

*Pawnee earth lodge model made by children at the Ancona School and inspired by Field Museum's Pawnee earth lodge, in Hall 5.*

## ANCONA SCHOOL COMES TO FIELD MUSEUM

BY CAROL BURCH-BROWN and MARY HYNES-BERRY

PHOTOS BY ELIZA HOUSTON DAVEY

**T**wo women walked boldly to the Museum exit, carrying between them an unwieldy, table-size model of a Pawnee Indian earth lodge. A daring, daylight robbery? The young Museum guard could scarcely believe his eyes, much less find words to halt such a brazen act.

When finally stopped, however, one of the ladies blithely produced an official pass, which authorized removal of the model. Constructed at Ancona Montessori elementary school in Chicago's Hyde Park-Kenwood neighborhood, it

had been on exhibit temporarily, during Field Museum's Members' Nights.

Perhaps the most significant thing about the Ancona model is the way in which its builders—fourth, fifth, and sixth graders—had drawn upon the Pawnee exhibits at Field

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Museum and how their translation of that information had been a valuable learning experience. For them, the Museum's Pawnee exhibit was not just a briefly viewed curiosity, it had served them meaningfully and in a way that they might well remember for the rest of their lives.

According to the Montessori philosophy, the child is the critical agent in his own education. Moving from essentially concrete to mainly abstract activities, he constructs his own learning by assimilating facts and discovering principles. Facts and principles, say Ancona teachers, are of particular value when they are learned and put to use in a context that is personally meaningful to the child. It is within the setting of this philosophy that Field Museum has been an important social studies resource for Ancona.

Conveniently, the exhibits in the Museum galleries are arranged in categories that children can easily comprehend; and, as it happens, their arrangement is consistent with the Montessori approach to social studies. As the child proceeds from one exhibit case to the next, he becomes aware of the

principles by which the artifacts are arranged. For example, he observes that every object in a particular case is an article of clothing of one tribe, that their weapons are in another case, and that religious objects and diagrams explaining their religious beliefs are in a third, and so on. The dioramas accompanying the displays further arrange the objects of each category, put them into context, and show more dramatically than any textbook could how a tribe's culture is its own unique response to its basic human needs.

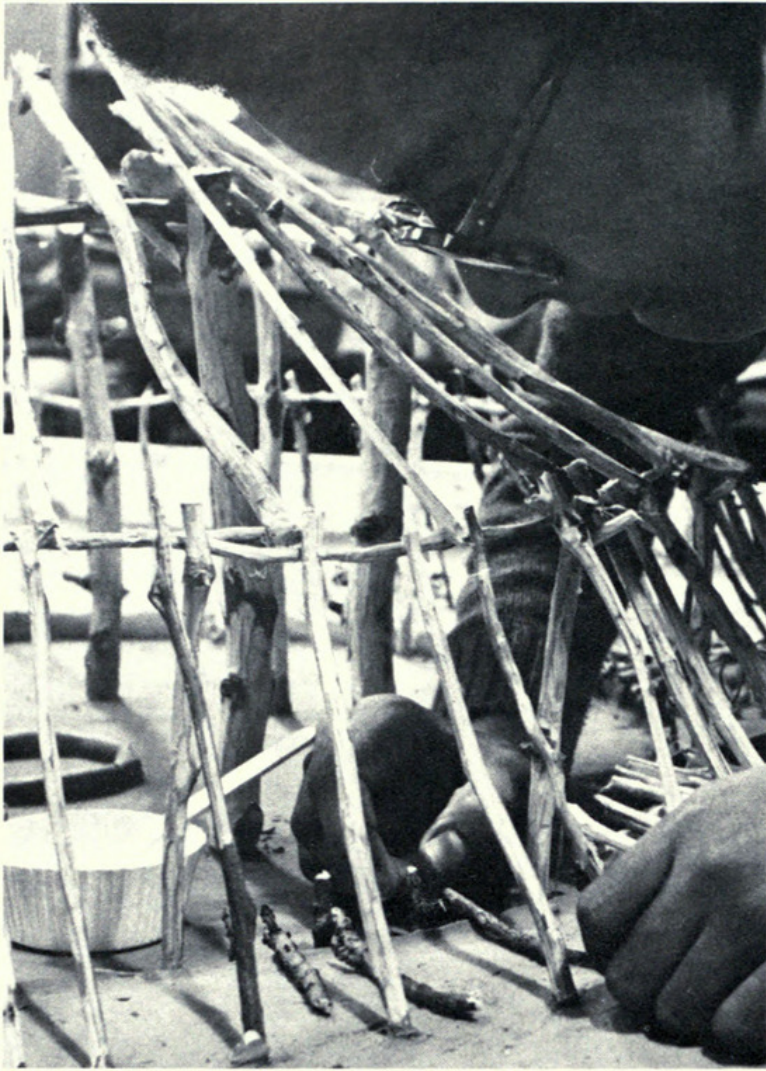
But even though the information in the exhibits and dioramas is presented in a most accessible way, the Ancona staff recognizes that the child still needs guidance in utilizing this information; projects that draw upon Museum exhibits are thus designed with the teachers' personal guidance in mind.

Before the students make their initial museum visit for a particular project, they are prepared for the topic at hand through classroom study and discussion. At the Museum, in groups of five to ten, the children usually concentrate on a

*"We sawed and stripped sticks to make support elements. The Indians stripped theirs, too, but definitely not with X-acto knives! While we were doing that, and getting sore hands and making a huge pile of*

*wood shavings, we talked about crazy things. It was a good day except for our sore hands from stripping wood. I liked that day a lot."*—From the journal of Elizabeth McCausland, student.





