DEEPANAM SCHOOL

Sept 2024 | newsletter | Vol. 1

What's Deepanam School?

Well...

Located in a lush green and beautiful campus in the international township of Auroville, South India, Deepanam is a unique school for children between the ages of 7 to 14 years.

Founded in 2006, Deepanam is a movement towards an unending education. Our aspiration is to cultivate a nourishing environment that helps children become lifelong learners.

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OUR EIGHT-YEAR LEARNING PROGRAM IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR MIXED AGE GROUPS.

THE MIXED AGE GROUPS PROVIDE ABUNDANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPLORATION AND PEER-LEARNING.

DEEPANAM SCHOOL

Storytelling

Everyone loves stories, regardless of age. There isn't a stronger connection between people than storytelling, for we are all storytellers.

In the classroom, teachers are in fact storytellers in so many ways. In Deepanam, teachers aim to inspire, connect and ignite curiosity through storytelling this year. The idea is to make topics more interesting and engaging by weaving a story around it rather than a mere transfer of information.

> STORIES HAVE TO BE TOLD OR THEY DIE, AND WHEN THEY DIE, WE CAN'T REMEMBER WHO WE ARE OR WHY WE'RE HERE.
>
> — Sue Monk Kidd

Storytelling has an almost magical effect on students' attention. Starting a lesson with, "Let me tell you a story," changes the entire atmosphere in the room. You can feel the collective anticipation, and suddenly, there's a lightness and vibrancy in the students' minds.

Lessons through Stories

For instance, when teaching the young students in the Light group about teeth, instead of just labeling parts and having them color diagrams, the teacher narrated an imaginative tale called “The Great Adventure in Tooth Town.”

In this story, different types of teeth—like the Premolar, Molar, Canine, and Incisor—were brought to life as unique characters.

The topic came alive, sparking joy and curiosity among the kids.

Mahavir

Ways teachers can use storytelling

Start a lesson with a story

Depending on the topic and age group, relevant stories can be told from the history or personal experiences.

Create Characters

Topics like fractions can be brought alive by naming the characters who have their own personality. Puppets can also be used as characters.

Use metaphors and analogies

Complex topics can be easily digested if they are explained with metaphors. Stories told through metaphors leave a lasting impression on the minds of the students.

Classrooms can be filled with fun and magic, colors and visualization by integrating stories into the lesson. And every good story, when told well, leaves a mark that lasts a lifetime.

Light Group

Age 6 to 8 years

Monday, 6th July, finds 6 and a half year olds walking into a 'big kids school' for the first time.

Settling in...

For any first grader these first few weeks are a big deal.

In Deepanam's mixed age approach, the challenge is twofold:

The first term in Light Group is one of great transition. For last years' Kindergarteners to settle into a new and strange space, adjust to a longer day's routine and for last years 1st graders to shift gears to now being the seniors in class, the ones who must guide and take care of the little ones.

> THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF TRUE TEACHING IS THAT NOTHING CAN BE TAUGHT. THE TEACHER IS NOT AN INSTRUCTOR OR TASKMASTER, HE IS A HELPER AND GUIDE
>
> — Mother

Outings

Discoving Auroville
The sense of adventure

A young child learns from everything around them. Yet we have learnt to organise our schools into formal study spaces, which year after year inform our young as to how they should learn.

A paradox maintained, out of habit or the difficulty of finding new ways.

The great outdoors calls, and with it the sense of adventure. Each week on Tuesdays or Fridays, depending on the group, Deepanam responds.

