



ST. MARY'S

An IB World School

PRESCHOOL

Jean Piaget, leading cognitive theorist, theorized that a child's mental models, or cognitive structures, are based on the child's activities; engagement makes meaning. Free, unstructured play is healthy and, in fact, essential for helping children reach important social, emotional and cognitive developmental milestones. Piaget's theory is based on the idea that the developing child builds cognitive structures known as mental maps, or schemas, for understanding and responding to physical experiences.

St. Mary's offers an inquiry based program allowing the students to reflect on their learning in order to develop their own understanding of the world. Through teacher directed activities and child initiated play experiences, the student adjusts their mental model to accommodate their new knowledge. Our focus is on creating inquiry based, engaging activities taught in a transdisciplinary curriculum which also involves an important element: play. "Play is the work of the child." – Jean Piaget

Through play, the child learns to negotiate the world around them. Their imagination and creativity flourishes as they role play and invent games and the rules that govern. Through a fine tuned balance of academics and play, St. Mary's students become life-long learners prepared to conquer the challenges that lie ahead of them.

PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM

Three & Four-Year-Old Classrooms

Language

In preschool, students are introduced to letters and phonemes. Through stories, games, and direct instruction, preschool students will gain letter recognition and phonemic awareness. Reading to young children is an essential tool for early literacy. In both large and small group, Preschool children are read to throughout the day from a variety of genre. Through stories, students strengthen their ability to rhyme, sequence, and demonstrate reading comprehension.

Through the above instruction strategies, Preschool students will begin to experiment with print materials, recognize and create rhymes, recognize and begin to spell their first name, begin to recall and re-tell stories, dictate sentences about life events and stories, and begin to show an interest in writing.

Math

Numeracy is an important skill for young children. Rote counting, number recognition, patterning and measuring through standard and non-standard units of measurement is the core of our math curriculum. Students are introduced to math through hands on activities with the use of manipulatives for counting, sequencing and patterning, as well as activities such as cooking and measuring for an interdisciplinary approach to teach math concepts.

Through hands on activities, students will learn to compare two sets of objects and identify which set is equal to, more than, or less than the other. They will begin to count numbers to 20, begin to identify, sort and classify objects by attribute and identify objects that do not belong. Students will begin to use math vocabulary such as longer, shorter, heavier, empty, full, next to, above, below, behind, up and down when describing their environmental boundaries and position of objects.

Science

Science is an abstract concept for young children; however, through the use of our garden, along with art and sensory activities, science comes to life. Interacting in the garden is a hands on way to learn about plants and what they need to grow, and why we need plants. Through cooking, art, and sensory activities, the students are introduced to the concepts of how materials change such as through color mixing and cooking. Through the use of ramps, the children learn how to negotiate through the world of physics and gravity.

Throughout the year, students will be provided the opportunity to observe environmental changes due to seasonal changes, care for the environment, begin to understand the life cycle of plants and observe how they change over time, identify the different parts of plants the purpose plants serve in the environment, classify materials by similarities and differences, explore how things move and begin to ask scientific questions in order to formulate predictions and record observations while communicating what happened.

Social Studies

Preschool students will gain an understanding of people and their lives, focusing on themselves, their friends and families and their community. They will gain an increasing awareness of themselves in relation to the various groups to which they belong. They will gain a sense of place, and the reasons why particular places are important to people.

Through our IB units of “Who Am I? Who Are You?” and “Tell Me a Story”, students will begin to understand that events occur in order, identify what places in their community are like, understand how to plan for a trip, recognize similarities and differences between people, understand that family and friends should care for one another, and begin to share their opinions respectfully.

The Arts

Art is an important component to our daily curriculum as it allows each child to develop in their imagination and creativity as well as provide an additional means to express their emotions. Each day, unstructured art is available to the students through the art/writing center in addition to a planned art activity. We focus on process driven art rather than product driven to allow all our students the ability to plan and create a piece of art they are engaged in and are proud of at the completion of their work.

Dramatic play is another essential art form in the preschool classroom. Through dramatic play, children are provided the opportunity to role play. Through role play, children take on roles of family members, peers, teachers, and learn to make sense of the world through their experience. Language confidence and acquisition is an important component to dramatic play as they interact with their peers in a variety of roles and settings. In order to continue in dramatic play development, the theme of our dramatic play changes throughout the year, often supporting our current unit of inquiry.

