As December began, we dove into the colorful world of Patricia Polacco. Our new unit provided the opportunity to explore the components of a story, beginning with what an “Author” and “Illustrator” are, then digging deeper into the key parts of a story. As we continued to study Patricia Polacco, reading more than twenty of her fifty-five books, our discussion focused on what each story has in common: a title, characters, setting, beginning, middle and end. Feeling inspired by her use of imagination, creativity and ability to retell her own life stories, we spent our December days becoming illustrators and authors. Students practiced retelling memories using special mementos from home that helped spark a recollection, wrote and illustrated their own “Shared Moment” memory stories, created books at the writing center, and invented stories using story telling cards created by classmates. As the month continued, students quickly discovered their interest in reading and writing blossoming.
SIGHT WORDS
During the month of December, we continued our exploration of literacy and language development. Allowing students the opportunity to develop as strong, confident readers and life-long learners begins with providing children the chance to develop the power of self-efficacy (a person's belief in his or her ability to accomplish a task). The power of self-efficacy in learning situations cannot be underestimated. When children believe they can learn something new, they are much more likely to actually acquire new knowledge. Although, at times, children need evidence that they have what is takes to achieve. Learning sight words can provide this proof for an emerging reader. This month the kindergarten class practiced recognizing, recalling, writing and spelling sight words. Through the use of word searches, scavenger hunts, sorting and graphing, reading and speaking in front of an audience, students were provided a fun, challenging twist on learning.

COOPERATION AND TEAMWORK
This month during gym, the kindergarten teachers had the chance to add their own spin to our weekly Friday visits: Teamwork and Cooperation. The ability to work together as part of a team is simply not a skill needed at school, it is a vital skill used in all areas of life. Teamwork requires people to work cooperatively with others towards a shared purpose. For a team to work together effectively, it takes all members of the team to respect each other’s abilities and opinions. Teamwork is a highly social activity and involves much interaction and exchanging of ideas and actions. Being part of a team allows students the chance to move from intrapersonal (individual) ways of thinking to interpersonal (communicating with others). Working as part of a team will strengthen a child’s social and emotional skills, help develop their communication skills, can improve their confidence, and help them feel part of a community, too. The students had the chance to practice these skills by challenging themselves to work in both small and large groups, communicating ideas and strategies. Students passed a hula hoop around a circle without breaking the link, moved a ball with a partner without using their hands or having it touch the floor, ran relay races as small teams, and moved cups by just using string and rubber bands. Be sure to try these activities at home with your family!
Inspired by many of Patricia Polacco’s “Shared Moment” stories, students spent the month of December illustrating and writing their own “shared moment” memory story. Students began the process by reading several of Patricia Polacco’s stories inspired by her childhood in rural Michigan and summers spent with her Babushka (her grandmother). “Thank You, Mr. Falker”, “My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother”, “Some Birthday!”, “Meteor!” and “Thunder Cake”. After discussing the noticeable components of a shared moment stories, students began the brainstorming process by sharing special memory objects from home with the class. From there, students wrote the rough draft of their story with Mrs. Blizman and then sketched their ideas for illustrations. Teachers reminded students that being an illustrator like Patricia Polacco takes lots of hard work and focus. The students then began the final illustration of their stories, using black marker and watercolors. Once the illustrations were complete, the stories were typed with help of the teachers. The finishing touches were added as students assembled their work as a special holiday gift for their family to enjoy.

**REPRESENTATION OF NUMBERS: TALLY MARKS**

Throughout the month, we explored the math concept of tally marks, a representation of quantity, focusing on counting, making groups, counting groups and counting by 5’s and 10’s. Students first explored how tally marks are used as a quick way for keeping track of numbers in groups of five. One vertical line is made for each of the first four numbers; the fifth number represented by a diagonal line across the previous four. They then practiced counting objects, determining their quantity in numeral form and with tally marks. After several days of teacher directed activities, students made the connection of tally marks and making groups of 5’s. This led to a class discussion of the different helpful ways you can count; by 1’s, 5’s, 10’s and so on. To culminate our focus on the representation of numbers using tally marks, students were given the challenge of applying their knowledge of how tally marks work by grouping numbers to count/organize objects by 10’s.
DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE KINDERGARTEN READING

Learning to read is a developmental process; all children do not begin to read at the same age. Literacy milestones appear along the way as children develop a basic oral vocabulary and understanding of the alphabetic principles before beginning to read. Learning how to read is a complex cognitive process that requires enriching and enjoyable experiences with books. As educators, we strive to create a comfortable and stress-free learning environment that promotes an understanding of the function of reading, while developing a positive attitude towards it. In kindergarten, we focus on emergent literacy and gradually progress to what is developmentally appropriate for each child at that time. Research has proven that reading and writing develop at the same time in young children and are interrelated. As students begin to explore “kindergarten spelling” (invented spelling), they reconstruct their knowledge of reading and books as well. Below are just a few milestones experienced within the kindergarten classroom and examples of how they are integrated into our curriculum.