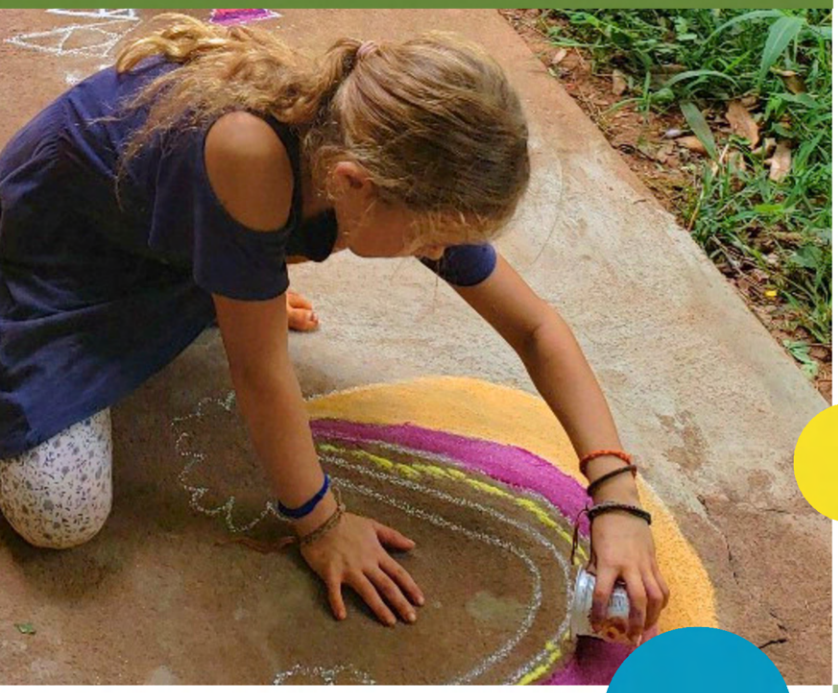
With Light Group, the first term we cycled to the Matrimandir, entering the silence of the chamber or spending time in the gardens.

Last School, welcomed us with their butterfly and glass exhibition, “what is common between the two?” Response to other responses led us to the word Transformation. And this became the theme of our term with the little ones.

In the Mahalakshmi park and outdoor gym, we played, drew in the quiet of the Ganesh temple.

Next term the places we visit will be linked to our projects on animals.

Aurevan



Painting Chitra

The theme this term was art expressing the inner world.

Primary focus on geometric art through Mother's Flowers, and their significance. The five elements were brought in too.

Students created their works using various materials such as salt, sand (both white and red), lemon juice, wax and flames of a candle.

Craft Suguna & Kamala

For skill development, we begin with paper crafts, cutting and stitching to create decorative items like table mats.

These activities help assess and improve the children's fine motor skill.

As soon as they are ready, we move on to loom weaving. That is a big project they really enjoy and find concentration in.

Next we focus on basic stitching.

> THEY MAY BE SKILFUL WITH THEIR HANDS AND BE WILLING TO LEARN TO MAKE THINGS. THIS TOO SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED.

An insistent request

Science please

As the term progressed and the group settled in, a demand for science began.

It started with one student asking,
"Can we learn about atoms?" and another,
"What are atoms?" and another,
"Some science stuff,"
"Yes! Yes! Science stuff!"

We asked, what kind of science? Subjects ranged from molecules and atoms to how our bodies work to animals. This went on for days, and then a week, and still more.

We began with our favorite animals, read about them, drew them, and classified them into insects, reptiles, and mammals.
"We are mammals too?"
"You tell me, were you born in an egg or directly as a baby? Do you have fur, hair, feather, scales?" Soon, classifications widened to vertebrates and invertebrates.
"In-vett-whats?"

So, we called Mahavir and Bob, the school skeleton.

Aurevan

> YOU MUST NEVER REFUSE TO EXPLAIN TO A CHILD THE HOW AND THE WHY OF THINGS.
>
> IF YOU CANNOT DO IT YOURSELF, YOU MUST DIRECT THE CHILD TO THOSE WHO ARE QUALIFIED TO ANSWER OR POINT OUT TO HIM SOME BOOKS THAT DEAL WITH THE QUESTION.

Peace Group

Age 8 to 10 years

This age group is very open. These children are ready to explore, to learn. Propose something and they are all excited.

Forming a team

Field work and projects

With mixed age groups, it is very important to build the team as a class.

At the beginning of the year, third graders are a little shy, fourth graders have already been in this space, they know the teachers, the rhythms, etc.

It is through field work and projects we crack that collective feeling.

