



ROSE ROCK SCHOOL

Learning Newsletter

Update

FROM THE ROSE ROCK PTO

A small grant writing committee has been fundraising for a few years to transform the currently unused pool on our grounds into an aquaponic greenhouse built with earth ship principles. The greenhouse will serve as a full-time classroom, providing students the opportunity to cultivate sustainable livelihood skills through academic work. RRS students of all ages will have access to the space for productive learning time throughout the year. This space will hold lessons for various grades and subjects, including nature stories, gardening, seed-to-table-food cultivation, compost cycle, earth skills (such as building structures and working with fibers), plant and animal studies, aquaponics, botany, mineral processes, and components of soil.

The Kirkpatrick Foundation has approved Rose Rock for a grant of \$5,000 in support of our **Greenhouse Eco-Classroom** project. This money will be used for classroom furniture and supplies. We hope to have our greenhouse classroom funded and ready to use by the August 2024 school year.

April



APRIL 22

Earth Day



ALANA LESSLY -

OUR UP AND COMING

FIRST GRADE TEACHER



My Journey with Waldorf Education

My family was welcomed with open arms into the Rose Rock family nearly one year ago. It has been a wonderful experience, and we are just getting started! I am overjoyed to share that I have accepted a new position at Rose Rock School as a Class Teacher starting with the upcoming class of first graders--beginning this fall! I am so excited to be taking this journey with my future students and the entire community, and I look forward to all of the adventures we will have together.

Throughout this past year, I have immersed myself in the culture of RRS. I am grateful for the opportunity to observe and learn in both the Early Childhood and Grades programs. I have had amazing support and dedicated mentoring for my role this past year, as a grades program subject teacher and Early Childhood aftercare teacher. I know that I have a rare opportunity to work with exceptional and brilliant mentors and colleagues, and I couldn't dream of a better group of people to whom to share this experience.

The world of Waldorf education is not entirely new to me. In fact, it has played a significant role my entire life. When I was very young my mother studied Waldorf education, as well as a variety of other educational approaches. My parents were involved with a group of parents who desired to open a Waldorf school in Norman. Many of

the families from that idealistic group left Norman to pursue formal Waldorf education in established schools. One of my mom's closest friends, Cynthia Aldinger, was a part of that original group of dreamers, and she became very involved in Waldorf education around the world. Cynthia was also the founder of the LifeWays North America, which inspired the program we have here in our early childhood program. Cynthia is very much a part of Rose Rock School today, and it is an absolute joy to see her when she visits Norman.



Alana as a child with Cynthia Aldinger.

As time passed, my parents were the only ones left in the Norman area from the original group of hopeful parents. My mom was so confident about the strengths of Waldorf Education that she modeled her own homeschool program after it. She used the

knowledge she had gained through studying with the other like-minded parents to create a wonderful and rich educational experience and childhood for my siblings and I. I have so much appreciation for my childhood that felt so easy and free. Little did I know at the time how much careful planning went into our days with meaningful and engaging learning activities that would meet our learning styles and aptitudes and leave us eager to absorb more. Now I do!

In my time experiencing, teaching, learning and observing at RRS, I have been able to draw so many parallels between the student's experiences and my own as a child. In a way very familiar to my childhood experience, the structure of the main lesson blocks are skillfully designed to focus on a specific topic for a period of time, and the topic is artfully woven together with multiple subjects--creating a wonderfully deep and enriching experience for the students. In this intricate educational tapestry, you can find meaningful stories combined with elaborate activities that bring life to the topics in enjoyable and memorable ways. I am thoroughly enjoying the artistic and creative projects I am seeing from all of the students. I often reminisce about being fully immersed in similar projects of my own. Like the students, I was blessed with being surrounded by creative adults--talented artists, musicians and storytellers. Being around these people was as enriching as it was inspiring. It means everything to me that my own children are surrounded by so many of the most wonderful and talented people I know.

Some of my fondest memories are of celebrating festivals with our friends and neighbors. Little did I know at the time, but many of these were Waldorf inspired! I just thought that everyone celebrated the seasons, the solstices, Michaelmas, Advent, and had a May fair!

