Native Americans

The month of November naturally leads into a study on Native Americans. We explored Native American tribes and their lifestyles, concentrating on the Plains Indians. The children enjoyed learning about the food (buffalo), shelter (tipis), transportation (horses), communications (picture writing), tools (arrow heads) and culture of the first Americans. We concentrated on the close relationship that the Native Americans had with their environment; everything that nature provided was treated with respect, thanks were given for all animals, vegetables and minerals used.

Benjamin’s friends, Michael and Eva, from the Cherokee Nation spoke with the children about life as a Native American. Eva performed a traditional dance for us. The unit culminated with a trip to the Carnegie Museum’s Native American exhibit.

Will, Elena, Benjamin and Ali exploring our Native American props.

Important Notes

- It is that time of year! We go outside as often as the weather permits. Please send snow pants, boots, mittens and hats.
- Please remember to send shoes with your children if they wear boots to school.
- Our classroom can be hot; dress your child in layers.
- Check your child’s extra clothes box to include winter clothes.

Michael and Eva sharing their heritage with the class.
We teachers offer the children experiences that build on earlier skills plus extend the time, attention and energy needed in the activity in order to help the children grow.

This unit on Native Americans offered many opportunities to do just that. Many Native American tribes were excellent weavers. We built on the children’s earlier skill of patterning by introducing weaving. Over and under was heard repeatedly as the children worked on their looms. The task required the children to spend more time than they previously had been spending on activities. Our expectations of your children are increasing, and they are rising to meet them with beautiful success.

**TOTEM POLES**

Another example of stretching your children’s attention span and building on their knowledge of symmetry was the construction of totem poles. Mrs. Perovich led the activity by reading stories about the Northwestern Native Americans and their use of totem poles. The poles were basically elaborate mailboxes, depicting the people who lived in that house and their social standing in the tribe. Using small wood scraps, decorative wood shapes, and glue, the children constructed a small totem for themselves.
NATIVE AMERICAN MASKS

The Native American masks had varied purposes, from entertainment to spiritual and/or medicinal purposes. Many tribes believed that when a person donned a mask for specified ceremonies or rituals, the actual spirit of the animal depicted entered the individual wearing it and thus the individual was able to share this creature’s power, be it strength, purpose, wisdom, etc.

The children began this multi-step project by first painting a recycled cereal box a background color, next painting facial features and colorful designs, and last embellishing the mask with straw, moss and feathers. This week long process resulted in colorful and unique masks!

NATIVE AMERICAN FOOD AND DRYING FOODS

This month the children tried many different Native American foods: acorn and butternut squash, popcorn, green beans, dried apricots, cranberries, pomegranates, hominy, avocado, chickpeas, beef jerky and buffalo meat and “everyone’s favorite” Fry Bread served with honey! Surprisingly, every one of the foods were “liked” by the majority of the class!

During the harvest season, Native Americans prepared for the winter months by drying foods. Dried foods kept longer without spoiling and were easier to store and carry. When out fishing or hunting or gathering, people enjoyed a small meal of dried fruit, nuts and perhaps pemmican. Pemmican was a mixture of pounded dried meat, berries or dried fruit and buffalo fat.

After researching the drying process with the children, we decided to try to dry some foods. We are fortunate to have a food dehydrator at the Children’s School so our first challenge was to make fruit leather out of flavored applesauce. The children devoured the fruit leather in 5 minutes! We then decided to experiment with different foods. Each child chose a fruit or vegetable to dry. We tasted the fresh foods and then added them to the dehydrator. Check our blog to see the results!
THREE SISTERS

The Three Sisters are an ancient method of gardening using an intercropping system that grows corn, beans, and squash crops simultaneously in the same growing area that is typically a rounded mound of soil, often called a hill. **Corn** is the oldest sister. She stands tall in the center. **Squash** is the next sister. She grows over the mound, protecting her sisters from weeds and shading the soil from the sun with her leaves, keeping it cool and moist. **Beans** are the third sister. She climbs through squash and then up the corn to bind all together as she reaches for the sun. Beans help keep the soil fertile by converting the sun's energy into nitrogen filled nodules that grow on its roots. As beans grow, they use the stored nitrogen as food.

NOVEMBER SCIENCE EXPERIMENTS

This month, we concentrated on science experiments that focused on the natural world, especially the 3 sisters.

**Sprouting Indian Corn:**
* I wonder...what will happen when we place an ear of Indian corn in a dish of water.
* I think...Mrs. Perovich recorded the children’s predictions. The children made many interesting hypothesis and were amazed when the corn sprouted!
* I learned...that the corn seeds will begin to sprout while still on the cob.

**Planting the 3 Sisters:**
* I wonder...which seed will sprout first.
* I think...the children made their predictions and “planted” their 3 seeds in a ziploc baggie with a moist paper towel. The bags were taped to the window and checked daily.
* I learned...that the beans sprouted the quickest but the corn plant grew the fastest.

**Animal Pelts:**

In the Science Center the children explored a variety of animal pelts including bear, skunk, badger, rabbit, cow and coyote. Deer antlers and a cow skull were also available.
KINDERGARTEN MATH

Math in the kindergarten is practiced throughout the entire day. The children begin the day answering the “Question of the Day”. The results are counted and tallied each day by the “Helper”. The concepts of equality, more and less are practiced.

Morning work may consist of counting, recognizing and writing numbers. Games such as rolling a dice, counting the dots and blotting out that number on a paper help with these skills. Each week the children rotate the jobs of Number Helper, Math Spinner, Guessing Jar Helper and Snack Helper. The Number Helper writes the number of days that we have been in school to add to our 100 block chart. They also complete a chart by writing the number, spelling the word, recalling the numbers before and after, identifying the tens and ones, and then showing the number with tally markers and stickers. The Guessing Jar Helper asks each friend to make a ‘good guess’ of the number of items in the jar. At the end of the week, the items are counted and the children can check their guess. Snack Helpers set the tables for our daily snack. One to one correspondence is put into practice.

During our morning circle, the Weather Helper graphs the daily weather and reports on the changes in the graph. The calendar helper practices writing and recalling the day’s date.

Specific math skills such as patterning, sorting, graphing and adding are presented by the teacher in various ways during our morning group. The Smart Board, manipulatives, and books are all used to introduce a topic. Children practice the skill several times with a teacher in a small group. Once the skill has been mastered, the children are then asked to complete the task independently to check their competency.