

Beth and Celia's Group

Nursery

Curriculum Report 2008-2009

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Once upon a time there was a little school in the woods where seventeen boys and girls ages three to five went to play. Their names were Alden, Ben, Cole, Dexter, Django, Estella, Finlay, Hailey, Ifeanyi, Jules, Julie, Mattie, Owen, Sheldon, Sophie, Tommy and Zachary. Each day they ran, walked and skipped up the path to their classroom, ready to get the day started. They came to their nursery school happy and eager to see their friends and teachers, Beth and Celia, who embraced them with love. These children lived their days to the fullest and loved to sing, play and laugh. No matter what their interests, personalities, likes or dislikes, each child brought their own unique style of learning and playing, creating a close-knit community of thinkers and learners. They discovered the Nursery was a safe place where they could be themselves; it was a home away from home.

Our class peace rose (a silk rose in a vase) played a significant role in our Nursery's peacemaking. The story of *The Peace Rose* introduces the children to the skill of solving problems with the use of a "peace rose." The story consists of three everyday problem solving scenarios. It encourages the independent and peaceful resolution of difficulties between children in a classroom or at home. Our children were devoted to this process and it empowered them not only to help themselves, but to help one another in solving issues.

OUR DAY

Choice Time

The day in the Nursery began with Choice Time. Children could choose from a wide range of activities including dramatic play, small manipulatives, blocks, art and cooking

projects. Clay and water play, the reading corner and discovery table were always available. Choice Time is a busy and valuable part of our day; while playing a child might try a new activity, reinforce a skill, or practice their developing conflict resolution skills. During Choice, we got a feel for individual interests and specific ways in which a particular child might relate to materials and to playmates.

Dramatic Play

Children love to pretend and dramatic play is the perfect environment for them to practice and apply literacy concepts. It also contributes to children's social and cognitive development. They try out roles they have observed as future parents, jobholders, and community participants. They become increasingly skillful at negotiation and compromise as they play together. Language skills are enhanced and developed as they reenact various scenarios from real life, books or movies. While immersed in play, the child is continually developing his or her imagination and creativity. These are important skills for pre-readers. For many children, this mode of play occupied much of their daily lives and it went far beyond our little house area. One could find elaborate drama developing in the office or block area and, of course, in the great outdoors. Story lines were wide and varied: popular scenarios were builders, workers, teachers, moms, dads, big sisters, horses, princesses, firefighters, restaurant customers/employees, astronauts, pilots and train conductors, and so on. Many props and costumes were utilized in the children's play: sticks were used for making fishing rods, paper for puppets, airplanes, hats, and

crowns, and cloth for making a hideout or to cover the ground for a tea party. Our class 'office' continued to be a popular dramatic play area. Available in the office were rubber stamps, envelopes, telephones, and a typewriter. The children stamped notes, typed letters, had telephone conversations, wrote memos, and held meetings. In this environment letter recognition, phonics, and inventive writing develop in the course of play.

Manipulative Area

In the manipulative area, the children had access to a wide array of materials. Legos, pegs, puzzles, and other small manipulative type toys helped develop many early skills. While at play, children improve their eye-hand coordination, fine motor control, and visual discrimination. Number concepts and math skills, such as matching, one-to-one correspondence, and pattern recognition were utilized as well. Long attention spans were evident while children worked on elaborate creations. To preserve their valued constructions, the children could write their name on a piece of paper and affix it to their project.

The block area was always bustling with activity. Blocks were used to create ramps, bridges, rocket ships, garages, towers, and homes for stuffed animals. In this space more expansive structures could stay up from day to day and allow for continuous building. Blocks are basic materials for young children and are excellent tools for creative construction, trial and error, and learning about design. Children explore spatial relations, balance, shapes, and dimensions as they build.

Art

Children possess a natural and wonderful power to create. Supply them with some art materials and you can be sure they will embark on a journey of discovery. Creative activities develop a child's self-esteem; as they paint a picture, glue scraps of paper onto a collage, or mold a lump of clay into a pot, they are learning to make decisions and solve problems. Which color should I use?

Should I use tape or glue, pencil or crayon? Making choices helps self-assurance and independence. Children love to share their accomplishments: "Look at what I made!" is a statement in pride. Art was central to many children in the Nursery. Each morning children would congregate around the art table. Teacher-directed art activities were available at this time, in addition to free access to a wide variety of materials. Markers, crayons, colored pencils, chalk, and craypas could be used for drawing. Some illustrations inspired stories that were then dictated to a teacher and made into books.

