



2017-18 Curriculum Report

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Social Emotional Learning

In the second part of this school year, we built upon our existing connections and also focused on intentionally forming new bonds, more often based on shared interest that brought third and fourth graders together. Some favorite games to play in the winter included card games like chess, Apples to Apples and Sleeping Queens indoors, and fort building and some intense snowball play outdoors.

Winter brought the high excitement of the Eagles in the NFL playoffs, and both before and after the Super Bowl, many in our room were interested in football games on the woodchip field. The challenge there was to navigate how to play football safely and kindly without lines or referees.

Spring brought the resurgence of baseball and wiffle ball games, and many members of the 3/4 were faithful daily participants. Then, following the spring work party, came the arrival of the newly built Gaga pit, which made a big splash in the school as a whole. It was a favorite daily activity for many, and again offered a significant learning opportunity, a time to talk through what it looks like for games to feel both respectful and competitive, how to balance your excitement in a game with the importance of honesty when you "get out." These are passionate issues for our 8-10 year olds, and are potentially moments to build character and deepen friendship when we slow down and take the time to work through them.

Other children would spend Choice time "walking and talking" with friends, or curled up with a favorite book. We had quite a numbers of artists and makers, too, who would often choose craft or engineering projects in their free time. This year an elaborate fort/house also sprung up below our classroom steps, the imaginative play there another sign for me of how this age is a magical borderline between young childhood play and the next steps of growing up. As the weather warmed up, we saw our kids back in the creek searching for toads and coming back to lunch covered in mud. Even as they start to have different interests, it is a wonderful age for play, and as usual Miquon is a great place to do it.

Language Arts

Our Language Arts work from January on continued the work we described in the December report, with regular time spent in Independent Reading, morning journaling, read-alouds of both picture and chapter books, handwriting, and word study. In addition to these core pieces, we focused in the winter and spring on several additional areas:

Book Groups

During the winter, Wendy, Sara, and Rossana Zapf, one of our Language Arts and Learning Support Coordinators, each worked with a group of four children reading the same book, and exploring its writing style and themes. These book groups were a time to practice fluency reading aloud, listen to others' questions, ask about unfamiliar vocabulary, and learn new explicit comprehension strategies. The books we read this year were:

- *Wonder* by RJ Palacio
- *Because of Winn Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo
- *Jubilee* by Patricia Reilly Giff
- *Wishtree* by Katherine Applegate
- *Mr. Lemoncello's Great Library Race* by Chris Grabenstein
- *Spell Shaper* by Sarah Agajanian

Writing Workshop

Our Writing Workshop time in the 3/4 includes modeling of writing strategies and much time for exploring one's own writing voice in the drafting of stories. At this age we are also ready to learn the ins and outs of revising and editing for clarity, so our readers can better understand our ideas. We spent several weeks after our Lenape Journal project working through each entry, using peer editing, conferencing with teachers, and editing with a mechanics checklist. For our third graders, this was often the first time typing their own writing, and with much support everyone was able to learn the basics of touch typing and correcting errors with a keyboard.

Our Unit Celebration in January was a time to share our published journals with families, such an exciting time for our young writers who were very proud of their work. They were thrilled to share what they had learned both in their study of Lenape history and in their writing development.

Poetry Genre

In March and April we explored various forms of poetry writing, and the children all practiced different styles of poems both to read and to write themselves. Sara and I shared some of our favorite poems with the group and encouraged them to explore our classroom poetry book collection for inspiration. Many children chose to use some of their poems to create their page for the Miquon *Grass* literary magazine this spring.

Fairy Tale Genre

For the final two months of the year, the group was immersed in a fairy tale genre study, and many shared at the end of school that it was one of their favorite experiences of their 3/4 year.

Together with Rossana, we explored a wide range of fairy tales, many from different cultures around the world, including twists on classic fairy tales which played with the common stereotypes. This was a group that could skillfully and critically read these fairy tales, delighting in good word play, spotting the smallest details woven into illustrations, and wondering about how they might have changed a character or ending.

