The theme for the month of January was the Desert. The children learned many interesting facts and features about Deserts. Circle time discussions focused on location, climate, vegetation and habitats. The children especially enjoyed learning about all the fascinating creatures that can be found in the desert. We loved borrowing the desert animal and rock boxes from the Carnegie Museum, which allowed the children to observe desert wildlife up close. The dramatic play center was transformed into a desert and was very popular. Our art projects included making Scorpions, Roadrunners, and Prairie Dogs from various craft materials. The children also created unique cacti by tracing their body and used colored sand to create beautiful desert landscape dune pictures.

Earth is our home and we are its friends. “The Earth and I” by Frank Asch was used to open a dialogue with the friends about what it means to love the Earth and take care of each other. Because we love the Earth and everything in Nature works together, the friends talked about different ways to take care of it. In the classroom and at home, we recycle and try not to waste water. We also talked about what happens when we do not take good care of our environment. The Earth is not supposed to be full of trash because it hurts the animals and the environment. We learned the Earth is a friend to us with the things we enjoy. By studying the desert, we also learned to appreciate water like the desert animals do.

Our Favorite Theme Books

- Look Once Look Again – In The Desert, by David M Schwartz
- A Walk In The Desert, by Caroline Arnold
- Dig Wait Listen A Desert Toad’s Tale, by April Pulley Sayre
- About Desert Habitats, by Cathryn Sill
- I Don’t Like Snakes, by Nicola Davies
What Is A Desert?

During the first week, the children learned what a desert is and found where they are located on our classroom globe. The friends learned many deserts are very hot and have little water. We also discovered that a desert can be cold and have small amounts of water. The children observed that deserts have some of the most spectacular landscapes in the world, from rugged cliffs and painted canyonlands to endless stretches of giant sand dunes. We began our first week about the desert by looking at photographs of deserts, and then using watercolor paints to capture the beauty of a desert sunset for the stairway gallery. The sand tables, loose parts table, science center, water table and the art and writing center were set to give the friends a realistic feel of how a hot desert looks. We also made sand art to get the feel of sand.

Since it is winter in Pittsburgh, and it is not unusual to find snow in a desert everyone was excited to draw snow people with white chalk and markers for their new locker tags!

Desert Areas and Desert Friends

The friends had opportunities to look at a map and learn where deserts are located. Next, the friends had a chance to locate the deserts and then marked them on individual maps. We took a look at the various animals that live in different deserts. They also practiced identifying animals that live in the Savannah Desert. The friends practiced identified and sorted animals that live in other environments such as the Arctic Tundra, Oceans, and Rainforest. Everyone enjoyed our desert obstacle course when the friends climbed and howled like a coyote, hopped like a jack rabbit, slithered and hissed like a snake, and soared like a bird! Some of the other activities this week included putting together desert animal puzzles, going on a desert animal scavenger hunt, putting pieces of paper together to form a scorpion and having our bodies traced to resemble saguaro cactus. Everyone had fun in the Dramatic Play Center with a tent and pretending with soft desert animals!
Week 3

Desert Animals and Plants

Some people think the desert is a barren, uninhabitable place, but the children learned that lots of animals actually thrive in this extreme environment. We learned that some animals escape the heat by burrowing into the ground during the day and emerging in the early morning or late evening. Others are active during the day but move very quickly over hot surfaces, only stopping only on cooler patches of shaded ground. The friends learned that some desert animals “drink” by eating juicy cactuses and other plants that contain lots of water. And some, such as many snakes, get all the moisture they need from the mice and other small animals they eat. The friends enjoyed eating bread dough cacti that they made for snack! Our Science Center’s cacti display was popular for the friends to use magnifying glasses to have a closeup view of the spines and flowers.

Week 4

Adapting to Living in the Desert

During the fourth week we compared hot and cold deserts. The children had opportunities through their play to use materials to create their own hot and cold desert environments. We learned to wear the right kind of clothing for a walk in the desert. No desert hiker should be without water and wearing clothes to protect their skin. The children pretended to be archeologists and excavators in the desert Dramatic Play Center to explore rocks with magnifying glasses and fossils with tools to scrape away crystals from a pretend mining kit. We learned a lot by creating a hot desert in the block area and comparing it to a cold desert on the Green Room rug. We ended our Desert Theme by making a sweet Crunchy Cacti treat with melted butterscotch chips, sunbutter, chow mein noodles and a little green food coloring. We learned that Pittsburgh does not look like a desert!
Make Shop Experiences

Some desert soils look like a layered cake with one or more clayey, reddish brown horizons directly above the white calcic horizon. During our Desert Theme, the children were given opportunities to manipulate natural clay. The friends explored clay by poking it, squeezing it, hitting it and pounding it. The children discovered that each time they acted on the clay with their hands, with tools, or with water, the clay adjusted and responded. Manipulating clay helps develop large and small muscles. Everyone was fascinated and motivated to keep experimenting!

Music Experiences with Mrs. Hraber

This month, Mrs. Hraber complemented our Desert Theme with unique musical experiences! She began by having us look at a desert background and then taught us a song about what we see in the desert by adding photos to the board. We sang songs about the animals and plants in the desert and used different instruments to mimic the sounds those animals make, such as a roadrunner and a sidewinder rattlesnake. The friends took turns going under the parachute pretending to be snakes! Everyone loves music days!

Center Spotlight: The Book Center

The Book Center allows our children to be self-motivated by concentrating on ideas that interest them intensely. In the Green Room, we change our books according to the theme, the season and individual interests. It allows the friends to freely choose books they find interesting, express themselves, and relax. For instance, the friends enjoy revisiting at the class made Family Collage books throughout the year. They are also studying print and some are learning to read basic sight words. The Book Center also allows children to investigate and discover things that are new to them. It helps them to practice communication skills, and build relationships with classmates. Taking the time to sit and read books is wonderful!
Ms. Debbie from the Carnegie Library read books about desert animals, while we acted out the animals in the stories.

Mio showed her colorful roadrunner.

Aras explored our classroom worms.

Felix was interested in drawing his own roadrunner by looking at the roadrunner specimen from the Carnegie Museum at our Science Center.

Gwen practiced her cutting skills to make a spiral snake.

Slava assembled the parts to make his scorpion.

Moses and Matteo strung beads to make a pattern snake.
The friends used loose parts and their imaginations to create a hot desert.

Sing pretended to be an archeologist examining desert rocks and crystals.

Everyone had a good time playing in the snow!

Nalu, Kiern and Felix experimented with gel beads at the light table.

Brandon and Kipton used markers to decorate their spiral snake.

Atticus stamped the letters of his name in sand colored playdoh.
Atticus and Nalu pretended to be excavators digging crystals in a plaster block.

Peter and Kipton dyed water to observe capillary action with celery.

Rowan and Atticus used desert animals with loose parts.

Jaime Ann dropping watercolors onto paper towels to see how cacti soak up water.

The friends enjoyed helping each other find scavenger hunt photos.

Nicolas and Kieran matched paw prints to desert animals.