The new year brought a new thematic unit, the Desert, and new opportunities for learning! Our thinking began by looking at the characteristics of a desert. We discovered that it doesn’t **rain** very much in the desert and that only certain plants and animals can live there. The friends took a close look at a **cactus** and creatures such as **bats**, **rattlesnakes**, and **coyotes**. As always, we used literature to inform our discussions and experiences. A few of the books selected for this unit were “Creatures of the Desert World”, “Cactus Hotel” by Brenda Guiberson, “Art and Max” by David Wiesner, and “The Three Javelinas” by Susan Lowell, which is a desert version of the Three Little Pigs and was a nice transition book from our previous theme, Storytelling. We were also privileged to have real animal specimens like the gila monster, horned lizard and roadrunner from the Carnegie Museum. Mr. Salinetro also provided some natural artifacts from his personal collection such as a little brown bat, bird feathers, and a turtle shell. It made such a difference for the children to see and touch the real things!
In order to deepen our understanding, we tailored the learning centers to incorporate the thematic concepts introduced at circle time. Our dramatic play center became an Animal Hospital where we cared for desert creatures. In the Discovery Area, the sand table was a desert and the water table became a rainforest (where it actually rained!) so the friends could compare and contrast the habitats. A simple board with holes cut into it became a desert-scape where animals could go underground to escape the desert sun.

Art and science factored into our learning, as well. We painted a large tube to create a Saguaro cactus, bundled tissue paper together to make the flowers on the cactus, drip painted with watercolors to give the effect of a desert sunset, and brushed with paints mixed with sand to experience that texture. The friends created their own sand by crushing rocks with hammers, saw how rain is made by heating water then cooling it quickly, and used a digital microscope to investigate a snake skin, a turtle shell, and a bird feather.
LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Melodie painting an arm of the cactus for our desert bulletin board.

Betty Lou looks like she’s keeping cool in a desert burrow.


Masaki and friends enjoying a parachute game during music class with Mrs. Hraber.

Nevin, after hearing about desert ground squirrels, stops to watch the grey squirrel that frequents our playground.

Will dropping colored water onto paper towels to see how cacti soak up water.
Maisie and Wally observing and touching a bird’s wing feather while learning about owls.

Chloe adding color to her desert bat.

Kiley, Madelyn, and Melodie taking care of an injured kangaroo in the Animal Hospital.

David and Jacob making snakes by stringing beads onto a pipe cleaner.

Ada playing a counting game and adding flowers to the cactus.

Ezra asking questions about the roadrunner specimen from the Carnegie Museum.
As always, thank you to Mrs. Hraber for the music class that the friends SO enjoy! And starting this month, the three’s will welcome the librarian, Miss Debbie, to our class to hear stories and participate in activities related to our theme.

Below is our completed desert bulletin board! The friends worked together to make the big cactus, the sunset, and the sand dunes. They also made their individual cacti, the flowers on top, and little bats to eat the cactus fruits.