

# Cornerstone Monthly Newsletter

February 2025

Dear Families,

I am staring down the last day of February with a brain full of mush. This time of year is a strange one in school administration. We are simultaneously waist-deep in the here and now, with classrooms solidly in their routines, and we are starting to think about the next year, more than 6 months away. It's the time to start contemplating enrollment, staffing, space, and all the other things that are remarkably intangible when we're in the thick of the brand-new toddlers and the mud and the illnesses that all the staff get 3-4 days after all the children do.

One of the topics swirling in my mind is the concept of "respect." Dictionary definitions state that respect is to hold in esteem someone for their qualities or achievements, to paraphrase. But so often the quality in adults that we expect children to respect is simply that we are older or were here first. And, of course adults have more experience, but that doesn't inherently make them worthy of higher esteem. Dr. Montessori wrote about respect in *The Secret of Childhood*, " 'Respect' is on one side only; the weak respecting the strong" (2017, p. 97). I think about this a lot when I hear that someone was "disrespectful." Disrespect implies that there is an obligation, that someone *owes* another respect, when in fact respect is something the "strong" must cultivate. The power imbalance between a child and an adult that Montessori described means that so often children are spoken to in ways we would never speak to another adult, among other small injustices. Respect isn't necessarily a two-way street, but it shouldn't be assumed that it is inherent in every interaction, either.

When we talk about respect or disrespect at school, I think (hope?) what we really mean is kindness. Engaging with one another kindly doesn't require that someone do or be "better" than someone else. It just means that we act with generosity and friendliness. As I'm sure every parent of a 3 year old does, we spend a lot of time saying to Ellie, "oh, no, please try again," when she demands something. When she does remember to ask nicely the first time, she often remarks that she said "please" or didn't yell. It's fascinating to me that there are kindnesses that are hard-wired – comforting someone who's sad, say – but communicating with others kindly requires explicit instruction. She isn't seeing or hearing "give me milk" at full volume modeled to her, it's just not something that's innate. (If your 3 year old does always ask you nicely for milk, without ever being reminded, I would love to know your secrets!)

I'm sharing this peek inside my thinking because we have an in-service day next week, and having these types of conversations are so much at the center of planning for now and planning for the future. I'm not sure if this topic is one that we'll get to on Thursday, or even one we'll get to in August, but I also hope that in a world where civility sometimes seems like an afterthought, it's something that is foremost in our minds here.

Take care,  
Alyssa

## Toddler Community

Matching cards, magnet tiles, and a bread phone—children are constantly learning from their environment, caregivers, and each other, and they do so effortlessly!

They are naturally curious, engaged, and eager to explore new ways of doing things. They play with purpose, drawn to objects and activities that capture their attention.

At home, consider rotating toys and games or introducing new books—poetry, stories, or songbooks featuring their favorite tunes. Your local library is a great resource for fresh recommendations.

Variety helps maintain engagement and fosters learning, especially during the winter months. At school, we follow a structured rotation: books and puzzles change weekly, language and manipulative materials shift monthly, and food and artwork themes are refreshed seasonally. These thoughtful changes keep the learning environment dynamic and inspiring!



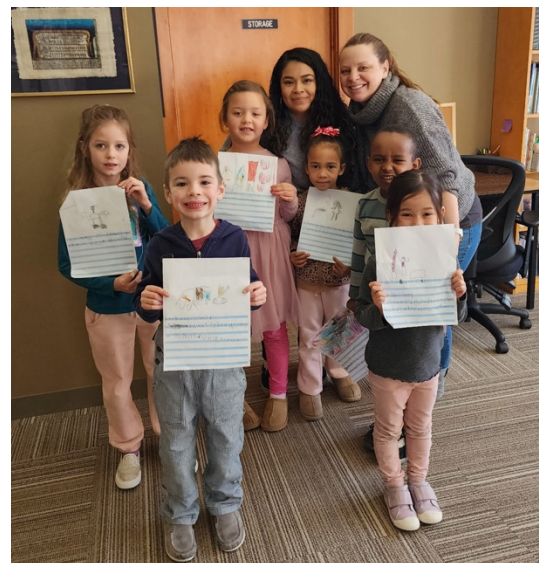
## Children's House 1

I hope you've all had a wonderful start to the year I can't believe February is almost over!

