

Nov 8 Bring Your Dad to School
Day: Last Names A-L
8:00-9:00 a.m.

FALL 2011

9 Bring Your Dad to School
Day: Last Names M-Z
8:00-9:00 a.m.

A LETTER FROM ANITA

17 Programs for Parents
at City Hall 6:00 p.m.

Dear Parents,

21 Picture Day

The school year is off to a great start here at CMS. I want to commend the work of our Parent Social Committee, spearheaded by Ms. Rebecca, for helping us ensure a strong turnout for our Grill Fest and for our Programs for Parents events this fall. The staff and I are pleased that the attendance has been excellent and that so many of you have taken a keen interest in participating in school functions. Ultimately your children benefit from your deeper understanding of our school, of Montessori education, and of their process of development. Your participation strengthens our community, and is especially helpful as we welcome new families.

23 Grandparent's Day-
Half-Day Session

Our school is accredited by Independent Schools of the Central States (ISACS). Our status as a member in good standing of ISACS is a mark of distinction among independent schools and allows you to be assured that our school meets the standards required by a rigorous accreditation process. We are currently in the early stages of our second cycle of accreditation. As part of that process, we will this year complete a constituent survey and a self-evaluation. Ms. Rachel is chairing the self-study committee, and within the next few weeks you will be receiving an anonymous survey through your email. We ask that 100% of our families will take the time to fill it out, and take the opportunity to share your thoughts to assist us in ensuring that our school is the best that it can be.

24-25 Thanksgiving Break

As you know, we started our Adolescent Program this year, and I am happy to report that our charter class of adolescents has settled in to their new space – provided by the generous donations of so many of you. It is very satisfying to see those students so lit up and enthusiastic about learning. They added a new dimension to Riddle Day this year as they enacted a scene of space exploration – how perfect, considering that they are themselves charting new territory for our school.

The staff and I look forward to seeing all of you at our last Programs for Parents event of the semester with Dr. Annette Haines on November 17th at Chesterfield City Hall. I encourage each one of you to attend the presentation, entitled “Your Child Will Never Be This Age Again: Maximizing Optimal Development from Birth to Adolescence”. Dr. Haines is a powerful and insightful speaker with a world-wide reputation as an expert on Montessori education.

Sincerely,



Anita Chastain
Head of School

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Baking in the Toddler Community

By: Ms. Jana

The cooler fall weather has given us a wonderful opportunity to bake something special every day in the Toddler Community! Food preparation is one of the most popular activities in our classroom. Two children at a time wear beautiful aprons and set up our cooking materials on a table and together we follow our recipe. Toddlers are known to be sensorial explorers, and baking gives them the perfect opportunity to actively explore. Children have the opportunity to fully engage their senses by smelling cinnamon, ground cloves, and vanilla extract prior to pouring it into the mixing bowl. This is also a chance for them to learn language within their environment. Cooking is an extremely satisfying activity for the young child.

There is a special meaning attached to food for these little toddlers. The food encourages interaction and brings our community together. The moment of eating is a moment of sharing and uniting the class. It is a very important occasion to support toddler relationships, friendships, and to express their thoughts and emotions. In every culture, food is part of every celebration; it should be a joyful experience! We create very positive and pleasant experiences for the child when we eat together. It helps the child to adapt to the society where he or she can

see the joy and pleasure of sharing the food.

In addition to sharing in the classroom, the children also learn how to reach out to the wider school community by presenting their baked goods with the office staff and teachers. Their roles are defined. One child offers the napkin; the other child offers baked goods. Lessons in sharing create beautiful smiles upon the faces of the toddlers, which in turn, light up the entire school. The joy the young ones experience during baking and sharing lessons brings about an amazing calmness through concentration. The children are deeply happy, confident, and at peace.



The Montessori Way

By: Ms. Jaya

"I wish I had learned math the Montessori way." This was the response of many parents who attended the hands-on parent evening in October. Dr. Montessori observed that a child's educational experience is richest and most enduring when it incorporates the fullest range of senses and intellectual capabilities. Education should be rounded in activity rather than passive participation. When working with concrete materials in a Montessori classroom, children understand concepts and principles clearly, and they develop reasoning skills which prepare them for abstract thinking. Each activity lays a foundation for the next lesson and prepares the child for a higher level of learning.

