

# Cornerstone Monthly Newsletter

April 2026

## Dear Community,

I've been thinking a lot lately about how to know when you're done with your work (this is **not** a subtle way of resigning!). One of my old Montessori friends likes to do big work – opening the new middle school, moving to a new building, etc. When she finishes that project, she “puts her work back on the shelf” and moves onto the next school. When Sadie, my toddler, is finished with her work, she does what we call the “record scratch” and all her materials end up on the floor or in a big mess. Sadie, obviously, isn't self-aware enough to always recognize when she's finished and so she gets destructive. My friend, while more graceful, likewise knows that she's going to be bored if she keeps working.

With so much of the work we do, there's an obvious end point. The cookies are done baking, the scarf is the right length to wear, the class is fully enrolled. Often, especially in the Montessori environment, there's not, though. We want to see repetition: children learn when they experience things repeatedly, and we know that open-ended work leads to creativity. What cues us, then, to know that we've written enough words, scrubbed the table to completion, are ready to put our work away? Dr. Montessori described this as “one of the child's secrets” (*The Secret of Childhood*, 2019, p. 204). She goes on, in *Citizen of the World* (2019, p. 24), to say that, “At each age one must seek for the opportunity for the greatest effort.” If we give our work our maximum effort, as Dr. Montessori described it elsewhere, then we may just know inherently when we've finished. Perhaps not the most satisfying answer, but since I am struggling to know how to finish this particular piece of work, maybe just knowing that it's something deep inside us is enough.

Alyssa

## Toddler Community

The sand box was opened up again this week. The toddlers are learning how to experience using the sand in collaboration with each other. They need to safely scoop the sand inside the box. Sometimes it means learning to wait for a sandbox toy/tool that a peer is using. The children continue to enjoy riding around on the cycle track, and chasing bubbles from the bubble blower. Let's not forget about finding a treasured dandelion for the picking!



## Children's House 1

April has been a great month! We've enjoyed spending more time outdoors and observing the changes in nature. We have been busy working on so much from fetching sounds to working with fractions and we have also been doing a lot of artwork.

It was nice seeing you all at the event the children enjoyed washing, cutting, and assembling the fruit salad.

This week, elementary visits will begin as well and we are excited to see the older children begin their transition to the second plane of development.



**Children's House 2**





## Lower Elementary – Garden

We certainly did not let the April showers bring us down in Garden. Children came back from Spring Break raring to work! We saw an intense explosion in math this month. Children have been using their hands to complete long multiplication with the Checkerboard and the Flat Bead Frame. There have been explorations in both long division and group division with Racks and Tubes and the Stamp Game. Many children have been exercising their math "superpowers" with subitizing and finding patterns with the Math Flip cards, while others have been earnestly trying to commit facts to memory.

Elementary children delight in discovering people who have done incredible things and look up to them as heroes. Inspired by the recent *Artemis II* mission, children have been excited to talk about the extraordinary feats the four astronauts achieved in their journey around the moon. This crew - and the incredible team at NASA - would not have been able to pursue this work if it weren't for the people who came before them.

This month, we read a biography about Dr. Mae Jemison by Heather Alexander. Children were fascinated by what Mae was like when she was younger and how she told her kindergarten teacher, who didn't believe her, that she would become a scientist. Through hard work and challenging people's expectations of her, Mae studied to be a doctor, became a scientist with NASA, and eventually journeyed into space on the *Endeavour* in 1992. Dr. Mae Jemison continues her work today as an educator, speaker, and advocate for STEM programs, like the 100 Year Starship Initiative, to foster future interstellar space travel.





