

CONSERVATORY NOTES

Bringing Learning to Life

By Jill Martin

What is amazing about the month of May in South Shore Conservatory's arts-integrated full-day kindergarten class is the completion of the developmental metamorphosis of each child. The hungry caterpillars that began school in September, voraciously eating from the tree of knowledge and actively participating in many thematic learning experiences, slowly develop patience and perseverance needed to evolve into the self-assured, confident and free soaring butterflies. They are ready to sip the nectar of life and begin the journey of a life-long learner.

It is no coincidence the kindergarteners begin a thematic study of insects and life cycles during May! In fact, this week our students present their own Broadway production, "The Grouchy Ladybug" by Eric Carle. This student centered project combines the process of extending thematic learning, drawing upon cumulative knowledge and skills from across the curriculum, ultimately creating what is referred to as an "authentic experience." It is giving life to learning, making knowledge and skills more meaningful because it combines the highest level of engagement for students. Our play allows the children to be completely involved with process. When students are given a voice and some degree of choice, it is more likely they will be able

to see the importance in what they are doing.

The strong arts-based foundation acquired throughout the year allows the children to participate in all aspects of producing their classroom play. They use their visual art skills and knowledge of shape, line and color to create the scenery backdrop, props, and costumes. Their musical and drama experiences at SSC present opportunities to choreograph the movement of the different animal characters and to use their beautiful "sing voices" to bring down the house with the play's theme song. Numeracy skills identified in the text, such as telling time and sequencing roles, are reinforced through mathematic activities in the classroom.

With their attained ability to read and write, students narrate the play, memorize lines, and construct a playbill. Developing their scientific minds and natural curiosity, they observe, cultivate, and document the actual life cycles of ladybugs, butterflies and praying mantises in our classroom. Investigating and classifying all the animals in the play is also an important connection to the curriculum. The combination of these skills require inter and intrapersonal intelligence and the ability to collaborate and work cooperatively toward a common goal. In insect terms, it is the perfect beehive or anthill in action.



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After so many years as the kindergarten teacher at the Conservatory, I am still in awe by the developmental growth of a kindergartener, and how pure and wonderful the journey can be when children are presented with opportunities to be involved in the process and take ownership of their learning experiences. Their newfound wings allow them to soar to new heights of learning, building upon prior knowledge, taking risks, and making sense of the world as active participants!!

Jill Martin Young is the Conservatory's lead kindergarten teacher. A graduate of Stonehill College, she received her Masters degree in Education from Wheelock College, with a concentration in Pre-K through 3rd grade/Inclusionary Practice.