Once upon a time, there were twenty-three kindergarten friends that lived in an enchanted classroom. As the weather became cold, they spent their time embarking into the whimsical and magical world of fairy tales. The stories they read and imagined took them on a journey into a world of a mischievous Big Bad Wolf, a slimy magical frog, a princess in distress and an angry giant. Our new unit provided the opportunity to explore the components of a fairy story, asking the question “What would you find in a fairy tale?”, then digging deeper into the key elements of a story. As we continued our exploration, our discussion focused on what each story has in common: a title, characters, setting, beginning, middle and end.

After posing the question of what makes a story a fairy tale, the friends brainstormed and compiled a list. The friends determined that a fairy tale may have... a “Once Upon a time” beginning, magical elements, include falling in love, talking animals with human characteristics, good vs. bad characters, set in a castle or forest, include royalty, have a special number pattern and/or end “Happily Ever After”. After reading each story, the friends would review their checklist, recording and comparing the elements. With each story, the friends eagerly hoped for a book that would fulfill every element (unfortunately, we are still on the hunt). Inspired by these magical tales, friends became authors and illustrators themselves, creating stories at the writing center, drawing pictures, and dictating their stories to the teachers. After adding words to their stories, friends were eager to share their fairy tales with the class at circle time.

Reminders
- For 2017, school begins Wednesday, January 3rd. Our unit for January is Food.
- The winter season is here; please send hats, gloves, scarves, snow pants and boots.
- Please remember to label all winter items.

Evren, Josie and Julia perform Goldilocks and the Three Bears.

Friends “Huffed and Puffed” like the Big Bad Wolf, sequenced stories, created royal castles and explored addition with Magic Fish.

Tyrease sorts characters and setting.
As we continued reading different fairy tales, 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 with a **Solution**. After learning the components that go into a story map, the friends furthered their knowledge of the elements of a story by discussing what is a beginning, middle, and end. They learned that at the **Beginning** you meet the characters and where the story is set, moving onto the **Middle** where a problem often occurs and how it is solved in the **End**. Students also had the opportunity to practice their retelling skills, taking a walk down our story path. As they walked down the path, illustrations were used to help guide their retelling, as they shared the story with classmates.

**ONCE UPON A TIME... WITH A TWIST**

Inspired by the stories we read, the friends explored different challenges in the classroom driven by their wonderful sense of curiosity and inquisitiveness. In *Jack and the Beanstalk*, Jack climbs a magical bean stalk, but is there an easier way for him to reach the top or quickly get down safely? In the *Three Little Pigs*, a Big Bad Wolf tries to blow down a house of straw, sticks and wood. Could you build a house strong enough to withstand the Wolf’s huffs and puffs? The friends embraced these challenges, integrating problem solving conversations and cooperative team working skills throughout their exploration. Some of the greatest tools we can give our kindergarten friends is the belief in their abilities, a thirst for knowledge and a passion for thinking critically and creatively.
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.**
- Explores books independently. **Free Choice, Activity Time.**
- Able to retell a familiar story. **Group Time discussions, Story Map, Sharing at Group Time**
- Listening to and comprehending books that are read 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, Journals**
- Uses language, memory, picture and print as major cues to read and understand text. **Reading with teacher, Read aloud**


Lillian, Eli and Aubri working on a birthday page and photo journals.

Josie reads with the teacher.
SORTING

The kindergarten friends focused this month on sorting. This beginning math skill allows the friends to gain practice in understanding and verbalizing which objects are similar or different. We explored organizing items into different groups based on a characteristic (shape, size, or color) as well as characters vs. settings from a story. After physically sorting the objects, the friends were able to describe their rationale.

FAIRY TALE MAPPING

As we explored the world of fairy tales, friends had the chance to become navigators. Using illustrated maps from The Once Upon a Time Map Book by B.G. Hennessy, friends explored their mapping skills, learning how to find and identify coordinates. Using an illustration, friends had to find the location of a character and record their location on the map as coordinates. Reading a map remains an important tool for building a child's spatial reasoning skills by helping them visualize objects and places in relation to one another.

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS BERRY?

While studying Pittsburgh in November, friends eagerly sent Berry the Bear off on a journey around the world. Now that he has had time to travel and explore, Berry is returning to the Kindergarten classroom, ready to share his adventures! Berry has traveled from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to New Jersey, Washington D.C, London, England, Florida, Toronto, and a Spanish Island off the coast of North West Africa. We can't wait to see where Berry's travels take him next!
THE ELLIS SCHOOL PLAY

We were invited by The Ellis School to attend their production of “Willy Wonka”. The children excitedly rode on a large, yellow school bus to The Ellis School, where they enjoyed a brown bag lunch together in the cafeteria. They took part in a craft project, drawing the candy of their dreams. The friends were a wonderful audience!

A TIME FOR GOODBYE

The month of December brought a time to say goodbye to our student teacher, Mr. Lehmberg. We have enjoyed our time listening to stories, exploring in the Make Shop, and conducting exciting science experiments with Mr Lehmberg. We wish him the best of luck at his next student teaching adventure. We will miss Mr. Lehmberg and we hope to hear from him often.

CONTINUING ADVENTURES

With only a little over two weeks in the month of December, the kindergarten class was limited with the number of books we could read. The students truly enjoyed exploring the magical world of fairy tales and are eager to continue their adventures. As you explore and delve into more fairy tales at home, please feel free to share any book recommendations with the class!