Gerbils in the Willow Room
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The Willow Room

Our classroom:

- Gerbils share the classroom with:
  - 19 Preschoolers aged 4-5 (we call ourselves the Willows)
  - Two lead teachers and one assistant teacher
  - 10 freshwater fish
Introducing Gerbils

We talked a lot about the gerbils entering the classroom before we brought them in. Children practiced sitting quietly in “Gerbil Area” to learn how to appropriately act around the gerbil cage.
Introducing Gerbils

Before bringing in the gerbils, we had the gerbil cage fully set up with a laminated picture of a gerbil inside.
The following are learning centers and activities inspired by our classroom pets:

- Voting on gerbils’ names
- Baking gerbil treats
- Gerbil adventure land
- Kid-sized gerbil area
- Journal prompts
- Making gerbils toys
- Birthday celebration!
The Willows Named the Gerbils

The day we brought the gerbils in, we had a voting activity to determine their names.

● Each child contributed a name suggestion for each gerbil.
● Four names were pulled out of a hat and then voted on.
● Carrots and Marshmallow had the majority vote! A child exclaimed, “A vegetable and a treat!”
Children vote on the gerbils’ names.
The Willows Baked Gerbil Treats

We researched a recipe for a gerbil treat that the children could help us make. One morning we took all of the ingredients to the playground and the children took turns helping make the dough and forming the tiny treats before teachers put them in the oven.
The Willows Baked Gerbil Treats

We found the recipe, along with many other tips and ideas here:

http://gerbilforum.proboards.com/thread/28292/homemade-treat-recipe
Gerbil Adventure Land!

After months of letting the gerbils get acquainted with teachers and each child, teachers felt both the gerbils and children were ready to interact more closely. The children were eager to pet and hold their classroom pets they had been caring for.
Gerbil Adventure Land!
Teachers set up a safe enclosed environment with many toys and tunnels for the gerbils to play with. Over the course of two weeks, teachers sat in the enclosure with every child as they had their own turn to spend one-on-one time holding and closely observing how the gerbils played and interacted.
Carrots and Marshmallow enjoy Gerbil Adventure Land!
Kid-Sized Gerbil Area

- One day a conversation came up about how the children wished they could be a gerbil. We talked about the different things they wanted to do as a gerbil.
- We started thinking, “Why not? How can we make this happen?”
- We came up with the idea of turning our pretend play area into a kid-sized gerbil area!
Kid-Sized Gerbil Area

- We combined our neighboring pretend play area and block area to accommodate the large scale of the activity.
- Materials:
  - cotton fluff for nesting (stuffing from pillows)
  - tunnels
  - pop-up tent for nest
  - pretend play food that gerbils eat (carrots, apples, corn, etc.)
Children enjoy playing in Kid-Sized Gerbil Area!
Gerbil Writing Prompt

During center time, in tandem with the kids-sized gerbil area, teachers gave children the journal writing prompt “If I were a gerbil I would __________.”
“If I were a gerbil I would climb the cage.”
Gerbil Toys

For a center activity we provided children with materials to build toys for the gerbils.

- cardboard tubes
- non-toxic glue
- twine
- wooden craft sticks
Gerbil Toys

The children’s imaginations took flight!
Birthday Celebration!

We planned a special day for when the gerbils turned one year old. Children made signs and cards for Carrots and Marshmallow and we looked up a recipe for a birthday cake for the gerbils (banana slices and sunflower seed butter).
Birthday Celebration!

The calendar is marked for the birthday celebration!

Our morning sign in reads: “Good morning! Please write the name of a gerbi that is turning 1 today!”
Birthday Celebration! (cont.)

Carrots and Marshmallow had a birthday cake!

The class made a variety of birthday presents for the gerbils!
Playing a Big Part!

In addition to inspiring our learning centers and activities, the gerbils play an integral part in the climate of our community. They play a big part by......

- making appearances at morning meeting
- helping keep the classroom noise level low (children often give each other reminders about talking quietly for tiny gerbil ears)
Playing a Big Part! (cont.)

- Helping children say good-bye to their grown-up and transition in the classroom.
- Helping children see beyond themselves as they offer care for the gerbils’ needs.
- Helping inspire new songs and games.
  - Game - “What’s in the fluff?”
  - Song - “Gerbil song”
Carrots and Marshmallow join us at morning meeting!
We have been so thankful for the opportunity to have Carrots and Marshmallow be a part of our classroom! They have brought so much joy to both teachers and children!