



Cornerstone Monthly Newsletter

September 2025

Dear Families,

Welcome to the monthly Cornerstone newsletter! In these newsletters, you will hear and see updates from each classroom, a spotlight on a 1611 Ames staff member, news from the CMES Board of Directors and/or Montessori Center of Minnesota, and an introduction that is usually my scattered reflections on schooling, parenting, and Montessori.

This month, I am turning my space over to Sara Wade, our Upper Elementary Forest guide, to introduce you to the Great Stories, the foundation of the Montessori elementary experience:

Dr. Montessori had a grand vision for education. She believed that education should be more than just filling children's minds with what they ought to know. Instead she saw education as an "aid to life", meaning that what we offer children must support the development of their full potential. When we predetermine what it is that the child needs, or what they must know we limit that great potential. Dr. Montessori observed that the elementary years, in particular, are a time of huge intellectual development and the elementary child's capacity for intellectual growth and understanding is immense. For this reason she believed that it is not enough to give the elementary child the world, we must instead give them the universe. Her vision for educating elementary children is known as Cosmic Education. Cosmic Education provides for the unique characteristics of the elementary child and supports their great intellect, allowing them to explore, discover, and make connections about our world, humanity, and the universe.

Each year the children in the elementary are invited to experience a series of stories that invite them into the adventure that is Cosmic Education. These stories are referred to as Great Stories, or Great Lessons. At the beginning of the year, the elementary children in each class at Cornerstone heard the first of the Great Stories from their guide. The First Great Story, known as 'The Coming of the Universe', provides a foundation for discovery and an invitation to explore. We ponder together the mysteries of the universe, setting the stage for further exploration and encouraging deeper study.

In the coming weeks the children will hear the subsequent Great Stories and have countless opportunities to dive deeper into the wonders of the universe.

I am sharing [this video](#) with you so you can have a window into the classroom. Each guide tells the story with some variations, but the heart remains the same. Please enjoy the story if you would like. Perhaps you would like to ask your child about their favorite part of the story or what they hope to learn more about in the coming weeks.

The start of a school year is deeply intentional, in any academic environment. One of the things I love about Montessori is that the intention is not only to develop routines and establish expectations, but it is also to set the foundation for the big work that these children are so capable of completing. In the first six weeks, children come to know that science and history and math and writing are all intertwined and they have the rest of their school careers to dig into these strands. What an exciting way to start the year!

My best,
Alyssa

Toddler Community



We are looking forward to gathering with parents at our first Parent Partnership Monday, the 29th. The Parent Partnerships help support each individual child when parents and staff teams work together in support of their growth.

This past month has gone quickly since the Back to School Fair with all of the connections that have been made within our Toddler Community and the Cornerstone Community as a whole. It's been a series of 'in the moment' gifts to observe the toddlers

genuine interest in some of life's simple pleasures: a child sharing a colorful fall leaf, another finding a walnut seed on our walk to the front of the school grounds ("What's this?"), watching the rain from the patio door window panes, sharing a book, a song or some other language material work with a small group, a child spontaneously hugging a peer, and another personal favorite, hearing a child exclaim "I did it!"

There is a general daily routine; but every day is a new day. The toddlers have each other to build community; along with the opportunity to meet other adults that observe and work to support the children.

"I have seen that children can do much for the community. In the child is much knowledge, much wisdom. If we do not profit from it, it is only because of neglect on our part to become humble and to see the wonder of this soul and learn what the child can teach."

- Maria Montessori, *Citizen of the World*



Children's House 1



Children's House 2

In Children's House 2 we have started the year learning how to take care of each other and the classroom/environment. Our highlight was harvesting the carrots we planted together last spring! Some were small and some large, some were white, purple, or orange. After harvesting came the big work of scrubbing all these carrots and peeling them to eat. Several carrots were scrubbed probably 3 or 4 times by several different children. Everyone was so excited to try our carrots and children asked for seconds and thirds. We have also been enjoying creating lots of art like painting, watercolor, collage, and drawings.





Lower Elementary Garden

It's been a delightful start to the school year in Garden! As elementary children are developing their sociability and have a natural desire to work in groups, the Montessori environment purposefully allows them to meet this important need. There have already been some beautiful collaborations in the classroom, such as writing stories together, teaching each other how to use different materials on the shelves, creating bright colorful posters for Peace Day, and even performing songs and skits on the stage outside during recess!

Every day after lunch, we have time together as a class community for read-aloud. We started this year with the classic *Stuart Little* by E.B. White and children were astonished by the abrupt ending and had many ideas of whether Stuart ever found his friend, Margalo.



We are now enjoying *Skunk and Badger* by Amy Timberlake, a fairly new novel about an unlikely friendship between two woodland creatures. Badger lives alone in his Aunt Lula's Brownstone and likes his daily routines of eating cold cereal with cold milk for breakfast and doing his "Important Rock Work." His life however is interrupted when Skunk comes to his door and introduces himself as his new roommate...along with a penchant for cooking messy but delicious breakfasts and inviting all the neighborhood chickens over for an overcrowded sleepover. Imagine having to clean up after that event!



