

The Branch School

WHERE LOVE LEADS



At The Branch School students learn through experiential projects which help them to solidify their understanding of the concepts they are learning. Our goal is to combine disciplines when possible to make a robust STEAM program.

Below are some examples of the integrated lessons and projects put together by our teachers. These projects make learning meaningful.

INTERACTIVE, CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

PK3

When studying dinosaurs, the PK3 students participated in read aloud with a variety of dinosaur books. They also learned the dinosaur names and recited them, enhancing language development. They learned about herbivores and carnivores and learned the differences through the hands-on activity of separating dinosaur models into categories. They also got to participate in making dinosaur art projects and a “fossil” dig, like real paleontologists, utilizing the sensory table. A guest speaker spoke to the class regarding how real dinosaurs look different from pretend ones. The culmination of the dinosaur unit was a trip to the science museum to see dinosaurs in person. This cross-curricular unit enhanced students’ verbal and visual learning as well as fine-motor skills.

LOVING TO LEARN.
LEARNING TO LEAD.
LEADING WITH LOVE.

PK4

When studying continents, PK4 students learned the seven continents through a variety of methods, including song, a puzzle matching globe with names and continents, videos featuring the topography and landscaping, and discussions around the people, culture, and animals on each continent. They also got to participate with a hands-on simulated iceberg on a sensory table to experience the sensations of Antarctica. Art and science are incorporated through exploring the water cycle while painting with colored ice cubes to learn how ice melts into water. These lessons developed students’ verbal and creative interest in learning.

KINDERGARTEN

Our Kindergarten class participated in a language arts unit to study non-fiction reading. Students picked a topic of interest and collected appropriate reading books to learn more about their subject. Students learned to collaborate by being paired with someone with an interrelated topic, such as insects and flowers. Throughout the process, students learned the basics of research, enriched their vocabulary, and gained presentation and leadership skills through presenting their topic to the class, whether through a game, report, mural, story book, or play.

FIRST GRADE

Our first grade students did a unit on butterflies that incorporated the life cycle with research, reading, writing, interviewing, and presentation skills. To see the life cycle first hand, they raised caterpillars making observations and taking notes. During this time, they did a non-fiction writing unit, researching butterflies. They also interviewed an expert via Skype from the Houston Arboretum, learning how to ask experts for more information and utilize technology to communicate. When learning what butterflies need when they come out of their chrysalis, the students wanted to provide them flowers and release them to migrate. They made a book class report with illustrations and developed a play to showcase the four stages in the life cycle to present what they had learned to our Outdoor Classroom teacher. This unit of study fully engaged students in the learning process, allowing them to explore their curiosity to make learning fun.

SECOND GRADE

Our second grade students did a unit of study on Ancient Egypt. Students learned about its number system and geography through creating maps, hieroglyphics, and mummification through observing the mummification of a banana. A guest speaker came to discuss the pyramids and the students were able to visit the museum to experience more first hand. This project incorporated elements from all subject areas to help students make connections.

THIRD GRADE

As a unique expression of art and a fun way to develop fine-motor skills necessary for cursive, our third grade students participated in making origami throughout the school year. At the end of the year, this enabled the students to do a paper automata as an engineering project, utilizing the skills learned through making origami, to build simple machines out of paper. For instance, they built a cam shaft that drove a creative project of their own design. They learned the engineering behind it and created a 3-D working model. This exciting project combined artistic design with engineering technology.

FOURTH GRADE

Our fourth graders become immersed in the lives of Texas citizens who shaped history by creating and participating in a Wax Museum display. This fun project incorporated research, reading, writing, technology and presentation skills, making learning come to life. Students learned the writing process, including prewriting, brainstorming, editing, revising, and publishing in order to present their findings while dressing up as the character they had studied. They made digital timelines and learned more about cause and effect and the sequence of events. They began the process of learning by studying to know if sources are reliable and how to cite them for their report. Through researching and speaking from the perspective of the historical figure, learning took on a whole new dimension.

FIFTH-EIGHTH GRADE

Our middle school students, consisting of fifth through eighth grades, collaborated in a weekly project-based learning opportunity, named Sequoia. Sequoia is a fictitious island created by our students and each year the project focus changes. Past projects have focused on archaeological digs, creating the island's government, building environmentally friendly homes, designing roller coasters, developing various means of transportation, and exploring the pros and cons of drilling for oil. These projects involve field trips, collaborative group learning, outside speakers, and integration of interdisciplinary subjects. For instance, writing components have been done in Spanish and English, physics knowledge was incorporated with roller coasters, math with designing homes, and social studies was integrated when developing the fictitious country's constitution. This hands-on learning further engages students' involvement and develops a deeper understanding of the world around them.