

Cornerstone Monthly Newsletter

March 2025

Dear Families,

Like many of you, I'm sure, I have spent a lot of time this month reflecting on where we were 5 years ago. During spring break of 2020 there was nowhere to go, of course, and we had exceptional weather. I spent a lot of that week sitting outside pulling weeds. This year I am behind my weed-pulling game, but do have child laborers to help prepare my garden for the summer. Not only is it planting season in the yard, it is also the time of year where we plant seeds for the fall – where we greet new families and plan for the next school year.

Overgrown analogies aside, I give a lot of tours during the spring and introduce Montessori to prospective families. In the Children's House, I discuss how children need to get their hands dirty – to put their hands on the materials – in order to learn. Elementary-aged children also need to work with the materials, and yet they also have a greater capacity for abstract thinking and understanding concepts through storytelling. One of the wonderful things about Montessori in general, and Cornerstone in particular, is that there is ample opportunity for real life experience. The children are getting dirty, which you likely have noticed when doing laundry, because they are outside putting their hands in the soil, in the kitchen making apple pie, getting slimed (or attempting to) on a Going Out.



I have very little confidence that the seeds my children helped to plant will germinate, but, to mix another metaphor, it's the journey that counts. The experience of filling the cups with soil, watering each morning, waiting patiently to see the seedling emerge is what will teach them the lifecycle of a plant, and more importantly, that they can impact the world around them. When we harvest the tomatoes later this summer, Sadie and Ellie will know that they are directly responsible for the sweet fruit (even though they will also refuse to eat any of it). What a powerful experience for a young child.

Happy Spring,
Alyssa

Toddler Community

We're all experiencing the seasonal change, (sometimes feeling like 2-3 seasons in one day!). The toddlers are blessed by living in the moment. For example: the large mud puddle is an exciting sensorial experience. To the adult it is a reminder to enjoy what it fully is, and not just a muddy mess. 😊

Our newest toddlers are already forming a nice work cycle after breakfast: making work choices, working and putting away their activities on the shelves. The older toddlers are also working well, and



children that are preparing to transition to the Children's House are making some brief visits to those rooms.

A Toddler Community goes through changes in its membership more quickly with less than a 3 year cycle as in the primary and elementary classrooms. They grow and develop so quickly!

We look forward to meeting with the toddler parents this week and sharing more *March Gladness* happenings between their home and school.



Children's House 1



Hello and Happy Spring, CH1 Families!

It's hard to believe that April is just around the corner. We've been so busy working and exploring in the CH environment that time has flown by! With the arrival of nicer weather, we've been enjoying more time outside, embracing the sunshine and fresh air.

This month, we were lucky to have a student teacher, Adriana, join our classroom. The children loved working with her, and she brought such a positive energy to our days. It was wonderful to see the students engage with her and show such kindness and curiosity.

One of the most heartwarming things we've witnessed lately is the grace and compassion the children show toward one another. Their acts of kindness and cooperation are truly inspiring, reminding us daily of the beauty in their growing hearts and minds.



A Quick Note:

I wanted to share that I will be traveling to El Salvador to visit my parents and will be out when we return from spring break. We've had some conversations with the children to help prepare them for this, and Angela and Melanie will still be available during my absence. Additionally, there will be another adult in the environment to help support the children. Thank you so much for your understanding. I look forward to sharing pictures from my trip with the children when I return!



As we move into April, we look forward to continuing our learning adventures, both inside and out. Thank you for your continued support and for sharing your amazing children with us each day.

