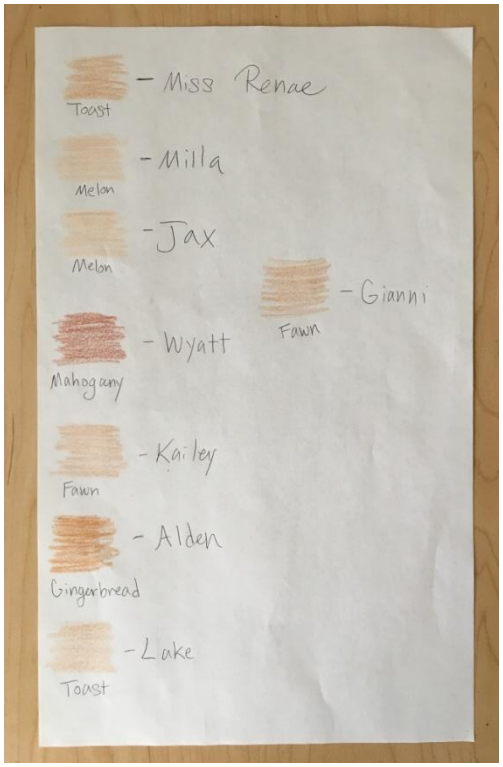
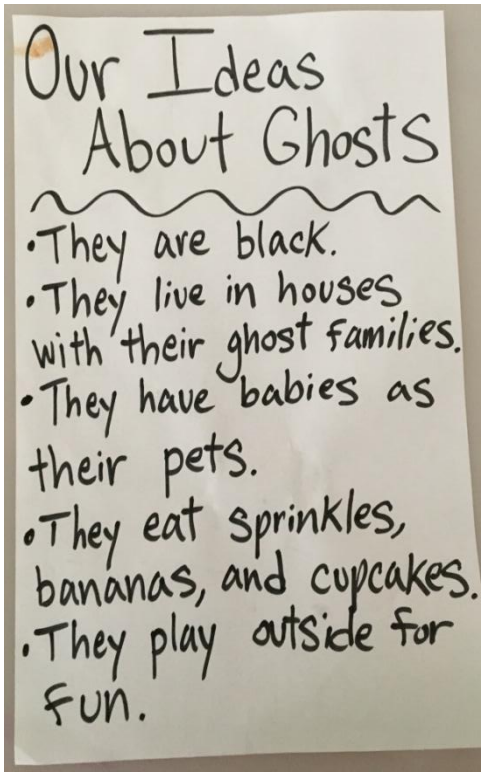
Creating a Community of Learners

The beginning of the school year is an important time to develop relationships. Preschoolers, especially those who are 2 to 3 years-old, tend to be very egocentric. They require experiences that give them the opportunity to gain characteristics like empathy and compassion and that help them learn about how they fit into the world around them.

One experience that helps children to develop a sense of community is to talk about our similarities and differences. We do this daily over lunch and snack, where we have open-ended discussions comparing and contrasting things we like, things we have done or seen, questions we have, etc. We also participate in more intentional experiences, like identifying our skin colors and looking at big blown up pictures of our faces. These kinds of discussions benefit children now and in the future because they help children be accepting of cultural and physical differences.



In our classroom, we have a variety of skin tone art materials. Pictured above are "our colors" according to our colored pencil. The children continued to "match" themselves and their classmates after the initial experience.



We also hold regular discussions. Sometimes there is more participation than at other times. Recently, the children became very fascinated with a specific page from the book Good Night, Gorilla (*pictured below*). They speculated about it: "It's a ghost!" "Boo!" "He's scared." "He's alone." They determined it was a ghost and we discussed what ghosts are like and how they live. By recording their responses in front of them as they gave them, they are gaining literacy skills. Group discussions promote important social skills like speaking in turn and using expressive language. They also require self-control to stay engaged.