**Telling a Story Through Pictures**
- Taking a “Picture Walk” through a story, uses the illustrations to anticipate what might happen in the story. Reading books aloud during our daily circle times.
- Using picture to create meaning. “Reading” Picture Books with Friends, Reading with the Teacher Journals, Writing Center
- Their drawings and artwork tell their story. Journals/Birthday Pages/Writing Center
- Explores books independently. Free Choice, Activity Time
- Able to retell a familiar story. Circle Time Discussions, Story Path, Sharing at Circle Time
- Listening to and comprehending books that are read aloud. Circle Time Discussions, Story Path, Sharing at Circle Time

**Letter Recognition and Recall**
- Able to recite the alphabet in alphabetical order. Challenges, Morning Work, Daily Work
- Recognize upper and lower case letters. Challenges, Morning Work, Daily Work Activities, Identifying Name
- Form letters of alphabet. Challenges, Morning Work, Daily Work Activities, Writing Name, Forming Sight Words

**Relationship between letter, sounds and printed words**
- Recognizes known sight words and uses picture clues and print to recognize new words.
- Reading books with the teacher.
- Understands difference between letters and words.
- Letter identification, Reading with the teacher, Photo Journals, Daily Journals
- Has control of most consonant sounds.
- Sounding out words when reading, Photo Journals, Daily Journals
- Uses language, memory, picture and print as major cues to read and understand text.
- Reading with the teacher, Read alouds

- Mae sounds out sight words in her journal.
- Hugo writes his name during his morning routine. Dany answers the question of the day.
- Clark and Collin practice identifying and writing sight words.
- Savanna writing sight words at writing center.
- Clark uses pictures to “read” a book.
- Rohan draws in her journal.
- Hugo writes his name during his morning routine. Dany answers the question of the day.
INSPIRED BY A STORY

After reading Patricia Polacco’s “Babushka’s Doll”, the kindergarteners were inspired to create dolls of their own using fabric, markers, buttons, a sewing machine and lots of love. The students began the week long process by drawing their faces on pieces of muslin fabric. They used handheld mirrors to help with adding details, such as eyelashes, eye color and earrings. They quickly moved onto stuffing fabric arms and legs with fiber filling and used the sewing machine (with the assistance of Mrs. Perovich) to attach all parts together. One final step was necessary, using tulle, ribbon and fabric pieces to create clothing. Then, magic glitter was sprinkled to help the doll “come alive” just as the little girl’s doll had done in the story.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

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.
The month of December brought a time to say goodbye to some of our friends. We enjoyed our time working with our University of Pittsburgh student teacher, Ms. Amoscato. We wish her the best of luck on her next student teaching adventure, teaching elementary special education within the Pittsburgh Public School District. We enjoyed the many illustrated stories, science experiments, and artistic adventures we experienced with her. We also say goodbye to Ashley, our intern from Dr. Carver’s Child Development Practicum.

With only three weeks in the month of December, the kindergarten class was limited to the number of books we could read. The students truly enjoyed the works of Patricia Polacco and are eager to continue their adventures with Babushka, Tricia, her rotten, redheaded older brother and many more of her lovable characters!

**ELLIS PLAY**

We were invited by The Ellis School to attend their production of “Cinderella”. The children excitedly rode on the large school bus to the Ellis School, where they enjoyed a yummy lunch in the cafeteria. They then joined a sing-a-long and decorated royal crowns to wear during the performance. The friends were a wonderful audience, engaged in the thrilling story of how Cinderella, a servant to her wicked stepmother and stepsisters, finds true love with Prince Charming after a magical journey to the Royal Ball.

**GOODBYE TO GREAT FRIENDS**

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**IF YOU LIKED THUNDER CAKE, YOU MAY LIKE...**

Check out these stories we haven't read yet by Patricia Polacco.