



## **2018-19 Curriculum Report**

*Rachel Elin-Saintine, Group Teacher*

*Marie Beresford, Assistant Teacher and Group Teacher Maternity Leave Replacement*

*Sam Herron, Student Teacher and Assistant Teacher Maternity Leave Replacement*

This year, Rachel, Marie, and Sam's group was a mixed age group, composed of 12 third and 7 fourth graders. They are curious children who threw themselves fully into both learning and play. Only seven of the children returned to our room for a second year, so we spent the early weeks learning the rhythms of daily life in our classroom. We built a strong foundation in our community by gaining a deeper awareness of what similarities bind us and celebrating ways we are different.

In the early weeks we played games to learn about one another's summer adventures and finding commonalities among us. Reconnecting with known friends and exploring new connections is essential to the work of building community in the beginning of school. Both 3/4 groups met for morning meeting each day, a time to greet each other by name, share happenings from our lives, and get ready for the day together. Along with the rest of the school, we worked to incorporate elements from the Responsive Classroom model into both of our rooms. Our intentional community building work of the first six weeks of the year helped to lay a solid foundation for relationships and for learning communities that were based upon respect for one another.

We began the year welcoming Sam Herron into our group as a Student Teacher from Swarthmore College. In November, Rachel went on maternity leave following the birth of her son. From November to February, Marie Beresford took on the Group teacher role and Sam joined her as an Assistant teacher. Keeping this structure provided consistency for the kids during a time of great transition. The kids formed meaningful bonds with Sam and they were delighted to have Sam return for special events throughout the remainder of the year.

### **Classroom Structures and Rhythms**

Our daily rhythm provided important structure but was flexible as needed. We hoped to find a balance between establishing a comforting routine and as well as remaining open to spontaneous ideas or unexpected needs.

A sample day in the 3/4:

- Morning work: journal writing, math games, handwriting, individual/small group support
- Morning meeting: greeting, sharing, announcements
- Half group time: Specialists (Science, Music, Art, Library or P.E.) for one group, book clubs or math for the others, then switch
- Snack and Choice time, nearly always outside
- Read Aloud and Word Study or handwriting
- Whole group work, often in theme studies
- Choice and Lunch
- Half group time: Specialists for one group, math or writing for the other
- Closing circle

Many times activities spilled over from one time period to another, but the usual daily rhythm matched the needs of the group well. It gave opportunities for balance: “being” and “doing,” indoors and outdoors, active-movement time and quiet reading, group discussions and independent table work.

### **Social and Emotional Learning**

The patterns of our day intentionally reflect our understanding that social learning is integral to the work of childhood, and cannot be separated from the academic work of school. Children learn best when they feel known, welcomed, safe, and integrated into their learning community. Whenever events arise that lead to feelings of disconnectedness, exclusion, hurt, or uncertainty, it is important to stop and take the time to listen, give space for processing, and support children in working through their problem. Our 3/4 groups were overall very positive socially, but issues still arose, some familiar from earlier years as well as new social challenges as they got a bit older.

We gathered bi-weekly for Good of the Group (GOTG) meetings, similar to the all school monthly assemblies. This was a chance for the children to discuss concerns that arose as the group generated potential solutions together, focusing on building empathy and awareness. Over the course of the year, this evolved into giving children more responsibility during Good of the Group (GOTG) in the later months. When we met for bi-weekly for GOTG meetings, two of our students led the discussion, taking on a moderator role. By gradually increasing their responsibilities during this time, individuals became incredibly invested in this community building practice, and their peers took this opportunity seriously.

During this time, we often heard celebrations over class wide procedures, transitions, and taking responsibility for individual class jobs. There was also a reoccurring theme of difficulty during organized Choice time games, like gaga, wiffle ball, basketball and baseball. By having fellow peers moderate and run the GOTG meetings, our third and fourth graders were able to troubleshoot these community concerns together and practice some of the solutions they devised.

Choice was also a time for relationship building and connecting with new and old friends. We often saw children walking and talking, playing on the swings, creating games on the

playbarn, playing in the creek when the weather warmed up, and sometimes partaking in a weekly dance party in the room when the weather wasn't so great.

Going to specialists was also a popular Choice time activity; many kids enjoyed tinkering, experimenting, and building with Arielle Drisko and Kate Shapero in Science. Some also enjoyed practicing a musical instrument or preparing for the talent show in Music with Diego Maugeri. Curling up with a good book or playing a game in the Library with Sarah Stippich was always another popular option. The third and fourth graders here at Miquon were able to dive into their interests and spend their Choice time connecting with others all over the school who shared similar passions.

## **Theme / Social Studies**

### Essential Questions

- Why do we study the past?
- How am I connected to those in the past? How is the past about me?
- How do changes in the distribution of resources affect people's' lives?
- How does geography affect where people live and how they live?
- How do the resources available in a place impact a cultures' needs and lead to new inventions?
- Why did ancient peoples develop some similar inventions in different places over time?
- In what ways can history be biased? Is it always the story told by the "winners"?