Cooking

What child doesn't like to be part of making something good to eat? Licking the spoon, taking a sample of sugar that spilled on the table, or eating the cut-up fruit before it gets in the bowl are episodes that delight children, especially if they are not caught! Cooking makes us feel good because each one of our senses is being used. It is a social time where we can talk about foods we like or do not like. We talk about cooking at home or with grandparents and our cooking projects have even been shared with Masonic Village friends and family members. Foods were prepared for holiday traditions: heart shaped cookies for Valentine's Day or fried matzah at Passover time. Experiences in cooking are an essential part of our program. Cooking is a tool for integrating math concepts. The children are exposed to measuring, counting, and classification. Skills are developed in comparing, contrasting, describing, and problem solving. They use the language of math and have fun doing it.

Circle

Circle was a time to come together as an entire group, a time to listen, quiet our bodies (for a short while) and have fun. It was a sharing of ideas and experiences, concerns and questions. Each day we had action songs or finger plays and a story. We exercised and moved, wrote stories, talked about the calendar, and discussed upcoming

events. Songs, chants, and rhymes were regular activities at our Circle gatherings and were often the way we began our group time. This medium is a valuable role in laying the foundation for reading readiness. It provides a natural way in the development of listening and oral language skills. The children loved to sing songs that used their names, such as *Hello Everybody* and *Who Has Come To School Today?* Other favorites were *Who Stole The Cookie From The Cookie Jar?* *Biddy, Biddy Bump, Bump, Honey Bee* and *Open Shut Them*. During Circle, the children were exposed to various topics such as making friends, peace, kindness, seasons, holidays, quilts and folktales. Language experience stories dictated by the children were an important aspect of our curriculum and we used the K-W-L (Know-Want-Learn) format to begin our thematic units. Field trips or vacations were good sources for reflecting on our experiences and to follow-up with a class book. Both Circle and the activities we implemented were significant in building a sense of community. Children and teachers alike interacted during this time, thereby connecting everyone in the group.

Specialist/Half-Group

After Circle, we had half-group time. While one half went to Library, Physical Education, Science, Music or Art, the other half stayed in the Nursery. Most children chose to play outside while others enjoyed spending some one-on-one time with a teacher or finishing a project from Choice Time. During half groups, children also often assisted teachers by setting the table for lunch. All were reliable and independent with their responsibilities. This half-group time allowed children to expand their circle of playmates, as some of these children did not usually interact during Choice.

Lunch, Story and Rest

At lunchtime we all came together to eat our homemade or boxed lunches. We provided special touches that made our dining experience more pleasant. Each table ate by candlelight

as we listened to soft music. The added ambiance was thoroughly enjoyed by all; it was instrumental in creating a calm and peaceful period out of what can be a hectic time of the day. Lunch was a grand time for socializing. Sometimes conversations were so involved that eating became secondary. After lunch, we had outside time or children could choose to look at books indoors. After the class bell rang, everyone settled in the reading corner for a story. It was then time to relax on our mats. During rest, the children listened to story tapes and soft music. After a period of resting, the children were able to look at books and magazines and draw in their sketchbooks while on their mats or in the reading corner. Following rest, everyone headed outdoors once again. When the class bell rang, it was time to pack up belongings and sit down for one last group gathering. Announcements and talking about our day were our usual end-of-day activities. With our good-bye song and one last hug, the children departed for home or the after-school program.

Outdoor Play

One of the nicest features of Miquon's Nursery program is our access to the outdoors. The children had many opportunities to play outside. This occurred during Choice Time, after Circle, at half-group time, after lunch, and after rest. We introduced the children to boundaries and rules about the creek, sticks, and rocks. The group spent much time formulating acceptable ways of using the many sticks that could be found in the yard. The most important rule was "Sticks cannot be longer than your arm." All sorts of play filled the yard each day. Chase games were popular and a lot of the high drama that occurred indoors continued as the children moved outdoors. The children successfully collaborated on a number of creative story lines. Their ability to work together made this a most satisfying activity for them. Children became immersed in sand, water, and mud play and became investigators and scientists. In the sandbox, the children played together or solo, each one working

diligently, digging and dumping. Roadways, forts, castles, and cities were popular constructions; make believe cakes, pies, and “yucky stews” were concocted daily. Here, as with other types of play, there was usually a cooperative feeling among the workers. Hunting for creatures down by the creek or elsewhere was an exciting experience. Worms, salamanders, caterpillars, toads, and crayfish were often found. Much enthusiasm arose from finding nature's creatures. The proximity of the outdoor environment was a wondrous opportunity for these young naturalists.

INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAM

While reading *Young and Old Together*, a National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) publication, I came across a summary of their goals for an intergenerational program. These goals speak to our program as well:

- To increase frequency of contact between generations

- To enjoy each other's company

- To increase positive attitudes between generations

- To foster a sense of continuity of life for both young and old

The children will:

- Appreciate relating with older people

- Develop an understanding of the aging process

- Receive support from an older person

- Feel the love of their older friends

The residents will:

- Share knowledge and skills with the children

- Increase their circle of friends

- Develop their sense of worth and importance

- Improve mental and physical health

- Feel the love of the children

Our program with the Masonic Village in Lafayette Hill is now in its sixteenth year. This year, the children made

one visit to the Masonic Village each month. Because we sent the children in half groups, the residents were able to participate in the program twice a month. The frequency of our get-togethers allowed relationships to develop with more comfort. Together we played table games, went bowling, sang songs, made art projects, planted window gardens, ate snack, and schmoozed. We ended our year with a delightful luncheon. Together we sat around a large table cutting and chopping fruit for fruit salad that we ate along with hotdogs and all the fixings. We sang songs, and laughed, chatted up a storm and thoroughly enjoyed the pleasure of each others company. The children made a giant card with drawings and dictations of the experiences they had with their friends - bowling was definitely the most popular activity. This token of our appreciation really moved our older friends; they loved this memorable gift. As always, we ended our meetings with hugs and kisses and a song entitled, *Goodbye Friends*.

The residents of the home clearly looked forward to our visits and luxuriated in the warmth and attention they imparted from their young friends. The nurturing they received from their older friends equally gratified the children. It gives Celia and me great satisfaction and joy to see the sunshine we share with our Masonic Village companions. Undoubtedly, our goals have been met.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

The Seasons

Each season at Miquon is a spectacular show of flora and fauna. We go to school in an environment where nature is at our footsteps and following the seasons is part of our daily experience. In the Nursery, we look at the multitude of changes that the earth, plants, animals, and people go through. In autumn we take walks to collect leaves and observe their changes, talk about the different clothing we wear, make an

autumn garden, take a trip to a pumpkin patch, and celebrate seasonal events. Art, cooking projects, stories, and music are always a part of the way the children are exposed to a topic. *Listen to the Leaves*, *Roll That Pumpkin Down To Town* and *The Witches Brew* were songs that were requested frequently.

In mid-October, we traveled to Maple Acres Farm in Plymouth Meeting. The farm is not far from Miquon, which makes for a great first trip. This year we went to the farm with our big buddies in Erica and Mark's Group. The children were thrilled to see piles upon piles of pumpkins spread out all over the farm. On a brisk, cloudy, some what rainy morning, everyone piled into a hay wagon that took us all around the fields of the farm. The hayride ended at a pumpkin patch where each child picked their own spooky pumpkin to take home. After picking individual pumpkins we needed to find that perfect class pumpkin to carve into a Jack-O-Lantern. Next, we spent time feeding corn pellets to the farms' pigs and cattle. Hand in hand, buddies trotted down the dirt path to the country stand where we picked apples out of large wooden crate boxes. The children thoroughly enjoyed each others companionship and this trip certainly cemented a year long bond between the youngest and oldest children of Miquon. What a perfect autumn day we had!

Back at school, the pumpkins were painted with the help of Anne, our art specialist, and decorated the window sills of our classroom. On Halloween it has been our tradition to join with our Kindergarten friends during morning Circle Time. The lights were turned down low, the Jack-O-Lanterns were lit, and together we shared some spooky songs, fingerplays, and poems. The next day, we took our class pumpkin and turned it into some delicious homemade pumpkin bread. The recycled pumpkin was cut up into pieces, boiled, skinned, scooped, and pureed. This project took a few days, but we were delighted to see how a Jack-O-Lantern could be made into something good to eat. Our bushels of apples that were purchased at the farm were used to make

apple cider using our new apple press; the children tossed apples in the wooden barrel and cranked the apples down through the press to make sweet delicious nectar. It is exhilarating to follow the process of making food from its natural state and then finally feasting on the end product. The children reveled in their cooking delicacies.

Early in November, in conjunction with Fire Prevention Week, the Spring Mill Fire Company comes to school to watch Miquon practice a fire drill. The Nursery was clearly thrilled to see all the fire trucks come down the driveway. There is something about a fire truck that provides sheer excitement to a child. Is it the loud noise of the siren? Is it the enormous truck or is it seeing firefighters in full dress? The firefighters invited us to their station to get a behind the scenes look at their job as a firefighter.

The children were happy to accept the invitation to visit the firehouse. There we were, up front and personal with real firefighters and their equipment and vehicles. The children gathered around Gary, the firefighter, watching as he put on his complex outfit and learned about the purpose of each part. Some of the children tried on the fire coat, mask and boots. Imagine a three or four year old stepping into the boots of a firefighter! We looked at the many types of emergency vehicles that were housed in the garage. The one hundred foot ladder truck was backed out of the station and extended into the air. We watched with baited breath as Gary scaled the ladder and waved to us from the top. Celia even attempted to climb this mighty ladder. The pumper truck was then connected to a hydrant and each child received a turn squirting the powerful hose. Lastly, we hopped into the fire truck, sounded the siren and took a ride around the parking lot. With their own fire hats to wear, the children returned back to school knowing the skills and bravery that these special people use to keep us safe. This experience spilled over into the children's daily play. Blocks structures were used to emulate fire stations, fire trucks and houses

on fire and the children took the roles of the variety of people who partake in these scenarios.