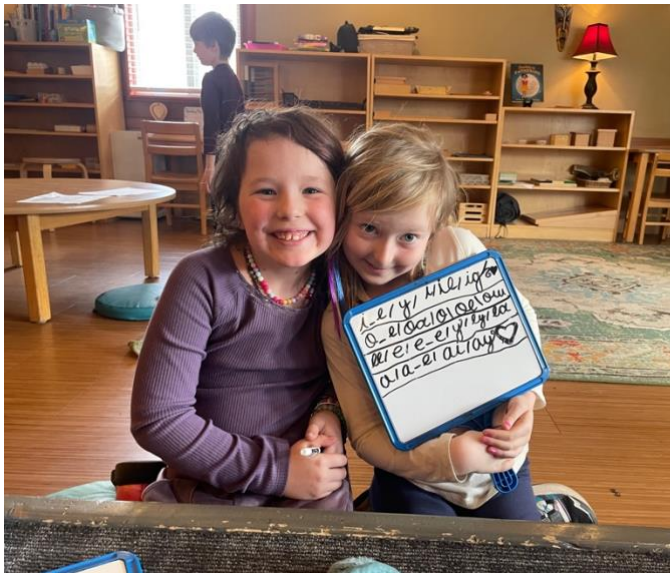
Warmly, The CH1 Team

Children's House 2

Children's House 2 is getting ready for spring! We've been sweeping our patio and reading books outside on nice days, and taking walks to observe the geese and ducks who have returned to our pond. We even tried something new and tapped our lovely maple tree. I had no idea how much sap would come out of one tree and how tasty it would be. We've been enjoying all the Montessori staples as well, binomial and trinomial cubes, moveable alphabets, metal insets, and golden beads. Some of the older children have been using their creativity to recreate our materials on cardstock. The children also helped to lay down our line, which is an ellipse taped to the floor for walking on and working on balance. We try balancing things on our heads or carrying heavy materials with care to grow our strength.



Lower Elementary Garden



March has been a month full of projects! There has been a lot of different kinds of research happening around the classroom. A group has been working diligently on gathering facts and writing a 28-page book, fully illustrated and complete with author bios, about amazing snakes. Third years have been investigating a world country and writing a report about their discoveries. Some exciting follow-on has included a tri-fold presentation board all about China and a clay relief map of Jamaica!

This month, we read aloud the very charming and incredibly thrilling book *PIE* by Sarah Weeks. The story surrounds a mystery involving a famous pie recipe, two children, and a cranky white cat

named Lardo. We were so invested in identifying the main suspects and their motives that it was thrilling when we eventually solved the mystery! An important lesson we learned was to pay attention to punctuation...an exclamation point can make a world of difference!



Lower Elementary Pond

There is a classic Montessori story of a child who drops a set of items on the ground, just as a parade begins to go by. As the child begins to wail, torn between wanting to see the parade and cleaning up, the other students in the classroom leave the window to help. With many hands, the mess is cleaned up with time for everyone to see the parade. We didn't have a parade, but it was still heartwarming to see a version of this story of compassion and community play out in Pond recently.

With the advent of spring we've been heading outside regularly for outdoor lessons: trying to spot shapes in the neighborhood, identifying animal shelters, and sorting plants by whether they're coniferous or deciduous, among other activities. It has been very joyful to explore





Cornerstone's beautiful outdoor space, watch students make connections between the classroom and the world, and hear students yell excitedly about herbaceous stems. A heartfelt thank you to the folks at the Montessori Training Center of Minnesota for their intentional plant selections that make moments like this possible.

Also bringing me joy (besides my prediction in the last newsletter about Big Work coming true!) has been, well, joy. I have seen every student laugh over their work in Pond, and every day has some piece of exhilaration, happiness, and contentment. I don't know to what extent these moments are told at home (I certainly do my fair share of complaining at home!), but they are beautiful to experience in the moment.



