

# The VOICE

"All true learning is experience; everything else is just information." - Albert Einstein

## Trips to the Woods To Wonder in the Wild

At The Children's School, all classes, from Kindergarten through middle school, take frequent trips to the woods – sometimes two or three trips each month. Nature-play and learning outdoors sparks imagination, deep creativity, and a sense of connection with nature that can't be duplicated in a classroom environment.

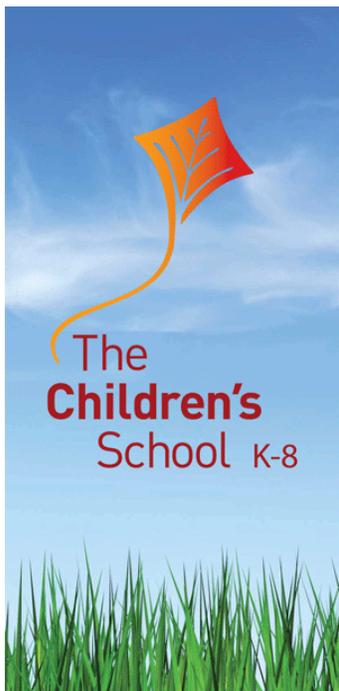
"The children love their trips to the woods. Time in the woods has many benefits. It allows for: open ended time for exploration, open ended play, imagination, it allows children to take risks or challenge their bodies," says TCS Kindergarten teacher, Nadine Brockman. "It also provides opportunities for collaboration and negotiation, it calms, it builds stamina, develops an appreciation for nature and the environment, while developing observational skills. I often notice that children shine in different ways in this natural environment."

While trips to the woods always include unstructured play time, there are often guided activity as well. Older students may participate in stewardship activities such as clearing invasive species under the guidance of Forest Preserve experts. "We begin with a community circle to discuss our time in the woods and it is then mostly unstructured exploration. One activity that is encouraged and enjoyed by the children is sketching in their sketch books as they explore," says Ms. Brockman.

Fourth grade teacher Chrissie Boehlen shares that "Several weeks ago, we were fortunate to learn some survival skills from a professional. Pretending we were in the year 1518, and dumped into the freezing creek, we prioritized our strategy for survival: 1. Warmth, 2. Water, 3. Food. We learned how to collect water from our environment such as placing a bag around a tree. We learned how to start a fire with flint and how to build a 'squirrel's nest' to keep us warm."

TCS trips to the woods happen in all seasons and in all but the most inclement weather. Lucy Coria, first grade teacher, says, "We see value in appreciating all seasons and experiencing the change to the landscape as the year goes on. The trips build resilience in colder weather and show that you can be active and outside even during winter or rain. It helps, too, in showing younger children how to dress for the weather so that we can benefit from exercise and sensory input of the woods."

TCS Middle School Coordinator and sixth-grade teacher Will Hudson, notices a wide range of unique opportunities the woods provide. "How easily we could fail to see the great things a ch



The  
Children's  
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An independent  
not-for-profit K-8  
school that embraces  
progressive education.



At The Children's School, classes of all grade level make frequent field trips to local forest preserves for both learning and unstructured play.

### "To Wonder In The Wild" continued...

suddenly becomes stellar, competent and courageous. The meek student who struggles to speak in front of her peers suddenly becomes a leader and an intrepid explorer."

"One thing I have noticed is how students come together and work collaboratively to support and help one another when we are at the forest preserves," says Mr. Hudson. They play amazing games that are deep and immersive. What's really stood out to me is how often and how eager students are to offer help and assistance to their peers. It's a tremendous exercise in building both community and a sense of belonging, the importance of which cannot be understated in the adolescent's quest to develop a positive sense of their own identity."

Our trips to the woods are part of our three-part approach to nature-play: play and learning indoors in the classroom with natural elements, outdoors in our facility's nature-play themed courtyard, and in excursions and field trips such as those to local forest preserves. It is an element of our program that we continue to expand as we observe the astounding benefits nature-play provides our students. *(Want to learn more? You may enjoy reading "Last Child in the Woods" by Richard Louv.)*

### Hands-On Exploration of Gravity and Flight with Test Pilot Humpty-Dumpty!

Our Kindergarten teachers Ms. Nadine Brockman and Ms. Jasmine Davis could see that their class had an interest in flight. How? Children were creating parachutes, air planes, and hot air balloons using loose parts and recyclables.

