

Montessori Pathways'

News

January, 2012

Notes from Ms. Alena

January brought several **new friends** to our school. Welcome *Josephine, Madison, Cole, and Dominick* to our Montessori Pathways family.

We are also excited to welcome *Ms. Patty* to our school, who has become a close friend to the kids since the very first day. She has brought a lot of new and interesting materials that she made herself, which is exciting and inspiring for the kids.

We would like to thank the *Blohm family (Christopher, and his dad Derrick)*, who volunteered and helped clean the snow off of the sidewalks at school, making them beautiful and safe for walking!

One of the events this month was our *parent evening* “**Thinking About the Future (Montessori Kindergarten and Elementary Year)**”, where Ms. Jocelyn, Ms. Katy, and I demonstrated the spiral nature of Montessori education, whereby the skills learned in the Kindergarten year are studied at a deeper level in the Elementary years.



Before the meeting, one of our parents asked how the Montessori Elementary differs from traditional.

I would like to share the opinion of Judi Charlap, the Head of the School by the Sea in St. Petersburg, Florida, regarding this issue, which I found in the “Tomorrow’s Child” magazine:

What makes Montessori Elementary different?

With so much going on, when you observe an Elementary Montessori class at work, you may find it difficult to get a sense of the big picture. Over here, some students are working on math, some are reading, while others are working on science. In the corner, a teacher is giving a lesson to a small group of children, while occasionally glancing up to keep an eye on the rest of the class.

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The Elementary classroom may appear to be unstructured, but this seemingly random, yet obviously purposeful activity, is basic to the independent learning and self-directed activity of the Montessori approach.

Each child is considered as an individual. We can see a vast range in the level of curriculum on which the children are engaged. Montessori teachers strive to challenge each according to his or her developmental needs and abilities.



“Montessori Elementary gives children the opportunity to continue to progress at their own pace in an environment that nurtures love of learning. Children take responsibility for their own learning and have daily opportunities to make decisions and choices in a child-centered classroom. They are exposed to many complex concepts at an early age through the use of wonderful concrete learning materials.



It is not unusual to see seven-year-olds in a Montessori classroom constructing atomic and molecular models. Nine-year-olds analyze the squares of trinomials, while ten-year-olds solve algebraic equations, and twelve-year-olds compute the square root of large numbers.

What parent who has watched her children thrive both intellectually and socially in the Children’s House wouldn’t want this to continue in the Elementary years?”

*Judi Charlap, Head of School
The School by the Sea, St. Petersburg, Florida
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This month, we also plan to have pre-kindergarteners visit the Kindergarten class, and Kindergarteners visit the Elementary class. I know that the kids will be really excited to be a part of Kindergarten or Elementary class during the day.

Coming School Events

On Friday, February 8 State Certified Vision and Hearing Technicians from the McHenry County Department of Health will be conducting ***screening of the students’ vision and hearing.***

We invite all parents and kids to our ***Story reading / Art and Craft / Book Fair Family Night on Wednesday, February 20th from 5:00pm to 7:00pm.***

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The registration for the upcoming 2013-2014 school year has begun

On Saturday, February 2nd from 11am until 2:00 pm we will be holding our first **Open House**. You can come and discuss any questions you may have and waive the registration fee if register during this event.

As always, if you have any comments, questions, or concerns, feel free to contact us via e-mail
montpathways@hotmail.com

Warmly,
Ms. Alena

Working with Montessori Materials

Word Building

The Montessori reading curriculum has three essential components: A strong foundation in phonics (*learning individual letter sounds using **the sandpaper letters***), comprehension of those sounds based on visualization (*Word Building*) and learning to read for meaning and using context clues (*reading picture cards, word labels, books and stories for comprehension*). Every child in a 3-6 Montessori classroom follows along this curriculum at his or her own pace.

Word Building is an activity that builds upon a child's knowledge of individual letter sounds and



creates a visual and sensorial connection between these sounds and spoken and written words. Using a material called **The Moveable Alphabet** a child is able to manipulate each individual letter to “build words” based upon the initial, medial and final sound.

