In our project work with children, one of our driving questions is “How do children learn and how can we help children learn better?” Our current project work surrounding ‘Mystery’ has provided a pathway for us to research how children’s learning truly does begin in wonder.

As teachers, we recognize that information is at everyone’s fingertips, but what is not always present is having the intrinsic motivation to want to find out more. Being able to ask essential questions on your own is fundamental to learning before information can have any worth. So how do we help children to be more curious, wonder, and ask their own questions?
Enter the ‘Mystery.’ On our most recent trip to Target, the children’s charge for the day was to find “missed mysteries”—any mysteries we might have missed, and “a most fantastical mystery”—a mystery superior to other mysteries. Having already established a working protocol while at Target, the children knew exactly what to do, where to go, and now what they should be looking for.

What we found was this time instead of just saying “I found a mystery,” the children were stating their own wonderings in the form of questions as to specifically what was the mystery about something. This had occurred in previous visits as well, but for most, it was scaffolded with help from a teacher. This time the children were mostly doing it on their own, and we could hardly keep up with all the questions they had!

What also made their questions extraordinary is their close reading of details, followed by inferencing what made sense to them and what did not. If there was something unknown, strange, or unexplainable, that is where they found a question, which to them has now become a “mystery!”

When asked why they are better mystery finders than the teachers, the response was, “Because when you’re young you can see things better. That’s why we can see more mysteries than you!” While there is truth to that, the children have shown us the mysteries they are finding are beyond what we can just see.

To help visualize how our time in Target is spent, we have attached a link to a short video below. We hope this video makes visible how engaged the children are in their work, and how much excitement and curiosity is still found in revisiting a space even for the fourth time. A shopping trip to Target will never be the same for all of us:)

Link to video: https://youtu.be/u7BleH7TKYI