Children who transitioned from the Toddler Community are walking into the classroom happy, confident, and with a sense of belonging. They have become independent in choosing their work and are already taking responsibility for maintaining the environment. They are busy participating with the older children in preparing snacks, rolling up rugs, folding laundry, sweeping, etc. Through their own work and by observing the lessons and activities of older children, younger children become aware of how the classroom environment functions. This is how the young child develops inner discipline in a natural way.

This is the beauty of having mixed age children in the classroom. The older children are gracious, kind, loving and patient with the younger children. It is gratifying to see how the children who started out as observers at the age of 2 ½ years are now mentors and leaders after being in the classroom for three years. Such an opportunity helps them develop self-confidence and high self-esteem. Dr. Montessori

said, "There is nothing that makes you learn more than teaching yourself." A Montessori classroom is the only environment that provides the opportunity for children to focus on their own learning, support their peers, and create a happy harmonious lifestyle.

Now that the fall season is here, we have been talking about what happens in nature as the weather changes: Why do leaves change color? How do leaves on the ground decompose and make the



soil rich? What is the difference between deciduous and evergreen trees? What is migration and hibernation? What is harvesting? We learned about how pumpkins grow and looked at different types of gourds and squashes. We tasted a variety of apples, and even made applesauce as a class. The children responded, "This applesauce tastes much better than the sauce we bought!"

The Importance of Cursive Handwriting

By: Ms. Tina

In today's fast-paced, ever-advancing age of technology, cursive is seldom used as a method of communication. Most interactions are now done via email or text message. Some even argue that cursive is a "dying art form," and several schools around the country no longer use it. However, cursive writing not only adds beauty and character to children's work, but has several developmental benefits for children as well.

As with most activities in a Montessori classroom, we present materials to children in the most natural and efficient manner. Dr. Montessori found cursive writing, with its gentle curved lines, to be an extension of the natural movement of the child's hand. When very young children begin "writing," their first drawings are of circles and squiggles. Cursive letters, with their rounded edges, are easier for children to differentiate than print letters. Print requires greater motor coordination than cursive. The hardest movements for the hand to make are a perfect circle and a perfectly vertical line. These are the components that make up print.

Must one begin with strokes? The logical answer is "No." These require too much effort on the part of the child to make them. If he is to begin with the stroke, it should be the easiest thing to execute. But, if we note carefully, a straight stroke is the most difficult to make. Only an accomplished writer can fill out a page with regular strokes, whereas a person who is only moderately proficient can cover a page with presentable writing.

-Dr. Maria Montessori,

The Discovery of the Child, Clio Press Ltd, p. 193

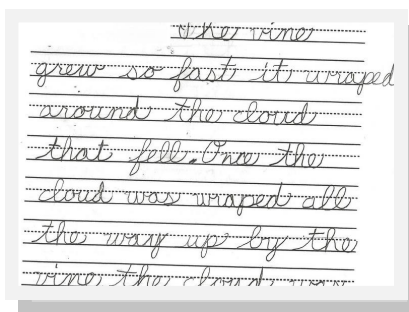
Cursive writing helps children to follow the proper sequence of letters and to recognize the end of each word, since the child only picks up his or her pencil after the word is formed. This also helps the child orient to left-to-right, top-to-bottom writing. With the continuous movement from left to right, children have almost no instances of letter reversals. With print, it is quite easy to mix up b and d, and p and q. Also, the hand is much faster and lighter in the flowing movement, so the children can write more quickly and for longer periods of time without tiring.

There have been some fears associated with teaching cursive letters before print. Some parents worry that their child will not be able to read print in books if they are learning cursive first. We should be careful not to underestimate a child's abilities. Children quickly make the transition from writing cursive to reading print. I see this happen every day. However, most children who begin writing in print often cannot read cursive writing.

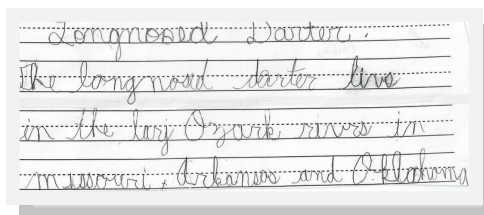
According to education and psychological development theories, the learning, practice and continued use of cursive writing is paramount in

the development of literacy skills. Part of the cognitive process is forming letters by using fine motor skills. This aids in the improvement of retention, understanding, and the use of letter patterns. Cursive allows children flow in their writing and a constant crossing of the midline. Brain research has shown that crossing the midline increases electrical activity in the brain, creating more potential for increase of learning.

