

PLAY

SPOTLIGHT



PLAY AT PRAIRIE CREEK

Play is a critical part of every child's development. It contributes to children's cognitive, emotional, physical, and social well-being. At Prairie Creek, we support and value children's free, unstructured play. We dedicate time and space for children to use their imaginations, move their bodies, test their ideas, and build connections with each other through play. Play provides a safe way for children to take risks, try out new ideas, and fail. It allows a space for children to direct their own learning that incorporates literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills.

IMAGINATIVE FREE PLAY

Imaginative play carries throughout all of the grades at Prairie Creek. For children at all levels, recess provides a daily, shared time for free outdoor play and exploration. Teachers can choose to take children outside at other times of the day, too, for both free play and more structured play related to PE, theme, or other learning areas. At the K/1 level, children have daily "Friendship Time" during which they can choose activities and build relationships as they engaged in those activities. At the 2/3 level, outdoor breaks provide an opportunity for children to organize their own tag games, or to create new games of their own design. Fourth and fifth graders take on more leadership in designing play-based experiences such as PE games.



PLAY ENHANCES ACADEMIC LEARNING

Play is an integral part of learning in themes. At every level, there are powerful examples of the ways in which children's play enhances student learning. At the K/1 level, one class engaged in a theme in which they learned about ants. As a part of that learning, they turned their classroom into an ant colony, and each child took on the role of an ant in the colony. Their teacher reported hearing lots of scientific vocabulary woven throughout the children's play.

At the $\frac{2}{3}$ level, the children learn geometry through a project called GeoTown. The children plan and develop plots of land using polygons and create houses and businesses on their plots. They are given a list of tasks to complete that incorporate math learning. At the end of the unit, the children create a game together that involves using all the lands as the gameboard.

Role play is form of play that is accessible to all ages. At the $\frac{4}{5}$ level, role play is a powerful tool that can help children to step inside the experiences of others and provide a powerful incentive for children to understand history. During a theme about colonial America, students in one class took on roles of people living in the American colonies starting in the 1750s and going up to the American Revolution. The students were motivated to learn about the time period so that they could understand their characters and bring them to life. They read about the news of the day and reacted as their characters would have reacted, through conversation and in writing. They made decisions about where their character would have stood on the issues of the day.

VILLAGE

Our oldest children spend the month of May each year engaged in an all-encompassing play experience called The Game of Village. Together, the children create an entire world to 1/12 scale. They make "peeps", and together the children and the peeps collaborate to build a government, an economy, and a physical town outside on the village land (a plot of land somewhere on school grounds). Through this game, children learn about all academic areas: they create a government, write laws, decide how to enforce those laws, etc; they take out loans using their land as collateral, keep checkbooks, make purchases at the store, etc; they write business plans and start businesses; they design and build peep houses out of wood. Through the whole experience, children are deeply engaged in the world they create.

Through play, children become farmers, travelers along the Silk Road, Fur Trade Voyageurs, scientists, and anything else they can imagine. Play allows children the space to explore the world and the tools to make connections between their observations and big ideas in each academic area. Play provides movement that is critical to helping children stay engaged with learning. At Prairie Creek, play is not an extra. It is an integral part of the learning our children do.