### *Integration of Studies*

At Miquon, we attempt to connect learning across the traditional boundaries of "subjects" wherever we can, just as work in the real world tends to do. Our Theme studies this year had a few threads which connected across the whole year, but the units of study took on a different look in the two classrooms. In both groups, the work we did involved reading, writing, research, computer skills, mathematical thinking, and often overlapped with projects using drama, art or science.

The common thread across this year was the question of how innovations were affected by geography and culture in ancient times. We were introducing the third and fourth graders to thinking of themselves as historians, understanding what it means to look at times "long ago." By studying how various civilizations developed differently around the world, we hoped to give the children a chance to think about how one's environment can affect what is needed for survival, and what resources are available to solve daily problems.

### *Ancient Civilization Studies*

Rachel, Marie, and Sam's group, took an in-depth look at the development of civilization in Mesopotamia, and familiarized themselves with some features of daily life. They merged these studies with a historical fiction writing unit, with each child creating a character for themselves to imagine in Mesopotamia, with a societal role and family life. Each then used what they had learned to write journal entries that incorporated inventions of the time and how their character's daily life was affected.

Having journeyed together into Mesopotamia, the students in Rachel, Marie, and Sam's

group then each had the opportunity to choose one of the ancient civilizations to study in greater depth. Through various forms of research, the children were able to learn more about Rome, Egypt, Greece, China, or the Mayan people. Each child then worked for weeks within a group to create replicas of ancient inventions that most interested them from the time and place they were studying. By the end of the spring, Rachel and Marie's group used their replicas to create a "museum showcase" for the other 3/4 group to tour. The children grew immensely from these projects in their sense of themselves as researchers and historians, and in their perspective on what it took to develop basic inventions needed in daily life from the resources on hand.

After studying how people lived during ancient times and solved problems in their communities through inventions, in the spring, Rachel, Marie, and Sam's group, surveyed their own communities to identify problems that could be solved with inventions. To get inspired, they read articles and stories about other children around the world who were able to make a difference in their communities through inventions and new ideas. After brainstorming problems and possible solutions, the kids got to work on creating replicas of their own inventions. There were a range of ideas: creating a detection device so that kids couldn't lose their clothes at Miquon, to creating a recycling truck that makes art out of recycled goods. Once their replicas were built, students then wrote an expository essay, describing the problem they noticed, how they planned to address it, and why they hoped their invention solved that problem. The group celebrated their hard work by showcasing their inventions and essays to families at the end of year Play, Potluck, and culminating celebration.

### *Combined 3/4 Play*

A highlight of the year for both groups was the combined play which we performed at the end of the spring. Both 3/4 groups created an original play broken up into four smaller skits about the evolution of inventions over time, which the group entitled *Past to Present to Future*. Each skit focused on a particular invention: Flight, Land Travel, Communication, and Money. In small, mixed groups, they researched the history of one invention and developed their own skits and wrote their own scripts. They also created all original props, learned roles, and practiced several times a week. The final performance for families was a perfect culmination of our Theme studies together.

### **Mathematics**

The philosophy of our math work was influenced by Jo Boeler's *Mathematical Mindsets*, and her Positive Norms to Encourage a Math Class:

1. Everyone can learn math to the highest level
2. Mistakes are valuable
3. Questions are really important
4. Math is about creativity and making sense
5. Math is about communicating and connecting
6. Depth is much more important than speed
7. Math is about learning not performing

In addition to this, 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](http://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

Our overall goals for these growing eight, nine, and ten year-old mathematicians included:

- Developing their inherent curiosity for puzzling, conjecturing, and wondering.
- Building confidence and a sense of competence and possibility, a “growth mindset” and an understanding that wrestling with questions has a value beyond correct answers.
- Growing fluency with computational skills, which by this age, for most children, will include secure skills with addition and subtraction and developing fluency with multiplication and division.
- Building our skills at working together in groups and partnerships to solve problems and discuss ideas respectfully.
- Making connections across curricular areas, as numerical understanding was woven into our Theme work and overlapped with explorations of graphs, maps, ancient number systems, and money-related problem solving.
- Growing development of a vocabulary for mathematical concepts, including math discussion and journals.

The concepts explored during this year centered around six units of study:

- Review of number strategies, addition, subtraction, place value

- Factors, multiples, and arrays
- Reading graphs and interpreting data
- Parts and wholes: understanding and using fractions
- Applying multiplication and division
- Measurement and 3D-Geometry

Throughout the year, we primarily used the *Investigations* curriculum by TERC. We also made regular use of a range of math games, puzzles, manipulatives and building materials. These sparked the children's interest and creativity while engaging a variety of learning styles. 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. Additionally, students in the 3/4 enjoyed grappling with ken ken puzzles, playing 24, Zeus on the Loose, and Flip 4.

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 about how math can be used.

