

Imagine King George School Under the Prairie Sky ...

At King George School we have an opportunity to naturalize a portion of our school grounds and after considering the location, natural history and historical background we have come up with the theme of "Under the Prairie Sky". A theme we believe honours the past, celebrates the present and cares for the future. There are many stories that can be told of our school and the land it sits on. Through curriculum links, interpretive signage and an engaging site plan students and the larger community can learn these stories, play amongst features and connect with the natural features of the prairie.

Past - evolution of our prairie land

The site where the school sits is the dry bed of an ancient ocean. Shifting continents and catastrophic events gave way to a time of ice and eventually the scouring forces of glaciers. The resulting land evolved to become short grass prairie and marks the gateway to the Great Plains of North America.

People were drawn to this site. Whether passing through according to seasons and ritual or to settle permanently, the people discovered it's many resources: weather, plants, animals, minerals and a way of life.

One hundred years ago, sandstone was harvested from the ancient dry bed and became the building blocks of King George School. Wars were fought, sod was broken, families built homes and planted gardens. A community thrived and grew through the ages.

Present - Mount Pleasant

It is easy for children to forget or not realize that King George stands where short-grass prairie once grew: tall buildings set in an urban centre and established neighbourhoods with trees planted over a 100 years ago obscure the

flat, sprawling beauty of the plains. We are fortunate to border a large City field and if we look north we can see Nose Hill with its grasslands still intact.

King George School has provided a place for learning and healing since 1912. Thousands of children have passed through its halls and played on its grass fields and there was a brief time when the building housed influenza patients who needed a place to rest and heal. Continued popularity of the area brought more settlement and more children. An expansion to the original building, meant better accommodated the needs of the community.

King George School remains under the prairie sky providing a majestic meeting place to learn, play and grow. adapting when necessary, but never wavering in its purpose to support the community. The opportunity to reshape our school grounds, allows us to honour our past by highlighting its story through plantings, features, art and learning opportunities.

With a little imagination, help from photographs and understanding we can bring the essence of the plains back to King George.

Future - celebrating 100 years

In 2012, one hundred years will have passed since King George opened its doors to the community. Opportunities exist to forge partnerships with community members and organizations to come up with creative ideas to celebrate this event and to give input to the site development plan to ensure the grounds remain as vital and inspiring as the building itself.

With the Mount Pleasant community, City of Calgary, Parks and Recreation, CBE and King George School teachers, students and parents, we can celebrate 100 years of proud moments.

Imagine the possibilities... walk with us through the school grounds

One of our features brings the plains largest land animal to the fingertips of children: situated in a wallow, a bison skeleton cast in concrete and covered in sand waits for discovery. Stepping stones with animal tracks leads the children through the school grounds and ends at the wallow. The tracks show a progression of small to large plains animals (grasshopper, mouse, snake, burrowing owl, prairie dog, swift fox, hare, hawk, coyote, deer, antelope, wolf, bison). Following the footsteps through the grasslands and uncovering the plains bison could spark many discussions and learning opportunities.

Surrounding the wallow imagine a seating area for an outdoor classroom (perhaps something rustic or more complex such as a raised planting bed). Plantings could enhance the experience of the plains. For example, sage, wild rose, saskatoon bush and grasses would be planted close by so in the heat of the day the fragrance could waft over the class. A grove of trembling aspen could add their music to the experience. At the outer edge of the plains, a small stand of lodge pole pine help block the wind and encourage discovery of this resourceful tree.

The proposed "Rock and Rope" structure for the new playground serves as a climbing area for children and also a reminder of the geologic forces that helped shape this landscape. One of the largest glacial erratics is known as Big Rock located near Okotoks. Bison used these huge boulders as rubbing rocks to help shed their heavy winter fur and bring relief from nagging insect bites.

Peripheral tree plantings around the playground, wallow and streets will shelter students from the hot sun; link to curriculum; offer trails for discovery and play; frame Nose Hill Park and provide access to the grass playing fields while keeping the essence of the plains intact. A careful balance needs to be made to abide by guidelines provide by City, CBE and Community to make sure our children are safe and there is visual access to site.

Many cultures have been attracted to the prairies and have brought with them plantings with special meaning or purpose. Whether these plants were used for medicine, food or beauty they are now a part of our landscape. A selection of these plants will be highlighted in a heritage garden.

Our final feature will be in the east courtyard and would remind us to look up and focus on the night sky. Ursa Major is already a popular stepping path and we will complete the constellation with setting Ursa Minor with its Pole Star into the ground. Large poplar logs will be moved to the courtyard and positioned to serve as a second outdoor classroom. Additional plantings will help transform this area into a more parkland like setting.

Legacy

Leaving a legacy takes imagination, creativity, hard work and fun. Partner with us to shape this project for generations to come.