A child will begin with simple 3-letter phonetic words that follow the pattern of consonant-short vowel-consonant (for example: *c-a-t*). In order to allow each child to work independently, they use small phonetic objects which represent the words they are to build. Later, pictures of phonetic words can be introduced for variety and additional practice in word building. As a child continues to practice word building she will progress to *longer words, long vowel words, blends, silent letters, phrases, sentences and finally stories.*

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Word Building is an important language material because most children are ready to “build” words before they have mastered the fine motor control to “write” words. This activity keeps a child challenged and developing language skills so that when they are able to begin fluently writing letters to form the sounds they hear, they are successful. Children who are working on Word Building activities are *simultaneously learning to read by reading a wide variety of classroom picture cards, word labels, sight words and phonetic early readers*. They are listening to adult and child read stories in class and are using all of their foundational skills to continue *to develop oral language, auditory listening, word visualization and phonetic reading skills*.

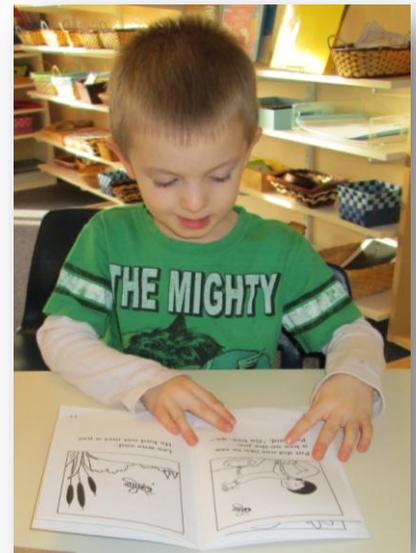
Ms. Jocelyn

Beginning Reading.

Typically, in the Montessori classrooms, the reading books that are first introduced to the child are called Primers. Primers are beginning reading books and are used *to practice phonetic words* (words that can be figured out by the sound of the letters) and for *practicing sight words* (words that need to be memorized because there are no set rules for why they are spelled the way they are.)

In our Montessori classroom we begin with the *Bob Book* series. The first set of twelve books contains simple, short, mostly phonetic words, and the next two sets of eight books progress to include more words per page and a few non-phonetic words. The first book, “*Mat*”, is readable by mastering six letter sounds, (*a, m, t, s, n, d*). The same five words (*Mat, Sam, sat, and, on*) are used in varying two-to four word sentence arrangements involving some variation of “*Mat sat,*” “*Sam sat,*” “*Mat sat on Sam,*” and so forth.

As the program advances, it introduces non-phonetic words systematically in ways that make it easy to understand and incorporate. Once the child completes their first Bob book, they feel of sense of personal accomplishment. The success of reading a “real” book gives them the confidence to progress to the next level!



Ms. Patty

The Pink, Blue, and Green Series in the Elementary Language



The Pink, Blue and Green Series are a Montessori material that was developed after the Montessori Method spread to the United States from Italy. Maria Montessori had initially relied on the sandpaper letters to teach children to read since the Italian language is very phonetic. However, the English language relies heavily on graphemes, digraphs and blends such as *-ough, -igh, ch, sh, cl,* and *tr* to name a few. *The pink, blue and green series break down these different elements of the English language into a way the child can easily progress from phonetic reading and spelling to more of the “rule” based portion of the English language.*

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The Pink Series starts out utilizing *the short vowel sounds*. All of the words in the pink series are purely phonetic. A few examples are *cat, dad, sun, tin, set*, etc. The student moves through different lessons with this material to master the concept of both reading and spelling words that would fall into this category.

The Blue Series introduces a child to *the blends and the digraphs*. Common words in this series would include *clock, stop, flag, chin, thin, ship*, etc.

The Green Series includes words that use *the long vowel sound* and the different ways that the long vowel sound can be produced in a word. For example, the long vowel sound “a” might include words like *bake, paint, sleigh, play, and eight*.