As a way to extend this type of problem solving and interest, the teachers created a "Humpty Dumpty Challenge." First the entire group worked with blocks to build a large wall. Each child was given a hard boiled egg that they then used to create their Humpty Dumpty character. They also created protective gear so that when their Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall it would not break. Each child worked with great excitement to use recyclables of all sorts to protect their Humpty Dumpty.

Each child then let their egg fall from the wall while the class sang the Humpty Dumpty song. If their egg was still intact, they moved up to higher levels of the wall. After this first challenge, the children unwrapped their eggs, checked for cracks and happily ate them.

In the afternoon the children started with a new egg, a new character of choice, and made both protective gear and something to help the egg take flight. Using recyclables, the children made wings, parachutes, hot air balloons, and other flying accessories. Each child then dropped their creation from the balcony at the top of our staircase. Children sat at the bottom of the staircase and cheered as each Humpty Dumpty took flight.

As the children ended their day of prediction, problem solving, collaborating, creating, imagining, experimenting, singing and of course having fun, teachers overheard the children saying: "That was awesome!" "This was the best day!"



### A Really Cool Project with Ice in 1st Grade

Project ideas big and small can pop up all sorts of places. A theme that came up one week in first grade was "changes in temperature" when many children noticed that all the snow had melted. This led to a discussion on how temperature changes things in our world. "The snow melted after it rained." "How cold does it have to get to start snowing?"

To learn more, the class played with blocks of ice and observed the changes to the ice when placed under different circumstances.

*"I think the ice is going to make a puddle when we put it under a lamp."*

*"We should put it under the radiator and it will melt faster."*

*"The ice cubes melted faster than the big piece."*

Hands on play with natural elements like water and ice, and observing cause and effect, can be the best way to ingrain key principles of science along with research and observation skills.

## At TCS, if Your Group Interest is Toys, You Can Build a Toy Museum

All kids love toys! But our 2nd grade used that interest to explore the world of toys at a whole new level in the process of creating a toy museum. Not only did they learn about different types of toys, their history, materials, and the methods of manufacturing toys, they also learned what goes into making a museum and delved into the field of research. Ms. Dana Nasralla, their teacher, observed: "Children are collecting data, then comparing and drawing conclusions from that data. We have talked at length about what is fun and what is not so fun at museums. I have been impressed with the students' thoughtfulness in planning the set-up of our museum so that it is interactive, interesting, and fun for visitors. The beautiful thing about project work is that one never knows where it will take a class."



## The Tree of Life has Many Branches!

When the third grade chose to study the tree of life, the class found out that the history of life on earth has many facets: biological, evolutionary, environmental, cultural, and sociological. 3rd grade teacher Angela Whitacre de Resendiz says, "While we looked at humans, we also discussed the 'big ideas' in evolution -- survival of the fittest, adaptation versus 'getting better,' and genetics. We took time to distinguish all the different branches of science that work together to understand our evolution, including the development of culture and the importance of early communities."

While the group focus of the project centered on human evolution, the students worked either individually or in small groups to cover sub-topics that interested them. Some worked with botany or marine life, some with survival in prehistoric times, some traced the history of creation stories in a culture that fascinated them. The final presentation was a rich, interactive walk through our planet and its inhabitants, their relationships, interdependencies, and the wealth of wonder that unfolds or has unfolded on this planet through its living beings.



## Exploring the Physics of Roller Coasters

As fourth graders explored the world of amusement park rides, they chose to learn about physics concepts by focusing on roller coasters. Students built marble runs, testing the marbles' trajectories, speed and force. Some of the phrases heard during project work included:



"Steeepen the angle of the decline!"

"A 45-degree angle is the best for its trajectory!"

"Will it go farther if the hill is longer?"

"I need to make it work!"

"It worked!!!"