Music

Music allows the child to learn concepts such as rhythm, melody, and pace in a fun and interactive way. Music is incorporated throughout the day with the availability of musical instruments, such as rhythm sticks, drums, and shakers, in the classroom as well as singing together as a group in circle time. Music is also a means to teach concepts such as numeracy and literacy and is integrated into our core curriculum.

Gross Motor Skills and the Outside Curriculum

Through an abundance of materials provided for outside play such as bikes, climbing structure, balls, and organized games, our students are strengthening their large muscles, core strength, and balance. In addition to the daily materials provided, St. Mary’s provides additional outside activities to ensure each child is engaged during recess. These activities might include easel painting, gardening, or dramatic play.

Fine Motor Skills

Fine motor skills are the small muscles needed to learn how to write. Through the use of clay, cutting practice on a variety of materials, using tweezers, art, and lacing activities, our students are strengthening those necessary muscles daily. Once a student has demonstrated strong fine motor skills, we will begin to teach proper pencil grip leading to writing success.

IB Units of Inquiry

Preschool students are engaged in four units of inquiry within the school year. The four units are transdisciplinary in nature in that the units encompass all academic and social disciplines essential for the child to be prepared for Junior Kindergarten and life. The units of inquiry for Preschool are: “Who Am I? Who Are You?” With a central idea of “similarities and differences make us special” engages the students in inquiry of who they are, how they are similar and different from their peers, why each child is special.

- **From Here to There:** The central idea for this unit is “taking a trip requires planning and preparation”. Students inquire into the concept of taking trips, why people take trips, what people need to take on a trip, and how they might travel.
- **Tell Me a Story:** This unit of inquiry is so literature rich. The central idea is “people express themselves through creativity and imagination”. Through the use of old favorites and new stories, students are introduced to the literary arts of folklore, poetry, storytelling as an art, and engaging in creating their own stories.
- **How Does Your Garden Grow?:** The central idea for this unit is “plants change over time”. We teach this unit in the spring when we can spend a lot of time in our Preschool garden planting and harvesting vegetables and learning how plants grow and change over time through a hands on unit. The students will inquire into the life cycle of plants, what people and animals get from plants, and how we help plants grow.

PRESCHOOL TECHNOLOGY

All Preschool classrooms are equipped with video cameras, picture cameras, and light tables. Light tables provide the opportunity to explore science and light through engaging hands on activities. A variety of materials are placed on the light table such as x-rays and glass encased insects and small animals. Students are introduced to technology and curriculum content through interactive media to aide in learning and retention. Video and picture cameras allow teachers to capture students engaging in activities throughout the day. This equipment provides the means to create digital and video reflections for both students and parents. Videos capture the true essence of student learning at this young age, including dramatic play, social interaction with peers, creative interpretation, and making cognitive connections using ramps.

The Jr. Kindergarten program features three computers in each classroom and a Smart Table, used as an interactive computer for students in small groups. Learning games are designed and developed based on the current IB Unit of Inquiry. The Smart Table offers another method of visual and hands on instruction, encouraging students to actively participate in their own learning. The Smart Table and learning games reinforce concepts that are being taught in the curriculum and create a fun, social and interactive learning center in the classroom.

WEEK OF THE YOUNG CHILD

St. Mary's is proud to be both an IB World School with a Preschool that is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC is both an accrediting agency and advocate for young children. Part of being an NAEYC accredited school is being able to participate in Week of the Young Child (WOYC). NAEYC describes WOYC as:

“The Week of the Young Child is an annual celebration sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the world's largest early childhood education association, with nearly 90,000 members and a network of over 300 local, state, and regional Affiliates. The purpose of the Week of the Young Child is to focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families and to recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs.

NAEYC first established the Week of the Young Child in 1971, recognizing that the early childhood years (birth through age 8) lay the foundation for children's success in school and later life. The Week of the Young Child is a time to plan how we--as citizens of a community, of a state, and of a nation--will better meet the needs of all young children and their families.”

During WOYC, St. Mary's Preschool designates each day within the week-long celebration with a specific learning theme. Our goal is to showcase how much young children learn through play. Past themes have been: buildings and architecture, language and literacy, the arts, and through the senses. Within these themes the students are “playing” yet learning so much. Through buildings and architecture, the students are learning math concepts, spatial awareness, and how to building with materials other than blocks. This week long celebration takes place every April and is a favorite of our teaching faculty.