The kindergarten friends couldn't wait to return back to school, eagerly greeting their teachers and friends! What do you think kindergartners like to talk about when they come back to school in January? You probably guessed it. They like talking about themselves. So, we found it fitting to let them do just that. During the month we focused on celebrating our individuality, learning about our similarities and differences, while continuing to create a sense of family in the classroom.

At the beginning of the month, we focused on ourselves as individuals. We proudly shared All About Me bags, practiced recalling how to spell first names, graphed physical traits and drew self portraits. We then focused on learning more about our friends. We created surveys to ask one another questions about their preferences and experiences, brainstormed character traits that make us special and unique, taste tested our friends’ favorite foods and used our artistic skills to draw portraits of a classmate. We ended the month learning more about our families, celebrating the traditions and cultures that makes them exceptional.
ALL ABOUT ME

We have spent an enjoyable January getting to know the kindergarten friends better. At the beginning of the month, the friends were asked to take home, fill and return an All About Me bag to share with their classmates. Using five special objects from home, the kindergarteners were able to share and learn something new about each other. Show and Tell is an effective and enjoyable way for young children to refine their public speaking and oral communication skills, especially while learning more about their classmates.

One of our first art projects of the unit was having the children draw their self portraits, a monthly activity that shows the development of a child’s fine motor, observation and focusing skills. Self portraits are also a great way for the children to express various aspects of themselves and their identities beyond the surface of their physical appearance. These portraits can teach students to draw beyond just what they think they see but to draw what is really there. All students were given a mirror to first observe their facial features and look for small details. For this portrait, we concentrated not only on form, shape and detail of our faces, but our bodies as well. The children then used pencils to draw the outline of their head and bodies. Next, using tempera paint, they added their skin color and clothing. They then added facial features using markers and glued on various textiles, gems, beads and buttons, adding detail to their clothing.

During the month we also shared and illustrated some of the children’s favorite things. After brainstorming a list of favorite things, each child created a Heart Map. A Heart Map is a visual reminder of all a student loves and cares about. Friends drew illustrations of their families, favorite foods, activities they enjoying doing and much more to add to their heart. The friends also practiced drawing a family portrait, keeping the concept of perspective in mind, creating illustrations that mimicked a family photograph. After completing their art, we created a display space in the hallway to hang their work. Their self portraits, family portraits, heart maps, friend portraits and names are displayed for the school community to enjoy.
Each week a student is assigned the classroom job of Clipboard Helper, a survey/graphing job. This child asks each friend to answer the survey question. The child records the answer and keeps track of who has participated. Once the survey is complete, we tally the results and share them with the class. Due to such a high interest in the types of survey questions asked each week, students decided to create, write and ask a question of their own to the class. As a whole group, we brainstormed ideas, then each child chose a question for themselves. Questions ranged from “Do you have a Dog?”, “What’s your favorite snack at school?” and “How many times a day do you hug your parents?” Students enjoyed the responsibility and excitement that came from recording their own data.

Once the friends returned to school after winter break, we shifted our focus from not only being able to recognize and recall the spelling of our first names, but our last names as well. When answering the morning question of the day, each friend must now write his or her last name. Our seating chart is now organized using last names. Even for daily work friends were asked to write and stamp their last names using different mediums. They also practiced identifying the letters that make up their classmates’ names by using a venn diagram to sort the letters that were in either both names or just one.

As we sorted the letters in our first and last names, each friend began to notice similarities and differences. They quickly discovered how many friends share their first initials with a classmate. Using large cardboard letters, the kindergarten friends decoupaged pieces of fabric scraps, covering the entire 3-dimensional of their first initial.

ALL ABOUT ME: GRAPHING

We continued to get to know each other by graphing our eye and hair color, as well as how many people are in our family. The friends especially enjoyed graphing their preferences after tasting some of the kindergarteners’ favorite foods.

Graphing is an important math tool. It can be a simple way to introduce broader concepts of greater than/less than, or most and least. Being introduced to graphs at an early age can help children to understand important mathematical concepts such as sorting, organizing, counting, comparing, and analyzing.

