

Puffin Class News August 2018



It's finally August, and everybody is ready to get back to the business of five-days-a-week, mornings and afternoons spent doing Montessori work. Welcome back! Our summer session was lovely. I joined the older primary children on two of several off-campus field trips they enjoyed, including an exploration of North American wildlife at The Woodlands, and a sampling of meat pasties at the Australian Bakery. The younger children had their own special in-house field trips, which included activities such as learning folk songs from Europe, and listening to a visiting didgeridoo performer.

Also over the summer, we were privileged to have several new students join the Puffin class. Be sure to come to the primary kickoff meeting on August 8, so you can give a warm welcome to the families of Santiago and Gabriela (whose family just moved here from out of town). We are very pleased to have you here.

We will also use the kickoff meeting to take care of sign up for Family of the Week for the entire academic year, and a sign up for holiday presentations.

Always, I hope our monthly newsletters will give you a chance to learn more about what's happening in our class. This year, my plan is to cover the four areas of the classroom, one per month through winter break; and then in the spring session, cover some of the theory behind the Montessori method. There are more than 300 different activities in a Montessori primary classroom, divided into the groups known as Practical Life, Sensorial, Language and Math. All are critically important to the psychological and intellectual development of a child up to age 6.

So, for this month, let's look at Practical Life. These are the activities that children get to do first because they are familiar already: taking care of themselves and taking care of the classroom involve skills that they've at least seen an adult do. While we teach our young companions how to cut an apple, pour a glass of water, clean up a spill, sweep, wash a cup, and zip a zipper, they're getting an experience of being capable. They're learning how to pay attention to a lesson, and organize their own work. They're building both gross and fine motor skills.

(continued...)

Calendar:

August 3: School closed for teacher workday

August 6: First day of fall session. To their great excitement, older children resume Montessori afternoon work cycles.

August 8, 4:45 p.m.: Primary kickoff meeting

August 17, 8:00 a.m.: Material Morning

August 31: Maria Montessori's Birthday



Eleanor enjoys snack. The process of choosing snack, eating with good manners, and cleaning up afterwards is a Practical Life activity.



Chase practices tying a bow. Practical Life exercises continue for the child's entire Primary experience, gradually growing lengthier and more complex.



Yael peels a tangerine, carefully removing the pith from each segment. She'll need to take her plate to a table with a chair before she begins eating, but she's chosen to do the work standing up (incidentally, this is building her core muscles).

They're learning how to concentrate on progressively longer activities (it takes much less time to button the button frame than it does to make a flower arrangement, clean up the materials and put everything away dry). They're learning how to persevere when things are difficult (peeling a carrot, for example, is quite frustrating when the carrot peeler is at the wrong angle), how to ask for help, and what kind of help may be offered. (It's rare that we'll do something for a child, but we will gladly show how to do it again).

And perhaps most important, they are learning how to be independent, to direct their own work. As adults, we may offer suggestions if they seem, especially at the beginning, to be somewhat rudderless. Would you like to do a "thinking" work, or one to take care of the class? (I don't mention that all the work, done properly, requires "thinking.") Would you like to do something at a table, or would a rug be better? Do you need something where you can sit, or stand?

Children never outgrow practical life; it only becomes more complex. We have had children who learned how to follow a recipe for pizza dough, crochet doilies, sew purses, paint self-portraits, fold origami. Still, it is on this foundation — the child now full of confidence, good coordination, lengthy concentration, strong organizational skills, and capable of independent action — that all the rest of the Montessori curriculum is built.



Miriam practices the hook and eye frame. It's easier to learn to manipulate fasteners when the work is on a table in front of you.

At home:

All of these activities are home activities as well. If the activity is shown carefully to the child, and the child is able to practice, they're getting the same benefit as they would at school. For more specific suggestions, please take one of the chore lists from the pocket on our bulletin board.



Claire practices peeling a carrot. Young children are perfectly capable of using sharp tools if they are shown the right way to use them.

Maya practices hand-washing. Like all practical life exercises, hand-washing has controls of error (a way for the child to see for herself if she did it right). One is, whether the child's hands and fingernails are clean at the end; the other, if the washstand is covered in soap and water.



Santiago enjoys chopping an apple. As with other Practical Life exercises, the mini work cycle is: choose the activity, do the activity, clean up the activity, put it away.