*"I made the bed of a young boy, Otter, and his grandmother. Here I am gluing posts to the base of the earth lodge to make supports for the bed and I am propping up the posts with little sticks until they are dry."—Malcolm Paige, student.*

few display cases previously selected by the teacher. While there, they fill out teacher-designed study sheets which require them to observe, record, and analyze what they have seen. Sometimes they make drawings of what they see; sometimes they relate or contrast their observations with material they already know. Later, in the classroom, the study sheets will provide groundwork for additional discussion and research.

Construction projects are often used at Ancona to reinforce what has been learned at the abstract level. As they design, construct, and assemble with their own hands, the children must apply what they have observed; frequently they realize that they have overlooked something and they return to observe more carefully. They come to realize that details are often important, and bear remembering.

In the fall of 1977, Ancona's fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teachers—Susan Agate, Anne Goudvis, and Annika Levy—decided to test the value of coordinating classroom learning with the resources of the school's art center and those of Field Museum. A newly developed curriculum on American Indian life at Ancona was to involve each student in a project of his or her choosing; the Pawnee earth lodge was chosen by ten children as their project. The lodge was a good selection on several counts: The Museum resources are extensive, to say the least, and the full-scale Pawnee earth lodge exhibit, opened in 1977 in Hall 5, could serve as a major stimulus to the children's imaginations. There are also two large dioramas of earth lodges from which the group could draw further information. Finally, the lodge is a superb illustration of Pawnee philosophy and social custom; it thus provides a good introduction to Indian belief systems.

In November, before the project got underway, I took a large number of students on a tour of the Museum's Pawnee exhibit. Edith Fleming, anthropology instructor in the Museum's Department of Education, made arrangements to accommodate our group. Most of the children who subsequently built their own model lodge at school were on this tour, so they already had some familiarity with and interest in the topic.

In January the project began with several long visits to the Museum. Together, the children and I made up a work sheet with questions about the lodge's construction and with space for their drawings of details. The group's first trip was to the Museum's Department of Exhibition, where they were able to see some of what is involved in the physical preparation of an exhibit. Their notes and sketches later eased the transition from looking to constructing and helped them become even more committed to the project.

After several visits and much note-taking, they began work on their own lodge, starting with the wooden framework and with the beds that are arranged along the lodge walls. They gathered sticks for the building's framework, stripped away the bark, and glued the sticks to a plaster base—a process which required altogether about six weeks. Their interest grew apace, even though a great deal of the work was monotonous. As one of them remarked about

bark stripping, "You think *this* is bad; just think what it was like for the Indians. They were working on long poles and they sure weren't using X-Acto knives!"\*

To design and construct the beds and the lodge interior, the group relied heavily on information in *The Lost Universe*, by Gene Weltfish (Ballantine Books, 1975), a detailed account of life in a Pawnee village. Each child made a bed for the particular doll who slept there. Since the Pawnee assigned their beds according to the person's social function, the system of the Ancona children not only provided an organized way of distributing the work among themselves, but introduced them to Pawnee social practice. With the bed-

making and later, the doll-making, the imaginative involvement of the children increased dramatically.

They saw their work now as symbolic of the larger task of the Pawnee, and as construction progressed they became more and more attentive to the significance that various parts of the lodge held for the Pawnee. For example, the children always took care that their model, like an actual Pawnee lodge, was facing to the east, so that the interior arrangements were in proper orientation to the four points of the compass. If anyone left an article in the lodge's sacred area—intended to hold nothing but religious articles—one of the children would complain, "Somebody left something in the *wiharul*!"

After the framework was done came the roof. The ceiling consisted of little bundles of broomstraw tied into mat-

\*The X-Acto knife is a razor-sharp knife commonly used in art studios.



As the children made their straw mats they fitted them to the frame, trimming them where necessary. The entire frame of the lodge was covered with mats before the final covering of plaster was put on.



*"On Tuesday it was the most fun time of all. We mixed plaster, dipped strips of old sheets into it and laid the strips on top of the straw mats which covered the frame of the lodge. Boy it was fun gushing around in the plaster! We had to work fast so it wouldn't set*

*before we were finished. We didn't cover the back of the lodge so that people will be able to see into it. It will be finished soon so it can go to the Field Museum Members' Nights."*—From the journal of Elizabeth McCausland.

ting, and once again the children showed exemplary patience in making the mats. They were now deeply committed to their project, they had developed a group spirit, and they applied themselves with energy to even the most monotonous tasks.

In the sixteenth week of work the children were finally ready to apply the outer roof covering. This consisted of cloth strips soaked in a plaster-and-brown-paint (simulated mud) mixture. They found this task thoroughly enjoyable, completing it at last, plaster-splattered but jubilant. Next they had only to fashion the interior furnishings and to make the tiny dolls to be placed in the lodge. This more creative activity was a welcome change of pace after the long and often arduous process of lodge construction.

The project's culmination was placing the lodge on public display at the Museum for Members' Nights (along

with other Indian projects made at the school). On each of the four nights, two teachers and several children were present to answer questions. So the project ended most satisfactorily—surpassing, in fact, the most optimistic hopes of the Ancona staff. It gave the children the chance to show their work and discuss it with an interested audience, to communicate something of what they had learned, and to act as transmitters of the knowledge they had gained.

The project itself demonstrated once again how effectively Field Museum can serve as an educational resource.

*At the Museum, the lodge model and several other projects made by the Ancona children were exhibited in the Department of Education. The children who made the projects were on hand to enjoy the occasion and to answer the questions of visitors.*





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