LEARNING OUR NAMES

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ALL ABOUT EACH OTHER

After we had practiced drawing ourselves, we moved on to drawing a friend's portrait. The children used the easel and drew the model focusing on detail. When the portrait was complete, the model and artist switched places. It was interesting to hear the conversations taking place. The children really concentrated on their works, taking particular care to draw their models in the correct clothing and always with a smiling face! The friends even had the chance to draw a portrait of one of the Children's School teachers. Be on the lookout for these amazing teacher portraits, as they will be displayed on the cabinets in our newly renovated teacher workroom.

CHARACTER TRAITS

As the friends began learning more about each another, it was the perfect time to explore stories that emphasized the importance of being proud of who you are and what makes you unique! As we read, the friends discovered that most characters, at one point, experience the same basic emotions (happy, sad, angry) as we do, but noticed that the authors used words such as artistic, selfish or compassionate, to describe a character's personality or abilities. We first explored character traits by reading “Chrysanthemum” by Kevin Henkes. We discussed the differences between what you see on the outside (physical traits) versus what the character is like on the inside (personality traits). Physical traits can be seen with our eyes. Personality traits are harder to identify; you have to use what you know about a person or a character - actions, choices, words, thoughts, feelings and more. The friends learned that you must use all of these clues to draw conclusions about the personality of a character or person. For example, we found that Chrysanthemum was happy, brave, embarrassed, unique, shy and excited. While we read different stories, we brainstormed a list of personality traits. Using this list as inspiration, each student randomly picked a friend to create a Character Trait collage. Each friend proudly shared the finished collage with the class.
OUR AMAZING BODIES

As we continued to learn more about ourselves, each other and what makes us unique, our conversations quickly sparked an interest in how our bodies work. Each afternoon we spent time learning about a different part of the body. The children were excited to learn that their skeletal system contains 206 individual bones and that this system of bones protects the internal organs such as the heart, stomach, and liver. Using kindergarten spelling, the children labeled more than fifteen bones on Mr. Bones’ body, including the mandible, phalanges and vertebrae. We discussed how we use our muscles, which are attached to the individual bones of the skeletal system, to move the parts of our bodies. The heart is a muscle that pumps blood through the body. The children discovered where their heart is located and got to use a real stethoscope to hear their own heartbeats before and after exercise, which we decided sounds like this – lub-dub, lub-dub. We used a diagram depicting red oxygenated blood flowing out to parts of the body and the darker “blue” blood flowing back to the heart/lung system to be re-oxygenated before being pumped back out.

We also explored how the brain is the control room of your body, always sending and recovering messages. The friends discovered that each side of the brain is responsible for different skills. The right side holds our artistic talent and imagination, and the left side is more responsible for practical abilities and logical thinking.

Each Friday the friends explored a fun and active way to keep the body healthy, most recently by practicing yoga in gym class with Mrs. Wendolowski.

JANUARY CHALLENGES

The kindergartners have eagerly continued with their classroom challenges, often asking for “more of a challenge!” This month we challenged our minds by focusing primarily on letter and number recognition. During the first challenge, students were asked to recall and recognize the letters in their last names, building their names three times using different types of letter tiles. While learning our last names, the friends also practiced typing their names using a typewriter and using letter stamps to build their names. Next, the friends were challenged to match upper and lower case letters in alphabetical order and using a typewriter, type out the letters of the alphabet.

The students also worked on recognizing and recalling numbers one to thirty, using their counting and sequencing skills. All of these activities were independent tasks that each child had the opportunity to complete.
KINDERGARTEN FAMILY
Towards the end of the month, the kindergarten friends explored what makes a family by brainstorming what families: Have, Can and Are. While we quickly discovered that most families have similarities, the friends found that their own families may have distinctive traditions that help provide a source of identity, strengthen the family bond or that pass on cultural and religious heritage. Several families visited to share their special traditions with the kindergartners. Owen's family shared their yearly tradition of visiting a family cottage in Maine with photographs and by baking blueberry muffins with the friends. Amanda's family shared the celebration of the Chinese New Year and taught us how to use chopsticks and make dumplings using play dough. Marley's dad shared the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah with the friends, explaining the tradition of lighting a menorah and playing the dreidel game. Roxie's family shared their tradition of visiting the Queen's Cup at Steeplechase (a horse race) and Mattias' mom taught us about the culture of Brazil.

FINALLY SNOW!
The kindergarten friends couldn't wait for it to feel more like winter. When it finally snowed, they were eager to build snowmen, have snowball fights and sled down the hill using our classroom trays. We all have our fingers crossed for many more snowy playground days to come!