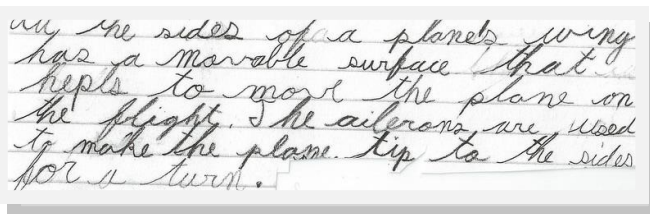
In our classroom, the children practice their cursive handwriting every day. Whether it is learning how to form letters properly, connect letters properly, practice their spelling words, write a story about pre-historic times, or research Leonardo Da Vinci, they are practicing their cursive. The children are able to write quickly, for long periods of time. They are able to focus on their work and deeply concentrate. They are able to produce smooth, continuous work that they love to do, and that they love to show off!



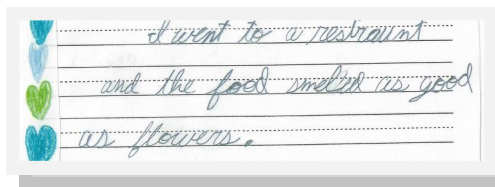
Paige, a third year, wrote a descriptive story about a dark, black vine.



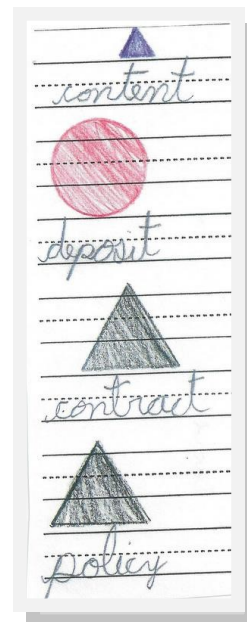
Embry, a first year, researched endangered animals in Missouri.



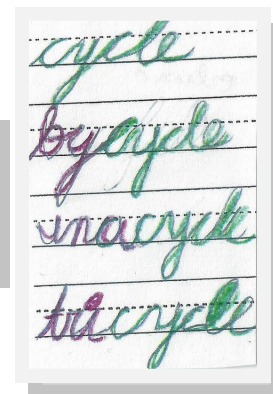
William, a second year, wrote a rough draft for research on airplanes.



Annabel, a third year, wrote a simile while learning about written expression.



David, a second year, symbolized several parts of speech.



Olivia, a first year, worked with prefixes.

Writing in the Elementary Classroom: Steering Children Toward Their Stars

By: Ms. Rebecca

There is no satisfactory explanation of style, no infallible guide to good writing, no assurance that a person who thinks clearly will be able to write clearly, no key that unlocks the door, no inflexible rules by which the young writer may steer his course. He will often find himself steering by stars.

—E.B. White

Like painting-by-numbers, children can be taught how to write a technically sound paragraph or essay. It is when we seek to show them how to write a gripping, vivid or hilarious one that we are met with challenge. It requires a blend of technique and creativity plus an injection of the individual's personality, his or her own voice. While we cannot be the child's voice, there are many steps we can take to release the creative writing potential within each child and to steer the children toward their own stars.

We begin with the belief that our children graduate competent, confident, and expressive writers and that all children, like all humans, have a longing to write. Our approach is simple. First, we give clear, concise presentations covering one skill at a time, followed by ample time for exploration. Children will gradually build their strength as writers, applying their new skills in their work. For example, Carson, after being able to explore dialogue, decided to apply it to his research by having continents talk to each other!

Current best practices in writing indicate that teaching on an individual level provides the most progress in the shortest amount of time. Following the Montessori adage, *follow the child*, we come by this practice naturally. We observe the children and read their writings, thereby letting them dictate which lessons would be best suited for them at their developmental level. For instance, after reading Neema's dramatically descriptive and well-plotted adventure story, "Viko the Viking," I noticed that his characters could be expanded. For his next writing lesson, I presented the idea of character development, which he took to immediately because his writing was asking for it!

To learn to write, children must write, write, write. We give ample opportunities to write-- science experiments, lists, reflections, instructions, poems, stories, letters and research papers are all fair game. We also explore different genres of writing with the children. So far this year we have covered biography, adventure, mysteries, fables, nonfiction, and concrete poetry. Offering a variety of genres allows a child to discover what suits him. Matthew, when discovering concrete poetry, was able to utilize his acute observation skills and zany sense of humor

in a format that was less demanding of his time—consequently he actually spent more time writing concrete poetry! At any given point during the day, you can see a child hunched over the table, with paper and pencil. Frequently, different children ask to stay inside from recess so that they might continue working on a piece of writing. They even asked me on Riddle Day if he could finish editing his research!