AND AT THIS AGE, THEY LIKE TO TALK A LOT.

So we have to patiently listen to them, they really enjoy that. When we listen to them without any judgment.

"Tell your stories. We are ready to listen." They really enjoy that.

Mother's Flower Garden

Term project

Flowers are beautiful, colorful, and full of life—just like children.

The project aimed to foster team building, community work, and provide children with an opportunity to connect with the community beyond the school campus.

FLOWERS ARE BEAUTIFUL, COLORFUL, AND FULL OF LIFE —JUST LIKE CHILDREN.

The work

Every Friday, we walked from our school to The Mother's flower garden, creating a beautiful bonding experience during the journey.

These walks allowed us to engage in meaningful conversations with the children, discussing various topics and strengthening relationships—a delightful highlight of the project.

At the garden

The children weeded and tended to the flower beds, learning the value of hard work with pleasure.

They helped in the nursery, planted seeds in pots, and nurtured them with care. Inspired by the serene environment, the children expressed their creativity by drawing and writing poetry.

They also learned about the significance of flowers from The Mother, a unique aspect of Auroville's spirit, which contributed to their vital and mental development.

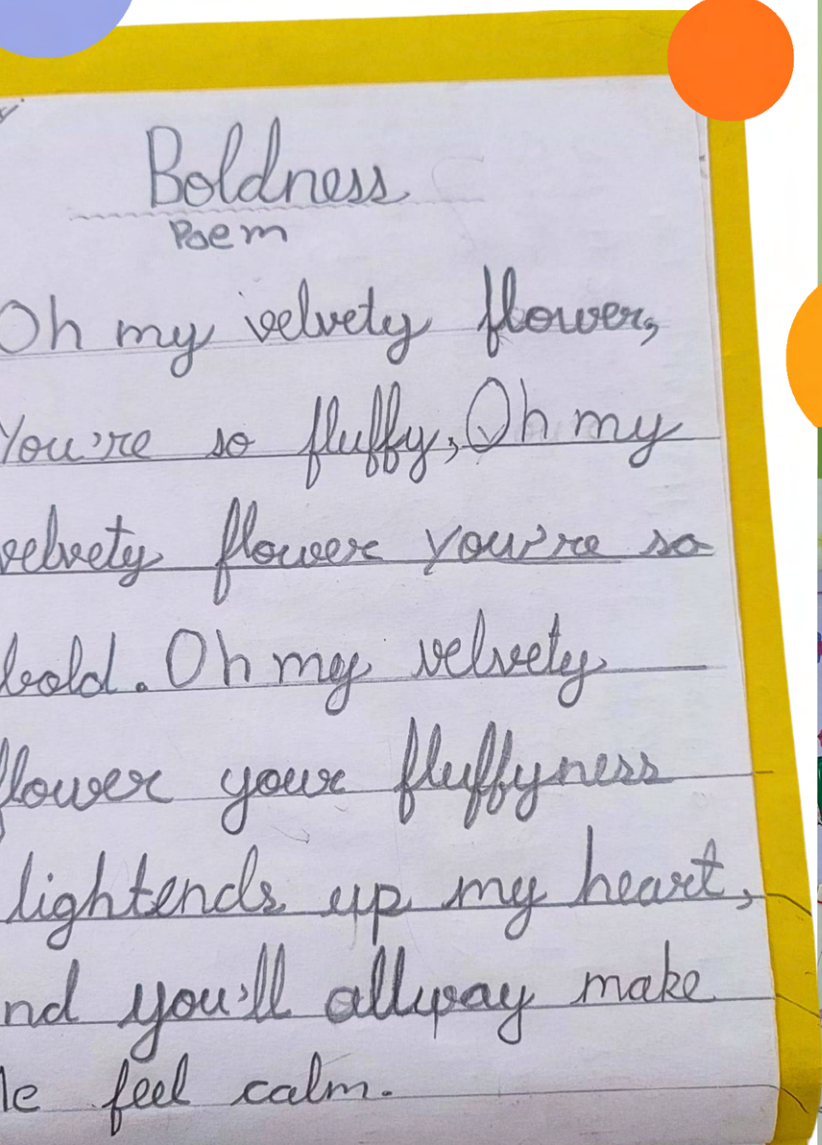
Through these activities, the children connected deeply with nature, enriching their physical, emotional, and creative growth.

