

Mrs. Irre Classroom notes September 2011

Hello everyone,

With September behind us, the excitement of the new school year has now settled in to a lovely community of children working and playing together. Each year I marvel to see young children learn the ways of the classroom so quickly. Utilizing Maria Montessori's theory, and designing the prepared environment according to her vision, the children come together to form an industrious and warm-hearted community where we are respectful and conscientious.

Science lessons began the first week of school with a visit from Dylan Wilson's turtle. It was a great way to get the work of the vertebrate and invertebrate cards in action to discuss the five classes of vertebrates. The little turtle was also wonderful, seeing as it was very active. This inspired naming all the parts of the turtle and getting the vertebrate puzzle work started. Some children build the puzzles, some children match parts of the puzzles to the corresponding language cards, some children draw the puzzles, and then there are those who are old enough and proficient enough to label the parts after drawing. A little spark of inspiration is all we needed!

Dylan and his grandfather also shared an amazing collection of insects they had preserved over the summer. Our many insect cards and the characteristics of insects was a nice follow-up to Dylan's summer work. Thank you to Mr. Wilson for sharing his love of science with the children.

A visit to Hartland orchard came early this year. Farmer Hank and his crew of workers were extremely welcoming. The Kindergartners attend a field trip each year to learn about the cycle of the apple. We begin at school by reading and learning about the stages the apple goes through prior to our trip to the orchard. Each year the staff remark how mannerly and knowledgeable our classes are. Parents and chaperones assisted the children with all aspects of the day from riding the hay tractor to picking apples to playing on the orchard's giant slide and bouncy pillow. Fun was had by all. The apples we brought back to school were then processed with an apple peeler/corer/slicer during the morning hours the next day. Each child processed an apple for the bowl and had a turn to grate fresh nutmeg and cinnamon to add to the sliced apples. That afternoon the older kids made pie dough in preparation for the next day. The following day we each prepared a mini pie and smelled the delicious aroma of baking apple pie throughout the building. Many children told me of their plans to share their pies with their families. I hope you all enjoyed them - we sure had fun making them. On a whim we also planted some apple seeds after dissecting the apple and naming it's parts. One of them sprouted and we planted it one afternoon during a nature walk. We attempt to take several Listening Walks each fall after reading the book titled the same.

We added a new song to our repertoire this year called Way Down Yonder in the Pawpaw Patch. Two weeks later Uli and his dad offered to send in some pawpaws they had picked. The children got to see first hand what pawpaws look and taste like, bringing that song to life!

As part of our cultural studies with Kindergarten-aged students each year we begin with some US history and learn about the flag of the USA and the Pledge of Allegiance. While reading a book one afternoon called A is for America, a lovely collection of American icons from a - z, there was a picture of the Statue of Liberty. This incited much interest with the students so off to the library we went. As luck would have it Mary Sofia and her family were visiting New York that very weekend and did a lovely follow up to this interest. Mary visited the Statue of Liberty and brought back pictures and stories from her visit. She shared her picture album and her information with her fellow students and added just the perfect touch to our lesson.

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If you attended the Primary Conversations meeting in September you would know that I am intent on getting the message out about the benefits of reading aloud to children. The benefits to children's reading abilities, vocabulary, and motivation are innumerable, the most important work we can do with children to increase their love for reading and therefore their capabilities. With that in mind our class has enjoyed many read-alouds at all times of day in our class. Some of the elementary students have been very accommodating and come to visit often to read aloud to our younger students. As part of our afternoon cultural and novel studies we have just completed reading a book titled Flat Stanley. The children were so excited about this book; they looked forward to our after-lunch reading time each day. It is a silly story and at times the children laughed out loud.

The observation period begins next week and we encourage all of you to come and observe the class in action. Please schedule with Jessica at the front office. We will also be hosting Dr. Varia from Mindwell Psychology on October 11 at the Front Royal campus to speak about Executive Function. Executive function is the mental processes used to perform activities such as planning, organizing, strategizing, paying attention to and remembering details and managing time and space. This promises to be an informative session, and beneficial for us to know about seeing as the executive function skills are the exact skills our students need to possess for school success. Also note we will not have school on the 14th of October due to the teachers attending the NAMTA (North American Montessori Teachers Association) conference where Mountain Laurel Montessori School will be presenting about our school culture and how we implement Cultural Studies across the levels from Beginnings classes to our Farm School program. We will be sharing our presentation with the parent body at our October 18th parent education meeting. We are asking parents to share any school activity pictures you have with KC Dickman and Elaine Glier for publications and the NAMTA presentation.

The baking schedule rotation is in need of volunteers. The children love baking and sharing their baked goods with their friends the next day. Kate Long, mother of Anabelle, is coordinating the baking schedule for us. Please contact her if you can bake with students some Tuesday morning. Kate and Anabelle have already baked a banana bread last week and the children enjoyed it immensely.

It is a pleasure working with your children. Be on the lookout for conference schedules. Fall conference day is October 31st.

Sincerely,
Carrie Irre