

Cornerstone Monthly Newsletter

November 2024

Dear Cornerstone Community,

We know that children thrive on routine: the younger they are, the more consistency stabilizes and secures their daily experience. They also thrive on repetition: doing the same thing over and over helps them to memorize patterns, build neural pathways, and predict outcomes. At my house (and yours, too, I'd bet), this repetition largely consists of reading and rereading the same books. Sadie's favorite book right now is a copy of Sandra Boynton's *Blue Hat, Green Hat* that is missing several pages; Ellie has taken a deep dive into the *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* extended universe. Did you know that there are two sequels? And that the puns are A-plus grade throughout? I highly recommend looking into the first of the sequels, *Pickles to Pittsburgh*.

Repetitively reading books with my children has opened my eyes to the many ways in which we can share stories together that don't necessarily require reading the words on the page. After the first 4,103,300 times reading a book, it's painful to continue in that manner. With Sadie, I focus on "concepts of print" and vocabulary. "Concepts of print" is a fancy way to describe how we hold a book, how to turn the pages, that we read books left to right in English, etc. Sometimes all Sadie does is turn the pages and that's enough! But, when she is interested in doing more than turning pages, I point out the animals and the colors of their clothing. The page might read only, "blue pants," but I can also say, "the moose is wearing blue pants. Pants are for your legs." Or, "Sadie, there are blue pants in this picture! You are wearing green pants." A picture book, even with minimal text, can be a jumping off point for so much more complexity.



When I do read something more complex, like *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, Ellie tells me what she wants to focus on. She can point and ask questions about the content, and I can engage back and forth with her on what we're seeing on the page. There's another benefit of repetition: Ellie knows what it says already, so she can participate in the reading, even though she doesn't yet read. Reading a page with her might look like this: "We were all sitting around the big kitchen table. It was Saturday morning. Ellie, what are they doing in the kitchen?" "Grandpa is making pancakes!" Other times we don't read any of the words on the page, we just look at the pictures and talk about what we see; sometimes I ask Ellie to tell me the story; and then there are times we engage with the text very literally and look for sounds that she recognizes: "Ellie, how many 's' sounds can you find in this word?"

When I started teaching, I thought that it was important to read a book as it was written, that the child would absorb concepts of print and the language just from hearing it read to them. There is benefit to that, of

course: reading Robert Frost and interrupting yourself repeatedly to discuss where the two roads diverged is less emotionally meaningful than hearing “two roads diverged in a yellow wood.” But if you don’t know what “diverged” means, or why it matters that the woods are yellow, the poem also carries less meaning. There’s no right way to read to a child, but there is a wrong way, and that’s not to read at all. If I can leave you with any advice, as we head into a busy season where you may have a lot of time to spend with your children, it’s to go to the library, pick out some books that you can tolerate reading 5 to 500 times, let your child pick out some books, and spend time together discovering the many ways to read together.

Happy Winter,
Alyssa



Toddler Community

Winter Weather is Here!

As the chilly winter days settle in, we're excited to head outdoors for fun and active play! Please make sure your toddler is equipped with all the necessary winter gear—snowpants, winter boots, warm jackets, hats, and mittens—on days when the temperature is 10°F or above. **Be sure to label everything**, as it’s easy for items to get mixed up!



In the winter season, we keep encouraging independence during transitions. Help your child practice putting on and taking off their winter clothes, and try to let them take the lead as much as possible. By encouraging your toddler to manage their own gear, we're helping them build confidence and independence in their daily routines. Having a designated spot for each item will help you and your toddler find it when needing to head out the door.

We have lots of outdoor activities planned—running, playing with balls, shoveling snow, and even some rounds of hide and seek! We look forward to making the most of this snowy season together!



Children’s House 1

We have been having a wonderful time in the Children’s House, exploring and growing together! Recently, card games have become a favorite activity in our environment. These games are not only fun but also essential for developing critical thinking, memory, and social skills. It’s heartwarming to see the children work together, take turns, and enjoy friendly interactions through these games.

Another highlight of our days has been singing the special song, “I’ve Got Peace Like a River.” This song brings a sense of calm and joy to our classroom, and the children love joining in with their voices and movements. It has become a beautiful way for us to end our morning work cycle.



Children's House 2



Lower Elementary Garden

November was full of storytelling in the Garden classroom. Children learned about the Ojibwe's discovery of *manoomin* – or wild rice - in the Minnesota waters and cooked some delicious wild rice for the class. We also heard about the Wampanoag people and their practice of harvesting *weeachumun* – or corn – in the



land now known as Massachusetts. Before break, a group of children prepared and tasted a traditional Wampanoag dish called nasaump, which involves cornmeal, berries, and a drizzle of maple syrup. Children additionally learned about the traditional Japanese cord weaving of *kumihimo* and have braided a multitude of beautiful bracelets. There are so many more stories to discover in the upcoming months!

