

Kids Build Their Own Democracy with Fort Village

Decade-old Student Creation Evolves at High Meadow School

PoPo Village is a village of forts entirely built, maintained, and supervised by children. No adults allowed!

The village was created more than 10 years ago by third and fourth grade students at High Meadow School in Stone Ridge, NY, and has been maintained by the next generations ever since. Sharing limited resources, the children develop communication and collaboration skills while striving to maintain a functioning democratic village. Students establish and sometimes adjust the rules during their Po-Po Council meetings, which happen a few times a year. During these meetings, representatives from classes kindergarten through fifth grade also determine what the schedule will be for disassembling the forts and starting from scratch. This periodic collapsing and rebuilding ensures that resources are constantly redistributed.

Located along the Sacagawea Trail, which winds its way through a 2.5-mile wildlife sanctuary, PoPo is ensconced in the natural world found on High Meadow's nine acres of forests and fields. Fostering a deep connection to the natural world is a part of High Meadow School's ongoing mission.

Village Building Develops Mind Habits

PoPo exemplifies the ideals we strive to instill in our students. There are five essential habits of mind we want our students to develop at High Meadow, each of which is represented by the activities that keep PoPo Village alive:

Personal and Social Responsibility

Personal and Social Responsibility is cultivated through the understanding that every young person has a purpose and needs to recognize that he or she has something of value to offer. We support our students in understanding that they have something meaningful to give.

Competence

Competence is grounded in the belief that physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual development is important for all people. Acquiring competence means being able to make positive choices, solve problems, learn skills, and share them.

Independence

Independence refers to the ability to recognize one's ideas and core values and act in accordance with them. It requires the emotional strength to face obstacles, communicate effectively, and think critically. We believe that every young person has the capacity for independent thought and self-sufficiency.

Curiosity

Curiosity refers to the presence of an integral interest in pursuing a variety of perspectives for the purpose of developing empathy, cultural awareness, and diversity in thinking, knowledge, and erudition.

Service

All members of the High Meadow community commit to 25 hours of community service and participate in building the culture.

Hands-on Experience of Physics, Engineering and Cooperation

Through their participation in school leadership opportunities such as Po-Po council, our students learn how to listen to each other, formulate solutions, develop policies, and seek fair and effective approaches to solving problems.

In addition to this humanistic learning, students working in Po-Po are intuitively applying concepts in physics, engineering, and design. They are testing wood for its strength and determining what qualities materials have and how they can be utilized. They explore that which is familiar, and expand their knowledge through observation, experimentation, classification, organization, and communication.

The High Meadow staff honor and support this work by children by being near, but never intruding, by listening and guiding councils, but never running them, and by never coopting Po-Po into the formal curriculum. This is the work of and by kids at its very best and most authentic.

All schools have common elements that allow them to operate: buildings, teachers, administrators, supplies, students and parents/families. The human elements make up the school's "community." Please stop by PoPo Village the next time you are on campus and see how our little "community within a community" functions.