

Hello Everyone,

It's hard to believe that it is November already! The children are enjoying the fall season thoroughly. Colorful leaves are a favorite topic of conversation. The afternoon group went on a collecting walk in our woods a few weeks ago. Many beautiful leaves, pine cones and acorns went into the pockets of our special collectors aprons that we have had made for just such an adventure. Interest in the Botany Cabinet has been sparked and the children are exploring the various leaf shapes and parts of the leaf. Leaf rubbing has been out on the shelf and the children always love to see the veins of the leaves emerging from under the flat side of the crayon. I have also observed a new interest in art of all kinds. Paintings are being done with more care, the gluing/collage work has become popular again, and several of the older students are trying to draw an object they are studying.

Our curriculum is so beautifully integrated; it is easy to see interest and skills from one area meld into work of a different kind. Our materials help the children develop their perceptual and fine motor skills starting with the preliminary lessons in Practical Life, through working with tiny Golden Beads in the Math area. Last week I observed an older student starting to draw the Continent Puzzle Map. He was quite familiar with this map through much work with it as a puzzle, lessons to learn the associated vocabulary, and finally tracing around the pieces to create his own map. This time without thinking, he sat down and started to draw it free hand, from memory. This student had the day before, realized that he could draw leaf shapes from the Botany Cabinet in the same manner. Growth in one area of our classroom always spills out into others!

The students have become quite independent and really enjoy helping their classmates with things that they themselves have mastered. I have noticed the Kindergarten students embracing their role as leaders and fostering a sense of ownership of our class among their younger classmates. Students of all ages can often be observed sweeping, dusting, polishing, wiping up spills, etc. without being asked to do so by an adult. This is important work in 'The Children's House', as Maria Montessori termed the Primary level classroom. This work links the child from work done at home to their school environment. It also nurtures the child's developing sense of responsibility and caring for others.

The children are busy exploring our language. All the children are able to identify some or all of the phonemes (smallest unit of sound in a word) and are learning what letters make that sound. The youngest members of our class are continuing their work with Sandpaper Letters and sound games. Older students are using the Movable Alphabets to write words, phrases or sentences. As a result of all this language exploration and writing, many of the oldest students have discovered that they can read simple, phonetic words or are solid beginning readers.

Our cultural studies focus has been on the beginning of our country. The students are learning how life was for the Pilgrims and other colonists. My assistant, Misty Brown, found a recipe for unleavened bread cooked on a skillet. The students had great fun making and shaping the dough. It was delicious!! We also made butter to go with our bread by shaking cream in lidded jars. Benjamin Murphy's grandmother has an authentic butter churn from her childhood. We will be making butter again, but this time with a real churn! The students were also fascinated to learn about how the Iroquois Indians in the eastern areas lived. We have now moved westward (along with the pioneers!), and have begun reading 'Little House In The Big Woods', by Laura Ingalls Wilder. They will hear in the pages of this book many of the things we have been recently discussing about living during this time.

The seamless connections between the areas of language, history and geography, all overlap as the students learn about their connection to all people. This is one of the larger aims of a Montessori Primary level classroom. On Monday, 11/14/11, you will have an opportunity to learn more about the Geography area of our classrooms. Please plan to attend this parent ed event. We will talk about how Montessori explores geography and then go visit the Elementary science fair. This year projects have been done with a focus on geography . I am always amazed at where the foundations laid in Primary take the student later as they grow! I hope to see many of you there.

Sincerely,

Sandy Baumgart