

Dear Families,

Happy winter greetings to you all! As we head into February we are aiming for a more synchronized start to the day for all- one that allows children to fully participate in their morning activity and then begin altogether with a meeting discussion before we start our busy day. As always, we will open our door at 8:30AM and strongly encourage you to arrive at this time. At 8:45AM children come to their places on the rug. Please be sure you have said your good- byes by this time. Thank you for supporting this transition.

Homework

Our homework nights are Tuesday and Thursday. Homework assignments will go home in a homework folder and should be returned with the folder on the due date. (Tuesday homework is due on Wednesday; Thursday homework is due the following Monday.) The folder will contain an instruction sheet and will sometimes include materials or activities for your child to complete and bring back to school the following day. Sometimes a request will also be made for materials from home. Homework should be completed in **pencil** unless otherwise noted.

How long should homework take?

Assignments vary, and different children work at very different paces. Generally, however, homework should usually take between 15 to 20 minutes. Please remind your child to use their homework checklist after completing a written assignment.

How can I make sure that my child is doing a good job without interfering with his/her sense of ownership?

We want children to set high standards for their work. One way to support the development of this value is to ask a child to assess the quality of her/his own work upon completion. When a child announces, "I'm done!" it's a good idea to begin by responding enthusiastically to the accomplishment and speaking specifically about what you notice about the child's work. Then you might ask him/her one of the following questions:

"What was hard about this homework? What was easy? "

"Why do you think so? How does this look to you? "

"Is it your best work? Are you satisfied with the way it looks on the page?"

"Is there anything you want to add or fix before you turn it in?"

A few final notes...

Young children often need some “down” time after school before beginning their homework. Take a few moments to unwind with your child, share the day’s activities and a small, high-energy snack. This may improve your child’s ability to focus on an academic task later in the day. One key to success with homework is establishing a routine. Doing homework at approximately the same time each day - and preferably in the same quiet space - helps children adjust to this new dimension of their school experience. It is also a good idea that your child have a special homework box or other container for holding pencils, crayons, glue, scissors, etc., as well as a space that is comfortable for working.

Although the First Graders are currently quite enthusiastic about homework, there may be a time when it no longer feels like fun to them. It’s best not to let homework become the source of a power struggle between you and your child. Some families choose to create a simple and logical routine for homework with a built-in consequence, e.g., no TV time until the homework is finished. However, remember that missing homework frequently has natural consequences in school. Conversations about missing homework between a child and his/her teacher are often far simpler and less emotional than those between parents and children. If homework is a struggle, let us know. We can probably help.

Homework should become a routine that you and your child both find rewarding and enjoyable. Your comments about the homework activities are a very important part of this dialogue, so please write about your child’s and/or your own response to the assignments on the back of the instruction sheet. As written and math assignments increase over the year, teachers will respond to students’ work and return it on a regular basis. We encourage you to go over our comments with your child.

As stated previously, the homework sheets and folders should be returned on the due date. If this is impossible, please speak to the classroom teachers.

Writing

In the next few weeks, we will be launching our Nonfiction study. First Grade students will understand the unique features of the genre, both in terms of text structures and in content and voice. They will be participating in “accountable talk” with their writing partners and will be using these conversations as a forum for developing and expanding their writing ideas.

Reading

At this point in the year, our students are truly blossoming as readers. They understand what it means and looks like to be a lifelong reader and are reading books that progress along a gradient of difficulty. We continue to help them maintain a balance between thinking about print and thinking about meaning. The passion they are developing for reading is truly inspiring.

Social Studies

Last week we began a series of field trips that will serve as the basis for our exploration in social studies of the question, what does a neighborhood need? We discussed various aspects of a neighborhood through further questioning. Where would you go to get food? Where would you go to get clothing? Where would you go to mail a letter? Where would you go to report a fire?

After researching places in our neighborhood where people can get food, the class compared and contrasted each place, and learned about why different places meet different needs in a neighborhood. They then recreated these places in blocks, thinking about important details that were unique to each place; like the display counter at Murray's Cheese Shop or the many aisles in a supermarket. They also worked in committees to create a list of various jobs in their building. These people work in the places in our block town.

Blocks

"Blocks, and the dramatic play that accompanies block building, offer children multiple and diverse opportunities to express their understanding of the social and physical world in which they live. From the early efforts of three- and four-year-olds to stack and balance blocks to the dynamic communities of stores, and homes built by six- and seven-year-olds, children can experience a growing and vital sense of community.... Field trips, and the opportunities for first-hand research they provide, are an essential component of a block program...."

(From the New Perspectives course description brochure, Bank Street College, summer, 2005)

Why is block building so important in first grade? It allows children to explore meaningful curriculum in highly personal ways within a social environment. As the examples of last week's build attest, this experience must be created by and with the children.

In conclusion, here are two quotes from The Block Book edited by Elisabeth S. Hirsch:

"Depicting through construction engenders greater awareness of the environment. Children look at the whole scene, noticing details and questioning what they see. They become aware of people and what they do.... This awareness discloses new relationships; new consciousness of what makes things work and how people are related to things and to places. This social awakening can be the basis of the social studies program....Dramatic play serves as a medium for "thinking through action." It allows children to examine lives and social roles of other people." (Charlotte Brody and Elisabeth S. Hirsch, Pg. 66)

....Block building combined with dramatic play offers the child the opportunity to integrate information in the act of re-experiencing it. The re-experiencing becomes in itself an experience from which new connections may grow as the subjective and objective are intertwined, for in the doing the child wisely does not separate the cognitive and affective domains.” (Harriet K. Cuffaro, Pg. 87)

Math

Our class has just begun a new mathematics unit called *Quilt Squares and Block Towns*. For the next few weeks we will be studying 2-D and 3-D geometry.

The work we are doing will include the geometry of shapes and the way shapes are related. First the children used 2-D shapes to make designs and fill in outlines. They have begun to investigate relationships between shapes and notice how they are alike and different. Last week we worked with pattern blocks, which familiarized students with fitting shapes together and breaking them apart to make other shapes.

During this unit, you can help your child by looking for and talking about shapes around your home and in your neighborhood. Here are some ideas of activities you might do together:

- Look for patterns or designs made from different shapes. Ask your child if he or she can find floor patterns or wall paper patterns made from squares, rectangles, triangles, circles, hexagons, or other shapes.
- Take walks with your child to look at shapes of buildings in your neighborhood. Talk about the shapes in the buildings you see.
- Look at boxes you have at home. What shapes are they? How many sides do they have?
- If your child enjoys drawing, spend some time together drawing shapes you see around your home.

Please make sure to take a moment to look around the room and see all the wonderful work your children are doing. We are so proud of them! As always, please contact us with questions or comments.

kindest regards,
Gina and Ruthie
Rebecca and Christine
Penny and Ann