This project not only nurtured a beautiful flower garden but also blossomed the children's sense of belonging to a group, creativity and simple joy.

It was an experience that touched their minds, hearts, and bodies, leaving a lasting impression.

Priti

FLOWERS ARE EXTREMELY RECEPTIVE. ALL THE FLOWERS TO WHICH I HAVE GIVEN A SIGNIFICANCE RECEIVE EXACTLY THE FORCE I PUT INTO THEM AND TRANSMIT IT.



Boldness
Poem

Oh my velvety flower,
You're so fluffy, Oh my
velvety flower you're so
bold. Oh my velvety
flower your fluffyness
lightends up my heart,
nd you'll allway make
le feel calm.

Painting

The focus during the twice weekly painting classes was to establish an awareness of the materials we would use, of the body , of ourselves and others in the surrounding.

As young children we have a keen imagination, and often as we grow we limit ourselves more, using particular objects only for the reasons they were made. Painting is limited to an A4 sheet and a paintbrush.

So, we explored kolam and coffee powder, leaves and flowers, string and glue, toothbrushes, geometric sets, wax, sponges, straws and earbuds, and salt and sand and lemon.

> THE TRUE PAINTING AIMS AT CREATING SOMETHING MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN THE ORDINARY REALITY.

We visited Savitri Bhavan gallery and a Mahasaraswati Kolam was the occasion to explore the element of earth.

Chitra

Craft

In craft Peace groupers are refining there stitching skills, and developing surfaces.

Two projects are currently ongoing:

Students have a choice of working on a sea animals of their choice by stitching stuffed toys or creating them in papier-mâché.

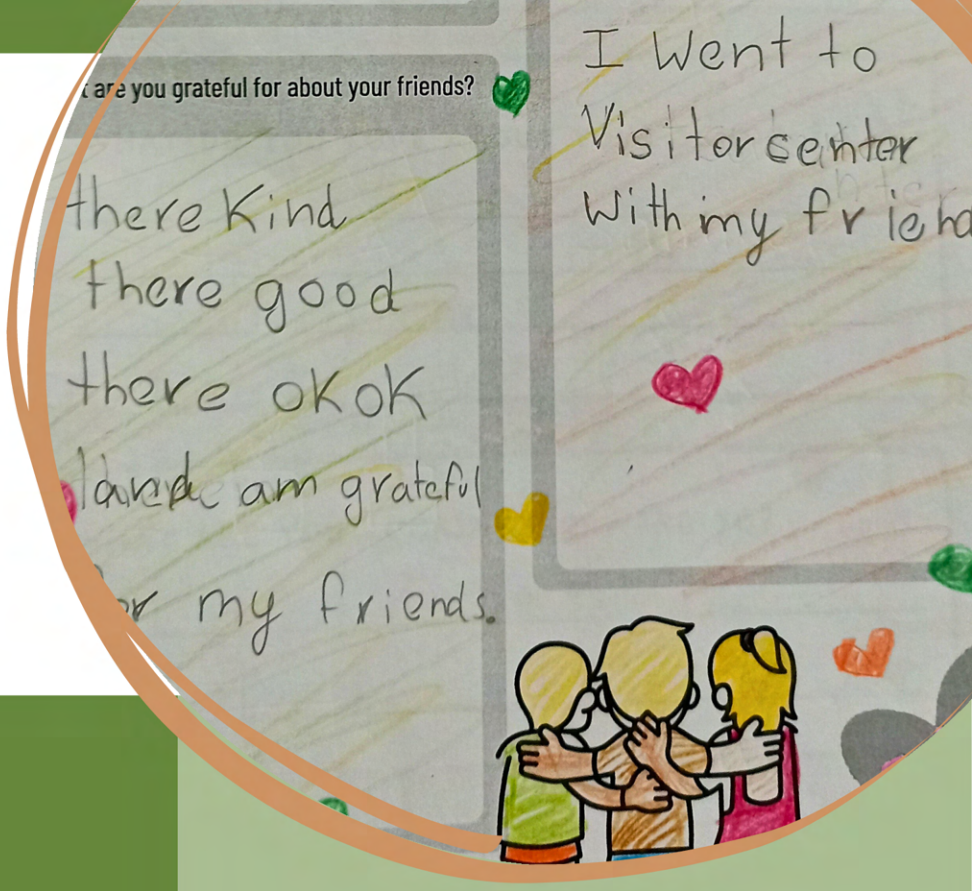
Other students in have requested to make dolls rather than sea animals, and are doing so.

