

Witches: A Look at the Learning Process

As we've been exploring storytelling and drama more in the classroom, the children have been particularly interested in witches. As with any new interest that emerges in the classroom, we have been anxious to see what the children know about the subject and what it is about it that piques their interest. Here's how we've done this and here's what we've seen:

A Conversation about Witches

Miss Renae: "What do witches do?"

Jax: "They laugh. Heh heh heh!!"

Kailey: "They have brooms."

Wyatt: "And wands!"

He turns to Kailey.

Wyatt: "I turn you into a frog! Poppity pop!"

Miss Renae: "Oh, so witches can turn people into things and they use magic words."

Jax: "Dabra Kabra! You're a frog!"

Milla: "Zippity zip!"



*Group discussions are a critical part in this process of learning about class interests. Teachers lead by asking open-ended questions and recording the children's responses on a white board. By conducting these discussions this way, the children **practice communication, understanding, and having back-and-forth conversations**. Writing responses as teachers repeat them aloud gives **exposure to written language**.*

*Relevant provocations are another way we learn about and then build on interests. A provocation is an open-ended activity that **invites children to explore and express themselves and their ideas**. Because of the children's comments about the magical qualities of witches, a potion provocation was provided: "How will you make your witch potion?"*

Carlina Rinaldi, a Professor of Early Education and Director of the Municipal Preschools of Reggio, Emilia, Italy, once said, 'If a child says, 'It's raining because God is crying', we could easily destroy his theory by telling him that it's because of clouds. How can we cultivate the child's intention to research? How can we cultivate the courage to make theories and explanations?' Whether witches and magic are real is irrelevant to our work in the classroom. We study witches because we want to do everything possible to encourage questions, deep thinking, and emphasize process rather than product. To continue to build on this interest, we will be exploring witch garb like hats, wands, and brooms by studying pictures, and materials, and by designing and creating witch things of our own.

Another way we explore ideas is telling group stories about topics of interest and acting them out. The teacher will start with an idea. For example, in this story, we started with the phrase, "One day, there was a witch." The teacher will then ask open-ended questions to prompt the story. As the children respond, all responses are repeated aloud and physically recorded so the children can see them. Here is the beginning of a story we wrote this week:

Our Witch Story

One day, there was a witch. She took all the pictures! She took the family pictures! "She took mine! She took mine!" The children shouted. "She even took Alden's!" She took them to the faraway trees. "Then, we have to trap her in a trap!" The children said. "She took our magnets and our kitchen, too. We will have to take her broom away. Then, she will fall down on the ground. We will also take her wand."