In preparation for Michaelmas, we would make a dragon piñata out of paper mache. This was an enormous project that always took several days. The end result was a very fine dark green dragon with carefully crafted details like teeth and claws. At the festival we would, of course, pretend to be St. Michael and fight the treat-filled dragon with our wooden swords, or sticks that we deemed worthy of being called swords. Another memorable celebration was the May Fair. I can clearly remember the first time I saw a May Pole. It was a very curious thing to see the tall pole with ribbons hanging down from it and not knowing the use of it. I was so mesmerized by the process of everyone joining together to weave the ribbons, and I was delighted by the unexpected result. Needless to say, it was quite magical for me to bring my children to the Rose Rock May Fair last year and to experience it with them for the first time--and with a Maypole of a much grander scale!





Alana attends a May Day festival as a child.

As a person who grew up in an out-of-the-ordinary educational setting, I get asked often about college or any post-primary education. To summarize, the questions are usually along the lines of: "Were you able to go to college?" and "How did that go?" Questions like this actually began while I was in my younger teens, and they sounded like "I'm concerned that you aren't going to be prepared or have the ability to handle it." As you can imagine, these seeds of doubt planted in my head made me concerned as well. But, I quickly learned that all of the concerns were completely unfounded. In some ways, I felt as if I had an advantage over many of my peers. I was competently prepared academically, and I was seamlessly able to adapt to the classroom format that many others were so exhausted from repeating over and over. I thoroughly enjoyed the learning environment of college and graduated from the University of Oklahoma with honors in my major of sociology and a minor in political science. I enjoyed my time in college so much that I have always left the door open for the possibility of returning for graduate school. I absolutely love learning. I am very excited to now be furthering my education to become a teacher in a setting that is so familiar to me. Not just because it is familiar, but because the value of it is so meaningful to me.

Another significant part of my childhood was an introduction to horses at a very young age. It was very clear to the adults in my life that horses were very special to me. Luckily for me, many of these adults who recognized this also loved horses, and some of them even had horses. They frequently invited me to come along for a ride or just help take care of horses or go watch a horse show! I was thrilled no matter what--to just be around horses. I've always tried to make horses a part of my life in some way. When I was 12, I joined the United States Pony Club (USPC) to be formally educated in riding,

horse care, and all around horse knowledge. USPC trains youth riders at all levels from beginning through advanced and emphasizes practical horse knowledge as much as riding. Soon after joining USPC my parents decided that I was serious enough, and knowledgeable enough, to have my own horse. My first horse was a beautiful chestnut-colored, off-the-track thoroughbred racehorse named "Barry". He was the first of many horses who I was blessed with having as a part of my life. They each taught me so many lessons. I later became a volunteer instructor for local chapters of USPC for over 15 years, and I would also teach private lessons during that time. Being well educated and an experienced rider gave me so many amazing opportunities. I enjoyed riding and training horses for competitions, working for polo players and professional riders, and working as a student at a famous Lipizzan stallion performance barn in northern Illinois. I am so thrilled to share my passion for horses this summer with RRS students in the upcoming Horse Camp summer session!!!



Alana begins her lifelong journey as a horse enthusiast.

I knew that I wanted my children to have a childhood like I did-- with a lively and enriching education and every opportunity to enjoy being a child. I have been working for a local law firm for the past 12 years. When I decided to homeschool my children I was very fortunate to have the flexibility with this job to continue working from home so that I could be with my children. I was grateful for the opportunity, and we really did have a wonderful time. But, working from home and homeschooling isn't exactly the ideal situation, as you can imagine. I decided to look into RRS specifically, as I already had a family connection and had positive impressions of the school. As I looked into all aspects of where each of my children would be and what their days would be like, I knew I had found exactly what I was wanting for them, and so much more. I also realized that this is what my parents had envisioned for me so many years ago. Well... after all this time I have finally made it here, and I am happy to have my children: Brody, Olivia and Miles with me! I am truly thankful for this opportunity, and I am so excited to be returning to the journey that I started so long ago. My wish is that all of the RRS students may feel as at home here as I do--that the days feel easy, free, meaningful, and enriching.

There are so many reasons that I immediately felt at home at Rose Rock School. The familiar educational style, the warm and welcoming teachers, staff, and parents are parts of being able to settle in so easily. The RRS community is filled with people who are of the same like-minded, thoughtful, highly conscientious, artistic, talented, nature-loving people I grew up around. While I have known most of them for only a year, it feels like we've been friends for a lifetime. I am so grateful and excited to step into my new role as a full time grades teacher, and I cherish the opportunity to do so!



CHRISTINA RUBINO -

EARLY CHILDHOOD

The Wonderment of Sewing

Run, run, as fast as you can...