Suguna & Kamala

Grace Group

Age 10 to 12 years

As a child grows into the preteen stage, we have found it is crucial to address the vital being from various different angles.



Tapping into the heart

Gratitude Journals

In the context of Auroville, Gratitude is one of the 12 Qualities included in The Mother's symbol.

Every year, an attempt is made to share a small practice around Gratitude in the classroom – in the past, creating a Gratitude Jar and a Gratitude Tree were explored during the weeks leading up to Christmas.

GRATITUDE - A LOVING RECOGNITION OF THE GRACE RECEIVED FROM THE DIVINE.

This year, the intention was to engage with gratitude regularly over an extended period, say a term and possible ways to introduce it in the classroom were considered.

Gratitude

Dr Robert Emmons, a leading scientific expert on gratitude had conducted studies involving Gratitude Journals.

He found that when people regularly engaged in gratitude, they experienced higher levels of positive emotions like optimism, enthusiasm, love and happiness. Grateful people were also kinder and more generous to others.

Having personally experienced the magic of Gratitude Journals until it became a daily practice, the class teachers chose to design a custom Gratitude Journal for the Grace groupers to help them tap into their heart.

> THE NOBILITY OF A BEING IS MEASURED BY ITS CAPACITY OF GRATITUDE.

On Monday mornings, the students reflected on the week that went by and expressed what they were grateful for - the positive events, joyful interactions, people who made their day and things they appreciated at home, in nature, in school and so on through words and drawings. The students got an opportunity to count their blessings for eleven weeks that concluded with a Letter of Gratitude to a loved one at home.

> VALUES CANNOT BE TAUGHT, THEY CAN ONLY BE CAUGHT.

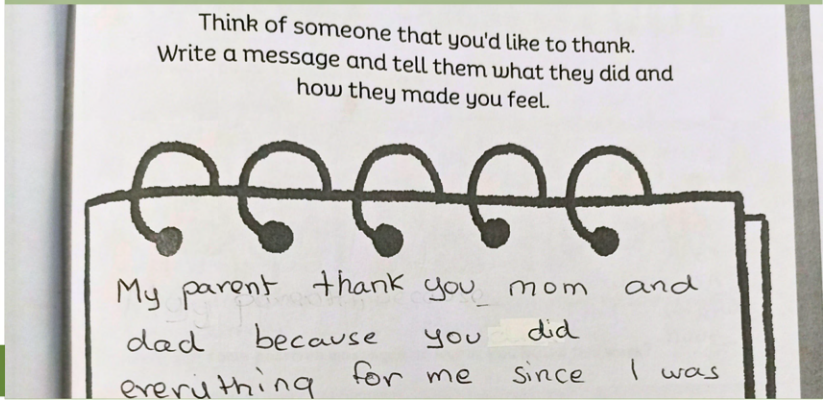
Teacher's Reflection

I have been curious about how children pick up values and have been experimenting and learning with my daughter over the years.

One of the key learnings has been that when I embody a value, it gets transmitted to the children through osmosis and very little external effort is needed. Children pick up my vibrations and therefore, it's a lot more work for me to be mindful about the state of my inner and outer being.

It was a beautiful experience to be able to share this practice of Gratitude with the Grace groupers and acknowledge each one's authenticity and unique expression.

