

# Exploring Fire Safety

Preschool Classroom  
November 2002 – March 2003

## Overview



### Beginning the Project

One September morning the preschoolers had to evacuate the building because smoke was detected near our classroom. The class participated in the fire evacuation and waited patiently outside for the fire truck and fire fighters to arrive. After they gave an all clear, the children wanted to get a closer look at the fire truck. Students went out to the fire truck and asked the fire fighters questions about fires. The fire fighters answered questions and let the teachers take pictures of everyone near the fire truck.

During October, the preschool class visited the local mall and participated in various activities for Fire Safety Awareness Month. Urbana fire fighters set up stations that students visited to learn about fire safety. Students watched a video, saw a puppet presentation, listened to the fire fighters sing a rap song about putting out fires, observed a fire fighter putting on equipment to go fight a fire and lastly, slid down a fire pole. Fire fighters distributed fire hats at the fire safety awareness exhibit. The teachers brought extra hats back to include in the dramatic playroom.

As time passed, teachers noticed that fire safety was still foremost in the students' minds. Fire trucks they saw as they drove to school intrigued them. Teachers noticed that the students began wearing fire hats in the dramatic playroom. This play initiated the idea that fire safety is an important topic for students to study. In November, the teachers held a team-planning meeting and created a teacher web of fire safety possibilities for study.

Teachers wanted to know what the students already understood about the topic fire safety. This was explored in the first phase of the project. To begin the project, teachers shared personal stories about fires. The students took turns sharing memory stories about their experiences with fire safety, too. During large group meetings, students brainstormed what they knew about fire and fire safety (Student Fire Safety Topic Web 1). This helped the teachers assess students' basic understandings. Teachers questioned students about all aspects of fire safety. They probed the students to find out what starts a fire. They asked how we use fires and how do you put out a fire. Also, the teachers inquired about things that alert us to fire or smoke in a room. Did the children know the answers to these questions? Teachers were interested in students' misconceptions about fire and wanted to know what children would like to investigate about fire safety.

Teachers chose clay, play dough, and boxes and junk for students to express their memories about fire or fire safety equipment. Students shared their creations at large group. As they told their stories, students asked more questions, giving the group more avenues to pursue. The teachers wrote the questions on sentence strips and placed them on the wall for everyone to read. These questions became the starting point to further explore the topic of fire safety.



The student created her memory of a fire coat out of paper.



This student wears his fire hat that he made from memory.

### Developing the Project

To facilitate small group work, the teachers categorized students' questions into three basic areas to pursue:

1. What causes a fire?
2. Where do we find smoke alarms and fire extinguishers?
3. What equipment does a fire fighter use?

The students chose one of the questions to pursue further and formed small study groups. As time went, on other small groups formed to answer additional questions about fire safety. Each morning, children chose from a variety of activities to explore the topic of fire safety during project/activity time.

They collected data in many ways. Students formed surveys to answer their questions. Teachers invited guest speakers to come to the classroom to talk with the children. Those interested in fire extinguishers and smoke alarms began exploring the safety features of the building in which our school is located. Students took walking tours of the building to find the smoke alarms and fire extinguishers. They took digital photographs of the building's fire safety equipment.

The whole class went to a local Fire Station. Teachers documented the field trip by taking digital video. Children drew observational sketches of the various fire equipment that they saw. They made a representation of a fire truck using boxes and junk.

During project/activity time, students created surveys and redesigned the question about what causes a fire. They not only asked parents and students from the preschool room for their opinions but they also approached students in the kindergarten-first grade room next door. Teachers helped students conduct experiments that demonstrated the relationship of air to fire. Students were eager to share their new knowledge with their peers and parents.



The child surveyed classmates if they thought a clock could start a fire?



This child shared his survey data in graph form.

### Concluding the Project

The students redesigned the dramatic playroom into a working fire station. They worked for two weeks during project/activity time to plan and implement their changes. The students built the equipment needed for a firehouse to operate by using materials in the classroom. Children created a computer, a computer mouse and telephone from boxes and junk materials. They used large pieces of cardboard for beds. Children designed and put together pillows and blankets out of fleece and cotton batting. They placed a fire pole in one corner of the room. Their hung their ear hung on pegs while they waited for a fire call. Once back from a fire call, the fire fighters wrote a report. The teachers assisted in writing the details of the call on chart paper. It was placed in the room for everyone to read. The teacher created an iMovie that captured their dramatic play in this area: "A Day in the Life of a Fire Fighter."

Other students created fire trucks, fire extinguishers, smoke alarms, fire coats and fire helmets from boxes and junk materials. One small group made a model house with the proper safety equipment in it. Another small group of children wrote and dramatized a play about using fire safety tips. The teaching assistant videotaped their play and created an iMovie entitled, “Greatest Fire Safety Movie.”

To conclude the fire safety project, the students and teachers invited family members and friends to see their movies. The children lead their parents around the room to see the walls that displayed the process of the fire safety investigations. Students also shared collective books about their newly gained knowledge of fire safety.



The student demonstrates the fire hose on the fire truck.



The student slides down the fire pole.

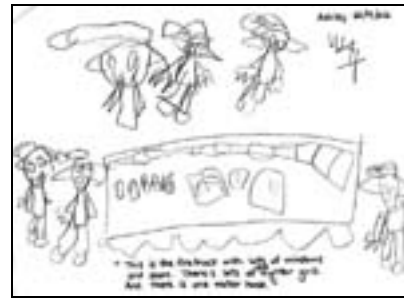
### **What did the children learn?**

At the conclusion of the fire safety project, the teachers noted that the students became very aware of what to do in case of a fire. Students became familiar with vocabulary associated with fire safety. They talked about smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, and tools that fire fighters used. They learned how to escape from their homes and other buildings. They practiced crawling low where they could escape the rising smoke. They dramatized “stop, drop, and roll,” if their clothes caught on fire.

Many students became intrigued with the life of a fire fighter. They gained an understanding of what is in a fire station and how fire fighters live during their 24-hour shifts. They learned that fire fighters could be women as well as men. They also became familiar with the protective clothing worn by fire fighters. Most importantly, students gained an appreciation of the danger of fire, and how to keep themselves safe. They now tell others not to touch matches or a fire!



This is the student's drawing of the Champaign Fire Station



This student drew female fire fighters around the fire truck.