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.

We turned our block area into a Native American village, complete with tipi, traditional clothes, and food and household materials. We added natural elements such as sticks and dried corn. The children enjoyed enacting scenarios either from their imagination or from the Native American legends that we had read throughout the month. The unit culminated with a trip to the Carnegie Museum’s Native American exhibit.

Tayshawn hunting buffalo while Milo, Rory, Lynn and Vivian build the cooking fire.

Lena, Asya, Lola, Lorelei and Jane 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 that are labeled with your child's name.
• Please remember to send shoes with your children if they wear boots to school.
• Our classroom can be hot; dress your child in layers.
PROCESS, NOT PRODUCT

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.

NATURAL FABRIC DYE AND ANIMAL TOTEMS

Native Americans used natural materials to make beautiful colors to dye wool, cotton, and other fibers.

The children were excited to learn about how the Native American culture created their own fabrics through weaving as well as dying fabric out of fruits and vegetables. To make our own dyes, we chopped beets, red cabbage, and red onion. We divided the cabbage into two pots, adding salt turned the dye blue and adding vinegar turned it pink. The onion made a yellow dye while the beets made red dye. After boiling the chopped vegetables, we added cotton fabric and let it sit overnight. The next day we removed the fabric and let it dry.

Native American cultures have the belief that a person is connected with an animal guide. We extended the concept by choosing our own totem animal. We decorating a pebble with that animal. Using the dyed fabric, we fashioned a simple pouch so that we could wear them around our necks.
Once we learned the process of weaving and dying cloth, we began a study on Native American clothing. Mrs. Blizman brought several animal pelts for the children to explore, explaining that animals were not only a source of food but used as clothing and tools. Native Americans respected their relationship with nature, not wasting one part of the animals they hunted. The children decorated paper bag vests and learned how to cut fringe.

The headdress is a very important part of Native American culture. Typically made of bird feathers, it was a symbol of courage and power. Each time a chief or warrior committed a brave act, a feather was added.

In kindergarten, we talk a lot about being brave, trying new things and challenging ourselves in our work. The children painted felt headdresses and added feathers. Once their headdresses were complete, we made a classroom book about bravery.

Natalie stated “I am brave because I do stuff I do not like to do.”

Using all of the facts we learned about Native American clothing from photos, books, discussion and stories that we read, the children drew Native American portraits. Paying close attention to detail, the children added patterns to the clothes, braids in the hair, feathers for headdresses, and bows and arrows for hunting. The unit’s vocabulary is enhanced as we share our observations and techniques with others.
THREE SISTERS
The Three Sisters are an ancient method of gardening using an intercropping system that grows corn, beans, and squash simultaneously in the same growing area, which 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.

Sprouting Indian Corn:
I wonder...what will happen when we place an ear of Indian corn in a dish of water.
I think...Mrs. Armbruster recorded the children's predictions. The children made many interesting hypotheses 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.

Pine Cone Experiment:
I wonder...what will happen when we place an open pinecone in water.
I think...the children predicted that it would sink, float or get wet.
I learned...that the pinecone closes up in water. The pinecone is actually protecting its seeds. The seeds disperse in the wind. During wet weather it is harder for the seeds to travel.
OBSERVATIONAL DRAWINGS

Drawing is an important part of our kindergarten day. We work on drawing lines, drawing shapes, drawing faces, drawing people, drawing animals, filling the white space, adding details, adding words, and building stamina.

Along with expressing our feelings and emotions, drawing helps us gain fine muscle control and strengthen eye-hand coordination. We develop our perceptual abilities by becoming aware of color, shape, form, line and texture as we try to replicate them through our representations. Drawing gives us the opportunity to make choices and solve problems.

Children learn to value diversity as they compare each other’s art and see that people express themselves in different ways.

Drawing in kindergarten is a social activity! We share, wait our turn, ask for help and offer compliments or support.

NATIVE AMERICAN FOODS

This month, the children tried many different Native American foods: butternut squash, popcorn, dried sunflower and pumpkin seeds, beans, dried apricots, cherries, beef jerky, 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 drying some foods. We are fortunate to have a food dehydrator at the Children’s School, so we made fruit leather out of flavored applesauce. The children devoured the fruit leather in 5 minutes!

We ended the unit with our own Native American feast. The children helped prepare and then enjoyed buffalo meat, baked beans, corn, dried cranberries, green beans and fry bread with honey.

Felicity and Julia enjoying our feast.
Native American Field Trip