Upper Elementary Marsh

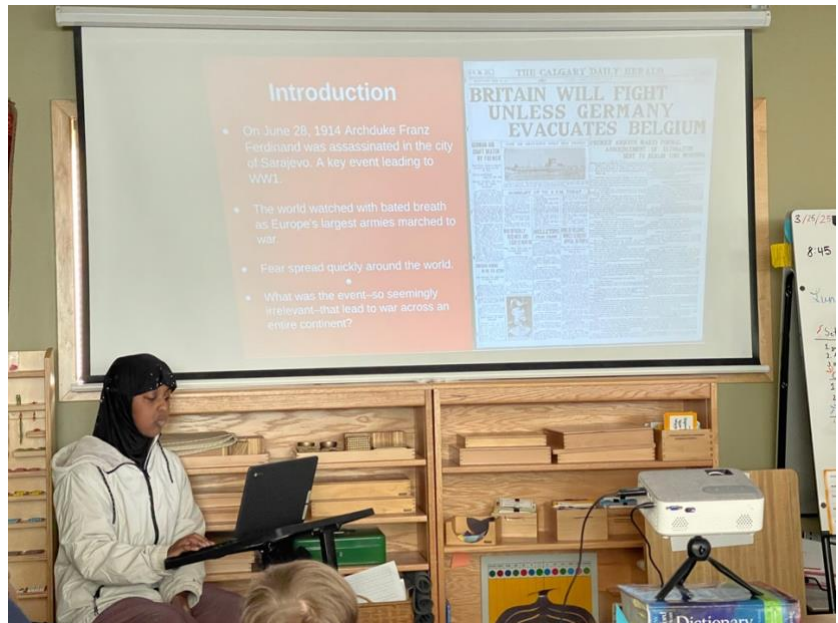
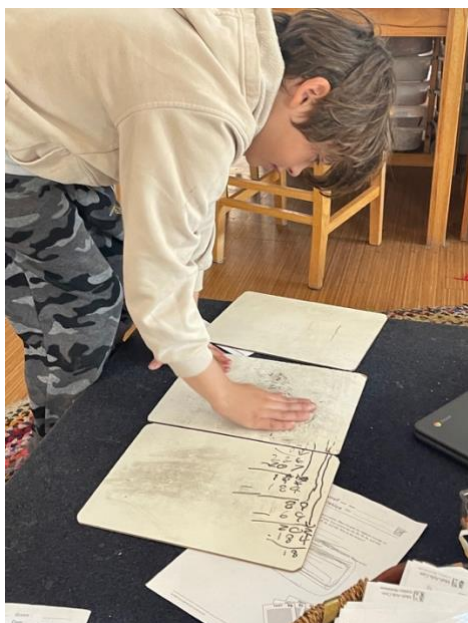
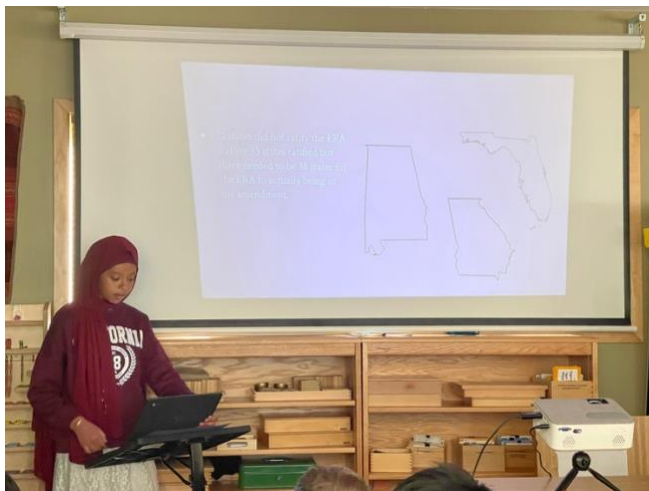
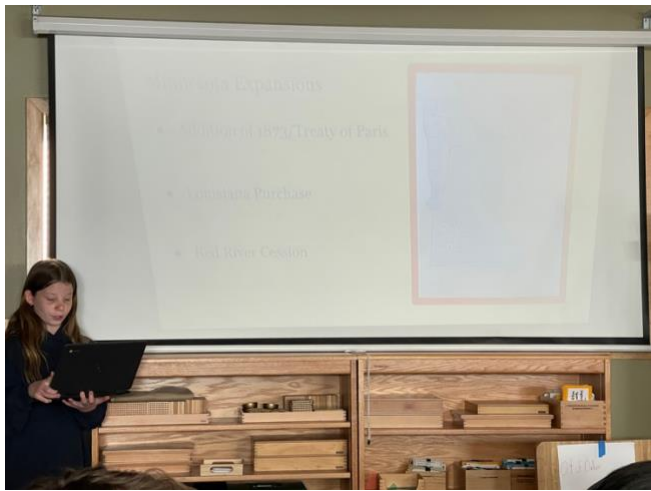
Montessori elementary considers the dual environment an important part of the child's experience. The dual environment refers to the community within the classroom and outside the classroom, which means that **going-out** is an important component of the complex learning of the Upper Elementary child. A going-out differs from a field trip in several important ways; field trips are planned by adults and all children attend, while going-outs are planned by the children and attended by only those who are interested and participating. We are lucky to be back in the practice of going-outs after our pandemic hiatus, and Marsh has had several amazing trips. For example, in March, four children went with Nou to the MOA amusement park as a culminating experience of their many-month study of roller coasters and physics. During the trip, the children were able to interview people who worked