The different presentations and work the children do with the Pink, Blue and Green Series often include the following:

- *Objects and spelling with the moveable alphabet*
- *Pictures and spelling with the moveable alphabet*
- *Pictures and Rhyming Lists*
- *Booklets that focus on the specific digraph, grapheme or blend*
- *Matching Pictures and Phrases or Sentences*
- *Sound Boxes*
- *Vowel Tree*
- *Sentence Writing and Story Writing with Spelling Word Lists*
- *Spelling Tests*



Once the child has mastered spelling with these materials during the three year elementary cycle, they are moved onto Advanced Spelling. These words can come from a number of places. The wonderful thing is that many Montessori works in the other areas of the classroom are filled with rich vocabulary for the child to study.

Spelling is a skill that requires study and practice. The Pink, Blue and Green series offer spelling, reading and writing opportunities for the child. A child’s work with these hands on materials will allow them to develop strong language skills.

Ms. Katy

Notes from the Elementary Class (North room)



Ms. Katy

January has been a busy month. The class returned ready to work and ready for some added responsibility. The students are now writing the Friday newsletter that is sent home to the elementary parents each week. At this point they are dictating what they would like to write, however as they move up in age in the three year elementary cycle, they will be writing and editing their own parts of the newsletter.

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It is something exciting to look forward to! To give you a sample of the perspective of an elementary child I have included the last two Friday's newsletters written by two different students:

Dear Parents,

On Thursday we were reading buddies with the Kindergarteners. They each had to pick out a book and then they read it to the Elementary and the Elementary read it to the Kindergarteners. The Elementary kids were learning about parallel lines. We had fun doing readers theater for the Kindergarten class.

We used thermometers to tell what the temperature is outside. My favorite work this week was Plant Stories!

I won't see you until Tuesday, so have a good long weekend!



- Gracie N.



Happy Good Afternoon,

We have let the bird out this week. I think it went good. He flew all the way to the floor and where the snack table is. The bird liked sitting on top of the cage.

We have been learning math this week. We learned a new way to do the Addition Snake Game.

We have also been solving problems with the peace rock. My favorite work this week was every work and my classroom job. I think the

class has been rolling rugs really nice.

This week I learned how to make up a story from just looking at a picture. I've also been learning about capitals of Europe.

We did experiments with mass, volume, and density, and learned how to measure volume.

I will see you back in school on Monday.

- Avnish K.

I hope you appreciate the opportunity to view the classroom through the child's eyes as much as I do!

Our students have been working hard this month in math, language, and the cultural subjects. Many have been working with the *Addition Charts* to improve addition fact memorization along with being introduced to a new way of using the *Addition Snake Game*.

In Language we have begun studying the many different forms of *plural nouns and compound words*.



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We did a few experiments this month that related to *gravity, mass, volume, density and a plant experiment* that hopefully will begin growing soon! These are just a few of the exciting things we have been working on this month.

I want to thank those who attended the parent meeting regarding the Elementary and Kindergarten programs. Your child's education is an important decision and I hope Ms. Alena, Ms. Jocelyn and I were able to help you through this process. If you have any questions regarding the Elementary Class, please don't hesitate to ask - or better yet, stop in for an observation to see it in action.



I will leave you with a few quotes I felt were worth noting this month:

- “*Can we use more than eight numbers?*” (When receiving follow up work for the teen snake game.) My reply, “*You can always do more!*”
- “*Vatican City is smaller than some malls!*”
- “*The paper falls like a parachute!*”- During an experiment on gravitational force and air resistance - an excellent connection!
- “*Ms. Katy, don't ever eat the plant that a koala bear eats because it could make you very sick.*”



Thank you,
Ms. Katy

Kindergarten Extended Day News

Ms. Jocelyn

The Kindergartners got right back into the swing with their weekly work plans after winter break. **In Math** they first reviewed the *concept of handful exchange* in order to be ready for playing The Banker's Game with “dynamic” equations that required the concept of carrying (changing 10 tens into 1 hundred, etc.) as well as *zero as a place holder*.

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The children were also ready to have the presentation for “short-cut” way to play the Banker’s Game which allows them to simply select the numerals they need rather than the elaborate set-up they have mastered earlier in the year. The structure that they have practiced will now serve them *to problem solve and explore different ways of completing a process*.

