PM Preschool Newsletter

Building

We are surrounded by structures. Every day, we encounter manmade structures such as homes, apartment buildings, schools, grocery stores, towers, and bridges. Other structures are natural, such as trees, hills, and mountains. During this unit, the teachers offered the children the opportunity to explore building and further understand the science behind how a structure is built. We experimented with building of towers and a bridge, and we gained hands on experience with real tools, such as hand drills and hammers. The children learned a bit about the process an architect uses to design a building. In addition to learning about building structures, this unit enabled us to build relationships with one another.

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 Three Little Pigs” by Amery and Stephen Cartwright
“Dreaming Up” by Christy Hale
“Old MacDonald had a Shop” by Lisa Schulman
“Three Billy Goats Gruff” by Paul Caldone
“Ananzi the Spider” by Gerald McDermott

Mango Monkey Says…

Our wise puppet friends Mango Monkey and Shy Squirrel visited the friends this month to talk about being a kind friend and staying together with the group. We shared the book, *Join In and Play*, by Cheri J. Meiners. The story examines the basics of being a kind friend. After the story, Mango Monkey helped to teach Shy Squirrel ways of being a kind friend at school during play time. Mango Monkey also helped Shy Squirrel to find a less crowded classroom area to visit when he wants to be by himself. The friends showed Shy Squirrel how to look around the room for less crowded areas when he wanted to be on his own while still staying with the group.
During week one, we examined the role of buildings in our lives. At the start of the week, the friends viewed a fast motion video *Amish Barn Raising*. The friends watched with intrigue as the barn was raised from frame to walls to roof. This video set the stage for a month-long study of building. The PM Teachers asked the children, “What do we know about building?” A common answer given was, “we build UP.” When friends were asked “what” they can build with, most children responded by naming, “wooden blocks” as a building material. While blocks are always an open classroom area during free choice time, the children were given the opportunity to build with varied materials such as small bricks, connecting ladders, sticks, hay, Zimbos, and bristle blocks. Their exploration of these materials gave the children a broader view of how to build a structure. During circle time, Ms. O’Neill read different versions of the classic story of the “Three Little Pigs”. The block area was turned into a stage with costumes and set design houses. The friends took the roles of the characters from the story. The Big Bad Wolf was the most prized role—even though the wolf gets tricked in the end!

“Building up,” was emphasized during week two with a focused exploration on building towers. The friends were presented with more building materials such as letter blocks, pegs with pegboards, and playdough with tiles. They were challenged to build a tower using varied materials. The friends found that some materials were much easier to build a tower with than others. Many interesting towers were built in the Green Room Block Area. This activity brought the need to highlight an important block area safety rule: only build as tall as you are. The Dramatic Play Area was turned into a Fix-It Shop with plastic tools. Friends were encouraged to “fix” the wooden block structures they had built in the neighboring block area. During the week, the friends noticed that the plastic work bench in the Dramatic Play Area had lost its leg. A group of friends used the tools that it holds to screw the leg back on. The Green Room carpet featured K’Nex and the PM Preschool friends got busy building with them to create interesting structures and shapes such as “ink squirts,” hoses, stars, and fishing poles. Outside on the playground, the friends were able to select a pumpkin to take home from Facilities Management Services. The pumpkins were a wonderful seasonal surprise!
Building “across” or “over” was emphasized during week three with a focused exploration of bridges. The friends were presented with materials that can be assembled to form a bridge and were asked to build one. In the water table, the friends were asked to create different kinds of bridges using plastic applesauce cups and wide popsicle sticks. The friends then viewed pictures of the many local and international bridges and were asked to draw and paint what they saw. A balance beam “bridge” was set up on the Green Room carpet for the friends to experiment with different ways of moving across it. *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* by Paul Caldone was a popular story from the week. After the story was read, the friends were given the opportunity to take the roles of characters in the story using costume headbands and props such as a wooden bridge. The friends enjoyed “trip trapping” over the bridge at the appropriate time. The friends focused on Bridges outdoors by assembling wooden planks over tires to carefully navigate.

The process of designing a building was examined during week four. Ms. O’Neill worked with friends to compare building with blocks in the block area to how a real building such as the Children’s School and its home, the greater Margaret Morrison building is built. The friends viewed the plan for the building—a blueprint that an architect had created for the Children’s School. The teachers examined how architects keep us safe by thoughtfully designing safe structures. They then set out to create their own blueprints for building. The friends got busy designing places and buildings such as a “bike park” and a “museum.” The friends viewed a “3D Tour of Fallingwater” designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. They also designed a zoo in the block area with Miranda, a PM Preschool Intern, and built their design. The friends built what they envisioned all the way to snipping the greenery for the animals inside. The friends designed and built in groups and separately, in harmony.
Mrs. Hraber visited twice to teach the friends music. In our first music class, Mrs. Hraber focused on tools. The friends used a variety of instruments to mimic the sounds of tools, such as wooden rhythm sticks and sand blocks. The friends sang songs about using tools and how to be a builder. The PM Preschool practiced self-regulation and following directions while using the instruments. In the second music class, Mrs. Hraber focused on animals who build special homes. She led us in singing songs and playing instruments about bees, beavers, and birds along with their unique homes. We drummed onto, banged rhythm sticks, shook shaky eggs, and played xylophones and castanets to imitate the animals.

The purpose of the Makeshop is to challenge and nurture creativity and inquiry by offering experiences with real materials and tools. We started the month focusing on the use of hand drills. The teachers first reviewed the Makeshop safety procedures with the friends and reminded them of the importance of using safety glasses for eye protection when working with tools. Then the friends got busy drilling holes. After getting the hang of using a hand drill, each friend completed an airplane project by drilling holes into two wooden shims and connecting them with a nut and a bolt. Later in the month, PM preschool friends tested their hammering skills by hammering nails into a tree stump and other pieces of wood. Finally, the Four’s friends created a mini-geoboard while the Three’s friends created one of a kind structures by gluing wooden pieces together.
Albert poses with a structure he designed and constructed of translucent geometric shapes at the light table.

Mary glues wooden pieces together in the Makeshop to create a wooden structure.

Seiichiro and Satoshi look through a book together in the Library in the Green Room.

Klemens and Araad form shapes and designs by stretching rubber bands across geoboards.

Maddox balances on a wooden halfpipe outside on the playground.

Aria uses a ruler to measure Mary on the Green room carpet.
Our Month in Photos

Claire spells her name with foam letters at the Letter Center in the Green Room.

Maddox assembles a stacking tower in the Discovery Area.

Aria creates a bouquet out of K’Nex and puts her stems into a cornucopia basket.

August and Satoshi wait for their turn to portray the wolf in the Three Little Pigs on the Green Room stage.

Mrs. Johnson works with PM Preschool friends to paint rocks as part of the “Scribble Stone” art project.

Seiichiro stacks yogurt cups to create a long winding structure.
Our Month in Photos

Zoyah matches emotion cards and inserts them into wooden slots.

Happy 3rd Birthday Araad!

Klemmens assembles a structure with connecting straws.

Miss Bing, a Master of Education Student from the University of Pittsburgh, is completing her practicum with the PM Class. In this photo, Miss Bing works with the friends to assemble a classroom trampoline.

Ewan climbs to the top of the climbing cave with a pumpkin and sets it on top of a blue block from the Imagination Playground.

Getting ready to head home after a good day!