



Art by Isla (detail)

## News

If you haven't filled out the form specifying your plans for next year, please do so as soon as possible so that we know how many spots we have to offer new families. If you have any questions or concerns, please see Sara.

Please be sure to hand in proof of your child's flu shot as soon as possible. Thank you.

Snow and cold weather are coming! Please send your child in with proper clothing - hats, boots, mittens and snow pants. Slippers or easy-to-put-on shoes are a good idea for classroom wear on boot days. Label all items with your child's name, as mittens are easily lost and the cubbies will soon be full of nearly identical boots.

**School will be closed on January 16th (in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day) and January 17th for professional development.**

# THE WINDOW

An inside look at Bethesda Nursery School



## Hooray for Play!

The next few months are a sweet spot in the school year; the younger children are saying good-bye easily to mommy and daddy in the morning and beginning to make social connections, and the older kids are reveling in their deepening friendships. It is the perfect time to explore the importance of play in our school day.

The curriculum at Bethesda is divided into four parts - art, science, music and meeting - but if you study our schedule you will see that free play is built into the day as well. While all children take part in meeting and music, art, science and snack-making activities are optional. Your child may prefer to build with blocks, squish around the play-dough or pretend to be a firefighter in the climber room rather than work on these projects. But lest you worry that he or she is spending the school day "just playing," be assured that your son or daughter is doing important work.

The hour between arrival and morning meeting is a fertile time for imaginative free play, and the block area is often the place where ideas flourish.

One morning a group of boys built a sprawling construction marked by a tall tower on one side and a long ramp running off in the other direction. The tower was a volcano, one boy explained, and the lava would flow down the ramp when the volcano erupted. The boys busily added to their creation, adding and subtracting blocks and amending their design. Other boys and girls, attracted by their enthusiasm, joined the fun. A block village sprang up outside the volcano, and when the question was raised about the fate of the villagers when the volcano erupted, solutions came from all directions. Ben built a water slide that would carry the people to safety; Julian suggested a gate “that will stop the lava. It will be made of extra strong metal.” A set of little plastic people was brought out and houses were built for them around the volcano. During morning meeting volcanos - the pretend one and real ones - were a main topic of conversation and play continued after meeting time was over.

The construction of the block volcano is just one illustration of how free play, with minimal teacher intervention, encourages cooperation and leads to a rich and complex sharing of ideas. Or we could just say that playing together is a lot of fun! Another example happened yesterday during outside time, when a melting pile of plowed-up snow became a kid magnet. At one point all but a few of the class were on top of the heap, working industriously. From a distance they looked like fairy tale gnomes, but up close many different scenarios were being acted out. Some kids were construction guys moving piles of dirt, some were filling pails with pretend ice cream and selling their wares and some were just enjoying the digging.

Every day we teachers are privileged to observe your wonderful children interacting in creative and imaginative ways that never cease to delight us. And while they play and have fun together, they are learning to cooperate, to resolve conflicts, to accept the ideas of others and to negotiate to have their own ideas accepted. All these skills will serve them well as they go on to kindergarten and beyond.



Sono and Simon work on the volcano village. (Photos by Tara)