

Mary Kate Baldwin – Lower School Science

"We made rain today!" beams Mary Kate Baldwin as third graders file out of her science room. This meteorological miracle occurs, she explains, when students put a pan of water on a stove to make water vapor. When the vapor hits a cookie sheet filled with ice, water droplets form on the bottom. As they grow too big to hold on, they fall as rain, completing the water cycle.



"It's always an adventure in my room," laughs Ms. Baldwin. Twenty years of teaching Lower School science seem only to have fueled her enthusiasm. "Children bring all kinds of crazy stuff to put on the 'touch time' shelf: nests, snake eggs, dragonfly wings, cicada shells, fossils. We mix up strange concoctions, we make it rain, we raise mealworms and watch composting red worms turn apple cores into healthy soil for plants. We have so much fun in science!"

Pre-k and kindergarten children agree. They delight in surprising their parents with words like phytoplankton and zooplankton as they discuss the ocean food chain. What they don't realize is that Ms. Baldwin's science curriculum is preparing them, even as 4- and 5-year-olds, for their eighth grade trip to SeaCamp. The curriculum builds as students advance through Lower School. By fifth grade they are making models of sea sponges, learning the form and function of each part. By the time they collect live sea sponges in Florida, they recall that lesson and confidently demonstrate their knowledge. SeaCamp instructors are typically impressed and Ms. Baldwin is very proud.

The Lower School Science curriculum is far-ranging. In the fall, for example, fifth graders compare the flora and fauna of short grass, mixed grass and tallgrass prairies, and perform a field study at the Wildwood preserve where they collect the four dominant grasses of the tallgrass prairie and search for goldenrod galls. Don't know what a gall is? Just ask a fifth grader! (Galls are what is formed when an insect lays eggs in the stem of a plant and it swells.)

Ms. Baldwin's hobby is herpetology, so there is an ever-changing assortment of native reptiles and amphibians in her classroom. Some are permanent residents, others are visitors. At special times students have the opportunity to look at, examine, touch and even hold the snakes and lizards, if they wish. Watching them, Ms. Baldwin is clearly in her element.