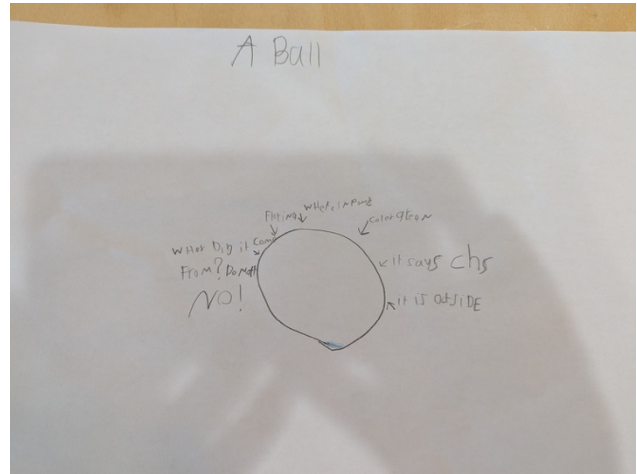
## Lower Elementary - Pond

Dr. Montessori liked to look for the commonalities of people, and one thing she noticed was that all humans have certain tendencies. The Human Tendency that I've been thinking about recently is the human tendency toward order, that tendency we have to build and maintain habits and to understand the purpose behind something.

At Montessori schools we work to provide structure to help meet this need for order. Read aloud in Pond is always before recess, song time is always after lunch, and we sing Safe Home before we go home every day. Lessons follow a sequence that build on each other over time, with each lesson preparing students for the next step. When something contradicts a student's sense of order they can react strongly, for example if a ball goes into the pond where it isn't supposed to go one might wonder "Where did it come from?" or knowing that it doesn't belong there, and maybe imagining a scenario that led to it getting there think, "Do not, NO!"



The sense of order that we instill is important, but even more exciting is the ways that students build and implement their own sense of order. We set a baseline that students use their work journals, and then students spontaneously decide to start pre-filling some days in advance with things they know are going to happen, or that they want to happen. Six students crowded around (and on!) a piece of paper might not look very organized to an adult at first, but watching as each person performs their role in the group to create a giant multiplication table and you might start to see that the method isn't madness, it's just a different way of creating their own order.



## Upper Elementary - Forest

Even with spring break this month we have been busy and productive in Forest! The 6th years completed their Imaginary Island projects and had the opportunity to share them with classmates and lower elementary children. It was inspiring to see the oldest children sharing their pride and joy in their work. As we near the end of the year, there is much excitement about end-of-year traditions and wrapping up big work.



Our current read aloud book is *Blended* by Sharon M. Draper. It is a story about a young girl who is seeking connection and identity. She is navigating a world that doesn't always feel safe or fair and trying to find her own place when she is constantly switching between two houses. Although her specific struggles are unique, many of the children can identify with her desire to fit in and how it feels to be misunderstood. The children's compassion and desire for justice are apparent as we discuss the events of the story and how they relate to their experiences.



## Upper Elementary - Marsh

We are back in our Marsh environment! The first week or so has been so smooth, it seems like we've been back longer. We have been spending lots of time enjoying the view and observing nature again - the pond, the birds! We also have been diving into some materials that we didn't have in our temporary location like square root and cubing. Our current read-aloud book is *Framed* by James Ponti. Every child completed a written response to a book this month. We have several new book recommendation pages for our community anthology, and we sent off letters to six different authors! A small group set up a lovely virtual meeting with a favorite author, Kate O'Shaughnessy, and enjoyed asking her all their 21 prepared questions! It was great to see so many of you at the Children Teach Adults/Fruit Salad (Stone Soup) event on Monday. Please look for your child's end of April reflection letter which will come home on Friday, May 1.





## 1611 Spotlight

This month we are highlighting my kids' favorite person in the building (sorry, Maggie). Gina Murray is in her first year at the Montessori Center of Minnesota, working as the 3-6 Course Assistant. She is also the facility's primary distributor of chocolate, which is why Ellie and Sadie like her so much. Gina was a Montessori child herself, attending the same public Montessori school in Milwaukee as our own Tom Fendt, and spent 25 years as a Primary Guide before transitioning to administration and, now, teacher training.



A parent to a daughter in her final year at Sunny Hollow (serving children through 8th grade), Gina finds daily grounding in a three-mile morning walk with her dog, Archer, taking in the steady rhythm of the changing seasons. As an AMI consultant, she is passionate about supporting Montessori practitioners: listening, affirming their instincts, and encouraging them to trust their training. Her work focuses on guiding educators back to strong, authentic practice so they can offer their very best to the children in their care, helping Montessori reach and impact a broader community.