

Highlights of Project Work at Central Park School for Children 2010-2011

KINDERGARTEN

- One kindergarten class focused on familiarizing themselves with the local community – specifically, the Durham Central Park neighborhood. Throughout the year, they took walking field trips to a police station, Scratch Bakery, Measurement, Inc., and Massengill’s Auto, to name just a few. The class then engaged in classroom projects, such as constructing vehicles out of blocks, based on their community visits.
- Project work from another kindergarten class centered around learning about the Piedmont area, the local community, and plants, worms, and food. The students even recreated the Eno River in the classroom!
- During project time in another class, the children spend time observing real objects or animals, sketching and writing, looking through books, painting, making models, or building. Their learning is often driven by the changing seasons, their observations, and their questions.

FIRST GRADE

- In one classroom, students learned about India, including making a replica of the Taj Mahal, which they presented to their parents and to the entire school at a whole-school meeting. They also created bound books and put on a play about the stages of becoming a butterfly.
- One classroom studied plants and animals throughout a quarter, learning strategies for reading non-fiction texts, observing plants and animals, making observational drawings, and creating information webs to share their knowledge and generate additional research questions. After field work studying an animal of their choice, each student created a model of the chosen animal, ensuring that the animal could meet all of its needs in the habitat created.
- One class’s project work around learning about presidents included singing a song about them with their music teacher at an all-school meeting and making a model of the Washington Monument with the art teacher’s help. Each student chose a president to learn about and shared what he or she learned through written work or a timeline.

SECOND GRADE

- A project in one class included learning about water, the three states of matter, the water cycle, and wetlands. As part of this project, the class took a trip to the Water Reclamation Facility, where they learned about making water healthy enough for human consumption. With the art teacher’s help, the class made models of a cypress swamp. They also wrote non-fiction books, visited the Life and Science Museum, and shared what they learned in a PowerPoint presentation at an all-school meeting.

- In another class, the students learned about meteorology, including about thermometers, anemometers, and rain gauges. They met with a real meteorologist and learned about weather balloons. They also learned how to identify the different types of clouds and determine what the weather would be. In addition, they read and wrote myths about the weather, transforming their stories into puppet shows for their families and the kindergarten classes.

THIRD GRADE

- As part of a unit on understanding plants, children in two classes held their own farmer's market, making booths relating to produce, crafts, games, and food. They also visited Duke Gardens, learned about bee pollination from a visiting expert, and created books about plants.
- One class also learned about plants throughout the year through direct experience with their strawberry garden. They worked with one student's father to plant, grow, and harvest their strawberries, and they made delicious strawberry ice cream as a culminating activity.

FOURTH GRADE

- Students in one of the fourth grade classes wrote and bound their own fictional narratives and presented their novels at the Regulator, a local bookstore.
- The highlight of this fourth grade class was their creation of a working town. They wrote a town charter, elected a mayor and town council, created their own businesses, preparing business plans and taking out loans from the town bank to begin operations, and creating their own logos. They bought raw materials from the town store, prepared and marketed their products, calculated sales tax, balanced their books and paid their debts and met payroll. Parents and some of the other classes were invited to visit the town.
- Students in this class spent two days at Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge with rangers from the Fish and Wildlife Service. They learned what animals live there and discovered that the Outer Banks are a major highway for migrating birds and turtles. In addition, they tracked birds all around the world and created bird migration maps, models, and watercolors. They did bird counts and graphs everyday to compare the birds in their environment to those they would see at the coast. They camped under the stars, waded in the ocean, and saw all the beautiful animals that call the Outer Banks home or a rest stop. On their return, they wrote and drew and created from all their memories at the beach.

FIFTH GRADE

The fifth grade classes worked together on many of their projects. All of the classes did a unit on migration in which each student chose a type of migration to study and explore. As a culminating event, they held their own Migration Museum, where parents could come in and visit the various displays, such as an ecosystem PowerPoint, dioramas, puppet show, plays, and models made in art class based on an African American piece called "Great Migration."

Throughout the third and fourth quarters, the fifth graders were involved in elective classes. One-third of the fifth graders were in movement class, while the other two-thirds were taking elective classes, rotating so that each fifth grader would have a movement class and two elective classes. The electives included art, environmental club, computer programming, civics, world music, world dance, cuisine, documentary films, and creative writing. The classes were taught by the three fifth grade teachers, along with countless guest parents and guest artists. At the end of each quarter, students presented what they had learned and accomplished during their elective courses.