As we studied the common features of many books in this genre, the children became experts at finding patterns of number and magic spells, identifying the protagonist and antagonist, and naming the conflict and resolution. As they planned for their own stories to write, they mapped out the story arc, and thought and rethought ideas of the protagonist's big problem, and how magical elements could be used to solve it.

We spent weeks drafting our fairy tales, sharing with peers for feedback, revising our ideas, and, finally, improving our clarity through the editing stage. When completed, the fairy tales were read to our kindergarten buddies, and published in a class story collection which we were able to share with families at our end of year potluck night.

Math

In addition to Jo Boaler's *Mathematical Mindsets*, and her *Positive Norms to Encourage a Math Class*, the 3/4 team used the *Focal Points* from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics as a guide. The goal of these Focal Points is to assist schools with focusing on essential topics for each grade level and to go into greater depth exploring and extending these concepts, rather than simply "touching on" every possible math skill (www.nctm.org).

These are the third grade Focal Points:

Number and Operations and Algebra: Developing understandings of multiplication and division and strategies for basic multiplication facts and related division facts
Number and Operations: Developing an understanding of fractions and fraction equivalence
Geometry: Describing and analyzing properties of two-dimensional shapes

These are the fourth grade Focal Points, which relate well to those above but take them further:

Number and Operations and Algebra: Developing quick recall of multiplication facts and related division facts and fluency with whole number multiplication
Number and Operations: Developing an understanding of decimals, including the connections between fractions and decimals
Measurement: Developing an understanding of area and determining the areas of two-dimensional shapes

The concepts explored during the second half of the year centered around these units of study:

- Factors, multiples, and arrays; applying multiplication and division
- Parts and wholes: understanding and using fractions
- Measurement and mapping
- Geometry

Our mathematical work overlapped regularly with Language Arts through math-themed picture books and stories, or writing our own story problems. Trying to explain one's thinking in written words uses a whole other part of the brain while also solidifying concepts. Math journals and games encouraged a different way of thinking how math can be used. One favorite time each week in both rooms was when we used Marcy Cook math centers, tile activities that included many different topics and allowed kids to enter at different levels and work independently in a fun and relaxed setting. This spring we introduced several challenging new centers to further explore fractions and division.

Whenever possible, we incorporated Miquon's natural environment into our math explorations. For instance, when reviewing measurement, children in Rachel and Marie's room went outside in mapping groups to measure areas of campus. They brought their information back to the group and built three-dimensional models to scale.

Meanwhile, children in Wendy and Sara's group used a 10-foot string to estimate and measure the height of familiar locations on campus, and incorporated their study of map scale into the fairy tale world maps they created. The mix of active outdoor and indoor math work was another way we reached a range of students and integrated our bodies and brains. For some children, the geometry work extended into calculating area and perimeter, and an exploration of properties of three-dimensional solids.

Social Studies

Essential Questions

- How do we learn about the past?
- Why is the past important to us today?
- How do perspectives about the past differ depending on who is telling the story?
- How does the natural environment impact how communities use resources to survive?

Winter and Spring Theme Study

Following on the three months spent learning about the daily lives of the Leni Lenape people of the region where we live, we continued to study the region's environment and the changes for local people in the 1600 and 1700's.

We started in March with a close look at maps and how to understand place through geography study. Our groups looked at historical maps of Philadelphia, as we tried to understand both the

establishment of what became modern day Center City and the impact of the Europeans' arrival on landscape and lives of the Lenape.

We took a close look at a historical account of life along the Wissahickon Creek today. Children were dismayed to learn about the multiple factors that led to the drastic decline in the Lenape population between 1500 and 1700, from violence between tribes, sickness introduced by Europeans, and displacement from their land by the colonists. These facts had deeper meaning for them after months of learning about Lenape family and communities life. We explored other topics like history of mills all along the local creeks and rivers in the 1600's, and how these dramatically changed life for the fish and wildlife.

Perspectives

As we read a wide variety of picture books and chapter books about the history of colonial America, the children learned to be "history detectives." When we read an article that took on a white European-dominant perspective of the early explorers and their experiences arriving in "the New World," we focused on helping the group to become "history detectives," encouraging them to ask who is telling the story, whose voices are left out, and what the author is trying to convey about history? We asked how we could rewrite this article to make it more historically accurate and to reflect multiple perspectives.

