

THEME

SPOTLIGHT



THEME AT PRAIRIE CREEK

A commitment to thematic study differentiates Prairie Creek from more traditional schools. Theme is an extended interdisciplinary study with a strong social studies and/or science emphasis. Thematic study is a hallmark of progressive education, enabling students to make authentic connections across curricular areas.

INCORPORATING STUDENT VOICE

Children's voices are recognized and heard throughout theme which creates energy, joy, excitement, and engagement (and sometimes veering off in unanticipated directions!) Teachers work within a framework to plan science and social studies Themes, balancing children's emergent interests with learning that the teacher determines is necessary with reference to the Minnesota and national standards. Prairie Creek's curriculum does not repeat from year to year; however, teachers track theme content to ensure that the broad spectrum of science and social studies strands are part of each child's journey.

During the initial planning stages, teachers typically solicit children's questions and ideas as a starting point and then plan using the students' ideas as the primary focus. As a theme unfolds, teachers' curriculum plans are maps that guide students' exploration of their own interests. A class immersed in theme is a busy, active and engaged place.



MULTI DISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Teachers strive to incorporate as many disciplines as possible as children dig deep, keeping a lens on social justice and equity as a theme is explored through literacy, numeracy, the arts, physical education and authentic service learning opportunities. Teachers are comfortable assuming a facilitator/mentor role with students throughout theme. They strive to have children immersed in theme most of the time throughout their educational journey. This active, hands on learning time is incredibly powerful.

CULMINATING EVENTS

Students come to see teaching as an integral part of their learning. Themes end with culminating events that provide opportunities for students to share their new skills, knowledge, and understandings with other classes, the school community, and/or parent audiences. Culminating events are powerful tools for assessment, learning, and community building. Culminating events provide powerful assessment opportunities for teachers. Especially at the older grades, students take leadership of the planning and implementation of these events, and teachers find themselves in a supporting role, which affords them the opportunity to observe their students' learning. Culminating events are learning opportunities for the children leading and participating in them, but they are also learning spaces for other classes in the school when they serve as audiences for a play or visitors to a learning fair. Culminating events are often powerful community builders, as invited guests may include other classes, school staff, parents, and families.

ASSESSMENT IN THEME

Culminating events provide one powerful forum for theme performance assessment, as students are asked to perform or and/or teach others about what they have learned. In addition, students are assessed in theme on an ongoing basis through the use of tools including formative assessment (a form of pre-assessment that helps teachers plan instruction), reflection, habits of mind, and teacher observation.