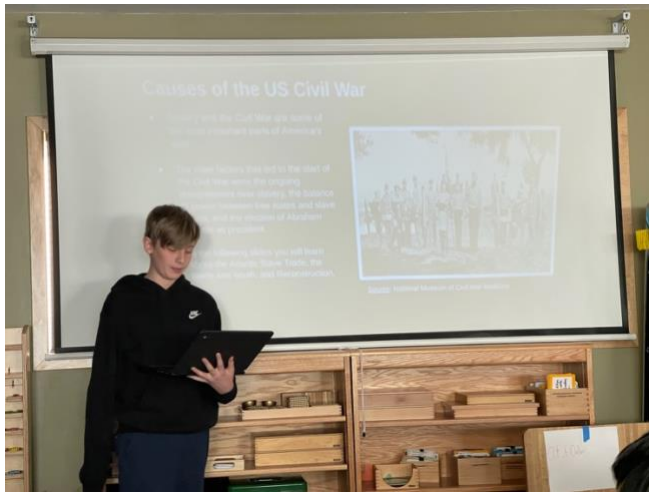


at the park and then go behind the scenes to learn more about the rides. And of course, they also got to go on some rides! In the course of their work this year, they had lessons, did research, wrote persuasive essays and reports, made models, and gave presentations. The group planned this going-out over the course of several weeks, emailing and calling with the amusement park, working on finding the best public transportation routes, and meeting with Jess, Alyssa, and Nou to make sure all the logistics were taken care of (bus fares, lunches, admission, etc.). Their parents surely heard a lot about it at home as well! Going-outs are a great example of a unique experience that Montessori children can have to further their curiosity and connection to the world outside the classroom, as well as to help them build skills of communication, organization, planning, stamina, and persistence. These plans take dedication and hard work! It's exciting to see what's possible!



Upper Elementary Forest





1611 Ames Ave Spotlight: Cynthia Crooks

Cynthia is the longest tenured teacher at CMES, starting here just shortly after we opened in 2011.

Cornerstone has been my teaching home since Fall, 2011. It's been a joy to know all of the growing children, work with amazing staff and see the increase in the size of the school during these years. I'm among those in our community who've gotten to hold newborns and then many years later watch them graduate and move on. That's super fun!

I get to increase language skills of children who come to us with another language besides English. Some have a lot of English when they come and some, none...yet! I work beside them and their guides as they develop social and academic language to be able to grow in all ways at Cornerstone. I try to at least be a friendly face in the beginning when all of it is new and somewhat scary.



Because the English language has such tricky sound/letter relationships, working on reading skills is especially important in the early grades. That's what I spend a lot of time doing. I love using books, especially the Frog and Toad books by Arnold Lobel, when a child has enough language to become an independent reader. I tell some children that Frog and Toad (I have stuffies of them) are my assistants.

Before coming to Cornerstone, I taught in public and private elementary schools as a classroom teacher, then taught my own children during their elementary years. I used a method similar to Montessori because I saw the many limitations of standard teaching. I took a year off to get my ELL licensure and was thrilled to find that Cornerstone and Montessori education was a dream come true for me.

I'm a mother of four adults, and the grandma of six grandchildren whom my husband and I get to play with on the weekends. I enjoy all kinds of outdoor things - hiking, swimming, gardening - as well as reading and doing yoga. I love history and natural history. I also really enjoy meeting people from around the world and assisting those who come as refugees or asylum seekers to settle in their new home here.

From the CMES Board of Directors

You have likely heard the recent news regarding cuts to the United States Department of Education and Governor Walz's proposed budget for Minnesota. We rely on state and federal funding to provide the incredible programming that Cornerstone offers, particularly for our children with special education services.

We need your help to tell the governor that cutting school funds is not the way to balance Minnesota's budget. Let us know if you would like a template for emailing Governor Walz and Lieutenant Governor Flanagan, or a script for calling your state senator and representative. **Five minutes today can make a difference.**

And, while we know that President Trump's proposals to change education nationally are not going to happen as quickly as suggested, we also know that they can have a significant impact on how we, and all public schools, operate. The Minnesota Department of Education is ***seeking feedback*** from families on how these changes will affect your children. Please click ***here*** to complete the survey.

CMES Board Elections

We are looking for community members and parents to join the Board of Directors at CMES! Nominations must be submitted by April 7. Visit our website to learn more:
<https://cornerstonemontessori.schoolinsites.com/boardelections>.