### **Language Arts**

By third and fourth grade, our kids were well-immersed in a love of literature from their early years at Miquon, and were already familiar with how to explore a story read aloud or give one another feedback as writers. We were able to go into greater depth as both readers and writers, developing and building on children's existing skills and interests, and encouraging them to grow in new ways as well. In Reading Workshop, we explored specific comprehension skills to foster deeper connection to texts. Reading was a centerpiece of our day in the 3/4, with practice choosing books at our "just right level," and time set aside each day for independent reading. Many children discovered a favorite new series, including mythological fantasy, historical diaries, or adventure-filled graphic novels. Each group also gathered regularly to share read alouds together.

Some favorites across the year included:

- *The Time Bike* by Jane Langton
- *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate* by Jacqueline Kelly
- *Ellie Engineer* by Jackson Pearce

Through shared reading children were able to make observations and predictions, ask questions and engage in debate with one another, and highlight unfamiliar vocabulary or interesting writing strategies. As we read aloud each day, we could model some habits of readers or writers that could be useful for all of us. Our nonfiction reading included bi-weekly explorations of *Time for Kids* magazine, which tapped into the children's wide range of interests in the world.

Small book groups, or literature circles, were another way that the children in the 3/4 engaged with reading this year. The groups varied in their format depending on the needs of the

children involved; some were more targeted around teaching decoding skills or practicing reading fluency, other groups had more independent readers but gathered to share reactions to characters or themes in the stories, and to write in reading response journals. The book group selections varied and included various genres, exposing kids to books they might not have chosen independently, yet in many cases leading to finding a new favorite author or topic to read about. There were so many rich exchanges over book groups.

Some favorite books from book groups included:

*Chocolate Fever* by Robert Kimmel Smith

*Homer Price* by Robert McCloskey

*The Lemonade Wars* by Jacqueline Davies

*Three Times Lucky* by Sheila Turnage

*When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead

*Julian's Word - The Stories Julian Tells* by Ann Cameron

*Meg Macintosh and The Case of the Missing Babe Ruth Baseball* - by Lucinda Landon

During this year, all of our children grew as writers as well. They continued to practice their handwriting skills with both print and cursive writing. In each classroom we had time to write daily in morning journals, word work centers, writers' notebooks, and social studies activities. Children also began to learn basic computer word processing skills so that part of their writing happened on Google docs. This allowed them to begin to practice typing, editing, and giving and receiving comments on shared pieces, building skills they will need in the 5/6 and beyond. In each room we used the key elements of Lucy Calkins' Writing Workshop to present pieces of the craft of writing across multiple genres.

In the fall, our group started with a writing unit on biographies. The children began by reading biographies about people throughout history who interested them. When they narrowed down their selection, they practiced note taking and organizing their findings into a graphic organizer. Once creating a first draft, they shared their work with peers and teachers as they considered ways to revise for clarity and finally to edit their writing mechanics. In each stage of the writing process, we used various mentor texts and mini-lessons to highlight strategies the children were working on. We worked on approaches to introducing the main idea, zooming in on an important event in someone's life, adding "juicy" describing words, and writing a compelling ending.

The writing units for this year included:

- Biographies
- Historical Fiction
- Expository Essays
- Poetry

Several units ended with a publishing party to celebrate the gifts of our amazing emerging writers.

## **Field Trips**

Our exciting year was enhanced by a number of really fun and educational trips:

- University of Pennsylvania's Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology
- National Museum of Jewish American History - Rube Goldberg Exhibit
- Escape Room - Conshohocken
- Science field trip to a Philadelphia Water Department water treatment plant

## **Buddies**

Friendships across the ages are a wonderful part of our community life at Miquon. The buddy program gives us a regularly scheduled time to connect with one or two special friends of another age throughout the school year. This year Rachel, Marie, and Sam's group were buddies with the Nursery. During buddy time, children in both groups often read books, enjoyed craft projects, seasonal celebrations, and free play outside. The third and fourth graders cherished their time each week with their younger friends, and it is easy to picture these connections continuing as they grow together at Miquon.

## **In Closing**

This brings us to the end of an amazing 2018-2019 school year. There was so much to love about this year: watching each young person grow and change, ask questions, take risks, and try new things. Each one of the teachers enjoyed the time we were able to spend together, and learned so much from these funny, thoughtful, curious Miquon kids. The year included some very memorable moments: studying Ancient Mesopotamia, the Ancient Civilization Research Project, designing and creating their own inventions, and trying to navigate our way out of an escape room!. By the end of the year, they got to know one another really well and shared a love of tinkering, building, creating, and performing. Not only that, but they were all members of a dynamic community of learners, creators, explorers, and adventurers. They learned so much from one another and that really made for a year of significant growth for each of the members of our group.

We are grateful to the fabulous families who sent their children to us each day and supported their learning and growth at home. Thank you to our class parents for all of the support and help with communications and events: Gretchen and Mike Merryman-Lotz (Sylvie's parents) and Chet and Jennifer Thompson (Gavin's parents). We appreciated all of the field trip chaperones and all who sent in special items or helped to facilitate projects as needed. Most of all, thank you to each of the children who were a special part of Miquon's 3/4 in 2018-2019. We will look forward to seeing you continue to grow and thrive in the year ahead!