A traditional autumn activity is our Thanksgiving luncheon for parents. During our group time, we talked about the meaning of Thanksgiving as a time for family gatherings and reflected on the things we are grateful for in our lives. Many of the children were thankful for their parents, grandparents, pets, and toys. For the luncheon, we baked quick breads, a hearty vegetable soup and a dessert. Before we got started, we made an extensive list of vegetables that could be used for soup and decided on a dessert that everyone would like. The children brought vegetables from home so they had a choice as to what went into the pot. Flower arrangements were made with dried flowers, leaves, and grasses collected from a hike up to the horse farm. Lastly, we prepared the tables with cloths, festive napkins, centerpieces, and baskets of warm bread. The children were so proud of this day and they worked hard in making everything special for their parents. The fruits of our labor were well received and a lovely time was had by all.

Winter had an unseasonably mild start so it took some time to get into our theme. Once the weather became colder and we had a few snow events it was easier to talk about the many changes of the season. The snow events we had were thrilling for the children as they immersed themselves into Miquon's winter wonderland. Snow angels and snow/ice castles were some of the many outdoor activities. Reading *A Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats inspired us to make snowy day collages. We reenacted a popular winter story entitled *The Mitten* by Jan Brett. We placed a blanket over a table to make a mitten for the children to crawl into. We discussed which animal was next to fit inside the mitten. Was it a rabbit, a badger, or a bear? The question was resolved by looking at the book and seeing the next animal was a mouse. This story was used for many days in the children's everyday play and even carried outside,

which made for more a realistic experience in the snow.

Bird watching became a passionate pastime. To expand upon this interest we kept a log of the variety of species we saw at our feeder and some children illustrated the many varieties we saw throughout the year. We made our own feeders by stringing oranges and apples on pipe cleaners and hung them in bushes all around Miquon. During the cold winter months, we made comfort foods such as French toast, biscuits, eggs, and hot chocolate, all of which warmed our bellies.

February was time to prepare for the Chinese New Year - 2009 is the Year of the Ox - which celebrates the coming of spring during a two week celebration. The children learned that it is a time of cleaning up the house and getting everything ready for the New Year. It is a time to visit family, settle old debts, ward off bad luck, and plant. Our dragons were the main attraction in celebrating the New Year. We made two dragons using grocery boxes for the heads and fitted sheets for the body; we were able to transform these materials into some very realistic looking creatures. The heads were decorated with collage materials and paint; we painted the body using a sponge print. The dragons were assembled and ready to go for our parade. Celia and I took turns being the dragon head and the children hid under the sheets to form the body. With great fanfare, parents and children marched around the Miquon campus warding off bad luck from our school. The brightly painted dragons were a stark contrast against the snowfall we had that morning. We banged drums and tambourines and made a lot of noise with egg shakers. Everyone at school greeted us and sent good wishes. As we paraded, we sang our Chinese New Year song, *Gung Hey Fat Choy* and chanted "Ni-Hao" (Knee-how) which means "hello."

Alden's mom, Debbie, shared with us the art of making dumplings. Debbie brought a big bag of groceries, traditional steamer and utensils and settled at the cooking table with her young novices to begin the process of making Chinese

dumplings. The cooking extravaganza took most of the morning. Everyone worked diligently cutting onions and celery and mashing meat together to fold into their shells; dumplings were carefully pinched and placed in the steamer. When they were done we drizzled them with a sweet sauce - m-m-m-m were they good. To add to this experience we read a story entitled *Dumpling Soup* about a family who gathers to celebrate the New Year to make dumplings for a traditional holiday feast. What a wonderful way to expose the children to another culture; it was just the right amount of information and activity for this young age. It was the beginning stage of studying other cultures throughout their Miquon education.

Shortly before Valentine's Day, cards were made for parents using a variety of dazzling collage materials. Once they were decorated, words of love were dictated and transcribed into the cards. We took these precious valentines to the Conshohocken Post Office where each child bought a stamp, postmarked their card, and finally slipped it into the mail slot. The children anxiously awaited the arrival of that special valentine and sure enough, in a few days, the card arrived at their homes.