We continue to stitch gingerbread folk in little windows of time throughout the week. Sometimes when we are outside at play, there is time for a few stitches. And, as one after another Gingerbread makes his or her way home, another child will come and ask, “Can I make a gingerbread?” I imagine our growing troop of felt gingerbreads will carry us all the way into summer, as this one-on-one activity takes considerable time. Some children started weeks ago and have the patience for just a few stitches at a time, and other friends are ever in the process of cycling into the stitching spot at the picnic table under the trees.

Play in early childhood is an important part of the outdoor curriculum, and most of our children love to run and dig and make sand-cakes and play hide and seek and visit the bamboo forest. They also like to help when they see their teachers stitching, raking, watering, or feeding the goats. I do not worry that the children will miss robust gross motor play or that they will miss the fine motor work that feeds their later writing and reading competencies because the children have vast opportunities for both fine and gross motor activities. These times we sit together, as I give varying degrees of help, elements of work and play are both present. And, all the while the children sew, they imagine their gingerbread going home to play.

For some children, their organization, executive function, and/or fine motor skill of sewing determines that they still need a lot of support; though, all of the children love doing as much of the sewing as they can for themselves. However much they do, they are developing lots of happy skills: the practical skills (creating blanket stitch, making a toy, threading a needle) and the socio-

emotional skills (focus, initiative, industry, and delayed gratification). The older children now track successfully most of the time--they know in which direction the next stitch will go. Often, they can measure how deeply to place the needle from the side of the felt and how far from the previous stitch. They can follow the several steps in the directions: threading the needle (they or the teacher), knotting the end (that's usually the teacher), keeping "holding" and "stitching" hands discrete, placing the stitch by going thru the back of the fabric and then going around again and coming thru the loop, pulling snug, placing the next stitch going in the same direction each time. They are getting a feel for when and how to place stuffing inside the gingerbread, and they are developing a feel for the project in its entirety--from start to finished form.

All the time the children are making their felt gingerbreads, they tell me about what they will play when their gingerbread comes traveling home. When they choose their thread, some will share that that purple will surprise Mom because she likes that color. Sometimes they learn, when the fellows travel home, that a few stitches need a bit more strength. So they are learning how they can repair, how things can be made whole again. These are good things to know. They know they can ask for help, and they grow to understand that "hanging in there" means we will get to the fixing at some point. In the meantime, there is running and climbing and becoming part sand in the newly filled sandboxes.





DESIREE VARASTEH -
FIRST AND SECOND GRADE

A Journey to Literacy

A Travel Guide by: Desiree Varasteh

Let's take a trip together, where the final destination is reading literacy! There are many stops along the way; and, before you know it, you'll probably realize that it's not the destination that matters. In fact, the journey is the most meaningful!

This quest begins in perhaps a place that you may not expect: **Your home!** Speaking to your babies when they're little, helping them to make the sounds, "Buhbuhbuh", "Mama!", "Dada!" Thus, begins the entry into the world of words...and later sentences. As you read to them before bed as part of their nighttime routine--a peaceful activity that sends them off to dreamland; they are listening to the world of language, the phrases and expressions that build a story--that build an imagination. You send them to Rose Rock in **Early Childhood**, where they hear fairy tales, or life stories--not just once, but many times throughout a season. They hear the words. They picture the images. They observe the puppet shows. They re-enact the scenes with silks and movements, as their classroom becomes a stage for the grandeur of their endless imaginations. They sing seasonal songs and recite seasonal poems. Their verbal acquisition grows, expands, flourishes. The foundations have been laid.

Next stop: **First grade!** The students continue to practice reciting poetry chorally as a class, but their repertoire now includes verses that their teachers have written for each child for his or her birthday. The child learns their own verse and recites it every week, on the weekday in which they were born. Here is an example:

*To wish on a dandelion, the seeds fly away
We wonder if it's possible, for them to have a stay
For the wish to come true, and yet to find the earth
And so it is: they've landed, with much merriment and mirth.*

Quick preview into a future destination: Second grade! At this point, the child has practiced his or her own birthday verse for a year, and now receives a continuation of that verse:

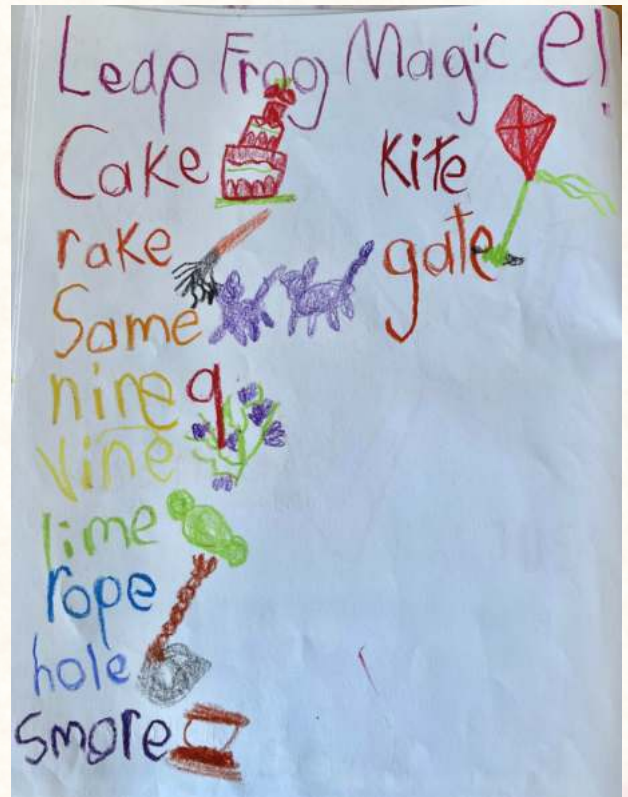
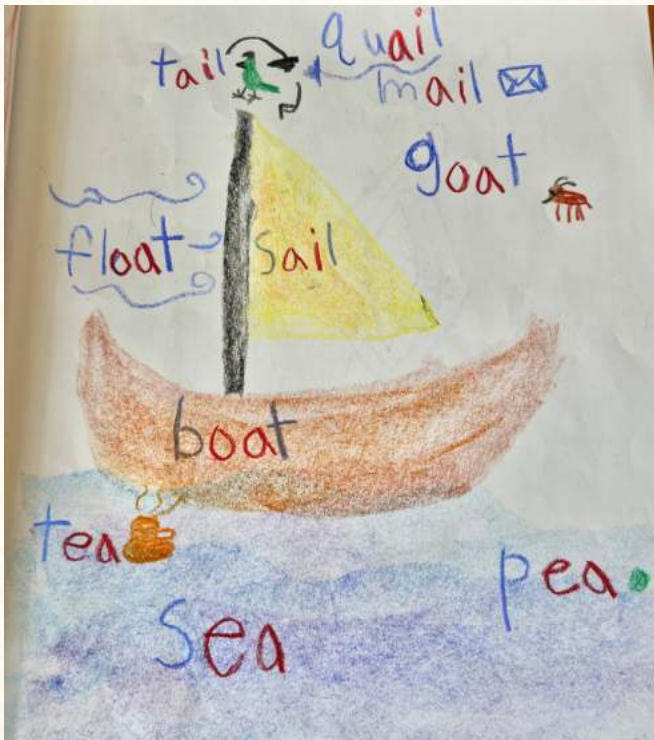
*Each little seed, a possibility
The future of these wishes? We will wait and see
For there are no limits with wishes, so open up and dream
The potential to become: is more than it may seem.*

But the above is a future stop; let's get back to where we were! **First grade.** Along with the poetry recitation, the children participate in various gross and fine motor activities in Movement class, Morning Circle (the opening activities of the day), as well as in Therapeutic Arts, Language, and Mathematics classes. Research has shown that when children are able to move their bodies in such a way that they cross horizontal and vertical midlines, activate their proprioceptive and vestibular senses, and incorporate movements that integrate their bodies, then hindrances can be removed which allows learning to be a smoother and more enjoyable process for them. They can carry out an activity without their systems being overtaxed due to retained reflexes that exhaust them, and they can avoid associating learning and practicing new things with fatigue and a sense of overwhelm. In this regard, we highly value movement and bodily integration as a precursor to reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Continuing in first grade, the children hear fairy tales and other stories, and they are formally introduced to the abstract symbols which represent the sounds made by letters. And here on our journey is where we diverge from where most other voyagers choose to travel in the land of literacy: we don't emphasize that the children learn to **read** ~ we emphasize that the children learn to **write**. The letters are actually not taught in alphabetical order, but rather taught through the recapitulation of the sounds that babies naturally make when first acquiring verbal language. The children hear and focus on the letters that make sounds using their voices (B, D, G, etc.), letters that make sounds without their voices (C/K, F, H, etc.), letters that have unique friendships that cause them to change their sounds (CH, TH, SH, etc.), and the heavenly and numerous sounds that vowels make. In this way, the children now gain everything they need to express,

on paper, whatever they want to say. At first, they begin with brief summaries of the stories they've heard. Later, they move on to writing down verses or poems they've practiced many times and know by heart.

