

A Day at River Rock School

As you enter, you may feel as if you are entering a home. In the kitchen, you might find a chatty group of people baking something. Children greet you with curiosity, questions and above all hospitality. Someone will volunteer to be your tour guide and you will be shown the block room,



the computer room, the drama/dance room that doubles as the group meeting space, the art studio, the “purple table” room and the coat room. Children are in small multiage groups or alone, engaged with paint, blocks, cardboard and tape, sewing materials, cooking supplies, woodworking materials, books of all sorts, maps, globes, natural science supplies and tools, clay, and mathematical equipment.

Join the children seated in a circle on the floor for group discussions. They may be discussing one child’s or group of children’s project. Or perhaps a theme that emerged from group interests such as animals or mechanics or Martin Luther King or nature study. It may be teacher’s choice of a topic or idea, such as geometric forms or a history timeline.

After the discussion, the children disperse with individual assignment folders to work on their writing, math or reading. The teacher circulates to guide their work and may call a small group together for instruction in a particular skill, like multiplication or the silent “e” rule.



During reading time, children nestle in cozy beanbag chairs, lounge on the floor or sit at tables to read their choice of literature. The teachers sit off to the side so that when a child comes to read out loud, they have privacy and don’t disturb the silent readers.



No bell signals lunchtime. The children put tablecloths on the tables choose their seats. Lively lunch time conversation punctures the air. Some of the older children cook their lunches and help the younger ones warm their lunches. The teachers eat and chat with the children.

Unless it is brutally cold (perhaps minus 15) it’s time to go outside. The large open area offers space for play and exploration. Fort building is a favorite. Children sort out relationship dynamics, fairness, governance, scarcity of materials and more. Shovels are handy to dig in the earth. There are tubes to crawl and roll in, wooden spools to climb on and jump from. Children run and talk and walk and sometimes lie on the tire swing to look up at the clouds.

Later in the day, children gather in two circles to hear part of the current chapter book being read. For the younger group it might be My Father’s Dragon, while the older group listens to A Wrinkle in Time. The children draw intently as they listen. After story there is more time for quiet folder work. Depending on the day, you might see foreign language instruction, a geography lesson, a discussion about a group theme like “bridges” or “architecture” or instruction in a new art area like crayon resist. At the end of the day you will see children clean up before coming together to hear a short fairy tale or myth.

During the course of the day you will notice the absence of many things typical of other school settings for example: there are no tests, no grades, no strict age segregation. There is a plentiful array of children’s work on the walls. There is no pre determined curriculum or any one textbook being used by all. There are tables and chairs that encourage collaborative learning, as opposed to individual desks. There are art materials in almost every room.