

February
in the
Outdoor Classroom

In our special classroom, we are intentional in creating the invitation to play by making it interesting and engaging. The children discovered a Pet Supermarket, an Animal Hospital with an X-Ray Room, a Pet Pharmacy, a Rescue Shelter, an Agility Course, a Horse Farm, and a Mini-Swamp. Since movability is empowering to children, one of the many benefits of their outdoor play is that the larger play space enables them to move the materials in a wider area. Our 'little saints' skills develop naturally as they explore, discover and experiment. Consequently, their learning as they play has the greatest value.

At the Pet Supermarket, our friends were able to purchase pet food, treats, toys, grooming supplies, and health supplements for dogs, cats, and birds. The large bags of food in varying weights and the boxes of treats were filled with rocks, paper, bubble wrap or beans. As the children transported the goods, they worked on their core stability, balance, and perseverance.

At the Animal Hospital, the children explored the many realistic props which encouraged them to be veterinarians for small and large animals, veterinarian technicians, and pet owners. The X-Ray Room was a multi-learning experience. Our friends observed many x-rays of real pets and consulted with each other as they discussed their findings and made recommendations. After viewing the x-rays, the children in Pre-K and Kindergarten delighted in recording their findings on a Radiology Report Form. This is a fun and powerful way to promote emergent writing skills. It is empowering because it is *spontaneous* writing. The veterinarians' conversations were revealing. One could hear them sounding out the words to spell and one could hear them encouraging each other to look at the alphabet poster as a reference to writing the letters. All the pets were lovingly cared for and all the treatment plans were effective.

The Agility Course consisted of a dog walk, a tunnel, a tire jump, a pause table, five weave poles and a standard jump. For the younger classes, we set up only the age appropriate parts of the course. The children enjoyed pretending to be dogs participating in the course or taking their stuffed animals through the course. Young children need many opportunities to move their bodies and fostering gross motor development is vital for brain development.

Pets enrich our lives. They teach children nurturing skills. They encourage a feeling of empathy for others. They motivate children to think/learn. They play an important role in providing support during transitional periods like a family illness or breakdown. A pet's unconditional love fills our hearts with joy and happiness. We love pets and we are grateful for them.







