Fall Seasonal Overview

Building Connections

To set the stage for a successful monthly Environmental Education program with Frank Wagner Elementary School Kindergarten students, teachers, and Oxbow, we focused our fall season lessons and gatherings on building connections.

We intentionally fostered connections between the kindergarteners and:

- **Oxbow Farmers!** Using language like “Farmers can be your teachers” and developing a group contract (we used a model known as a “CommuniTree”) laid the foundation for expectations and goals to enable students to learn and have fun. We created a video to introduce the farmers to the students and to show them what to expect when visiting Oxbow. Students explored the parts of a pumpkin plant and investigated how pumpkins change over time through the decomposition process. Students participated in the Fall Farm Adventure field trip to Oxbow and each received a sugar pie pumpkin to take home. Teachers used these pumpkins in the classroom for months to make observations comparing the pumpkins rotting under different conditions.

- **Classroom learning!** Students were focusing on trees, apples and seasons in their classrooms. Our “CommuniTree” group contract and metaphor helped them review the parts of a tree; the classes revisited the document as it changed through the seasons. At Oxbow, we harvested and ate apples and investigated the apple trees as habitats. As a special way to experience the cycle of an apple tree, we made apple cider together! Oxbow provided outdoor science toolkits for each classroom, so teachers and students could take their learning outdoors; this was an idea that originated from the teachers themselves.

- **Nature!** We used the first few lessons to work with the students to answer the question, “What is nature?” Students sorted objects and behaviors into “nature” and “not nature.” We used the phrase, “Nature can be your classroom,” showing that activities such as learning can happen in nature. Before their farm field trip, we used the theme “A farm is a place in nature.” to the farm.

- **Oxbow!** Students were each given a pair of boots and a coat to wear during their Fall Farm Adventure to keep them dry during the rainy months and to give them a sense of ownership of, and increased connection to, the farm. Another way we increased connection to the farm was bringing carrots and grapes for students to taste when visiting the school. Students were asked to draw themselves with their favorite veggie to increase connection to the farm.

- **Between lessons!** Oxbow created several linking lessons and themes, inviting students to explore nature and investigate the soil beyond Oxbow back at school. Additionally, we created videos for students to watch during the time between lessons which reviewed expectations, introduced new concepts, introduced what students should expect for their next field trip or lesson, and welcomed them back.
  - Meet the farmers, September:  
    - [https://youtu.be/lsqmn1bFqfA](https://youtu.be/lsqmn1bFqfA)
  - Welcome to your fall field trip, November  
    - [https://youtu.be/Bbe4dkjgE-8](https://youtu.be/Bbe4dkjgE-8)