As December began, we dove into the colorful and imaginative world of African Tales. 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 African Tales, our discussion focused on what each story has in common: a title, setting, beginning, middle, and end. Our December unit set a foundation for exploring open ended projects, allowing for friends to let their imaginations take flight.

Tales from Africa and a map showing representation of the 53 countries.

Reminders

- For 2015, school begins Monday, January 5th.
- The winter season is here; please send hats, gloves, scarves and boots.
- We do go outside in the snow; please send an extra pair of snow pants.
- Please remember to label all winter items.

Vivian helping to create a Safari vehicle in the Dramatic Play area.

Cecilia, Arnav, and Lena going on a “Safari”.
AFRICAN LANDFORMS

To begin our unit, we explored the makings of Africa, concentrating on the close relationship of African animals and their environment. Working with a partner, the children researched a particular landform by reading about the characteristics and observing photos. After constructing their landforms out of colored salt dough and clay, the pair shared their model with the class, explaining what they had learned and answering questions.

STORY MAP

After exploring the environment of Africa, we dove into the many tales shared in Africa by discussing what makes a story. The children learned how the Author is a person who writes a story and the Illustrator is a person who draws the pictures for the story. While listening to a story, the friends would become “Book Detectives”, looking for the parts of a story to help complete a story map as a class. First the children identified the Title of the story and the Characters we met while reading. They then worked together to identify where the story took place, the Setting, as well as the Problems the characters faced. We would finish by discussing how the characters resolved the problem.

From our many discussions of what goes into making a story, the children were able to help create stories together during group time and recognize the parts of a Story Map. After reading stories together, the friends were eager to head to the writing center where they could become illustrators and authors themselves.
AFRICAN ART

Inspired by the characters found in many African Tales, students each picked an African animal to illustrate on large paper, and then they wrote and shared interesting facts about their specific animal with the class. While reading tales, such as “How Crocodile Got a Bumpy Back”, and “Why Cheetah has Spots”, the friends were excited to add details to their drawings. First, with drawing a focus on the face of their animal, the friends were able to bring attention to many of the details found in the African Tales as to why a animal looks the way that it does. The friends then brought more appreciation to the animal portraits by outlining the animals in black and adding a complementary background.

While reading many African Tales, the friends took inspiration in the many colors, designs, and animals to create their own African Mask. While exploring the portraits of the stories shared, the friends found that great detail goes into each picture, finding bright colors, patterns, lines, and shapes. Using those details as a jumping point, the friends picked from patterned and animal print paper to create a background or base to their mask. Dipping individual pieces of paper into Paper Mache, a glue and water mixture, the students then carefully laid out where each piece would be placed on the mask. After being sure to leave no black space, the friends then took sparkling jewels, paper, feathers, and raffia to add details around the eyes, cheeks, nose, and hair of the mask. The friends were eager to showcase the masks to classmates and excitedly talked about how they would wear their masks at home during celebrations, like the Africans would do.
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 group times.
- Using pictures 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.
- Able to retell a familiar story. Group Time discussions, Story Map, Sharing a Group Time
- Listening to and comprehending books that are real aloud. Group time discussions, Story map, Sharing at circle

**Letter Recognition and Recall**
- Able to recite the alphabet in alphabetical order. Challenges, Daily Work
- Recognize upper and lower case letters. Challenges, Daily work, Identifying name
- Form letters of alphabet. Challenges, Daily work, 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 a teacher, Journals
- Has control of most consonant sounds. Sounding out words when reading. Sounding out words when reading. Reading with teacher, Read aloud
- Uses language, memory, picture and print as major cues to read and understand text. Reading with teacher, Read aloud

![Sally working at the writing center.](image1)

![Asya sounding out words using Kindergarten spelling.](image2)

![Arnav using pictures and sight words to read a story.](image3)

![Rory completing Daily Work.](image4)
AFRICAN INSPIRED HOLIDAY GIFT

Inspired by the colors and designs found in African artwork, the friends found inspiration to create a holiday gift. Using white tiles, the friends worked to cover the entire tile leaving no white space, with either warm colors or cool colors. Adding drops of rubbing alcohol, the colors then spread, creating a tie dyed effect. After the tiles were dried, the students then used paint to create patterns and designs on top of the background. We hope you enjoy this special holiday gift, and that it adds a little brightness to your home.

![Emma coloring her background with warm colors.](image1)

![A completed holiday gift.](image2)

SHARING STORIES FROM AFRICA

We were visited by Elena’s friend from the African Cape, Leigh, who shared stories from her time living in Africa. She shared with us her adventures on safaris she had taken and of the different animals she had seen.

![Leigh sharing an African story.](image3)

![Milo using a magnifying glass to look at the beans.](image4)

We observed beans that come from a “Lucky Bean Tree”. These trees are planted throughout Africa and it is said that the beans have magical powers that bring you luck. Leigh also taught us different words spoken in Africa.
The month of December brought a time to say goodbye to some of our friends. We enjoyed our time working with our student teacher, Ms. Young. We wish her the best of luck on her next student teaching adventure. We also said goodbye to our friend Milo, who has moved to San Diego. We hope Milo enjoys his new adventures in a new city. We will miss both Ms. Young and Milo, and we hope to hear from them often.

We were invited by The Ellis School to attend their production of “Aristocrats Jr.” The children excitedly rode on the large school bus to the Ellis School, where they enjoyed a brown bag lunch together in the cafeteria. They then joined a sing-a-long. The friends were a wonderful audience, engaged in the thrilling story of how cats from different types of home become great friends.

Goodbye and good luck to Ms. Young and Milo.