This is also one of the first steps moving toward first grade and the structure Ms. Katy employs in her classroom!

Also, in Math the Kindergartners are now working on *the long (cubes) and short (squares) chains for all of the numbers*. The skills associated with this include skip counting, one-for-one correspondence for larger numbers over 100+ and order and organization for advanced math works.



In Science, we continued

the animal study we began before winter break by learning the five categories of animals that are *vertebrates* (fish, reptiles, birds, mammals and amphibians) along with the *basic characteristics* that define them. The children then use this new knowledge to play the vertebrate quiz game. I would read the clue to a specific vertebrate group and the children would have to determine “Who Am I?” An example of one of the clues read “*I am cold-blooded; I have dry scaly skin and lay soft shelled eggs, who Am I?*” All of the foundational work earlier in the year about body parts and the difference between warm-blooded and cold-blooded animals was

easily retained by the children and utilized in this fun problem solving game.

Also in Science we began our study of *the Solar System and the Planets*. Our first **field trip** of the New Year was to the **Elgin Planetarium**. This was an introduction to our study and the children received a good overview of the planets and the constellations in a program called “One World, One Sky”.



After returning back to school, the children then worked on several activities to learn *the planet names, the order from the sun and planet composition*. Did you know that the 4 planets closest to the sun (Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars) all share the same characteristics; they are smaller, have no rings and are mostly made of rocks and metals. The 4 planets farthest from the sun (Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune) also all share the same characteristics: they are larger, have rings and are mostly made of gases. We also began **group research** to learn more *about each planet* before we begin our big solar system Kindergarten project.

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Our second field trip in January was to **Lee's Martial Arts Academy** in Cary. The Kindergarten and Elementary children combined to get a good gross motor workout at an introductory Tae Kwon Do class.



The children participated in a special class with owners Master Lee and Master John. Tae Kwon do does not promote fighting or aggression but rather combines mental activities (focus, discipline, memory and teamwork) with physical activities (fitness, control, balance and coordination). The children were fully engaged for the hour long field trip trying different skills and maneuvers. The instructors focused on being in control of your own body, listening to directions and treating yourself and others with respect. It was amazing to see the improvement in the skills of all of the children in just the one hour class. If you have been looking for an after school activity that will build your child's confidence, be a physical workout and encourage patience and respect- Tae Kwon Do may be a good choice for your child!



Ms. Jocelyn

Notes from the South Classroom

Ms. Jocelyn and Ms. Ambreen

We all headed back to school after a nice long holiday break anticipating some wonderful winter weather to incorporate into our work activities, but nature had a different more mild plan for the beginning of our month. So, rather than finding snowy inspiration outdoors, we created it indoors!

For the South Room's special activity day in January we hosted an **"I Love Winter" morning**. The children had the opportunity to visit and create at 5 different hands-on activity stations: *fruit snowman snacks*, *snowman sculptures*, *sticky pinecone birdfeeders*, *paper circle snowflakes* and *snowman snow measuring sticks*.

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The children practiced a wide variety of skills to complete each activity including banana slicing and clementine peeling, model magic squeezing and building, honey squeezing and bird seed rolling, paper folding and cutting and collage gluing and number writing.

Thank you so much to our wonderful parent volunteers who helped us on the fun morning: *Sydney's Mom and Grandma (Tammy and Diane), Elizabeth's Mom (Song), Jake's Mom (Nicole) and Alia and Shawn's Mom (Sally)*. We couldn't have done it without you!



Other new works have been presented in our room for the children upon their return to school. **In Science**, new activities regarding *the planets and the solar system* now fill the shelves.