Spring was a time for light jackets, short sleeves, mud, sand and water play, and planting gardens. There are few things children enjoy more than digging in the dirt. They are fascinated looking for worms and bugs and love to water the garden. Of course, children enjoy planting seeds and watching them grow. A very cool, wet spring made it easy to clean, weed, and turn the soil of our garden bed and flower boxes to plant an assortment of vegetable seeds and annuals. Gardening gives the children a sense of responsibility and accomplishment. It is a great way to spend time together and get to know the children on a more personal level. The gardens were well tended as we watched our seeds grow. By the end of school our vegetable plants were ready to be transplanted in home gardens. Once again, we observed the many changes that took place during this season: the daffodil bulbs

that were planted in autumn were now popping up, our backyard birds did not seem to need the feeder as much, there was more mud, and we could spend longer periods playing outside. We sang songs and recited finger plays about birds, turtles, rabbits, gardens, and the rain. The children were ecstatic about creek exploration. Finding a sallie and getting wet and dirty is every Nursery child's delight. How lucky we are to celebrate the seasonal changes and events that occur at Miquon.

Maple Sugaring

One of our many favorite traditions in the Nursery is to go maple sugaring in late February or early March. This season we began collecting sap the first weeks of March. We adopted one tree between the creek and the library and two on the upper field to use for our project. Chuck, our beloved maintenance man, helped us drill holes in the trees where we inserted the spiles and hung sap buckets. We were all elated when that first trickle of sweet sap came running out of the tree. Tongues and little fingers were quickly up against the tree to get a few samples. It took about a week for a good collection: warm weather above freezing during the day and cold nights below freezing are the best conditions for sap to run well. We read several stories, *Sugar Bush Spring* and *The Missing Maple Syrup Mystery*, to help us gather information about sugaring. The children collected, measured, filtered, tasted, and boiled the sap. Each day we checked the buckets; if there was sap we poured it into gallon water jugs and stored them in the refrigerator. We kept track of the jugs used, by posting daily logs so the children could illustrate the number of jugs each day. A day's worth of sap was about three to four gallons. By the end of the week, the quantities were considerably less. After all 14 ½ gallons of sap were collected we filtered it to rid it of insects and dirt. It was then time for the next phase, boiling the sap. Some of the sap was boiled in a pot in the classroom; the rest was boiled in large pans in the kitchen. Sugaring off takes a long time, but the children were

very patient watching the process of evaporation take place. Sap turning into sweet delicious syrup is certainly worth the wait. This was a thrilling phenomenon! When it was all said and done we filled about two one quart mason jars with this sweet amber delicacy.

The next morning we had a pancake feast. As pancakes were fried on hot buttery griddles the room permeated with the sweet smells of pancakes and fresh maple syrup. Before we all sat down for our luscious feast Celia recited a poem she wrote called *The Flapjack Flop* and we read a story together called *Pancakes For Supper*, a hilarious tall tale about a little girl who helps her parents tap a maple tree, but gets into trouble with some unexpected animals in the woods.

While cooking, some children decided to keep count of how many pancakes were fried. This was done by drawing circles on a big piece of paper. Together we counted 76 pancakes that were fried. We ate pancakes, pancakes (and more pancakes) with our precious syrup and it was heavenly! The children asked the question, *How many pancakes did we eat?* We kept a tally of the amount of pancakes that were devoured - the maximum amount was six pancakes with three being the average. In all, 64 pancakes were eaten by the Nursery children and their teachers. The children's knowledge of this project was well incorporated throughout their daily play outside and the maple sugaring project continued long after the sap stopped flowing. The creek water was flowing, so that became the sap during outside play. The little house beneath the slide became the "sugar house" and buckets of mud became pancake batter. We documented the conversations that took place during this rich play scenario:

*We're taking the sap to sugar house.
We're going to cook it at the sugar house.
We got it from the big tree over there.
We're making maple syrup.
We're going to collect more.
Are there hooks to hang the buckets?
Guys, the dump truck is carrying the syrup.*

All About Quilts

One of my special interests is learning about and making quilts. I have made two, one each for my great niece and nephew. The completion of my quilts was quite a remarkable feeling of creativity and accomplishment. This year I went to The Philadelphia Museum of Art to see a quilt exhibit entitled, "The Quilt's of Gee's Bend." This was a wonderful display of quilt making by an African American community in Alabama. My visit really inspired me and I found the experience of sewing quilts to be very rewarding. I knew I wanted to share my interest of quilts with the Nursery children. I felt it would be a theme they could find many connections to, as children tell stories, are curious about color and design and use recyclable materials for art; all of these elements are used to make quilts.

During the month of February we began our long term project of quilts. First, we read stories and talked about quilts that may be in our families. Some children brought in baby and family quilts and parents sent in quilting books and stories. Anne, our art teacher, shared her big book about the Gee's Bend quilts and a parent shared his collection of postcards of the same quilts. We talked about the different types of quilts such as crazy, pattern and story quilts. Reading stories helped generate conversations about the importance of quilts; some tell a story and are kept in families for generations. We enjoyed learning about shapes, patterns and sequences.

