We are surrounded by structures. Every day we encounter manmade structures such as houses, hospitals, schools, skyscrapers, walls, fences, and bridges. Other structures are natural such as trees, mountains and cliffs. Often, children desire to recreate a structure they have seen. During this unit, we offered the children an opportunity to explore and further understand the science behind how a structure is built, experiment with a focused building of a tower and a bridge, and consider the building process from start (architect) to finish (construction site and builder) as well as appreciate the aesthetic value in structures.

Our Favorite Theme Books

Circle time is a great time to hear stories that help friends learn more about our theme. This month our favorite books were:

**The Lot at the End of my Block** by Kevin Lewis

**21 Elephants and Still Standing** by April Jones Prince

**Construction** by Sally Sutton

**The Tree House that Jack Built** by Bonnie Verburg and Mark Teague

**Iggy Peck Architect** by Andrea Beaty

Mango Monkey Says…

Our wise puppet friend visited the friends this month to talk about Manners. We shared the book, *Mind Your Manners B.B. Wolf* by Judy Sierra to give the friends a gentle reminder about using their manners. In the story, B.B. Wolf practices using his manners at a tea party with his friends, Red Riding Hood, The Three Little Pigs and the Gingerbread Boy. The friends helped Mango Monkey teach his puppet pals when and how to use their manners during the day.
We began our theme by introducing the importance of a strong **foundation** when building to assure that the structure is stable. We used the classic story, *The Three Little Pigs*, to help us illustrate the concept of **stability**. As the friends created the props for our story, a house of straw, sticks and bricks, we discussed the stability of each material. Experiments with the balance scale and balance games helped the friends discover the concept of **balance**.

Next, we practiced building up. We remembered that a strong foundation is important, especially with tall towers. We built towers with foam blocks, wooden cubes, magnetic tiles, buttons, rocks, puzzle pieces, unifix cubes and we even built a tower out of bubbles! We practiced counting skills when we asked, “How many blocks tall are you?” Building a tower using the alphabet blocks allowed the friends the opportunity to practice letter recognition and challenged them to order the blocks from A-Z.
Week 3

Focused Exploration on Building Bridges

Next, we turned our focus to bridges. After reading *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, we worked together to build a bridge for the billy goats to cross. Looking at photographs of the many bridges in Pittsburgh helped us discover the parts of the bridge. Working together as a group, the friends were challenged to build a bridge using straws, model magic, paper plates, tape, paper etc. When finished, they tested the stability of their bridge by driving a toy vehicle over their bridge. If the bridge collapsed, they problem solved to strengthen it. A visit to the Pausch bridge on campus allowed us to make up close observations of a bridge.

Week 4

The Building Process: From Architect to Construction Site

Practicing the building process from start to finish provided us opportunities to role play the various jobs involved when building new structures. We learned about the job of an architect and visited the Green Room architect studio to draw plans for structures. Once the plans were complete, the architect delivered them to the builders at the construction site (block area) and the builders worked together to complete the plan. We looked at photos of building features such as arches, columns and domes. We worked together with a friend to create these building features with our bodies.
Make Shop Experiences

This month in the Make Shop, we introduced some of the woodworking tools. We began by learning our safety rules when using the tools: always wear safety glasses and follow the instructions to properly handle each tool. After practicing with the drill, the friends drilled holes into wood planks and fastened them together with a nut and bolt to create an airplane. Hammering practice lead to the creation of a Geoboard.

Music Experiences with Mrs. Hraber

Mrs. Hraber integrated music into our Building theme this month. Pete the Metronome returned dressed up like a builder! We learned songs about The Three Little Pigs, construction vehicles and tools. Instruments, including maracas, drums, rhythm sticks and sand blocks, were introduced to mimic the sound of different tools. In addition, Mrs. Hraber used the instruments to teach the friends how to keep the beat to the songs.

Center Spotlight: The Art & Writing Center

The Art and Writing Center offers the friends opportunities to strengthen their fine motor skills, as well as practice their creativity. The Art and Writing Center is stocked with paper supplies, various writing utensils (markers, crayons, pencils), scissors, hole punchers, and stencils. Letter and name guides are available for friends interested in writing their name or words. This month, we began practicing recognizing the letters in our name and writing our name.
Birthday Celebrations and Special Visitors

Atticus’ Mom and Dad visited during lunchtime to share a story to celebrate Atticus’ 4th birthday.

Miss Debbie, from the Carnegie Library, visited to share books and songs.

Richard Scheines, Dean of Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences, visited to share a story.

Azizan Abdul-Aziz took us on a tour of The Intelligent Workplace (Margaret Morrison rooftop addition) and shared ways to conserve energy when building. The friends observed the view of our playground from the top floor of our building!

Louise Sturgess from Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation visited to share the history of Pittsburgh, its buildings and its changing landscape throughout the years. She described the features of a structure, including arches, columns, windows, doors, etc.
Our Month in Photos
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