To further our discussion of perspective, we added a historical simulation activity in both 3/4 classrooms. Each child chose a name, age, and a role or trade for their character, many time creating elaborate backstories based on what they had learned about why the English of the 1600's in particular chose to come to this region to establish new communities. Many children studied a trade and created a project for their end-of-year potluck event.

In Rachel and Marie's room, small groups collaborated on buildings and artifacts for a specific piece of Colonial village life. In Wendy and Sara's room, partners worked together on buildings to house the life or work of their Colonial characters for a miniature village, including a gristmill, milliner's shop, blacksmith forge, and farmhouse. The spring study of three-dimensional geometry was incorporated into the buildings that all the children designed.

Through the activities of this year, we looked at the actions of the new villagers from the perspective of their Lenape characters from the fall simulation, considering how vastly the telling of historical events will change based on the point of view of the one who is speaking.

Field Trips

Several field trips enriched our work in the classroom and created great memories:

- **Cradles to Crayons** - We continued our longstanding service learning connection with this local nonprofit in Conshohocken, which "provides children living in homeless or low-income situations with the essential items they need to thrive." First there was a school-wide collection drive, followed by a sorting of the items as part of our Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service event. Each 3/4 group then traveled to the Cradles to

Crayons warehouse on a field trip, to deliver the collected supplies and help with a project at the facility.

- **Independence Seaport Museum** - This trip was a chance for each 3/4 group to connect with their science work around boat design and the water cycle, as well as our studies of the ways people long ago lived on the waterways of the region. It was good to travel downtown and see the Delaware River in person, and think about how it might have looked before the 1600's. At the museum, we were able to learn more about the early explorers, why they traveled over, what their journey was like, and what life was like when they arrived. We also toured a fascinating boat building workshop.
- **Pennsbury Manor** - In April we traveled with the entire 3/4 on a yellow school bus to visit this recreated of the 1686 country home of William Penn, his family, servants, and enslaved people. We were able to experience first hand what daily life would have been like on the Manor. Both of our groups were able to practice daily chores, try writing with a quill and ink, and explore the rooms within Pennsbury Manor. Many of the children's questions on the trip surrounded the disconnect between Penn's expressed opposition to the institution of slavery and the presence of enslaved people on his own property.

The Play

A highlight of the year for both groups was the combined play which we performed at the end of the year. Instead of one longer play, we chose to break it up into four small skits. Each skit was adapted from Native American folktales read to the whole 3/4 grouping prior to breaking up into play groups. The culminating play, which included adaptations of *Mother Corn and the Lenape, Ant and Bear, The Gift of the Maple Tree, and Dinner with the Bears*, taught the group lessons about Lenape daily life, how customs came to be, and the children were often captivated by the clarity of their explanations. Each child had a part in choosing and learning roles, practicing several times a week, painting the beautiful sets, and making their own props and costumes. The process of preparing for the play provided many opportunities for learning, from the group work skills of collaboration and compromise to the public speaking skills of fluency and clarity. The final performances for families and then for the school were a perfect culmination of our Theme studies together.

In Summary

This has been a wonderful year of growth together in Wendy and Sara's group. We saw each child grow as a friend, discover new interest and deepen existing ones, and form a stronger understanding of him or herself as a learner. The year included some very memorable moments: our Lenape village simulation, designing and building their own boats for the science show, writing fairy tales to read to our kindergarten buddies, miniature house creation, and our final 3/4 play are only a few that stand out in my mind. Along with all the small moments that make up morning circles, laughs at lunch time, or appreciations at closing circle, these were experiences that brought this group together and made for a great year.

I am grateful to all of the parent support we have received this year, especially from our class parents, chaperones, and occasional classroom volunteers, as well as to each of you who offered your encouragement and gratitude in various ways this year. The collaboration with Rachel and Marie for another year was a source of great inspiration and support, and working alongside Sara for the fourth year has simply made me a better teacher -- her clarity, efficiency, creativity, dedication, and kindness towards children have brought me lots of joy this year. As did each one of your children! Thank you for lending them to us for this time together; they are so much fun. Wishing all of you a very happy summer with them!