

# PreK, K Study Group

Thursday, November 5, 2009

## MINUTES

Facilitator: Dr. Sean Walmsley

- 8:00 Welcome: Alice Learn
- 8:30 – 9:30 Silent Sustained Professional Reading (articles/browse books)
- 9:30 – 9:45 Break
- 9:45 – 10:15 Small group discussion
- 10:15 – 11:15 Sean –Presentation on Centers  
Sean made a presentation on centers (see attached PDF), and handed out an excerpt on centers from Beaty, J.J., & Pratt, L. (2007) *Early Literacy in Preschool and Kindergarten*. Upper Saddle River, NJ, Pearson. (Establishing the Preschool Language Learning Environment (pp 55-68). [In the Study Group binders]. One of the challenges raised by participants was how to manage centers; another was how best to integrate centers into all the other components of the PreK and Kindergarten curriculum.
- 11:15 – 12:15 Lunch
- 12:15 – 1:15 Silent Sustained Professional Reading (articles/browse books)
- 1:15 – 1:45 Small group discussion on instructional philosophies from professional reading  
In small groups, participants discussed instructional philosophies from the books/articles being read, and prepared preliminary statements of beliefs to share with the whole group.
- 1:45 – 2:00 Break
- 2:00 – 2:45 Whole group: Drafting Horseheads Instructional Philosophy  
Groups shared their preliminary statements of beliefs with the whole group, and these were charted for further discussion and revision.
- 2:45 – 3:15 Finalizing Friday Classroom Visits; Next Steps for December Study Group/Classroom Visits  
Sean asked the Study Group to think about the recommendations in his report about how to minimize dittos and differentiate instruction especially in small group work; how to increase the amount of read-alouds (at least 2 per day), and make literature more prominently displayed in classrooms; and how to maximize displays of children's work. He shared some ideas for charting the books read aloud, and using these instructionally (e.g., differentiating between fiction and nonfiction).  
Sean also asked the group to consider (on a voluntary basis) the possibility of working on some Reggio Emilia themes (e.g., Adopting a tree by the school, and studying it throughout the year--possibly across several years). In the discussion that followed, the Study Group decided to focus December's meeting on how to create "meaty" themes.
- 3:15 Closing comments – Alice

### Participants

Abrunzo, Virginia  
Bailey, Anne Marie  
Barnstead, Lisa  
Berger, Louis  
Bower, Megan  
Burger, Joan  
Close, Abbie  
Darmstadt, Jill  
Fazzary, Susan  
Fuksman, Anna  
Hartman, Madeline  
Henry, Heather  
Kamas, Shannah  
Krebs, Jennifer  
Learn, Alice  
Palmer, Mari  
Scanlon, Betsy  
Scaptura, Elizabeth  
Sekella, Jillian  
Smith, Jane  
Sotero, Patricia  
Standish, Terri  
Stoltzfus, Kim  
Suggs, Mary Ann  
Yorio, Jean

### Steering Committee

Abrunzo, Virginia  
Krebs, Jennifer  
Learn, Alice  
Scanlon, Betsy  
Sotero, Patricia  
Stoltzfus, Kim  
Walmsley, Sean

# THEME-TEACHING

Themes can be:

**PLANNED**

Topic(s) are chosen by the teacher, activities organized in advance

Typically called themes, or projects

or

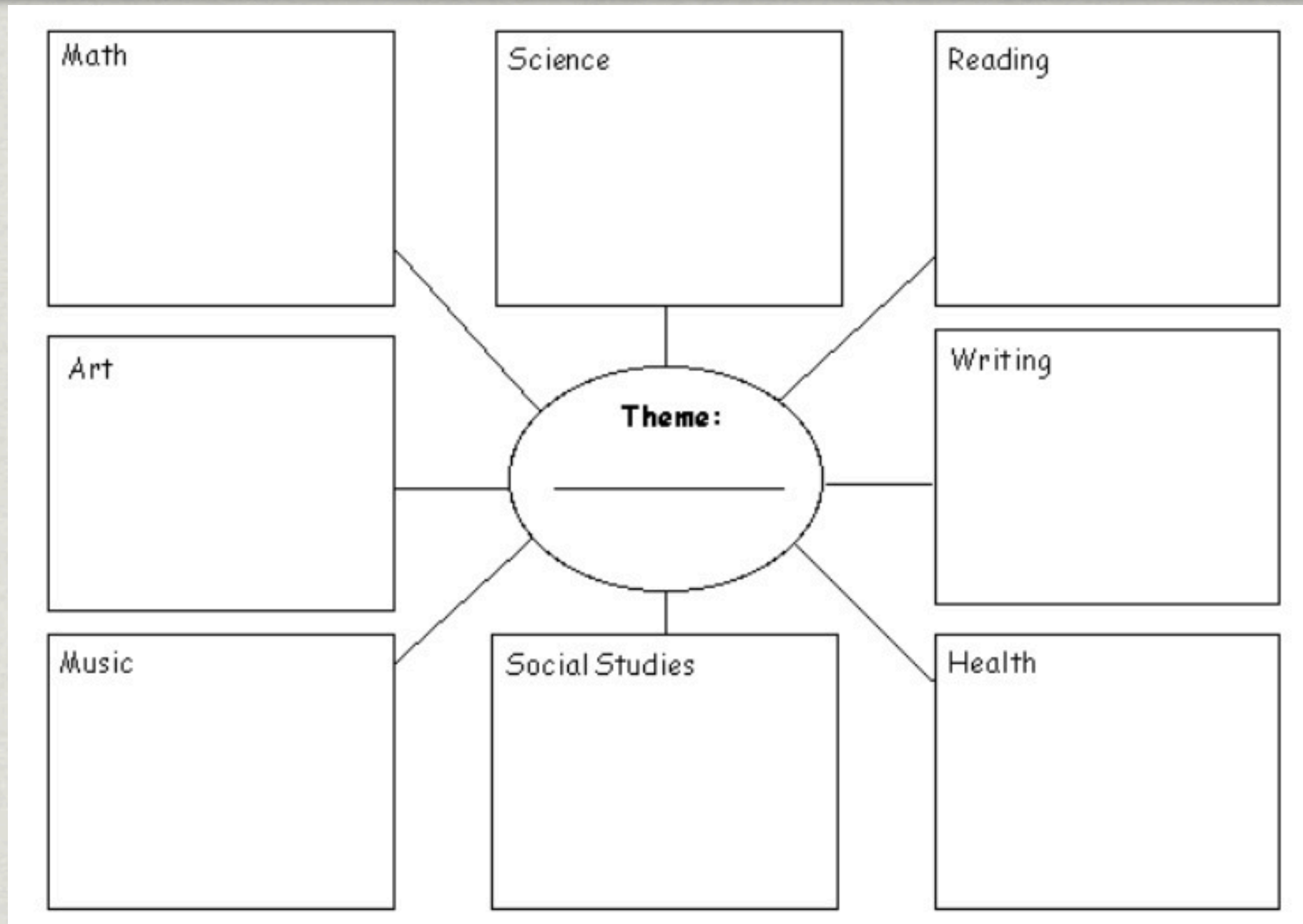
**SPONTANEOUS**

Topics arise from children's questions or interests, teacher follows children's lead

Typically called inquiries



# *Traditional planned theme:*



*Start by putting the topic in the center of a web, then create activities from different subject areas*



# Rethinking planned themes

- Themes should focus on topics that deepen and extend children's understanding of the world
- Themes should dig in deep and explore big ideas, not just details
- Themes need authentic activities that support children's understanding, and challenge them to deepen and extend their knowledge
- Themes aren't better if they incorporate more subject areas, they are better if the ones they do incorporate really contribute
- The main focus of a theme is content, not skills (skills can be tucked inside themes)