Lower Elementary Pond

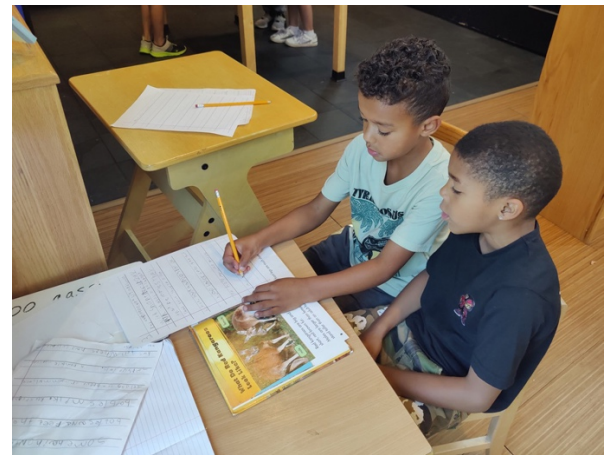


Dr. Montessori liked to look for the commonalities of people, and one thing she noticed was that all humans have certain tendencies. The Human Tendency I think about the most at the start of the year is the tendency to orient, that tendency we have when presented with something new to see what it does, how it works, and what its limits are.

In the classroom this can show up in quite charming ways, as when after a lesson a child asks, "Can I do more of this work?" They genuinely don't know! And it's a special treat for me to say "Yes! Yes, of course you can do more work on multiples/write another story/show your friend this science demonstration." Slightly less charming is when students want to find out if they actually need to clean up after themselves, how loud they can be in the classroom, or if hitting others is a viable problem-solving

strategy. Not as gratifying to address, but it's easier to figure out the most helpful response to a situation knowing it stems from a natural behavior for students right now. And of course, the adults are doing some orienting as well, getting to know how best to work with new students, figuring out how returning students have grown over the summer, and learning the hard way about just how quickly you can set off the fire alarm with a particular cooking project.

Our work early in the year looks to tap in to that tendency to orient. We build community agreements and discuss how we want the classroom to function together. We tell five Great Stories about how our planet was formed in the universe, how life arose, what's special about human beings, how we came to write, and where we got our system of numbers, with each story orienting the children to a different area of study in the classroom. All this orientation can lead to beautiful payoff: a recent history lesson included a student who spent a lot of time orienting to what was on the shelves last year. As I brought the material off the shelf for the lesson the student said, "Yes! I've been waiting for this lesson. Now I finally get to know what those are for." This may still be just the first month of school, but it's all starting to come together.



Upper Elementary Forest

What a beautiful start to the school year in Forest! The children have been working hard these past weeks and have so much to share with each other and the school already. Our Peace Day event has been a highlight as we prepare to share poems, commitments, and research about the International Day of Peace.

We have also heard the first and second in the series of "Great Stories" and a story entitled "The Black Strip." These stories introduce some big ideas about the universe and human history, which serve as a launch pad into all kinds of studies the children will take on from the composition of the earth to early systems of writing. We will continue the series over the next few weeks.

Our read-aloud book *Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky* by Kwame Mbalia is an exciting adventure about a boy from Chicago thrown into the world of African folk heroes. He is on a quest with his new friends to save both his world and the magical world of Alke from a mysterious evil presence that seems to want the power of their stories for himself. We are enjoying the wild ride with Tristan and company and can't wait to see if he is able to save his heroes.



Upper Elementary Marsh

The beginning of the school year in Marsh has been a time of energy and adjustment! For many in the community, this has been the start of the big transition from Lower to Upper Elementary. We have been building community through games and group activities, like index card towers and thinking challenges. Children are finding strong work partners and thinking about developing work habits and consistent challenging, balanced, and purposeful work. Chip, our class rabbit, has started to come out during quiet times and is much loved. Our read-aloud book, Fish in a Tree by Lynda Mullaly Hunt, has prompted good discussions about friendships, learning, and challenges. This past week has been full of preparation for our International Peace Day celebration, with children working on research about peacemakers and the United Nations, as well as poetry, artwork, and presentation skills. It was a lovely joyful celebration - thanks to all who were able to join us!



1611 Spotlight

This month we are highlighting Angela Kaufman, everyone's favorite Colombian! Angela is somehow beloved by children who were never in her classroom and is extra beloved by those who were. Angela joined Cornerstone as a parent in 2009 and has worked here since 2010. She has worked at every level except Upper Elementary, and, I'm sure, will find her way there one of these years (but not until Ellie flies up from CH1)!

Angela completed her AMI 3-6 training in 2019. She loves MCM so much that she opens the building for current adult learners on the weekends and is an aid to every person who walks through these doors. When Angela is not at Cornerstone/MCM, which seems impossible to imagine, she runs marathons, plays games, does needlepoint, and goes for walks. Angela is also the resident material maker: when she started here 15 years ago, she didn't know how to sew, and now she makes beautiful aprons, tablecloths, and more for the environments. If you haven't met Angela yet, don't worry – you will – she is always here, always joyful, and always eager to support any child who needs her.

