CULTURAL NEWSLETTER

October 1, 2018

Dear Parents,

We've begun our **Zoology** studies with our first invertebrate animal, the **porifera (sponge).** The children will get an up-close experience of what it's like to be a hungry animal that cannot move to find food, which is the porifera's daily challenge. (Someone will be selected to bravely play the role of the porifera with his/her feet stuck to the floor as 13 hungry "fishes" swim around the room to get their "food" (Goldfish crackers.) After the drama of the "feeding frenzy" We will discuss how all seven characteristics of living things manifest in this simple animal. (Remember that to stay alive all living things must Eat, Excrete, Breathe, Move, Grow, Reproduce, and Sense.)

We will study another type of sea animal that has no backbone, **the cnideria.** This group of animals include **jellyfish, sea anemones, and hydras.** They have sac-like bodies with tentacles which have specialized stinging cells to capture and paralyze their prey before they bring it to the cnideria's mouth. Ironically, these tentacles also provide shelter for small fish which are prey for other sea animals. We will see "Jellies," a beautiful video produced by the Monterey Bay Aquarium. The children will also create paper models of sea anemones, complete with the nematocysts (stinging cells). We'll also have a 3-D model of a jelly each child will "swim" with around the room. Please do ask them for details about this one! (Don't be shocked if they mention an umbrella…)

****** A Special Note on What We Call This Animal ******

We all grew up learning about beautiful sea creatures called JELLY FISH. In fact we still hear this name used … even at the Monterey Bay Aquarium! However, if you listen closely, you'll also hear people talk about JELLIES. This is the term I prefer to use in class because – as your child will soon learn – JELLIES ARE NOT FISH! Fish have backbones and many other characteristics that make them a more advanced animal. We'll meet this group of animals-with-a-backbone (i.e. vertebrates) in the New Year.

Our invertebrate studies will continue with a beautiful – and more complex - phylum, **Echinoderms**. If you've ever visited the "touch pool" at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, you're already familiar with the most obvious characteristic of the phylum/family. **Echinoderms have an external skeleton with spines.** They may be long, as

on the sea urchin, or short and bumpy as on the sea star. Echinoderms usually have five arms. The space between the arms may be filled, as with the Sand Dollar and sea urchin; or these arms may be separate as with the sea star. **The children will be creating their own echinoderm models (sea urchins),** showing its basic characteristics: Radial symmetry; a body divided into five parts; and spiny skin. They're really quite beautiful, and I think you'll want to set up a display in your home!

A note about SHARING: The children are welcome to bring in anything that is related to ***what we are studying at the time.*** So at this time they are welcome to bring in anything having to do with porifera. This could be a natural sponge or a favorite toy.

I wish you and your family a cozy and happy autumn ahead.

Sincerely,

Toni Tomacci

"The secret of good teaching is to regard children's intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown, to grow under the heat of flaming imagination. Our aim therefore is not merely to make children understand, and still less to force them to memorize, but so to touch their imaginations as to enthuse them to their inmost core."

- Maria Montessori