Their weekly Form Drawing classes allow the students to properly hold their crayons and orient their words on a page, again, emphasizing the importance of the writing, which will later lead to reading. First grade ends with the children having heard a year's worth of rich stories (both delivered orally by the teachers and read from books that include elevated language and robust imagery), which they can write about in a general sentence.



Next stop on our trip: **Second grade!** Now we find ourselves in a territory in which the children request materials so that they may begin to write their own stories. This is a critical moment on our journey, travelers! Please take this opportunity to take photos! You won't want to forget this experience in our expedition! Now is when the children are starting to develop and explore their own voice. Low and behold, through the above process, they have organically and personally come to find their way to reading. The teachers are aware of this all along and support them throughout these explorations, by pointing out the kinds of words that "play fair" and those that simply don't. The words that do play fair follow the rules that we've learned, reliably making the sounds that the letters have indicated. Our sense of hearing can be depended upon to read such words "dig," "cat," and "mail". However, "unfair" words don't necessarily follow any rules and require us to use our sense of sight to just know what they say ("right" and "once").

Accompanying this uptick of writing enthusiasm, the teachers now pair the younger students with older schoolmates who have already mastered the task of learning to read and are on their own journey toward reading to learn. These peers serve as role models and inspirations to their younger partners. The teachers tap into the strong social influence that is ever-present and behold the magic which unfolds when suddenly a second grader reads to his/her "Book Buddy" without a hitch. The older Book Buddies report back to the teachers how well their younger buddies read and can then continue to read aloud to their partner, thus demonstrating that reading comes (eventually and trustingly) with continued practice and excitement. The Book Buddies come together weekly to play various literary games with each other, the older partners pick out books that they think their younger partner would enjoy. They exchange hand-made bookmarks with one another. And, they generally encourage and inspire each other. Oh yeah, and they read together too!

By the close of second grade, it is expected that the majority of students are reading and comprehending beginner level books smoothly in such a way that they feel comfortable decoding, utilizing the "rules" they have learned, and coming upon words that occasionally stump them. But this is in no way a final destination, and they will happily continue on this journey throughout their learning lives. Please note what was not included on our trip, travelers!!! We

never stopped at Pressureville. We avoided Testing City. We decided to skip Disappointmentland--a place many early learners visit if they aren't meeting externally applied expectations. Instead, our trip included visits to life-giving locations (and we acquired souvenirs from) the beautiful destinations of Patienceopia, Enthusiasm Town, Discovery Nation, Creativity Avenue, Comradery Lane, and Joy Island--to name a few. I hope that you've enjoyed this trip and have fond memories of it for years to come! Feel free to encourage other parents to take this journey if you see that they have a stay booked at one of the less lovely destinations listed above. Perhaps they will reconsider and take a vacation that inspires them and thier children!





JARED COADY -
THIRD AND FOURTH GRADE
Morning Movement

For the first fifteen minutes of each school day, grade school teachers engage the class in movement activities, which prepare the children for learning by engaging their whole being. These activities have a multiplicity of value for the children's learning, but one of the most helpful aspects is to harmonize their breath, their movement, and their minds with their classmates'. Helping the children to be "one of many" is essential in the classroom, and it is a necessary ability as they learn to work in cooperation with others.

One of the most unifying and cooperative things that we do in morning movement is dancing. Our class has been dancing a Virginia Reel for the past few weeks. This requires singing, stepping on the beat, mentally mapping out the space, and remembering the choreography in real time (no pun intended for Virginia Reel). This type of dance has long been an important social opportunity for rural and urban peoples alike, and is an important cultural artifact of American history.

I highly recommend contra dances like the Virginia Reel and other folk dances for grade school students, especially beginning in the third grade. If you are interested in this as an extracurricular for your child or yourself, you can join the Scissortail Dance Society on the first Friday of each month:

Scissortail Dance Society

<https://scissortail.org/where-we-dance/norman>





NADIA ELLIS -
THERAPEUTIC PAINTING FOR
THE GRADES

Blooming into Spring

This month I offer a peek into the typical structure of the Grade 1-2 painting class.

