Ever wonder why the early settlers chose Pittsburgh as their new home? If you ask the kindergarten friends, I’m sure they’ll be able to tell you! The first inhabitants of Pittsburgh recognized the advantages the land held. The confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers to form the Ohio River allowed for quick and easy navigation, along with access for farming, drinking and working. The mountains offered protection from enemies interested in procuring land and the valleys offered flat, fertile land for farming. The land difficult was to navigate, so Pittsburghers quickly learned it was better to produce good themselves rather than pay and wait for items to be shipped from the East. Thus, Pittsburgh became a city of skilled craftsmen: blacksmiths, weavers, shoemakers, tanners, cabinet makers, tinsmiths and saddlers. Settlers were able to transform the region’s agricultural products into goods that could be used or easily sold and shipped down river. The significance of Pittsburgh’s geographical location quickly gained it the title, “Gateway to the West”, an essential debarkation point for those heading westward. From Pittsburgh’s geographical location to its many renowned residents and innovations, the kindergarten friends were eager to learn, experience and share firsthand how wonderful it is to call Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania home!
In addition to Pittsburgh’s navigable rivers, Pittsburgh was fortunate to have a wealth of natural resources such as coal, oil, limestone and natural gas. By the late 1800’s, Pittsburgh had become a manufacturing mecca with industrialist Andrew Carnegie opening a factory of inexpensive, mass-produced steel. While learning about the process of steel production and manufacturing, the kindergarten friends noticed the recurring use of magnets in the process. We learned that steel factories use magnets to assist with the lifting of heavy sheets of steel.

Magnets are usually made of the metal iron, or another materials that have lots of iron in them, such as steel. Magnets have the ability to pull things towards themselves. This invisible force is called magnetism. Magnets only attract (pull) metals that are made of iron or that contain iron. In the kindergarten, we began by exploring which objects around the classroom were magnetic. Then, we explored magnetic poles (north and south). When you put one pole of a magnet near a pole of another magnet, you may feel an attraction (pulling) force as the two poles stick together.

While exploring magnets, friends also disassembled old electronics, exploring the inside parts and pieces. They learned that some tools and
This month we introduced the children to two new families: the AT family and the IG family. Word families, or chunks, help readers look for patterns when decoding. When the kindergarten friends recognize those patterns, they can more easily sound out words they don’t readily know. We used a variety of ways to practice these families with the children, beginning with the Smartboard, as an interactive and fun way to introduce the new rhyming words. Once the children understood the pattern, we practiced the families in lots of hands on ways: we made AT word family books, illustrated AT words, such as a fat cat wearing a hat and an IG word flip book. The children played games like Zap, Word Family Bingo and Word Bounce to reinforce their learning. The children also read and illustrated a word family sentence.

After learning about textiles in the month of January (a unit that limited our weekly tastings), the kindergarten was hungry for some of the delicious food Pittsburgh has to offer! We began the unit by transforming our dramatic play center into Isaly’s, a local family deli and store. Isaly’s is best known today for its iconic chipped chopped ham and creating the famous Klondike Bar ice cream treat, popularized by the slogan, “What would you do for a Klondike Bar?”. It was only fitting to taste ham sandwiches, Klondike Bars, milkshakes, pierogies, Heinz pickles, an array of Heinz condiments, haluski, banana splits (a Pittsburgh first), and much more! After each taste test, the kindergarten friends recorded their preference.
The Science/Discovery Area has continued to be a busy place in the kindergarten classroom! We have explored several experiments involving the many forms of transportation around Pittsburgh, including Boats (Rivers), Bridges, Trains, Tunnels and Inclines.

**Boats**

One of the earliest industries in Pittsburgh was boatbuilding. In 1811, the first steamboat was built in the city. Whether it be a ride on the Gateway Clipper, a just Ducky Tour or admiring the river from the Point, the kindergarten friends were eager to explore the many boats found floating along the rivers of Pittsburgh. We first explored sink and float by testing objects found around the classroom. Then we used what we learned to build a boat that would successfully float. Next, we created an anchor to stabilize our boat. During circle time, we tested if each child's boat would float and if placing their anchor on top of the boat would prevent it from moving around the water.

**Bridges**

Pittsburgh is often referred to as “The City of Bridges”. All together, there is a total of 446 bridges, making Pittsburgh officially the city with the most bridges in the world. Today we have three more bridges than the former world leader Venice, Italy. Our exploration of bridges first began with the friends testing different materials, experimenting to make the strongest bridge. Then, with a partner, the friends were challenged to build a stable bridge across the water table. In a small group, friends were also challenged to brainstorm their ideas on the best way to build a bridge using objects at our kindergarten creation station. Friends concluded that popsicle sticks and cardboard provided sturdy support.

**Trains and Tunnels**

Many of our families use Pittsburgh's light rail system, known as the “T” or drive through one of many tunnels encompassing the city on a daily basis. Eager to know how you’d build a tunnel through the center of a mountain or a subway system underneath water, the kindergarten friends explored various materials from the classroom to construct their own tunnels. We made kinetic sand (sand that possesses a mushy texture and enough malleability to hold shape) and used rocks to represent the land around an underground tunnel. The friends also had the great idea to use large wooden blocks, building a life-size tunnel for us to explore.

**Ramps and Inclines**

At one time, Pittsburgh had 23 inclines in operation. Most have been removed; only two, the Duquesne Incline and the Monongahela Incline, are still in operation. The kindergartners explored which objects found in the classroom would roll down a ramp and used washers to control the weight of the car, exploring if weight affected the speed and distance the car traveled. Using an incline created by Mrs. Bird, we also worked with partners to experiment with making incline cars that would safety ride up and down. Friends even incorporated art with inclines by using paint, toy cars and an inclined plane to create artwork.
IMAGINATION TRANSPORTATION

After learning about the many modes of transportation found in Pittsburgh, the kindergarten friends were given a key that would operate their very own vehicle. The only problem was that the friends first had to use their imaginations to create their very own style of transportation. Each child was randomly assigned a geographical location (Land, Sea, Air and Underground). From there, the friends had to create and draw a type of transportation that would be used in their location. As they began their illustration, each friend shared ideas with Mrs. Perovich, explaining in detail how the vehicle moves, its purpose/how it’s used, if the vehicle has any special designs and, who would ride in the vehicle.

SPECIAL VISITORS

As we learned more about Pittsburgh, we were lucky to explore some of the wonderful resources the city has to offer. Our first visitor, from the Fort Pitt Museum, shared a map showing Fort Pitt’s location in 1758, along with the confluence of the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers, where the Ohio River was formed. We learned this piece of land was key to controlling the upper reaches of the Ohio River Valley and western Pennsylvania, as well as a focal point for trading due to its strategic river location. We were also able to explore artifacts that would have been traded amongst the settlers and Native Americans at that time. Next, we enjoyed a visit from an educator at Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, an organization that works to identify and save historically significant places and help to educate people about the Pittsburgh region’s rich history. Towards the end of the month, we had the opportunity to visit the University Center, observing a mural drawn by Doug Cooper, a professor of Architecture at Carnegie Mellon. The black and white drawing (drawn with charcoal) illustrates the story of Pittsburgh’s past and present.
Thank you to all the families who came to our Pittsburgh Party Family Festival on Thursday, February 26th! We really enjoyed seeing all our friends and families again. We hope everyone had a great time exploring our Pittsburgh building experiments, square dancing to music by Stephen Foster, food tasting, playing Bingo and more. We could tell all the children couldn't wait to share what they had been learning about what makes Pittsburgh such a great place to live. A special thanks to all the families who helped us successfully collect sweaters to donate to those in need.