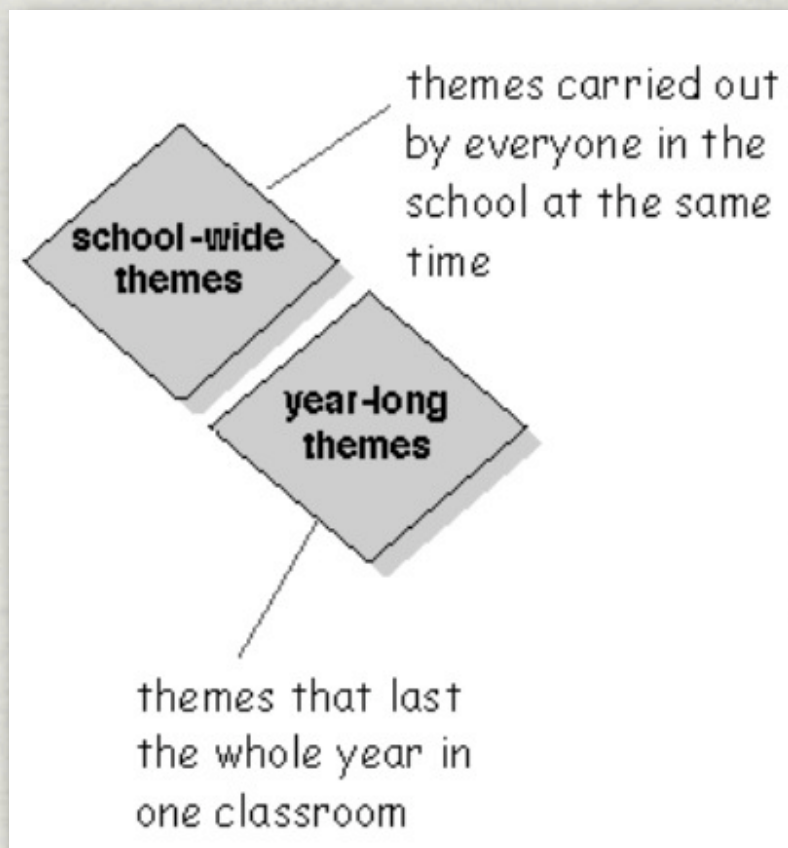


# Different kinds of themes

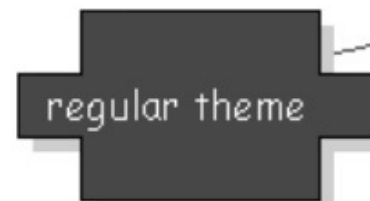
- Calendar-related
- Subject-area
- Biographical (authors, illustrators, artists, etc)
- Conceptual
- Form
- Current events



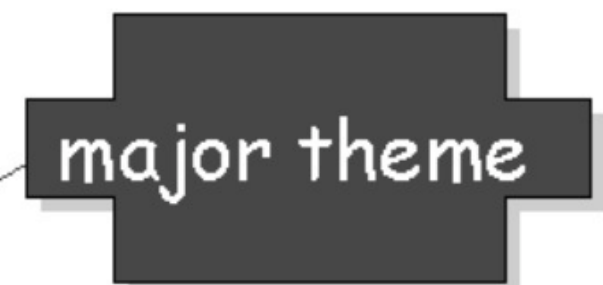
# How big? How long?



day or two in K;  
up to a week in  
6th grade



about a week in  
K; about a month  
in upper grades



about 2 weeks in  
K; up to 10  
weeks in upper  
grades



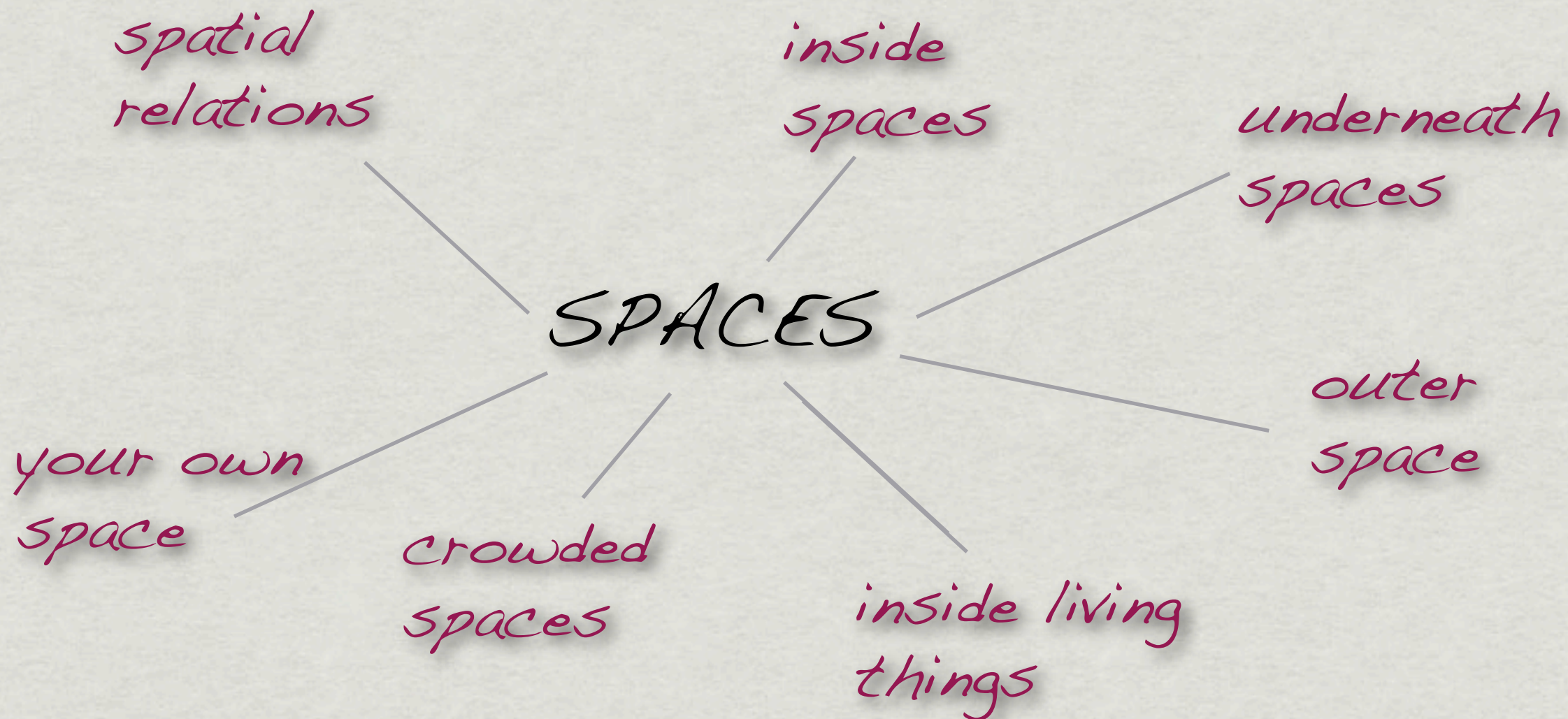
# Getting a theme planned

- Choose a topic
- Brainstorm dimensions of the topic (with colleagues, preferably)
- Bump up your knowledge
- Block the theme in terms of subtopics
- For each sub-topic, create instructional activities
- Teach skills within activities



# OK, let's put this into action!

- Choose a topic
- Brainstorm dimensions





# OK, now you do it...

■ Choose a topic, from one of these:

CONTAINERS or HATS

FIREFIGHTERS

BATS (the ones with pointy ears)

Van GOGH

POND

FOLK TALE/FAIRY TALE

■ Brainstorm dimensions



# THEME PLANNER

Theme:

- ☐ biographical
- ☐ calendar
- ☐ conceptual
- ☐ content area:
  - ☐ social studies
  - ☐ science
  - ☐ math
  - ☐ music
  - ☐ art
  - ☐ health
  - ☐ other
- ☐ current events
- ☐ form

Major Topics/Big Ideas:

Links to other areas (if appropriate:)

Social Studies:

Science:

Music/Art:

Math:

Health:



# OK, now you do it...

## ■ Bump up your knowledge

*This is all about extending and deepening YOUR knowledge of the topics of your theme.*

*This is NOT about instructional activities*

*Bumping up your knowledge will help refine your subtopics!*

*Sources:*

- *Books, magazines, journal articles*
- *Internet*
- *People who know a lot about your topics*
- *Film-Documentaries*



# Blocking a theme...



## Van Gogh Theme

Sue McWhinnie, 1st Grade, Northville Elementary New Milford, CT

### Read aloud

*Visiting the Art Museum*  
(Marc Brown/Laurie Kresny)  
*Van Gogh* (Mike Venezia)

**Discussed, looked at:** Van Gogh's self-portraits

**Discussed, looked at:** Van Gogh's paintings (emphasis on style, colors, brush strokes, etc.)

### Read together

*Vincent Van Gogh* (Ernest Raboff)

**Teacher Resources:** Van Gogh calendar (Metropolitan Museum); Richard Muhlberger's *What Makes a Van Gogh a Van Gogh?*; collection of Van Gogh postcards and paintings

### Intro

**Activity** Print up "tickets" to museum, chart who's been to a museum, who hasn't, different kinds of museums

**Activity** Chart things in the museum children find significant; make a class book

### Self portraits

**Activity** Children draw self-portraits, using mirrors

### Van Gogh paintings

**Activity** Children pick their favorite Van Gogh painting, and draw it as they see it

### Van Gogh stories

**Activity** Children write about what is significant to them about Van Gogh

### Cafe Van Gogh

**Activity** Children create a "cafe," invite parents and friends to share what they've learned, drawn, and written about Van Gogh



# Elements of teaching a theme

## 1 Introduction to the theme *(getting the theme started)*

—Connect the theme to children's prior experiences; find out what children know or want to explore; draw children into an unfamiliar topic with a powerful read-aloud.

## 3 Culminating Activity *(something to bring the theme to closure)*

—Share what's been learned with children in other grades; make a display in the school cafeteria; put on a readers' theatre; make a film-strip or video; take a field trip; invite parents and friends into the classroom to learn about the theme. (Make sure the culminating activity reinforces or transforms what's been learned in the theme, and don't let it become too big an event. Not all themes lend themselves to culminating activities!)

## 2 Activities within each subtopic *(you might spend a day or a week on each aspect of the theme)*

—Reading aloud, guided/shared reading, independent reading related to the theme.

—Writing (e.g., writing journals related to the reading, keeping track of an experiment, writing stories related to the theme).

—Speaking, Listening, Viewing, Representing (e.g., having children talk about their reading, watching a film on whales, listening to a speaker on raptors; taking a field trip to a pond; drawing what's taking place).

—Activities (e.g., making a class collaborative book about apples, measuring dinosaurs on the playground).

—Projects (e.g., children exploring a self-chosen or negotiated topic on their own or in small groups, over an extended period). Projects will typically span across several days or weeks.

## 4 Assessment *(finding out what's been learned, how well the theme went)*

—If the theme's purpose is to enlarge children's understanding of an important concept, make sure your assessment focuses on this understanding. Use portfolios to have children tell you what they've learned, and provide evidence. Use checklists to see what skills have been learned. Ask children and parents to give you feedback on the theme itself.



# Katz--Project Approach

- Phase One --Getting Projects Started. *Children share their experiences with the topic--in writing, dramatic play, centers*
- Phase Two -- Projects in Progress. *Taking trips, bringing new information back for writing, discussion, dramatic play, investigation, etc.*
- Phase Three-- Consolidating Projects. *Culminating activities to share what the children have documented and learned*



# Skills...

## ■ Teaching skills within activities