As part of their final project presentation, the class created their own version of the game show "Jeopardy" (*photo right*) built around physics terms. They invited other classes to come play the game and then watch a skit about a roller coaster encountering various forces of physics on an adventurous run. We know that for these students, no roller coaster ride will ever be the same!

## Learning Takes Many Shapes at The Children's School



### How Big is Our Solar System?

A fifth-grade project exploring space took on huge proportions when they worked to create a scale model of the solar system. They had to pull in all their math skills to work with big numbers and ratios, and quickly realized that any form of scaling the solar system to the classroom was almost impossible because of the vast distances involved. Nonetheless, they worked out how far away in nearby suburbs, or where in the state of Illinois, the outer planets would be if the Sun was in their classroom.

Their teacher, Christina Martin says: "This is a great example of how project work is so much more powerful for learning than just exploring a topic through a traditional academic lens of reading about it. It's one thing to read or hear that the Sun is much bigger than the planets, and another to realize, as you go to build the Sun, that you need something that more than one million Earths can fit inside."

In addition to the group project of putting the entire system together, each student chose an object in the solar system to investigate on their own. Students included a report on their planet or featured object during their group presentation. Each student also created a fictional character or creature that would

be equipped to live in the environment of their chosen celestial object. This provided a way to integrate art, writing, and imagination into their science, math, and research work.

Finally, the class assembled all their findings and creations into a comprehensive Powerpoint slide show, which played in an ongoing loop on a monitor during their presentation. Visitors could take in the full scope of their work. This project is a great example of how so many different academic skills can be woven into one topic to enhance learning on all levels.



### Turning an Everyday Object into a Learning Adventure

Can a fun, rewarding and learning-rich project grow from just about any idea? Our 6th graders decided to build a project on the most humble object in their classroom -- an everyday pencil.

Students researched everything from lumberjacks and how the raw materials for pencils are mined or harvested, to how they are transported from all over the globe to manufacturing plants. They learned how the materials are processed and manufactured into their final product and all about the discovery and molecular properties of graphite.

For their presentation, they built an enormous walk-through pencil museum right on our TCS stage. At the unveiling, student docents hosted tours of the many exhibits inside.

"In building the museum and exhibits, students measured angles in both metric and customary units, drew and constructed shapes for the blueprints, and used proportions and ratios to solve scaling challenges," explains 6th grade teacher Will Hudson.

The many interactive exhibits inside the museum included data, graphs, timelines, and geographic information. Once again, our students amazed us all with how far their curiosity could take them in hands-on project work. *(inside the museum, below)*



## Building an Informed Citizenry, One Project, One Class at a Time



Our 7th graders are learning what goes into the democratic process this year in a number of ways. They attended a debate between candidates for Illinois Attorney General at the Union League Club (*top photo.*) They also learned about different forms of government and their evolution through an in-depth study of a country in the Prussian Empire (1700 - 1900).

They also explored facets of effective community and government in their own classroom process. Of one exercise demonstrating what a difference being an informed voter can make, their teacher Ms. Barone reports: "I wanted the students to experience the work it takes to be informed voters, so we spent time in small groups thinking and discussing the four project topics we had previously voted on. The students spent some time considering new terms to define and apply each topic in the real world.

"Afterwards, we had a final vote on the topics. After the final vote, the students said they felt much different because they felt more informed about their decisions. One student even said 'Ms. Barone, you informed the voters, now my coercion won't work!'

At The Children's School, the concept of "democracy in action" is both a topic we study and a principle we incorporate in our daily activities and our collective school community culture and values.



## "Enjoying Education" - An 8th Grade Documentary Project

What do young people wish adults knew about education? In this class project documentary film, our eighth graders explore what they think school learning should be: challenging, active, flexible, and fun! Through interviews with teachers and students, plus scenes of the TCS community at work and play, the student filmmakers make the case that all students, including those in middle school, should have an opportunity to enjoy their education as opposed to carrying it as a burden or endure it as an endless series of disconnected tasks.



Students worked in pairs or small groups to plan, film and edit the different sections of the documentary. They chose interview subjects and prepared interview questions, scheduled the interviews, and tested equipment before recording their subjects.