But what of the child who stares at the blank sheet of paper, unsure of how to begin? Sometimes they need a push to write, a question to answer: "What would you do if there was no gravity?" Sometimes children benefit from a lesson on making a "topic list" that they can return to again and again. Sometimes children feel daunted by organizing their ideas and find that using a graphic organizer is helpful. Still, sometimes children are wary of making mistakes. "But why do I have to rewrite my paper? Is it bad?" Eli asks. Her friend Tegan gently reminded her, "Ms. Rebecca just wants it to be your best handwriting so everyone can read it. I have to rewrite my papers."

Sometimes the tool of the writer is not the pen, but the scissor. We also show children how to edit their work. Again, the best practices in writing support a one-on-one approach to editing, which many children actually happily anticipate, "Ms. Rebecca. I think I am done with my writing. Can we have a work conference?" The teacher can sit with the student, guiding them toward their mistakes and allowing them to maximize their time, without having to simply correct what is underlined in red ink. By meeting with a child, I am saying, "I care about your progress as a writer and I like what you write." I have actually had children thank me for helping them edit their work.

We emphasize the importance of writing through storytelling and drawing attention to how, as humans, we have only been writing for a short amount of time. We talk about how special it is that humans can write—how there are so many things you want to say to someone, past or present, near or far, that can't be communicated unless we write. By sitting quietly and putting thoughts to paper, not only can you gain understanding through writing, but provide others with your revelations as well. In this way, each child can contribute to the cosmos of writing that surrounds us as humans.

Close the door. Write with no one looking over your shoulder. Don't try to figure out what other people want to hear from you; figure out what you have to say. It's the one and only thing you have to offer.

—Barbara Kingsolver



Autumn in the Classroom

By: Ms. Laura

The children who have transitioned from the Toddler Community have smoothly integrated into their new classroom and are eager to choose their own activities within the Practical Life and Sensorial areas of the room. These lessons lay the foundation for the Language and Math works which are presented once the child has established self-control through concentration and an ability to complete a sequenced activity. Practical Life activities such as polishing, table washing, and flower arranging refine the child's motor skills by requiring them to be keenly aware of their fine and gross muscular coordination. Rolling small mats and using discretion by only applying a little bit of polish from a dropper bottle are just a few exercises practiced. The process of cleaning up and making the work ready for the next student instills responsibility and builds social cohesion.

Autumn has brought us a bounty of apples, giving us the opportunity to do cooking activities that help children develop skills in working cooperatively, taking on independent responsibilities, and working with concentration and focus. After reading a book about the process of making applesauce, children participated in washing, peeling, coring, and cutting apples. They took turns placing the apples into a pot with cinnamon and sugar and watched the ingredients cook down into a creamy sauce. The sweet aroma filled the classroom with warmth and joy. The children were very proud to serve their friends the applesauce for snack.

Autumn has brought many other opportunities for discovery and learning. We collected leaves and identified the botanical names of each one using the Botany Cabinet in the Sensorial area of the room. The older children have been learning the names of many trees as well as scientifically reasoning why leaves change color as the season shifts. We have also discussed the migration of animals and their habitats, and the children have planted spinach in the garden which we will enjoy in a salad very soon.

It was nice talking with all of you during the conferences and sharing the many noteworthy milestones your children are meeting. It is a privilege to work with them and to be in partnership with you.

Thank you for attending our hands-on Montessori evening. It was fun to watch you explore and enjoy the same materials your children work with each day. Have a wonderful Autumn!



Play with Purpose

By: Ms. Jayanti

Recently I was getting the classroom ready for the next day when an Upper Elementary child said, "Ms. Jayanti, I used to think that everything in Primary is just about games, but then Ms. Rachel told us that the Pink Tower has helped her students learn the concept of volume and that playing with all the materials in the Primary level have actually helped us understand all of the difficult concepts in the Elementary classroom."

The Montessori materials provide children an opportunity to explore, discover and be creative. One such experience happened when I was giving a Sensorial lesson with Knobless Cylinders to a child. After I had placed three cylinders on top of each other to show how to start to build the tower, the child looked at me, smiled, and exclaimed with delight, "Ms. Jayanti, it looks like a wedding cake!" This is an example of how children connect their daily observations with activities at school.

