

Philomath Montessori School Newsletter

DECEMBER 2016



Ames strings Italian flags into a garland.

Buon Natale

By Doni Manning-Cyrus

Happy holidays, everyone! Oh, heck, Merry Christmas! I am loving this unit on Italy and Italian Christmas. I love Christmas, and this year I get to let my Yuletide freak flag fly! My apologies to kids who don't celebrate nor care much for this holiday as it is non-stop Natale around here. We are stringing popcorn to hang out for the birds, making pomanders (clove-studded oranges), ornaments and Italian flag garlands to hang up.

Christmas can be celebrated any number of ways, of course, but I divide it up in my mind into the secular and the sacred. Many people who are not Christian celebrate Christmas for the fun of it and the dire need to have distraction from the gloom of late autumn and early winter. Lights, decorations, social gatherings, luxurious victuals and joyful music lure believers and non-believers alike to celebrate this holiday. Our Christmas here at school will have the foundation of the nativity story, however. Italy is a solidly Christian, largely Catholic country and in that spirit we will learn about the birth of Jesus, a historical figure who unquestionably changed the world. We will learn just why Christians celebrate His birth so jubilantly. I am not a Christian myself, but I am powerfully moved by the idea that a little newborn babe can be the savior of all humankind. In fact, we Montessorians dedicate our lives to it.

Christmas in Italy is a little more individualistic than in the U.S., with regional variations. Some families open gifts on Christmas Day, after lunch. These gifts are brought by Jesus. In smaller northern towns, a blind Saint Lucia brings the presents to the children. In some homes, Bobbo Natale (Father Christmas) bears gifts on the night before Christmas. In Rome, Bologna, Venice and other large cities, La Befana, a good witch, brings the presents. The witch was just an old woman who was too busy with her housework to accompany the Magi to Bethlehem. Now full of regret that she couldn't bestow an offering to the baby Jesus, she rides the broom that she was using to bring gifts to other children. She brings presents on January 5, the eve of the Epiphany, when the Wise Men arrived at the manger.

Children sometimes go from home to home, reciting Christmas poems and singing, often dressed as shepherds and playing pipes. In some towns, actual shepherds enter the town, caroling and playing bagpipes. Live nativity scenes abound. St. Francis of Assisi, who traveled to Bethlehem at great personal cost to spread the gospel to the Sultan of Egypt, was allowed to visit the site of the stable where the Babe was born. (This hospitality was offered by the Sultan despite the fact that towns in his sultanate were under siege from Crusaders.) Viewing the birthplace of Christ

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was so profound an experience for Francis that he desired to re-create that feeling in his fellow Christians at home and so used a crib to tell the Nativity story and was the originator of the “Presepi,” the manger scenes that Christians around the world display during Advent. The first Christmas cards were also exchanged in Italy.

We will be learning two songs in honor of Christmas. One is the boisterous “Dominick the Donkey” by Lou Monte. I suggest you listen to the song on YouTube. You’ll be sure to get a “kick” out of it. Our other song is “Adeste Fideles,” the Latin version of “O Come All Ye Faithful.” I have a feeling that we’ll end up singing a lot of random Christmas songs that the children suggest, which will suit me just fine! I love carols!

On the last day of school before Winter Break, we will celebrate by singing our songs, reading a nice Christmas book and feasting on panettone, the Italian Christmas fruit cake. We will hang up some festive homemade decorations and maybe even dance to some Christmas music.

Speaking of Winter Break, this is one point at which we send home the children’s work from their folders. We also send it home at spring and summer breaks. Some of the kids will have nothing to bring at this time because they are so young, they have nothing in their folders. Math papers, written work and sewing projects are mostly what is in the folders and many of our kids are, appropriately, not doing this sort of work yet. Some older kids may possibly not be able to bring theirs home yet either because some of it may be unfinished. We only allow the kids to take their work home if it is ALL done. This encourages



Aayenda takes a break from her washing.

the practice of finishing all these papers rather than continually starting new ones, which is consumerist and merely makes us FEEL like we’re productive.

Sniff, sniff. What’s that smell? That’s just the smell of fear emanating from the parents at the thought of having their darlings home with them non-stop for more than two weeks! Whatever will we do to occupy them? If this line of thought has entered your mind at all, don’t be ashamed. It’s natural to have some anxiety before a marathon! Please take a look at an old blog post from 2010 titled “Winter Break Fun.” Access the blog by going to philomathmontessori.org, click News and Events, click Blog, click Love of Learning and pull it up from the archives. I believe that the ideas and activities therein will provide some enjoyment for some of your kids and you parents, too.

