Animals In Winter

Four focus books were selected for the Extended Morning’s study of animals in winter. Although all of the books were fiction, their story lines and content led to further exploration of the concepts and facts about animal behavior in winter. The concepts studied included hibernation; how animal parents take care of their young in cold weather; how animals find food during the winter; and how animals keep warm.

In “Bear Snores On” by Karma Wilson and Jean Chapman, a big brown bear sleeps in his cave through the blowing snow and the howling winter winds. One by one, animals come into the cave to find shelter. Bear snores on through a raucous animal party, until a fleck of pepper causes him to sneeze and awaken. He is very grumpy, but mostly sad that he has missed the party! The animals all agree to party on through the night with bear. In the morning, bear is wide awake, yet all the other animals snore on! Activities included creating a Bear Cave to crawl into, cutting paper into unique snowflake designs, and baking animal biscuits. We also experimented with ice and Crisco-insulated "gloves" to feel how an animal's layer of fat protects it from the cold. In the experiment, the children held onto a piece of ice for the count of 10-20 seconds with their bare hands. Next, they put on the "glove" made of fur cloth-covered plastic bags with a layer of Crisco in between. They put the glove covered hand and a bare hand into a bowl of ice water and felt how the fat and fur kept the cold out!

“Without You” is a story set to music by Sarah Weeks and Suzanne Duranceau. While his mother is out searching for food, a baby Emperor Penguin's father keeps him safely tucked in on top of his feet. Through the cold and snowy weather, they wait for mom. At last she returns and, recognizing her baby's voice, is reunited with the family. The baby penguin sings this song for his parents: Where would I be, What would I do, Who in the world would see me through... Where would I be, What would I do, Without you?

We raced with a paper mache egg balanced on our feet just like Emperor Penguin dads, created stand-up paper penguins, experimented with water color paints on a penguin shape, and made black and white collages. We experimented with feathers and water and discussed the difference between a baby penguin feather and an adult penguin feather. In the kitchen, the friends used various fruits and juices in the shaved ice machine to make a treat.
“Fox's Dream”, written and beautifully drawn by Tejima, takes place "in a faraway forest, near a faraway mountain, on a cold silent night." Fox is cold, hungry and alone in the forest. His wanderings include chasing a rabbit, but not catching it; seeing other animals, but they are only figures of ice in the trees; closing his eyes and remembering playing with his siblings and being near his mother in the warm sun, but it is only a dream. Finally in the morning, fox meets a vixen, and they nuzzle noses in the sunlight. He is no longer alone and spring will come soon...

The activities included using pine branches as paintbrushes to make the white paint look like icy pictures on dark paper, painting tree shapes with thick, white paint (like snow on the branches), and adding a picture of a fox and the moon to the artwork. We made 3-D trees, a tree out of bread, and fox masks. The shadow screen was available for telling the story with puppets and dancing. We also played the fun game "What Time Is It Mr. Fox?" One child is the fox. She stands on one side of the room with her back to the others. The other children stand on the other side of the room and in turn, ask, "What Time Is It Mr. Fox?" Mr. or Miss Fox answers with a number 1-10 and the children take that many steps toward the fox. When the group of children is very close, the fox answers, "Time for dinner!" and turns and chases the others back to the other side of the room. If a child is caught, that child becomes the fox.

In “The Hat” by Jan Brett, Hedgie the hedgehog sticks his nose into a woolen stocking that has blown off of a clothesline. When he tries to pull his head out, the stocking sticks to his prickles. A succession of animals laughs at Hedgie because he looks so funny, but Hedgie just keeps telling them how good it is to have a hat in the winter. The little girl, Lisa, who has lost the stocking, chases Hedgie and gets the sock off of his prickles. When she returns to the clothesline to collect her other woolen clothes, they are all missing! The next thing she sees is a group of animals all wearing clothing on their heads as hats!! Silly animals, don't they know that animals don't wear clothes?

We played several games during the week: Prickly Pile-Up. (The players try to pile up as many little wooden hedgehogs as they can by balancing them one on top of the other.); Matching the animals in the story in a game similar to Memory; Musical Hats, a circle game; a Hide and Seek game with picture cards of the animals from the story (the children had to find the hidden animal pictures which were hidden around the red room, and then match the animal picture with the animal name); and “What’s Missing From The Clothesline?” (The children had to remember the items on the clothesline and guess which one has blown away.) We all made crazy hats for Crazy Hat Lunch Day on Thursday, practiced working with Nuts and Bolts in Woodworking, and enjoyed ice cream made in the kitchen.