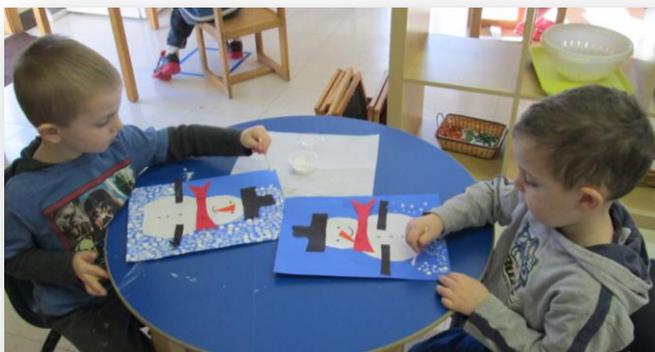
In Math, all of the long and short chains (*representing the square and cubes of numbers*) in the bead cabinet are now out. Many children are now being drawn to the math area in order to practice foundational math skills that will enable them to begin the bead cabinet.

In Language, new objects and cards for *extended word building* activities as well as *January vocabulary cards* have been added to encourage our pre-writing and emergent writers to try new and challenging language activities.



In Practical Life and Creative work, the children are continuing to build their fine motor skills with meaningful, cutting, gluing and painting activities to reflect the world around them (hopefully snowmen and snowy scenes will soon be a reality!)

Our classroom *author of the month* was **Jan Brett**. Jan Brett is the author and illustrator of many wonderful books that incorporate winter and animals in stories with moral lessons.



One of the books we read was “The Mitten”. This is a Ukrainian folktale in which a little girl accidentally drops her white mitten in the snow without realizing it is missing. Then, one-by-one, woodland animals climb in to keep warm beginning with a curious mole and ending with a giant bear. The children not only love to listen to the story but then act it out as a group. Another wonderful Jan Brett book we read was “The

Hat” in which a little girl hangs her wet wool stockings on the clothesline to dry, but when the wind blows one of them off a hedgehog finds it and decides to wear it as a hat.

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The other farm animals at first laugh at Hedgie but then all decide that this “different” hat is a good idea after all.

The moral for the children reinforces *the idea to be true to yourself, no matter what others think or say*. Jan Brett has lots of other wonderful titles, be sure to look for them next time you are in the library with your child!



Warmly,

Ms. Jocelyn and Ms. Ambreen

Notes from the East classroom:

Ms. Patty and Ms. Christine

As we celebrated the arrival of a New Year, we also welcomed *Ms. Patty*, and new students *Madison* and twin brothers, *Dominick and Cole*. We are looking forward to a fun and productive year ahead! We have observed such growth in your children since the beginning of the school year, and have been so proud of their ability to show our new friends the classroom and help with their transition.



In the Language area of the class, we continue our work with not only *individual letter sounds*, but many children are now *blending their sounds and using pre-reading skills*. We have created *rhyming word books and beginning sound books* as well. Some of the more advanced readers are working on *sight words* and have moved on from traditional "Bob" books to more challenging early reader books. We continue *word building* with objects and cards as well as *dictating sentences* orally that they then reconstruct by memory and knowledge of sounds/blending. We have also brought

new books into the reading areas that are funny and challenging for all reading levels in the class.

Along with reading, we encourage *writing activities* and move each child in the direction they need based on their individual capabilities.

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For some children, this means working on their *three finger pencil grip* and improving hand strength. For others, *proper letter and number formation* is stressed using sandpaper letters and numerals. We have seen reluctant writers prove eager to pick up a pencil and give it a try!

Land Forms have been a popular choice in the **geography section**. We not only have sandpaper puzzles of each but the actual photos open up a wonderful experience for cross referencing these landmarks on the globe as well.

We have explored *animal classification cards* which define reptiles, mammals, amphibians, birds and fish. Sequencing and laying out the cards is followed up by matching the proper label and then defining each corresponding part of the vertebrate. We then isolate each

specific part along with its definition to create a "Parts of....." book.

This exercise is also repeated in the **Botany section** of the classroom with the root, tree, leaf and flower. The repetition of laying out the cards, sequencing and labeling offers many choices to enhance a child's vocabulary and success in completing this work.

In math, some children have worked with *circle addition equations*. This is where one number is the inside a circle and various, different numbers are added to it to solve the equation. It requires organization of the work using counters as well as number recognition and writing skills. (Plus.....it looks really cool on neon colored paper!).