We gathered together for a quilting bee one morning to create a large community quilt made of paper shapes, patterned paper, magazine pictures, and scraps of material. As we sat around our beautiful quilt, we described the many things we saw. Following are a few responses: *I put a race car picture on it; I see a bird; I see orange squares; I see circles, pink and white; I see purple and green; I see racecars and rocketships and dogs; that's all squares and that's all*

squares and that's all diamonds and they're kind of attached.

Our next quilt took a longer time to make and was completed later in the spring. A letter was sent home to parents to solicit collage type materials that would help each child tell his or her own story. The children brought in scraps from old clothes or baby blankets, buttons, photographs, postcards, seashells, magazine pictures of favorite foods, toys or places. Parents and children really got into the "quilting spirit" and worked to find objects that were unique to them. Celia and I worked with each child individually to help them assemble a patch with their collected treasures onto a cardboard patch. The one on one opportunity gave us a unique window into the lives of the children. We learned about family relatives, memories of vacations, favorite foods and music, special interests of playing an instrument, countries where a parent was born or a family's support for Obama. Children who were uncomfortable speaking about themselves in a group were at ease in this safe setting. After the patches were completed, a finishing touch of yarn was laced around the edges. Finally, stories were dictated about all the materials that told a distinctive story about each child. The patches were connected together with pipe cleaners and our one of a kind paper quilt entitled, *Everybody's Quilt*, was hung in the classroom wall for all to admire.

The final project for this study was gathering acts of kindness to document in a quilt. We read a book entitled, *Because Brian Hugged His Mother*. The story describes the process of a feel good chain of events that people have when they do good things for each other. For several months, and actually through the year, the children taught kindness through their daily interactions with one another. Each time a child engaged in an act of kindness it was dictated to me or Celia and then written down to be placed in our *Kindness Basket*. This exercise was very easy for the children and they were invested in participating since kindness is ever present in our class. Good deeds were piling high in our basket

everyday, including such gestures as 'Estella helped Ifeanyi get help from a teacher,' 'Finlay got Julie's backpack from her cubby at Goodbye Circle,' and 'Jules told Mattie that he likes her shirt.'

The Kindness Quilt was another book we read to help us think about our quilt. The story is about a teacher who reads a story to her class, an Aesop's fable about the mouse who removes a thorn from a lion's paw. The children immediately understood the moral was about kindness. Each child in the story recorded acts of kindness, just as our Nursery children did. Next the children of this class illustrated their acts of kindness and placed them together on a colorful paper quilt patch. The Nursery also created their own kindness quilt just as the children in the story. This book was perfect for our project and the children were eager to put together their quilt, all the while learning how to make the world a better place.

An open house exhibit was held in the Nursery as a culminating celebration. Our buddies, the Kindergarten class and office staff, were invited to view our three quilts. The children baked breads for their guests and everyone reveled in the Nursery's pride of creativity and accomplishment. Many of the children wanted to know why we were not making a quilt out of material. To address this question we made a basket of material swatches. Usually during rest time a few children sat around the table with Celia or me and learned to use a needle and thread to sew patches together. This provided a time for developing fine motor skills and patience and was a good social experience.

And so as I began this story of my interest in quilts, I end with the pleasure of knowing our Nursery children now embrace this interest too. One of our children told us of a dream she had where quilts were all around her! What a delightful vision. **Folktales**

The Nursery's folktale trunk has grown through the years and has an abundance of materials: flannel board stories, books, tapes, costumes, puzzles,

recipes, storytelling dolls and puppets, all of which provide us with the opportunity to explore many different avenues of learning. Traditional folktales are well loved by young children. They love the predictability of the familiar and they enjoy the human traits found in the animals. The humor, rhyme and repetition attract children's interest.

The folktales we used were the "talking beast stories." These tales are ones in which creatures talk just as humans do to teach a lesson such as the rewards of courage, cleverness and independence. We focused on three tales – *The Three Bears*, *The Three Pigs* and *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. We introduced each tale by telling the story and inviting the children into the storytelling process. We read several versions of these tales and we reenacted the stories, this activity being the highlight of our unit. Lists of the characters and props that were needed were made to help us prepare for the plays. The children took turns as actors, narrators, stage hands, sound effects crew and the audience. Our playbarn structure was the perfect place to have our own folktale theater. This was a real team effort in collaboration and a lesson on building community. Some of our props were made by the children – using appliance boxes, paint, straw and sticks we had the pigs' houses ready to go for our daily play. The children were very astute in comparing and contrasting the many versions of the books we read aloud to them. One story that captivated their interest for a long time was a modern day version of *The Three Bears*, called *Goldie and The Three Bears*. One day, Goldie a modern day kid, gets off the school bus at the wrong stop and wanders into a strange house. Instead of porridge on the kitchen table there are jelly sandwiches and instead of the bears being upset that there was a stranger in the house they were happy. Goldie finds a friend, the little girl bear, who is "just right."

