

Philomath Montessori School

Classroom News

By Doni Manning-Cyrus

May 2015

As you know, we have been studying Egypt and it has been a wonderful unit. Ancient Egypt is a bottomless well of invention, culture and religious studies. The children are so fascinated with the pantheon of Egyptian gods, stories of various pharaohs and queens, the death and entombment rituals and, of course, the gory details of mummification. I am so grateful for all the wonderful books that have been made available to us as they reveal the times, the sensibilities of the people, the pageantry of court life, the misery of slaves and the universal and timeless relationships between parents and children, children and pets, people and their deities, etc, better than I could ever express.

The importance of literature in the development of a child cannot be overstated. As you parents know from your bedtime routines, reading a book together is a wonderful way to bond. You and the child

share this story and these pictures. It is now a part of you both. Reading is a way to see the world from another's point of view: a vital

tool in the development of empathy. In these modern times when we all spend less and less time in one another's company and more and more time communicating via text, email, message board and phone (and we do even less actual telephoning now), we must take extra measures to bring our children up knowing that behind all these written words are real people with real feelings and real life experiences that create their world view. As Anais Nin said, "We do not see the world as it is. We see the world as we are."

Literature also introduces us to archetypes, which help us to understand human nature. We recognize repeatedly certain icons such as the mother, the child, the trickster, the hero, the wise old woman and the flood to name a few. You can Google Karl Jung to see more of these. Another archetype we can all recognize immediately is the villain. I have heard it said that it is very important to introduce children to fairy tales at some point so that they can, in a psychologically manageable, child-appropriate way, come to understand that there is evil in the world. A parent here at school told me of a time when her sweet little girl said, "It's a good thing that there are no bad people in the world." This mother sadly informed her daughter that in fact, there are bad people in the world and that is why the little girl must not wander off from her parents or teachers until she is much



Jovi hammering nails.

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older. It broke the mother's heart to shatter the girl's rosy image of the world, but she also wanted her daughter to have this important information. Some would say that there are, indeed, no "bad people" or "bad guys." It is perhaps more PC, more compassionate, more open-minded to say that there are just "sick people" or "people with problems." I often say "dangerous people" as that casts a pretty wide net. Whether these dangerous people are sick, disenfranchised, marginalized, misunderstood, corrupt or brought up in a barn, they do inflict evil upon the world and fairy tales are a gentle introduction to the idea that they exist.

The longer I do this work, the more continuing education I am exposed to, the more I find myself loosening up on what literature I will share with young kids. When first trained and for many years after, I was very strict with myself about only reading fantasy and fairy tales to children over the age of 5. As it turns out, many of us Montessorians were a bit confused on this point. Dr. Montessori merely said that if we were going to read "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" to a little one, we had best make sure that the little one in question already knew about bears and chairs. Her point was that we should not rely on fantastic (not reality-based) portrayals of real situations, animals, people, settings, concepts, etc to convey truth to children. Such books are to us, amusing and to children, confusing. Their first introductions to topics and ideas should be firmly rooted in reality and facts. But after a child has learned about bears: that they are animals, mammals, omnivores who bear one or two cubs at a time, who live in mountains, polar regions, temperate and tropical forests, who hibernate and that there are various species and that males sometimes commit infanticide, well, then, we can go crazy and tell cute stories about them eating porridge. So, go ahead, read Charlotte's Web (one of my favorites!) to your young child, but only if she already understands that spiders are not good spellers and that rats cannot read.

And now, to tell you a little bit about what is going on in the classroom. We have been learning about dog safety. I am a huge dog lover. I currently have 2 of my own and I have been volunteering at Safehaven Humane Society every Friday morning since 2009. Recently, I went through a 7 week obedience course with my doggies and I also had a class at Safehaven on basic clicker training and best practices to interact with shelter dogs safely. I just joined a Friday dog walking group at SH in which we crate up a bunch of dogs, load them in the van and transport them to a park or other lovely setting to take a break from the shelter and spend some time in nature. I had to take the training to be allowed to be part of this. This training and other tips that Safehaven staff found for me online have provided the basis of what I shared with the children.



Zaybab & Ilana on the tire tree.



Many of the kids also love dogs. Some of them fear dogs. And they are all correct. Dogs are loveable and some are to be feared. They should all be treated with respect. My observation is that children, tragically, are the most likely victims of dog bites, often because they just don't know how to treat dogs with respect. We began by looking at cartoon drawings of dogs displaying signs of fear and anxiety. Dogs who bite usually do so out of fear and we humans often don't recognize the signs of fear. Some signs of fear in dogs are cowering, lip-licking, pacing, yawning, wrinkling the brow and placing the ears in a downward position. On a different day, we learned how to behave if confronted with a fearful dog. We turn our side to the dog, keeping our hands at our sides and slowly back away (unless there is a grown-up nearby to rescue us, in which case we would stand still with our side to the dog.) We avoid eye-contact with the dog as this is confrontational in dog world.