"Taking initiative, asking politely for others' cooperation, coordinating schedules, and thanking people who helped you are great examples of real-world skills that students develop during project work," says eighth grade teacher Gloria Mitchell.

One student volunteered to check the 60 or so release forms the class received against the school directory to see who had given permission to film them and who had not. "I feel like an office worker," they said.

"Indeed, a good project sets up an authentic work situation where there is a real need to get things done. Students hone their executive skills not merely because a teacher is telling them to, but because they must stay organized in order to carry out their own purpose."



Students screened the documentary both for the school community and in an evening event for parents and the community at large. The group has since worked on distributing the film to those who may have an interest in progressive education, such as college students in educational degree programs.

## Deep Roots Project Awards TCS Garden

The Deep Roots Project recently awarded The Children's School a raised bed edible garden to enhance nature learning and nature play at our facility. The new garden will be installed along Oak Park Avenue near our marquee sign. The Deep Roots Project is a community of volunteers working to bring edible landscaping and toxic-free lawns to our community. The grant application and project planning for the garden are thanks to our consultant, Ms. Lea Schweitz. Looking forward to spring planting!

## Thanks to Associated Bank!

The Children's School recently received a \$250 donation from Associated Bank as part of a program supporting organizations where their employees volunteer. Thanks to parent Mike S. for securing this Colleague Volunteer Grant. This is the second occasion Associated Bank has given to TCS through the program. Why not check if your company offers a contribution for non-profits you support or volunteer for?

## Welcome to Ms. Lori Nitzsche

Welcome to our newest faculty member, Ms. Lori Nitzsche, who will be our first grade associate teacher. Ms. Nitzsche has a B.S. in Education from Greenville College, where she specialized in elementary education and learning disabilities. Ms. Nitzsche has served as a substitute here at TCS, so is very familiar with and adept at creating a fun, play-based, and progressive learning environment for her students. "What a delight it is to participate with children in their experiences as they grow," she says. "It is abundantly clear to me that they build their own foundations best through activities that pique their interest. With literature, materials, play, projects, music, walks in the woods, museums, art, talking, listening, moving, trying, and trying again, their education builds and interconnects. I am delighted to join The Children's School where students and teachers are learning together in such meaningful ways."

## TCS Presents at Wild Things Conference

Thanks and congratulations to our team of Christina Martin, Will Hudson, and Lea Schweitz, who gave a presentation on our outdoor nature-play space at the recent "Wild Things" conference in Rosemont. Not only was the presentation well attended and successful, it led to a great story on the Goric playground equipment blog. You can access the piece, as well as other links to nature play and adventure playground information in the nature-play section of our website's "Resources" page under News.



For more information on each event, please visit the event calendar on our website or call 708-484-8033.

**APRIL 25TH** 7-9:00 PM

**SPEAKER PANEL: "TIME TO PLAY"**  
Please RSVP on website/calendar

**APRIL 30TH** 4-8:00 PM

**TCS CHIPOTLE FUNDRAISER**

**MAY 2ND** 6:30-7 PM

**BOARD MTG. & ANNUAL MEETING**

**MAY 3RD** 9-11:00 AM

**FIRST FRIDAY OPEN HOUSE**

**MAY 9TH** 11:30 AM

**Early Dismissal for Conferences**

**MAY 9TH** 7-8:30 PM

**One Book - One TCS: Book Discussion**

**MAY 10TH**

**No School - Conferences**

**MAY 23RD** 7-8:30 PM

**COLLAGE CONCERT**

**MAY 27TH**

**MEMORIAL DAY - NO SCHOOL**

**Now you can follow  
TCS on Instagram too!**



**The VOICE**

**Welcome** to the quarterly newsletter from The Children's School. Here we share stories, photos, interviews, and feature articles highlighting our student's work, faculty, school activities, and other news that gives readers a better understanding of progressive education and our school community. If you would like more information or have comments, please call 708-484-8033 or email us at [thevoice@thechildrensschool.info](mailto:thevoice@thechildrensschool.info), and be sure to visit us online at [www.thechildrensschool.info](http://www.thechildrensschool.info).