During our folktale unit Zachary's Grandmom Judy, a retired children's librarian, spent a morning sharing two folktales, *The Three Pigs* and *The*

Gingerbread Man. With Zachary as her trusty assistant, Judy used puppets, props and singing to tell these well loved tales. She engaged her audience in the storytelling by having them chant or sing the chorus and familiar verses of the stories. Zachary, his classmates and teachers were enamored with Grandmom Judy's talents! Many of Judy's storytelling books, props and puppets were donated to the Nursery. We are grateful to add these materials to our storytelling trunk.

We ended our theme with the question, *What did we learn about folktales?* We discovered that each story had three animals in it, there were bad characters (a wolf, a troll and Goldilocks), the stories began with *Once upon a time*, there is a bridge, a road or forest, and everyone '*lives happily ever after.*' We also played a game called *Name That Tale*. Celia or I would recite a line from a story (*trip trap, trip trap*) and the children would figure out which story it came from (*The Three Billy Goats Gruff*.) Everyone took turns coming up with their own lines and guessing the story it went with.

Our concluding event of the year was a performance on the last day of school. At the Nursery's playbarn, parents gathered to listen to The Nursery's Folktale Sing-A-Long. The children sang three songs that they learned during the cross of our study, *The Three Bears Rap*, *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* and *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?* The show was well received with an arousing applause and, of course, the children were proud of their accomplishment. They are on their way to great performances throughout their Miquon experiences.

Buddies

This is our second year engaged in a long term relationship with Erica and Mark's group. Each Nursery and older child was paired with a permanent buddy for the year. Some children had the same buddy as last year and were able to rekindle their friendship. We got together twice a month during Choice Time in the Nursery. These visits were a much valued time for the

children and everyone looked forward to days that they could be together. Some built block structures, read books, painted and played dress-up. Outside there were chase games, twirling on the tire swing or playing in the sandbox. Every Friday morning the children looked forward to Assembly as they were able to sit together; the younger children loved curling up in their buddies' laps. In the fall we took a trip to a pumpkin farm, during an Art class they carefully dipped candles and on Valentines' Day they baked cookies and exchanged cards. After an early spring snowstorm the children went tubing together. Bill, our P.E. specialist, was our trusty guide and worked hard to help the buddies go down the hill safely. The children could be heard squealing with laughter, as they held each other tight, flying down our infamous tubing hill above the lower field.

Aside from the scheduled activities, the older buddies came to visit the Nursery on their free time after lunch or during other breaks in their day. The Nursery was absolutely thrilled with the tender loving care they received from their older friends. Some children stepped out of their comfort zones and became more open and relaxed in their play. A child who had a more reserved personality became down right rambunctious under the guise of their buddy.

As an end of year activity both groups made books for one another. Each Nursery child's book had a photograph of the buddies and on the inside there was a drawing of the buddies. The children then dictated a memory, something they enjoyed doing or a sweet sentiment. The older children made hand sewn books and developed stories about their buddies' personal interests. Some were about dinosaurs, princesses, ballerinas, superheroes, unicorns, or horses. The stories truly captured both buddies in a real life fantasy. We gathered together to share both sets of these wonderful books, many of them bringing tears to our eyes.

At the close of the school year we made homemade ice cream and had a picnic. Many hugs and kisses were exchanged as

both groups felt a little bittersweet. Some buddies have gotten together outside of school as parents are invested in keeping these cherished friendships going. During graduation speeches so many of our graduates talked about their memories and the importance of the relationships they had developed with their young friends. I know the children will always remember their special connections and come away with a fondness of this experience. This was an extraordinary group of loving and sweet children.

PARENTS IN THE CLASSROOM

Tapping into parents' diverse backgrounds is a splendid way of enhancing our curriculum; it exposes the children to real life experiences that are concrete and meaningful. This year we had several parents share their cultural backgrounds and professions.

Jules's parents, John and Kira, have their own chocolate candy business. When we heard this we knew immediately that we would plan a trip to their chocolate factory in Philadelphia. Their gourmet candy has been featured in *O* and *Gourmet* magazines and John and Kira have been on The Martha Stewart Show. Their renowned chocolates are available to be shipped anywhere in the world.

In preparation for this trip we tried our hand at being chocolatiers by melting gourmet chocolate into molds and we read *Curious George Goes to the Chocolate Factory*. We also learned a little bit about the origins of the cacao bean. As you can imagine the children, parent chaperones and teachers were quite excited when the day came to go to the chocolate factory. When we arrived John and Kira greeted us and began with a tour of their facilities. First stop was the walk-in freezer where candy is stored for shipment; some braved the frigid temperatures and walked in and out very quickly. Next, we saw the machines used to melt the chocolate and where the candy is formed into molds and we got to taste chocolates in various stages. The class broke up into half groups to decorate candy and to

decorate small candy boxes with ribbons, sequins, stickers and markers. Each of us was given hair net caps to wear as we worked with the chocolate. Yes, we looked like Lucy and Ethel in that famous skit. Each child was given small sample boxes of chocolate to take home along with their decorated chocolate lollipops. Kira talked to us about the natural ingredients of mint, strawberries and lavender while Jules walked around with a beautiful box of delectable chocolates for all to enjoy. This was an exceptional behind the scenes look of a working family business. When we returned back to school, the children, immersed in their outdoor play, became chocolate makers. Here are the workers voices from the chocolate factory:

The Nursery Chocolate Factory

We're making chocolate.

