



#42: Humble History at Centennial Elementary School

Humble ISD's Centennial Elementary School opened last August (2020), and it is one of the most unique schools I have ever been in. Not only is it an amazingly designed school, but Humble ISD "themed" the building to tie-in to Humble's local history. The name itself represents Humble ISD's Centennial anniversary (which was held during the 2018-2019 schoolyear).

Principal Alison Pierce graciously took me on a tour the other day. As a former elementary school teacher, I was instantly envious of the building's design. As a teacher, you frequently hear students refer to schools as feeling like prisons. Sometimes you can sympathize with the way they feel: narrow hallways, low ceilings, school wings that have the same monotonous design. Not this school! The building is huge and spacious and has everything an elementary teacher could ask for! One of the unique aspects on the building is that it is designed around pods for each grade level. These pods consist of classrooms centered around a large Makerspace where students can collaborate. It is these Makerspaces that contain links to Humble's history.

The Kindergarten pod is themed as a forest area to celebrate early logging (Humble's history as a lumber town). This pod includes wooden benches, a cabin, stools designed like tree stumps, and large animals including an alligator, a frog and a large turtle. The 1st grade pod is themed for the San Jacinto River, where flowing designs on the blue carpet represent the river and Lake Houston (including a dam!). Students can sit in a large boat, move goods across the river using a ferry, or sit on stools designed as buoys. The 2nd grade pod is designed to celebrate Main Street Humble. It includes a hand drawn carriage, bales of hay, and signs and building fronts to represent many old Humble businesses, including the Mathews Hotel, the Humble State Bank, W. A. Taylor's grocery store, the Jewel Theatre, and the Humble City Cafe.

The 3rd grade pod is themed for oil (Humble's oil history) and energy. It includes dinosaurs (which helped contribute to the creation of fossil fuels), as well as a jeep that can be refueled by an Humble Oil gas tank at Duran's Service Station (one of Humble's old landmark businesses). The 4th grade pod is the airport (the opening of the IAH airport was an important event in Humble's history!). This pod includes a giant plane hanging from the ceiling, benches that look like waiting areas in an airport, and chairs that can be designed/aligned like seats in an airplane. Images on the glass walls represent destinations. The 5th grade pod represents the future and is themed around outer space. There are two giant space lab modules and two astronaut figures. All of the images on the glass walls give the indication of being in a lunar base.

Additionally, the school's logo has a train, which represents the train that was originally built through the Humble area (Houston East & West Texas Railway) and was responsible for the commercial development of the area. Their train is called the "Centennial Express." The center of the building contains a large train that students can climb on and through. There are also "train track" images in the carpets and floors throughout the building, that all lead back to the train (plus bridge railings that represent the Bevil Jarrell bridge).

The amount of thought that went into the design of the building, and the way so many areas of the building celebrate Humble's history, is a testament to the respect the Humble ISD School Board and administrators view the importance of our community's history.