I wish all of you a beautiful Winter Break. Regardless of which

winter holidays you celebrate, I hope you all get to enjoy festivities, friends and family. I wish you an opportunity to give and do good in the world. It is very hard to see others struggling when we have so much. Let us do what we can reasonably do for our neighbors and those in distant lands, and then let us enjoy and appreciate all the blessings that Fate has seen fit to bestow upon us.

Wishing you the happiest of holiday seasons,
Doni



Ella gets more glue for a collage.

NEWSLINE

- ❖ There *will* be art class on Friday, December 16. **Winter Break begins Monday, December 19.** School resumes on **TUESDAY**, January 3.
- ❖ Please join us for our next **parent meeting** on **Thursday, January 12, at 6 p.m.** This is an **important** meeting – just one month before our big fundraiser!
- ❖ There will be **no school on Monday, January 16.** We will be celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.
- ❖ There will also be **no school February 16-21.** The teachers will be traveling to the National AMI Refresher Course. There **will be** art class on February 17.
- ❖ There are two basket parties coming up: January 28 and February 4. One will be hosted by Katy (Ames' mom) and the other by Kai (Mackay's mom). Thank you, ladies!
- ❖ Our big fundraiser of the year – **The Love of Learning Auction and Family Fun Night** – will be on **Saturday, February 11**, from 4 to 7 p.m. at Linus Pauling Middle School. Please bring your families, friends, acquaintances and complete strangers! Many exciting offerings and treats!



Zaynab holds a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice.

THANK YOUS

Classroom and Take-Home Projects

Refinish classroom tables (many!) – **Brendan Ward**

Cut out shapes of Italy – **Karin Bolender**

Prepare burlap sewing – **Kai Foster**

Prepare 3rd level sewing cards – **Karin Bolender**

Leaf blowing – **Lua Siegel**

Classroom cleaning – **Lin Li, Yaya Mabeck, Lua Siegel and Rachael Oehler**

Donations

Two pairs of boots – **Leanne Miller**

Schoolyard rock (delivered into the yard!) – **E.D. Hughes**

Eggshells for crushing – **Karin Feldman**

Bouquet of flowers – **Jovi Tavano**

Repairs

Fixed bathroom faucet – **James Deatherage**

Year-Round Jobs

Social Media Parent – **Karen Petersen**

New Newsletter Designer – **Karen Petersen**

Other

Annual Giving Campaign – **Jon Stoll and Yalda Asmatey**

Phone Tree (Wow! What a job!) – **Leanne Miller**

Our sincere and humble thanks for the many things you do for us and give to us!! We are so fortunate.

FRIDAY ART NEWS

This past month on Art Fridays, we have made fabric collage flags and hand-printed and sewn journals, and created Andy Goldsworthy-inspired nature collages.

For the collages, the children worked in pairs, mostly, to create temporary patterns and designs from a selection of objects found in nature. They began choosing one basket with shells, leaves, drift wood, nuts, or rocks and created a design. They let me know each time it was complete and I photographed their work and then they returned those objects to the basket. Then they chose two baskets and then later three or more to choose from. There was so much concentration and inspiration as they created these arrangements and this went on for a few hours.

We are presently working on painted papers to create light catchers to hang, move and reflect light during this period of less daylight.

Jennifer

TOP RIGHT: Khetan arranges leaves and hazelnuts to make an Andy Goldsworthy-inspired collage.

RIGHT: A photo collage of four of the students' projects.

FAR RIGHT: The students also made fabric collage flags.



FAREWELL TO THE LI/LU FAMILY

We are sorry to have to say goodbye to the Li/Lu family! We are very grateful to Lin and Yi for their numerous contributions to our school during their time with us. Eric joined our class in September 2014 speaking virtually no English and blossomed into a talkative and joyful addition to our classroom community in no time at all! Eric's amazed us as his English vocabulary seemed to multiply exponentially overnight. His hunger for more never ceased as he developed in all areas of the classroom, sometimes counting the 1,000 chain two times in a day! Shortly after Eric began school in 2014, the Lu/Li family welcomed baby Emma into the

world. Lin jumped right in to prepare classroom materials and quickly stepped up to become our newsletter designer, even with a new baby at home! She never failed to produce a beautiful newsletter design on a tight schedule. Yi and Lin have worked hard at our beginning-of-the-year work party three years in a row and, as supporters of our annual LOL event, Lin attended basket parties, helped with set up and put together a beautiful booklet featuring our sponsors and live auction items. Yi and Lin always stuck around to help with clean up at our LOL event. Speaking of clean up, Lin has taken time out of her busy schedule over



the years to graciously dust our classroom to assist us in keeping our environment beautiful. To the Li/Lu family, we say thank you for all your contributions to our school over the years! Eric and his family were embraced by a very tight community and we will miss them all very much. Our very best wishes go with them!