Yasmina writing numbers on a chalkboard

On yet another day, we had a wonderful Grace and Courtesy Lesson on How to Meet a New Dog. First, we ask the owner if we may pet their dog. After receiving permission, we place ourselves at a short distance from the dog, with our side toward the dog, hands down, avoiding eye-contact. We let the dog come to us. If the dog comes over, he wants to meet us. Then we pet the dog's back only. If the dog doesn't come to us, we just admire him from a distance. It was great fun for the kids to take turns playing the roles of Dog Owner, Child and Dog. They acted out scenarios in which the owner allowed the petting or did not and scenarios in which the dog approached the child for petting or did not. At another time, we learned about some behaviors to avoid around dogs. We don't approach dogs from behind; we don't touch their toys, treats or food. We avoid dogs who are eating. We don't touch their feet, ears or tails and we don't hug them. I emphasized that these are the best practices for dogs we don't know well and trust. With my dogs, you could hug them from behind while caressing their ears and tails and stealing their food bowls and they still would not bite. But just like meeting new people, we don't subject new dogs to such familiarity until we know for sure that it is welcome.

Serendipitously, the next day, most of us were out enjoying a beautiful day in the schoolyard when 2 neighbors, a couple, were walking their 2 dogs in the grassy area outside our fence. We admired their dogs and struck up a conversation. The children told the woman that we had been learning how to meet a new dog. The woman quizzed the children about what they had learned and together, they came up with asking first, not making eye-contact, turning our side to the dog, etc. The woman asked if the kids knew why they shouldn't look a dog in the eyes and then answered her own question, "because dogs think you're being mean!" she said. She then picked up her little Chihuahua so that each and every child who had gathered there could pet her dog over the fence. He was so tolerant. I asked the children if anyone noticed anything unusual about this dog. Nope. No one even noticed that the dog had only 3 legs. "Can we pet that dog?" someone asked, referring to the Aussie shepherd who was hanging back with the man. "No, she bites," said the man. I couldn't have asked for a more teachable moment if I had staged it myself!

As this is my last newsletter article for this school year, I would like to thank you all for entrusting the care and education of your children to me for a few hours each week. I realize that it is a privilege and I am truly grateful. I thank you for the many contributions of time and energy that

have helped to keep our school operating smoothly all year. From making sure your child has their water bottle with them, to preparing art materials to soliciting donations for our fundraiser – they all come together to create this huge collaboration with so many moving parts that we call “Montessori school!” Thanks for making it happen! Have a wonderful summer break and everlasting joy wherever life takes you!



Noontime lunch bunch!

Thank You!

Classroom Projects

- Prepare 3rd level sewing cards: **Kim Catton**
- Trace & cut felt crocodiles: **Meagan Johanson**
- Provide blown eggs for egg dying: **Lin Li, Leanne Miller, Amy Ward, Kim Catton**
- Prepare construction paper cut outs: **Meagan Johanson**
- Cut muslin for sewing: **Kim Catton**
- Create Scrip Info Sheet: **Amy Ward**
- Trace & cut shapes for drawing: **Lua Siegel**
- Prepare muslin sewing: **Lua Siegel**



Jacoby & Jai work with the multiplication bead bars.



Auni milling barley.

Donations

- Small soaps: **Maya Emshwiller**
- Tulips: **The Wu/Emshwiller Family**
- Flowers/plants for the classroom: **Hahn Family**
- *China: A History of Art* reference book: **Maya Emshwiller & Zhaohui Wu**
- Egyptian artifacts: **The Giftai and Wiethorn Family**
- Caterpillar larvae & use of habitat: **The Hahn Family**

Classroom Cleaning: **Hahn Family**

Gift Books

- **Isabel Hahn:** *Are You a Snail?*
- **Connor Lynch:** *Where Would I Be in the Evergreen Tree?*
- **Mia Walker:** *About Habitats: Oceans*
- **Eric Lu:** *Papa, Do You Love Me?*
- **James Runciman:** *One Word, One Day*
- **Kaden Johanson:** *About Habitats: Forests*
- **Harper Mabeck:** *Are You a Spider?*

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

Art Friday

May 2015

We spent a couple weeks working on mosaic stepping stones that will be put in front of the sand table outside. Presently we are making musical instruments with an introduction into Australian Aboriginal designs, symbols, and dots to paint drums. We will then have a rhythm session to experiment with the sounds created using hands as well as mallets.

- Jennifer Smith



Ilana is decorating her aboriginal drum.

Newsline

- ❖ Please join us for our **End-of-the-Year Potluck** on Saturday, May 6 from 5pm to 6:30pm in our school yard. If the weather is inclement, we will meet at Mary's River Park (just south of the Philomath Library on 11th). This year please be sure to be on hand for our second annual farewell and flyaway ritual! It will begin at 6:15.
- ❖ If you would like to keep your **current year-round job** for the 2015-2016 school year, please let us know soon.
- ❖ Our **last day of school** is Thursday, June 11. No full day or extended care.
- ❖ Please be sure to mark Saturday, August 22 (9am – noon) on your calendar – our **Parent Work Day**. We will definitely need you!!