After a smooth transition into the school year, the younger children are working on hand-eye coordination, decision making, sequencing, and completion of a process within an activity. Sensorial materials like the Pink Tower and Geometric Cabinet are aiding the development of mathematical thinking through concepts such as geometrical forms,

height, width, length, etc. The older children are learning different shapes of leaves using the Botany Cabinet, the countries of North and South America, the states in United States of America, and concepts of addition, subtraction and multiplication with the 'Bank Game'. These older students are mentors and role models to younger children, who are always observing their movements and learning from their experience with the materials.

One day, while quizzing an older child on addition math facts, I explained that every time you add 1 to a number it becomes the next number. So, $4+1$ is 5 and $7+1$ is 8, etc. A $4\frac{1}{2}$ year old child working with the Addition Stamp Game at the same table overheard our conversation and paused what she was doing. She looked up at me and said, "Ms. Jayanti, now I don't have to count the units because you said that $6+1$ makes 7. I already know it without even counting!"

The purposeful activities of the Primary Montessori classroom help the children gain a deep knowledge from a variety of concepts and allows them to become self-reliant, independent thinkers. At our recent Programs for Parents session, parents were able to gain hands-on experience with the wonderful Montessori Math and Sensorial materials. It was a lot of fun for teachers preparing the lessons, and we enjoyed the positive reaction of the parents who discovered for themselves how their children engage in purposeful play each and every day.

Montessori and Model United Nations

By: Ms. Rachel

This school year is off to a great start and we are busier than ever in the Upper Elementary class. One of our new and exciting endeavors this year centers on our participation in the Model United Nations. The Model UN is a program available to middle and high school students. The goal of the Model UN is for students to learn about a culture other than their own. Through collaborative work the students research their chosen country and explore the problems faced by that country. They will then work to come up with realistic and effective solutions to those problems.

The Model UN is set up in such a way that the students spend the first half of the school year on their country research and the second half preparing for the General Assembly. Just like the actual United Nations, our student “delegates” will meet with delegates from other schools in the area to present, debate, and pass resolutions. The preparation for the General Assembly and the actual event itself will give the children a great deal of practice in public speaking and debate. They will have to think on their feet when answering questions about the resolutions they will be proposing. Our General Assembly date is May 11. The

countries our students will be representing are: Libya, Andorra, Madagascar, and Papua New Guinea.

With a General Assembly date so late in the school year, some might think that our children would put off their work until a later date. Not so! In typical fashion, our students dove right into the project with a serious level of dedication. The sixth and seventh graders are not the only ones involved either. Even though they won't be able to attend the General Assembly, the fourth and fifth graders have also become involved with the project. The sixth graders have formed research groups with the younger children, helping them research their countries.

All of this work fits in perfectly with the Montessori curriculum. We have taken advantage of the energy associated with this project and used it as an opportunity to incorporate a number of Geography lessons. The Model UN work has prompted lessons and discussions on interdependencies, food production, farming, the flow of goods, and world trade. The class will also be working on their public speaking and debate skills in order to prepare for the General Assembly. The children have shown so much passion and commitment toward this project that I feel confident that it will be a tradition in the classroom for many years to come!

Side by Side:

The Art of Working with the Adolescent

By: Ms. Jenna

As the Directress of the Adolescent Program, I am a medium, facilitator, protector, partner in learning, and an observer. I am a good listener, a comforting shoulder, and a testing ground for all the questions the adolescent students have about the world.

In our classroom, discussion is the way to sort out some of these questions. Critical thinking questions guide the students in considering new perspectives. Language, more than ever, becomes a tool to understanding humans.

As adults, we are an example of embodied values; the way we collaborate with others, the language we use, the problem solving approaches we employ, the ability to be patient, how we handle tension, etc. The adolescent is continually learning by watching us.

My job is to be right beside our students offering lessons diplomatically with choice. Side by side work with the adolescent helps the students acquire the skills to become a contributing member of society. I function as a co-learner, respecting the independence of our students, but available when help is needed. The adolescent wants adult companionship in a respectful way. The atmosphere in our classroom is calm and peaceful; we have created an environment where the adolescent can demonstrate positive characteristics. I truly have faith in our adolescences. The art of working with the adolescent results from cohesion and cooperation within our group. The

students are experiencing a genuine sense of belonging. They are contributors to our community and are recognized for their accomplishments.

