangari's Trees of Peace*, a truly inspirational story about environmental activist, Wangari Maathai. She founded the Green Belt Movement to restore the forests which had been cut down in her native Kenya. She enlisted local women to help her plant indigenous trees. By 2004, thirty million trees had been planted in thirty African countries. Maathai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 because of her contribution to world peace through the Green Belt Movement. (In some African traditions, a tree is a symbol of peace.) Our kindergartners were moved by this young woman who loved trees, mourned their loss, and helped to reforest her home.

After reading about Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement, they also wanted to take on the important work of caring for our environment.

We decided to commit ourselves to keeping Miquon litter free. We began by scouring the kindergarten playground for litter, then fanned out into adjacent areas - Creekwood Hollow, the path leading to our classroom, the "Red Playground," the apple orchard and playbarn, and finally the wood chip field. We collected quite a bit of litter. We continued to be on the lookout for litter as we headed to specialists each day.

Much like Wangari Maathai, the kindergartners have developed a strong affinity for trees. They continued to visit and care for "their trees" throughout the year. They checked on them regularly and excitedly shared any changes they've discovered. They especially delighted in noticing the reawakening of their trees as winter made way for spring. With just a few days left before summer break, they visited their trees one last time. As usual, they sketched their trees and dictated their observations. They also said "good-bye" to their trees for the summer.

Mariama Koroma O'Brien has been a substitute teacher in our classroom frequently this spring. Throughout her days with us, she shared many stories about her childhood in Liberia. She described her homeland so vividly that the children could visualize this beautiful faraway land. She spoke of her family, her home life, the marketplace, favorite games and other pastimes. She taught us to carry baskets on our heads, shared her beautiful traditional clothing with us, and cooked delicious food for us. Mariama also brought her drum. The children were mesmerized by her drumming for a bit, but then they just had to get up and dance to the enticing beat.

The children created brightly colored clay beads to wear with their *bubus* and *dashikis* for our

West African Market Day. Market Day was held at the very end of May – and what a special day it was! Together, the kindergartners and their parents prepared a memorable West African meal with festive marketplace decorations. The children with music teacher Diego Mauger's direction shared, *Oboo Asi Me Nsa*, *Sansa Kroma*, *Che Che Koolay*, *Africa*, *Funga Alafia* and *Sorida*.

Did you know that if you lose your tooth in Mali and put it under a gourd, the African tooth fairy will bring you two chickens? After reading the very entertaining tale, *I Lost My Tooth in Africa* by Penda Diakite, we just had to have chicks! So - we agreed to share the exciting responsibility of incubating a clutch of chicken eggs. "Farmer Sherry" brought us an incubator and one dozen eggs. She taught us all we needed to know in order to be good mother hens. We also met Sherry's hen, Miss Buff. The children were amazed by her soft, sleek feathers.

It was very exciting to anticipate the chicks' arrival into the world. The children were incredibly responsible mother hens, turning the eggs three times a day, adding water to the trough when necessary, and periodically checking the thermometer. Upon entering the classroom on the day the chicks were expected to hatch, we noticed that two chicks had created pip holes and were actively working to hatch. The process was very slow going though. The chicks were quiet and still for long periods and neither had hatched by day's end. Not much was happening with the other eggs. When we returned the next morning, there was one damp chick resting in the incubator. It was clear that none of the other chicks had survived. While the kindergartners were disappointed and sad, they also understood that things don't always go as planned in nature. They were also very grateful to have one fuzzy little chick. The children showed such wisdom, empathy and resilience as they processed and discussed this unexpected turn of events.

Endings

Amazingly the end of the year was upon us. We enjoyed our last days together, making one last visit to our trees, finishing projects, swimming in the pool, laughing and joking. We joined the Nursery for our end of year picnic, cleaned out those cubbies, and after saying our goodbyes headed down the driveway for the beginning of summer vacation.

Not only have I enjoyed working with this remarkable group of children, I have also had the pleasure of working closely with the parents in our group. They came and worked in the classroom, accompanied us on field trips, made *dashikis* and *bubus*, kept the lines of communication open, but most importantly, provided at-home support for their children's interests and endeavors. Your efforts enriched us immensely. I extend a heartfelt thank you to all of you!

As always, our Miquon specialists enriched our learning and our lives. Half group times were often the highlights of our kindergartners' days thanks to their amazing creativity and skill. Thank you, specialist teachers Kate, Lisa, Amy, Nicole, and Diego for a terrific year!

This has been a full and exciting year. I have felt truly blessed to have Sherry as my teaching partner. By introducing origami, Little Red Hen stories, chicks, sewing and other handcrafts (just to name a few of her many many contributions to our kindergarten year), Sherry has enlivened our days together. Her energy, creativity, and gentle spirit have been such a gift to our group. I am so glad that we will be working together again next year!

Sherry and I have also been abundantly blessed by the amazing support of our dear colleagues, Mariama and Leigh. They filled in beautifully when Sherry was unable to come to school. They jumped in, ready to take on any task sent their way. They created loving relationships with our kindergartners. They enthusiastically shared their passions and happily embraced the children's passions. I am so grateful for their deep wisdom, their positive energy, and their unwavering kindness. Thank you Mariama! Thank you Leigh!

This group of kindergarten children developed into a real community. They chose to play, explore, and learn together. They truly enjoyed one another. I am pleased and proud to have worked with such a joyful, loving group of children. I will always remember their endearing manner, their irresistible exuberance, and their fun-loving approach to everything.