

EDUCATION MINISTRIES

Heidi Hobler, Director St. Francis of Assisi Preschool



Snowmen, Hot Cocoa, and Cold Weather Apparel

Ever since our students have returned from the holiday break, there has been excitement in our classrooms about the possibility of snow! The children know that the temperature is now cold enough to don mittens and hats on a regular basis. Snowmen, hot cocoa, and cold weather apparel are just some of the winter themes that are part of classroom conversations, art projects, play materials, and songs! A few classes have even put ice cubes in the toilet, encouraged going to bed with pajamas on backwards & placing a spoon under pillows to “guarantee” snow as the old wives’ tale goes!

I have mentioned before that at preschool, our teachers are experts in knowing how to set up intentional play opportunities and hands-on experiences to teach various lessons and concepts without the children ever realizing that they are learning! They recognize that young children learn best through play and hands-on activities so all that they teach is woven throughout opportunities that allow for this. For example, one of our four-year old classes, in the past, has talked about how animals stay warm in the winter. While the teacher used books and discussion to introduce the concept/ideas, she also had them partake in a science experiment with baking lard and an ice bath. The children got to put their hands in a bag, dip it in the lard, and

then dunk everything into a bowl of ice water. As you might expect, their hands did not get cold in the ice water because they protected them with their very own “blubber”, just like many animals do!

Last week, I had the opportunity to watch one of our classes build “snow forts” and then have a pretend snowball ‘fight’. While many skills were targeted with this activity such as teamwork and careful listening (for when the teacher called ‘stop’), there were several other lessons that occurred that went beyond the laughter and excitement of this activity. Originally, the idea was that whichever team ended with the most snowballs when time was called was the “winner” of that round. One little boy in the class became upset because his team never seemed to be on the winning end. While learning to overcome disappointment is a major social-emotional skill to continually address by itself, one of his teammates tried to offer a solution to help his friend feel better. Instead of determining who the winner was based on who had the most snowballs when time was called, they decided to turn the activity around and declare the team with the LEAST number as the winner! Not only was this a great strategy for helping his friend who was sad because of not winning, but it was a wonderful critical thinking opportunity that occurred organically.

At preschool, we also recognize that children thrive on structure and routine. With this in mind, our teachers carefully construct plans each week. A wise educator, however, also knows the value of seizing child-generated ideas and building off of them. A child-led activity can be as important as one driven by the teacher. For instance, several of our classrooms have igloo sets that they put out for the children to use in their pretend play. These often include not only an igloo, but also several arctic animals, and a few Inuit figurines. Frequently it has happened where play with these stirs one child’s imagination enough to think further on the possibility of building an igloo for the classroom. This child-led idea can then be implemented and in doing so, leads to all kinds of other lessons along the way. To our preschoolers it is just fun, but to our teachers, it is a chance to incorporate so many other learning lessons!

As we approach Catholic Schools Week, I ask for your continued prayers for our teachers and students. May God watch over them and allow them to be inspired, to grow, and to enjoy new opportunities together!

Registration for the '21-'22 school year is NOW underway! To learn how to join our amazing preschool, please visit our website at: preschoolatstfrancis.com or contact Shelley Freeman at: shelley.freeman@stfrancisraleigh.org