Last week, some of the children wrote letters to legislators, and it was such a joy to read them together. It was inspiring to see their dreams and ideas come to life on paper. Even more exciting, our social worker, Nora, personally delivered the letters to the Capitol!

With spring right around the corner, we're seeing a great amount of mud in the play area. Apologies in advance for all the mud that might make its way home! Nonetheless, the children continue to explore and thrive in the Children's House.

I'm looking forward to seeing everyone at conferences, please be sure to sign up!







## Children's House 2



In Children's House 2 we have been loving celebrating so many birthdays this past month. One week we had 3 in a row! For our celebrations we gather as a group, tell a story about the child, ask them a few questions, sing a special song while they walk a globe around a picture of a sun, and sing happy birthday in every language we know. We have a special painted chair that the birthday child sits in and often share photos of the child from their life.

In the afternoons we've been taking requests of work to explore as a group of older children. We've been talking about how different materials feel like different temperatures and exploring the shapes and photos of land and water forms. It feels so great to be in community together.

## Lower Elementary Garden

February came and went so quickly in the Garden classroom! Children have been finding so many different works they are interested in learning. There has especially been a take-off in math this month! Children have been eager to use their hands with Racks and Tubes to do long division with or make necklace books full of math facts. A small group went on a multi-day quest to find the value of successive cubes in the "Tower of Jewels" and proudly displayed their findings for the rest of the class. In reading, children have been making fun connections to new sounds and spelling patterns they have learned in books and the environment around them.



As a class, we have been enjoying Roz's adventures in *The Wild Robot* by Peter Brown during read-aloud. Many children are familiar with the story either from Children's House or have seen the critically acclaimed movie that came out last year. We talked about how, as readers, we will often revisit stories that bring us joy or find fascinating. Children have been doing a great job keeping any "spoilers" from friends who do not know the story. However, there is always a lot of excitement when we come across a character or part of the story that they find amusing!





## Lower Elementary Pond

During Montessori training, we learned about the defining characteristics of children during their elementary years, and even though I've seen these characteristics a thousand times now, it still tickles me in moments when I get to see them so clearly. We know that elementary students like to do what they see their peers doing, and there's still something special about watching one, then two, then four or more students all gather on the carpet to read.

Similarly, we've had an absolute explosion of writing in the classroom lately. Poems, stories, research, songs, everyone has something to say, and they're saying it in writing. And then a student gets the clever idea to use a dictionary to help them find words for their acrostic poem, and suddenly half a dozen dictionaries are in use as that elementary peer instinct kicks in.

Another elementary tendency is toward big work, maybe filling the whole hallway of the main building big. We're seeing the first few people really get into tackling Big Work, but combine that the tendency to do what you see your peers doing and I think we're going to be seeing a lot more big work in the coming weeks and months.









## Upper Elementary Marsh



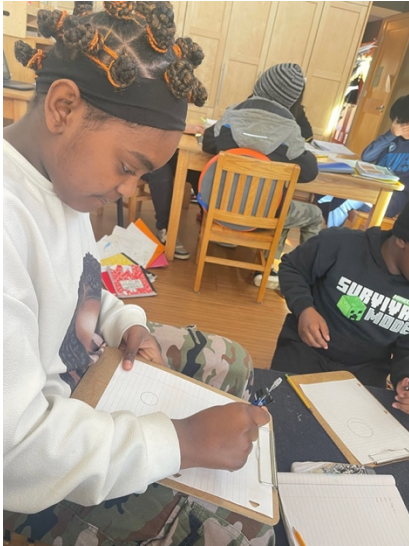
Different classroom environments have different traditions. In the Marsh community, birthday celebrations have evolved over time. This year, we celebrate each birthday or half-birthday (for those whose birthdays fall on breaks) with a poster of birthday balloons, one from each peer and adult with a personal message. Children can then choose whether or not to have a birthday interview. For those that choose to, they then call on others to ask questions, which tend to range from questions about favorites (foods, animals, books, games, movies, lessons, materials) to “Do you eat mac and cheese with a spoon or a fork?” to “Would you rather…” questions and more. It’s a nice opportunity to honor children by learning more about them. January and February are big months for these celebrations as we catch up from winter break and have lots of half-birthdays for those born in the summer.