The 45 Layout has been a group project that has been extended to building numerals with concrete cubes, squares. After a number is successfully built, we add another number to it to create *an addition equation* with the 45 Layout. Just laying out the materials is challenging! The children learned that slowing down and making sure to correctly gather the quantity would result in the right answer to their equation. Double checking work is important in achieving the correct result. They were very proud of their accomplishment!

The Mystery Bag of objects has been a source of fun and *lesson in vocabulary*. Almost daily, we are asked if we have changed the objects - it is challenging to come up with items the children are familiar with but often do not know the name of a particular object. Some items whose name has stumped them are: *eraser, clothespin, paperclip, thimble, Q-tip*; it is a favorite activity that we enjoy as a group, line activity.



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Thank you so much for your Sharing Basket items; the children enjoy helping prepare and sharing their snacks for their friends and the tables look beautiful with bright flowers!

With the upcoming Valentine's Day holiday, we are looking for some parents to help in preparing a fun snack and craft. Please share any ideas you may have and let us know when you could be available - we always look forward to having you in the classroom and your children do, too!



Sincerely,

Ms. Patty and Ms. Christine

Notes from the afternoon classroom:

Ms. Terri



For this month's art project *for the kindergarteners* we looked at the **artist George Seurat**, a ***French Impressionist painter***. Seurat invented a special style of painting called Pointillism. He painted pictures using tiny dots of paint color instead of brush strokes and solid areas of color. He made different shades of color by painting dots of pure color close to each other. In this way, he created green by mixing blue and yellow dots. Browns and golds were made with tiny dots of red, blue and yellow.

Seurat's most famous painting is called "*Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*" This pictures, as you probably recall, shows dozens of people walking and relaxing in the grass beneath shady trees. Up close, the dots are obvious but far way they truly blend together.

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For our project, the kindergarteners and the pre-kindergarteners worked together in pairs. Each pair was given five pools of color; red, yellow, blue white and black. The first part of our project was to simple paint 3x5 index cards with dots of the colors using only a Q-tip swab instead of a brush. Sounds easy but it took a lot of control as well as patience.

After the dots dried completely, the children added dots of another paint color on top. The card covered with red dots now had say, yellow, dots over it or blue dots. As we propped the cards up and looked at them from across the room, we saw orange or purple or green depending on the color combinations.

Next, we plan to paint an entire picture using only dots. Our pointillism work should be on display within the next couple of weeks.

Our *first year elementary class* is currently **exploring the world of drawing**. The children have enjoyed *working with a variety of pencils with both hard and soft leads*. Learning to control the pressure on a pencil produces a variety of values. Studying drawings and looking for values from white to black and all the grays in between has been a new experience for the children. The children also got to work with *charcoal vines* as well which is exactly what it sounds like. Vines, or sticks, which have been burned and are now used in drawing. They can be used in toning a paper and then the children can erase to achieve the light areas. Mechanical erasers were definitely their favorite sketching tool.



We used pencils and erasers for **a drawing of a raccoon**. Ms. Katy said the children were studying mammals this month, so I thought a raccoon was the perfect animal to draw. It has very definite light and dark value as well as texture in the fur. It has been a challenge – pencil and charcoal smudge easily. As a result, the children are learning to be careful where they put their hands on their paper while drawing as well as how to erase any unwanted smudges. We should be finished with our drawing this week. The children did a great job.



A favorite **project in the afternoon** this month was with **dinosaurs**. First, we looked at several books to study what it (most likely) looked like during dinosaur times. We drew the environment first – volcanoes, ponds, trees and plants were found in all our landscapes. Next, we outlined our pictures with markers to define areas before coloring with crayons. I like to use crayons with children over markers because crayons take muscles and control to use and are also neater and easier to blend.

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The children drew, cut out and colored the dinosaurs of their choice. We either taped or glued our dinosaurs on their environment. Great care was taken to make sure our herbivores, or plant eaters, had plenty of trees and plants to eat and that the carnivores, or meat eaters, had their food source as well. This art project has taken several weeks to complete and was very thoughtfully done, please allow your child to explain and show off his/her work when they bring it home. They have worked very hard and would love to share their story with you.



Warmly,

Ms.Terri