Beginning the process:

We start each class with a verse which embodies everything we aim for.

*All quiet and with brush in hand we enter the colors of wonderland.
Quietly, quietly, and with gentle care each color weaves their garments fair.
Silently, silently, we listen well to hear what the colors come to tell and
left foot in, right foot out let's find out what it is all about.*

In first and second grade, awakening to the mood of color is the main purpose of painting. At this stage children live in their feelings. Merging with the color and experiencing the moral qualities and character of the colors is important. We aim for pleasing results via rainbow colors and form that arises out of those colors (as an activity of the imagination). A communication between the inner life of the soul (left foot in) and the outer experience of colors (right foot out) is developed.

Living into the process of preparation:

Preparation is an activity of itself. The children are given tasks-- brushes, rags, paints, paper, water and sponges are handed out and painting boards are distributed. When appropriate, we discuss former work to develop objective sensitivity. We remember the main goals of the painting so that we can acquire a feeling for the paintings which approach those goals the most.

Offering a guiding demo:

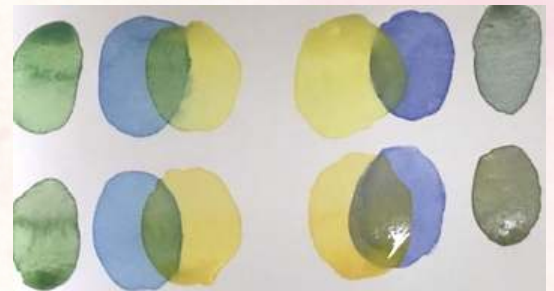
I aim for a quiet mood so painting, as a somewhat meditative exercise. The painting is demonstrated and colors are brought alive via a story or rhyme. The children are guided to the correct way of painting. This time a spring mood was introduced with the poem below, which was recited and acted out. Examples of kinds of daffodils were with us in the classroom to foster further inspiration and visual guidance.

Daffodondilly

by A.A. Milne

*She wore her yellow-sun-bonnet,
She wore her greenest gown;
She turned to the south wind
And curtsied up and down.
She turned to the sunlight
And shook her yellow head,
And whispered to her neighbour:
"Winter is dead."*

Each child made four greens starting from two yellows and two blues. The main goals for their paintings were to (1) awaken a lively spring mood with mixed greens and (2) to form daffodils in the negative (out of the environment) as well as out of the color yellow. All the children produced something unique and beautiful.

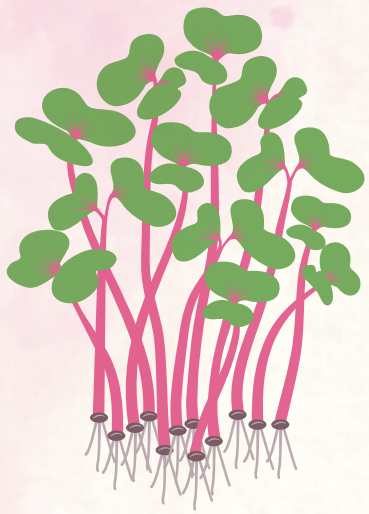


Closing verse:

Painting time has ended.

*What we have come to learn will go to rest.
Especially so if we have given our very best.*





CHEF ARIELLE -

COOKING FOR THE GRADES

The Enjoyment of Soapmaking & Growing Microgreens

As the days begin to warm and green, we happily welcome our first sights of Spring with one of the kitchen's favorite traditions, Spring cleaning! Our cooking class celebrated the spirit of cleanliness with a return to the foundation of hygiene. We revisited the importance of hand washing by creating squishy soap. This sudsy creation helped us incorporate aspects of consistency. Kinesthetically, the manipulation of these consistencies is a bit tricky, as this recipe begins quite crumbly and must be worked together. The children were able to practice adjusting the material to the desired consistency, which is a very valuable skill in the kitchen. They practiced proportion and measuring--and even a bit of color theory. Most importantly this activity opened the door to conversations on healthy habits.





In keeping with the sprouting of Spring, we also stepped out of the kitchen to start some sprouts (microgreens) of our very own. Using recycled strawberry containers and coconut coir, the students each curated their own tiny gardens of edible delights. We learned of the nutritional benefits of this bioavailable living food, and we discussed how to care for it safely. However, farming isn't easy and Brother Wind was with us on this day, and he very much wanted to play. Many of the containers were quite jostled and so, for some of us, replanting is in our future.