In addition to many birthday celebrations, this month has included lots of work on science (crystals, fossils, roller coasters, porosity and permeability, various simple machine projects, and so on), as well as work on fractions, decimals, percentages, and input/output tables. February is Black History Month and groups have explored historical stories as well as done Flash Biography projects on Black women that included writing and watercolor portraits - many are hoping to share this work on March 14th at Cornerstone Cafe.





## Upper Elementary Forest



*Current Read Aloud Book: Chains*

*Genre: Historical Fiction*

Written by Laurie Halse Anderson, Chains is the first in the 'Seeds of America' trilogy of young adult historical novels, first published in 2008. The story follows Isabel, an enslaved 12-year old striving for her and her younger sister's freedom on the eve of the American Revolution. Most of the story takes place in New York City when slavery was legal in all of the Thirteen Colonies. The book is followed by the sequels Forge (2010) and Ashes (2016). Forest children are highly engaged in Isabel's determined quest to gain freedom for herself and her younger sister!

*Forest Rituals: Birthday & UNbirthday celebrations*

Forest's birthday & UNbirthday celebrations have evolved organically over the years and

involve classmates writing compliments, gratitudes, and wishes on a "leaf" that classmates add onto a 'Birthday Tree' poster bestowed on the celebrant on/near either their actual birthday or their half birthday (for children with summer birthdays). Our ritual starts with me reading the story: On the Day You Were Born and ends with the celebrant receiving a "Birthday Tree" from classmates.

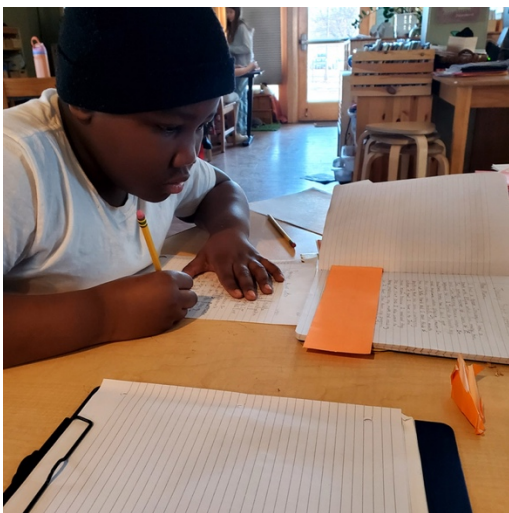


*Current Lessons & Learning*

4th Years are writing 'The Story of My Name' narrative essays, 5th Years are researching and writing biographies of African-American Sheroes, and 6th Years are deep into their MN to the World research projects, which they will present before Spring Conferences.

Recent science & social studies lessons include: vital functions & taxonomy of animals, Our Solar System, Earth Science, Colonial America and US/Mexico History.