Shaalini



Waste Area Design

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

The waste area in Deepanam was an ignored corner, time and again it grew disorganised, waste would end up mixed and wet and smelly. Was this what we wished for our school?

The Eco-service team found it difficult to pick up the waste from the barrels and wanted better segregation.

We needed to make this element a living part of the school, for the waste to be better organised and efficiently picked up.

> YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO USE ANY MATERIAL OBJECT WHATSOEVER IF YOU DO NOT TAKE CARE OF IT.
>
> YOU MUST TAKE CARE OF IT NOT BECAUSE YOU ARE ATTACHED TO IT, BUT BECAUSE IT MANIFESTS SOMETHING OF THE DIVINE CONSCIOUSNESS.
>
> — Mother

It was decided to relocate the dry waste area to a visible space within the campus that would look beautiful and inviting so the children themselves can start managing the waste generated by the school on a regular basis.

This mini project was taken up by the Grace group students at the beginning of the school year.

The sixth graders were taken to the previous waste area within the school, educated about different categories of waste within the school and were presented the challenge of redesigning the space with five different types of waste barrels on paper.

Manifestation

The polygon mural painting project was an artistic initiative conceptualized by Tatiana, our painting teacher, to enhance the school's visual environment while providing students with an opportunity to engage in a collaborative, creative process.

Students were tasked with creating a large mural using geometric polygon shapes and a vibrant color palette.

This project encouraged teamwork, problem-solving, and artistic expression, allowing students to contribute to the design and execution of the mural.

> CLEANLINESS IS THE FIRST INDISPENSABLE STEP TOWARDS THE SUPRAMENTAL MANIFESTATION.

It provided an opportunity to develop both artistic and social skills while contributing to the beautification of the school environment.

The mural stands as a lasting testament to their creativity, collaboration, and commitment to empowering our school community.

Narmadha & Tatiana

> ON THE PHYSICAL PLANE IT IS IN BEAUTY THAT THE DIVINE EXPRESSES HIMSELF.
>
> — Mother

Faith & Hope

Age 12 to 14 years

As children grow into youth and prepare to step into another stage of their development as well as new campuses or areas of life -- what changes the school environment?

The possibilities of Auroville

Internships

Deepanam School aims for the all-round development of its students, fostering not just academic growth but also meaningful connections with the Auroville community.

At this age a childs horizon must expand, questions of being and belonging begin to arise, and with it a necessity to widen ones scope.

IN LINE WITH THIS PHILOSOPHY, THE IDEA OF AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM WAS BORN.

Auroville as a campus

Internships

Since July 2023, every Friday, from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm, students step out of the school environment and into the wider world, immersing themselves in various work units throughout Auroville.

Engaging students aged 14 in hands-on fieldwork provides them with invaluable experiences and life skills that are not possible within a traditional classroom setting.

AUROVILLE UNITS ARE VERY SUPPORTIVE OF THE INITIATIVE. EACH STUDENT IS CAREFULLY MENTORED AND GUIDED BY EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONALS.

Students have the freedom to choose their internship placements based on their interests, allowing them to explore fields they are passionate about.

They commit to their chosen internships for a minimum of one term (3-4 months), which helps them develop both consistency and a deeper understanding of their chosen field.

At the end of the term, students share their experiences with the community through presentations, where they reflect on what they've learned, the skills they've acquired, and the challenges they've overcome.

THROUGH THESE INTERNSHIPS, STUDENTS GAIN A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY, INDEPENDENCE, AND CONFIDENCE.

For many, it's a wonderful experience that opens up new perspectives and potential career paths.

Mahavir

Towards Independence

In running the internship programme over the last few years, we realized that the shift was for most 7th grade, Faith group students was a little too great between the collective environment of the classroom they were use to and the close to complete independence the internships demanded.

Thus, this year a preparatory stage was introduced, out of the school setting, as a united group with a focus of hands-on learning and increased decision making.

Maker Space

Youth Centre

Every Friday morning, Faith Group students visit Youth Center's Maker Space, where they learn woodworking.