First, you put water, sand, and then batter.

The yellow stuff is batter.

No, the yellow stuff is the eggs.

No, the yellow stuff is the yeast.

What flavor?

Milk and vanilla!

How much chocolate do you make in a day?

20 times! No, a million a day.

Hailey's putting on a next batch.

It's an hour to make chocolate.

Wow! Look how much creek water!

We have three chocolate factories.

We're putting dark chocolate circles.

We put it in the oven.

Pudding chocolate. First of all, I put red peppers, apples, water. You actually need sugar.

This batch is heavy!

Estella's parents are musicians, who play the viola and cello. They wanted to share their interest of classical music with the Nursery. One of Estella's passions is learning all about the orchestra; she often shared her knowledge with her playmates through her dramatic play. We had a lovely Circle gathering with Susan and Eric, listening to the sweet melodic sounds and were mesmerized by their string ensemble. Estella was an attentive assistant to her

parents, helping them with their accessories and letting us know about the different parts of the instruments. We talked about the many similarities and differences of these two instruments and a child sized violin was available for the children to play. We feel this special opportunity sparked a new interest for the children. It was a great intimate way to learn about instruments of the orchestra.

Reading stories one-on-one or in small intimate groups is invaluable. It is the single most important avenue for encouraging a lifelong love of books and reading. Although storybooks are read each day in the Nursery, the setting is not always as small and intimate as we might like. This year a number of parents were able to come in for *lap reading*. Of course, each reader's child was thrilled to have his or her parent stay to read, and Celia and I were pleased to have literacy promoted in such a natural way.

Parents were an integral part of our Nursery community; whether it was joining us on field trips, assisting at The Masonic Village, being a substitute teacher, cooking, sending in materials, providing snacks, or just being an extra pair of hands, everyone was enthusiastic and helpful. Celia and I extend to all of the parents our thanks for enriching our program this year and for sharing their time, resources, and energy. We feel that all parents were extremely supportive of both their children and of us.

I would also like to give a heartfelt thank you to all of our parents for helping me celebrate my 20th anniversary at Miquon. You truly know how to make a teacher feel loved! The lilac bush for the yard is a perfect gift; you know they are my favorite flowers. The memory book with kind sentiments let me know the impact I have on you and your young children. It is my joy to help foster your children's growth and development. I feel honored to have the good fortune to teach at Miquon for so many years.

IN CLOSING

I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Celia this year. We are a good team in taking care of our very young children. Celia has a calm and patient rapport with the children and she knows each child's unique set of needs. Her impromptu style of teaching is full of surprises that delighted everyone, be it a recipe for face paint, homemade puppets to enhance a story or a self crafted poem with illustrations. Celia's special interest in homemade books became the children's passion, and the art of bookmaking came alive for all. Celia's creativity and imagination always added to our curriculum. Her support and willingness to jump into the Nursery's way of life with open arms is greatly appreciated. Celia you are a slice of heaven!

My daughters, Danielle and Hannah, have always been of assistance with the many end of year projects in the Nursery. Putting together the children's photo albums and technical support has been an enormous help. And of course, doing this keeps them connected to their Miquon roots. Thank you girls, you are the best!

As is our custom, we compiled individual albums incorporating photos of each child with a collection of his or her artwork. The year's activities were well represented in these books, which will enable each child to remember the good times he or she spent this year at Miquon. On the last few days of school, the children were able to look at their albums, sign their names, and decorate them. They received this gift with joy and appreciation. Like high school students pouring over their cherished yearbook, these young students are happy to celebrate their school memories. I know Celia and I will have many fond memories of this group for years to come.

Our year closed with thoughts of summertime and the plans that we had away from school. We made homemade ice cream, played in a big water tub of bubbles, went swimming, and had many opportunities to play outdoors, which is what the children loved best. Ahh, to splash in the pool, muck about in the mud, or swing

high on a swing to your heart's content. This was a perfect way to finish off the year.

The children's experience in the Nursery ended with the sense of belonging to a family where they all became so comfortable with one another. Now this tale has come to an end and this endearing group of children will go off into different directions for the summer season. Their smiles, hugs and laughter will always stay with Celia and me. My hope is that each child has come away with happy memories of the Nursery.

And, of course, they lived happily ever after.