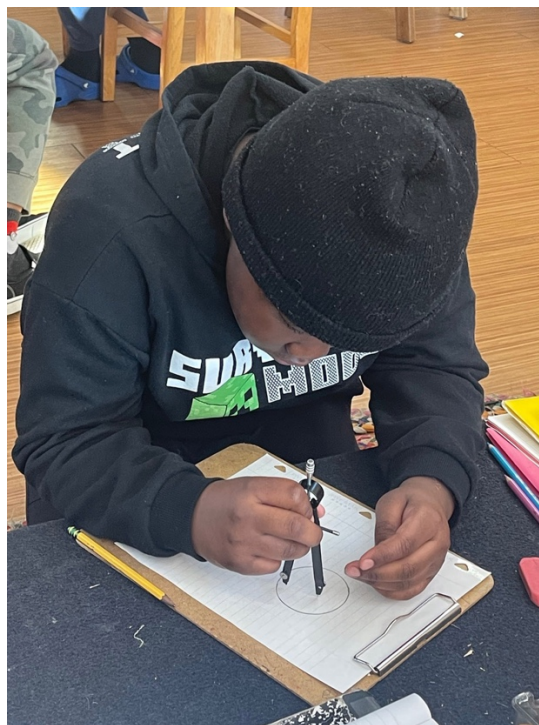
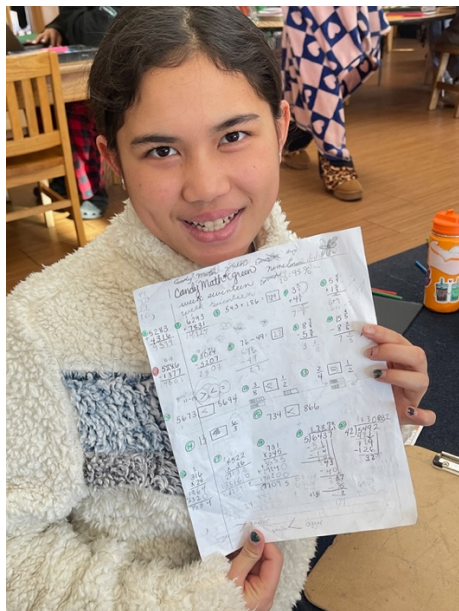
Recent math & language lessons involve common multiples and LCM, rounding & estimating, ratios and proportions, lots of fraction work, customary measurement, geometry, square root, word problems, algebra, irregular verbs, comparative adjectives, primary & secondary sources, and more.





Upper elementary children also had the opportunity to learn about the parts of the orchestra and American composers before their outing to the MN Orchestra. Many Forest children are developing their crafting and artistic skills through drawing, sewing, and watercoloring projects.

As always, there is lots of great learning going on in “The Forest”!





## 1611 Ames Ave Spotlight

This month we are highlighting our Cornerstone advocates at the Capitol! Katte Maldonado, CH2's Spanish-Speaking Assistant, and Nora Springer, MCM Social Worker and Director of Outreach, visited the Minnesota Capitol last week to lobby our local representatives for early childhood education funding and resources.

Katte was in the second graduating class at Cornerstone and is making history as the first alum to return as an employee! Katte is in her second year here as a grownup: she worked last year as a Special Education Paraprofessional; this year she returned to her roots in Children's House, where she is much loved by all the children in the 3-6 cohort. Katte is completing her BA at the University of Minnesota, majoring in Marketing. In her limited spare time, she likes to crochet, bake, workout, and spend time with loved ones.

Nora has been at the Montessori Center of Minnesota since 2018, beginning as the Licensed Community Social Worker and now serving as the Director of Outreach, in addition to her social work role. During distance learning, Nora was one of the two School Social Workers at the elementary school, and we still miss seeing her in the classrooms every day. Prior to coming to MCM, Nora worked with Head Start as a home visitor. Nora enjoys spending her free time outside with her husband, son, Gabe, who is in Children's House 1, and two dogs.

While Nora will be on leave from mid-March through June, we hope you will say hello to her if you see her at Cornerstone in the next few weeks. Katte isn't going anywhere and also would love to say hello to you!



## News from MCM



MCM is excited to announce its new Director of Advancement, Jessica Hennek. Jessica is an experienced fundraising and nonprofit advancement professional passionate about strengthening mission-driven organizations through strategic philanthropy. With nearly 20 years of experience in development, Jessica has successfully led major gift initiatives, capital campaigns, and donor engagement strategies at organizations focused on the arts, animal welfare, and senior care.

As a parent of a Montessori child, Jessica is deeply invested in the transformative power of Montessori education. She is thrilled to contribute

her expertise to further MCM's mission, fostering a future where more children, educators, and communities benefit from the Montessori approach.