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), 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 read throughout the month.

Native American figurines and a long house were added to the Small Worlds Area to extend the children’s play.

The unit culminated with a trip to the Carnegie Museum’s Native American exhibit.

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.

Norah, Isaac, Jovie, Carlos and Annika exploring the Native American props.

Owen setting up a scenario in the Small World's Area with figurines.
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 patternning 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.

NATIVE AMERICAN BIRTH SPIRIT ANIMALS

Many Native American cultures have the belief that a person is assigned an animal at the time of birth. Native Americans throughout time have held sacred, the connection between nature, animal, and man. Native American astrology is based upon your birth animal totem, which is the animal spirit that you are born under. A birth totem is similar to an astrological sign of the zodiac. Your birth totem can tell you many things about your personality, your attitudes, your abilities and your short comings.

We researched the children’s birth animal according to their birth date. The children painted their animal to add to the hallway bulletin board that displays their individual work.

NATURAL SELF PORTRAITS

In keeping with the Native Americans culture of using of natural products in their daily life, the children collected natural items found in their gardens at home. We drew an outline of their faces using charcoal found from the remnants of a bonfire. By adding leaves, dried grasses, seed pods, acorns, buckeyes, feathers, and dried flowers, beautiful self portraits were created. The portraits reflect the personality of the artist.
NATIVE AMERICAN KACHINA DOLLS

The Kachina spirits live in the San Francisco Peaks and other mountains that surround the 3 Arizona mesas that are the ancestral home of the Hopi-shinumu, the Peaceful People. Each winter solstice, the Kachina spirits come to the villages for the Bean Dance Ceremony. They are not worshipped but are allies of the Hopi that connect them with the forces of nature and take their petitions to the Creator. This understanding is at the heart of the Kachina dolls, meanings. The Kachina dolls’ meanings represent various deities, animals, ancestors or natural elements. Before each dance, Hopi men carve Kachina dolls from cottonwood. Each doll depicts a particular spirit that will participate in the dance. Using paper towel tubes, the children chose a Kachina to recreate. While studying a photo, they used paper scraps and feathers to craft the doll. The children shared the meaning of their Kachina with the group during circle time. During the field trip to the museum, they were excited to see all the Kachina Dolls displayed.

There are ceremonial mask traditions within many Native American tribes. The Hopi and other Pueblo Indians carve and paint wooden kachina masks for their traditional dances, the Iroquois create sacred "false face" masks from wood and corn husks, the Inuit carve small masks called finger masks that dancers wear on their hands, the Navajo and Apache make leather masks for dancing, and the Cherokee would craft gourd masks for storytelling. The kindergarten created our own masks using recycled cereal boxes and paint. After adding layers of paint, the children embellished the masks with feathers, beads, etc.
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.

**Exploring The Great Outdoors**

While visiting the park one Friday, the children were inspired to build a tipi. Working together, they dragged large branches from the woods and leaned them against a tree. Several children built a fire pit, adding stones to contain the fire and logs for benches. Hunters brought home buffalo and the meat was cooked for the tribe. We enjoyed watching them work together while they demonstrated concepts that we had learned in the classroom.
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, 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!

The children were asked to choose a food that they would like to dry. Surprisingly, many of the foods that we experimented with tasted good when dried.

NATIVE AMERICAN MUSIC

Singing and percussion are important aspects of traditional Native American music. Vocalization takes many forms, ranging from solo and choral song to multipart singing. Percussion, especially drums and rattles, are common accompaniment to keep the rhythm steady for the singers, who generally use their native language or non-lexical vocables (nonsense syllables).

We began our day with a Cherokee morning song, shaking the sun for rising. Throughout the day, we sang a variety of songs including The Earth Is Our Mother and The Canoe Song. Rattles and drums were added, along with keeping the beat by slapping our thighs.

Mrs. Hraber, the music teacher, lent us her authentic Native American drums to use. Since the drums were so popular with the children, Mrs. Armbruster helped the children make their own drums using a cardboard tube and piece of leather. The children also made rattles using beans and paper tubes.
FIELD TRIP TO THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM