LESSON CONNECTIONS

LITERACY

We introduced our classroom to Paxton the Pleco by first reading "The Rainbow Fish" by Marcus Pfister. Like the Rainbow Fish, plecos have special scales, called scutes.

MATH/SCIENCE

We tied in biology, ecology and the mathematics of patterns into our lessons about Paxton.

NUTRITION (FARM TO ECE)

This year one of our Center's major initiatives was to increase the children's understanding of farm to ECE lessons and healthy eating. Turns out our plecos were a perfect teaching partner.
Before we began our pleco lessons, we started our day by reading "The Rainbow Fish." Just like the fish in the book, plecos have special scales (called scutes), too. We asked the children to guess which fish in our tank they thought had special scales. While our pleco's scales don't sparkle, they did earn his fish family the nickname, "armored catfish."
ARMORED CATFISH

To tie in the lesson with dramatic play and science, the children tried on their very own catfish armor.
ARMORED CATFISH

Because we knew our pleco had to stay in the water, we created a set of pleco armor that mimicked the way a pleco might feel. We cut out scutes from a cardboard box and colored them with patterns typical to the markings on a pleco. Some plecos even have different textures on their scutes, so we used sand to add a new layer to the armor.

EVALUATION

After the children were able to feel and try on the pleco armor, we asked them to create their own. We provided photos different types of plecos and the children created their own pleco patterned costumes.
MATH/SCIENCE

To get the children brainstorming about our next topic, we asked them to share their ideas about why they thought plecos have special scales and different patterns. We talked about how plecos live in fresh water rivers with rocks, mud and driftwood. Their scutes help protect them and let them blend in to their surroundings.
EYE SPY

Plecos even like the dark! So, before our afternoon quiet/nap time, we talked about how plecos are nocturnal and turned out the lights in the classroom. We had the children turn to the child next to them and look at their eyes. When the lights were off, their pupils (little black circles in the eyes) got bigger and when the lights were on, they got smaller. Plecos have eyes that work in similar ways, and our children got to try some pleco specs on for themselves!
To add to the dramatic effect of the pleco eyes, we transformed a few pairs of jumbo sunglasses into pleco specs for the kids to try on. These glasses showed how the pleco's omega eyes work like our pupils. We cut out paper decals to look like pleco's eyes in different levels of light. We explained that when more of the lens could be seen, the darker it was for the pleco's eyes to see.

EVALUATION

As a take-home project to do with their families, we asked the children to take a scavenger hunt for rocks, twigs and other things plecos might like in their environment. The children brought them in to create their own terrariums for display.
FARM TO ECE

Sharing our lessons about Paxton allowed us a new opportunity to tie in our pets in the classroom with our farm to ECE projects that the children have been growing.
PLECO PLANTS

Over the past school year, our Pre-K classes have been growing their own vegetables to share with their friends and families and to enjoy during lunch. It turns out, plecos also love the very same vegetables we've been growing in our garden, like beans, zucchini and lettuce!

EVALUATION

We gave the children some options of the different vegetables that are safe for plecos and they had grown in the garden. They chose lettuce and beans. During lunch, we chowed down on the same veggies and had the children guess by vote which they thought the pleco would enjoy most.
Later that day, during naptime one of our teachers safely blanched the beans and prepared the lettuce. Before our transition to the end of the day, we talked to the children about how we had to blanche the beans (to make it safe for the pleco to eat, just as we cook some of our vegetables) and had the children help drop the beans and lettuce in the tank. (We speared the vegetables with a spoon to help them sink to where our plecos live.) Plecos are more active at night, and it's also when they eat.

The next morning, the bean was gone and the lettuce remained--just as most of the children had guessed.
PLECO PLANS

Throughout the same week, we talked more about the pleco's habitat, how they are bottom feeders who scour the floors in search of algae and other plants to eat. We also discussed how they help keep our tank clean, ensuring the other fish have a clean tank to live in, as well. For this, we played a pleco pickup game, where we scattered different items of favorite pleco foods (images of plants/veggies/algae) and mixed them about with other aquarium items (rocks/decorations/etc.) and had the children race to pick up the plecos favorites. We even made our science area a pleco cave for the children to view the terrariums they made, try on pleco lips (using dust masks we cut out/created pleco fish suckermouths) and magnifying glasses to search for our pleco in the tank during the day when Paxton often hides.