From 9:00 AM to 12:30 PM, students discover the joy of creating with their own hands under the expert guidance of Mirco.

The Maker Space is a wonderfully equipped workshop where students can transform their creative ideas into concrete objects.

Mirco's gentle yet firm teaching style helps young students learn valuable skills while ensuring everyone's safety. His patient approach encourages students to explore their creativity while mastering proper tool handling and workshop safety.

This hands-on experience goes beyond just woodworking. Students learn important life skills such as:

- Patient problem-solving
- Safe handling of tools
- Working independently and as a team

These weekly workshop visits are part of the school's approach to connect students with the community while developing practical skills and creative thinking.

Mahavir

Email from a
former student

Hello Bhakti,

I saw the recently uploaded video on the YouTube channel faith group uses, and I was touched by the short film of students talking about Deepanam.

I thought back to the time I was in Deepanam, and I cannot even begin to fully express how grateful I am to have attended a school that fostered my creativity and love for learning with so much attention and care.

I carry much of what I learned in Deepanam with me now, and probably will forever.

I HOPE THE SCHOOL CONTINUES TO BE SUCH A POSITIVE INFLUENCE AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR ITS STUDENTS.

P.S. your classes were my favorite :)

With gratitude,
Valentine

Accents across the school

STEAM

Gaining inspiration from last year's theme of story based STEM activites, led us to come up with another fascinating theme of five elements which has a broad spectrum of possibilities to involve science and technology projects with a blend of stories. These encourage students to draw connections between traditional philosophical concepts and modern scientific principles.

Panchabhutas

The concept of Panchabhutas refers to the five fundamental elements in Hindu philosophy, which are believed to constitute all matter in the universe. These elements are:

Prithvi Earth: stability, solid form, and the foundation of life.

Jalam Water: fluidity, life-sustaining properties, and adaptability.

Agni Fire: energy, transformation, and heat.

Vayu Air: movement, breath, and the dynamic force of life.

Akash Ether or Space: the unseen, the void, and the medium in which all things exist.

The five elements

These elements are not just symbolic; they have deep connections with nature and the environment, each element plays a critical role in sustaining life and balancing ecosystems.

In scientific terms, these elements correspond to physical properties, states of matter, and forces in nature.

COMING IN CONTACT WITH THESE FIVE ELEMENTS PLAYS AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN UNDERSTANDING ECOSYSTEMS, ENERGY FLOW, AND ENVIRONMENTAL DYNAMICS.

STEAM projects that explore the concept of Panchabhutas offer an innovative way to connect ancient wisdom with modern scientific exploration.

THESE ALLOW STUDENTS TO INVESTIGATE THE NATURAL WORLD THROUGH THE LENS OF PHILOSOPHY, ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY.

Stimulating intrigue and curiosity, through the hands-on approach, and link to cultural elements, we hope to awaken in our youngsters, a sense of the interconnectivity of life and the balance necessary to sustain it.

These projects also encourage sustainable practices and the use of technology to address contemporary challenges in an environmentally conscious way.

Design and Execution

The Projects are designed with great consideration of the children's ability and need.

Our Yuvabe Education facilitators, mentors, and volunteers meet everyday to execute the stem activities and every Saturday to make lesson plans, research, model prototypes, and shop for materials.

Across grades, students were challenged with observing prototype models to recreate, open end activities, games and solving puzzles.

These projects develop capacities for teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking. STEM projects that explored the concept of Panchabhutas offered an innovative way to connect ancient wisdom with modern scientific exploration.

These projects also encourage sustainable practices and the use of technology to address contemporary challenges in an environmentally conscious way.

Prema

TO LOVE TO LEARN IS THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFT THAT ONE CAN MAKE TO A CHILD, TO LEARN ALWAYS AND EVERYWHERE.

– Mother

Lending a hand

Deepanam School is growing in numbers, constantly developing its curriculum and updating materials.

Currently it is in urgent need of additional classrooms to welcome new students for the coming school year.

If you would like to help with fundraising efforts, or have contacts you can reach out to, please do get in touch with us.

With much gratitude,
Deepanam Team

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