This month, we read aloud [Stella Diaz to the Rescue](#) by Angela Dominguez. At the beginning of a new year Stella, a

fourth-grade girl, believes that it is going to be the best year ever. She has many exciting events to look forward to like her family's US citizenship ceremony, a special project with the Sea Musketeers, and a field trip to the Chicago Art Institute with the Art Club. (We learned about and explored Van Gogh's post-impressionistic style and Georges Seurat's paintings composed of many dots called pointillism!) There are some challenges along the way, obliging Stella to learn some important lessons about when to ask and how to give help to others when needed.



Lower Elementary Pond

We are getting to my favorite time of year (no, not winter break! Though that will be nice too.). As students build their work habit skills they hit a tipping point, and we've seen an explosion in variety of work. Bead bars for multiples and checkerboard. Stories about upcoming holidays and playful princesses. Research leading to going out and a new class pet?! Crochet and finger-knitting, where some of the students are adults. Heading outside for new songs and to make notes on the changing seasons.

With all that variety comes the (re)discovery that, well, learning is fun! It's a wonderful feeling when students start asking you when the next multiples lesson will be, or if they are *allowed* to write another page of story, or if there's a way to do this work with bigger numbers. It is then that I get to break out one of my favorite Montessori teaching moves, "Hmmm, what do *you* think?" Which is how we end up with a multiples lesson RIGHT NOW, a half dozen pages of story, and work that goes into the hundreds, or perhaps hundred trillions, and everyone excited to find out what happens next.



Upper Elementary Marsh



November marked the start of Book Clubs in Marsh! We meet weekly on Wednesdays with our clubs to discuss the reading we completed and the work we prepared. We've practiced many skills including marking places to discuss, asking questions as we read, and the elements of fiction (specifically character, plot, and setting). The books are all fiction - both realistic and fantasy. In addition, we have continued learning about big history - the beginnings of life and the evolution of humans. Science explorations have included robotics, fingerprinting, and kinds of mixtures (solutions, suspensions). Fraction work abounds as well as other types of math. We were lucky enough to watch the movie version of *Out of My Mind* on the day before break and will spend time in December writing to compare and contrast the book and the movie. The children have had heated discussions about the many differences, which should fuel strong writing.



Upper Elementary Forest

The main thing that I love about being an Upper Elementary Guide—besides getting to spend my weekdays with your child—is that *no two days are ever the same*. Even as we continue to work to establish consistent daily routines and strong habits of mind through repetition and repeated practice—with the goal of achieving skill mastery—I am never ever bored because your child is a universe unto themselves! I so love getting to know your child more and more deeply throughout our three-year cycle together. Being a part of their learning and growth trajectory is endlessly rewarding!

During Read Aloud this past month, we have been reading *George vs. George* and learning about Colonial America, the American Revolution, George Washington, King George III, The Boston Massacre, The Boston Tea Party, 'Taxation Without Representation,' The Declaration of Independence, main battles in the Revolutionary War, and other turning point events of this Era.



Last week a child volunteered to put away the Geometry Stick material that another child had left out the day before. While doing this, the entire box filled with dozens of tacks and sticks spilled out all over the floor. Forest children rushed in to help clean up all of the material without a single adult needing to intervene!

Younger children are building a foundation and framework for understanding their country and world with their physical and political geography atlas studies. They will further develop their understanding through independent research later on in the year. Older children have embarked on a year-long study of European Imperialism in the Americas and The US Constitution as frameworks for beginning to understand some of the cultural, economic, and historical context for current events.



We did our annual review about the #1 most effective way to prevent the spread of germs/illness: *frequent and thorough hand washing!!!*



We learned about the—*at least 2x/day*—proper brushing, flossing, and tongue-scraping techniques for ensuring healthy teeth & gums, *and for* preventing bad breath. Children received NEW brushing & flossing kits to keep in their lockers in order to support healthy oral hygiene practices during the school day.

1611 Ames Ave Spotlight

Meet Rachel Hansen Morris and Mercurie Morris!

Mercurie is Marsh's newest paraprofessional and enjoys carpooling to school with her mom, Rachel, who is the Mentorship Manager for Montessori Center of Minnesota.

5 Fun Montessori Facts about Mercurie and Rachel

Earliest experience in Montessori

- Mercurie was a Montessori child since BEFORE birth! (Rachel was pregnant during her Montessori 3-6 training.) Her first



Montessori *school* experience was in Children's House at Highland Park Montessori School with Wendy Warren.

- After college, Rachel worked at St. Croix Montessori School, which inspired her to take training and pursue a career in Montessori education.

A favorite Montessori material

- Mercurie's favorite material is the Binomial Cube because she appreciates the ability of Montessori materials to teach complicated mathematical concepts in an intuitive way, before they are introduced in an explicit way.
- Rachel's favorite material is Walking on the Line. She loves the way it is meditative for each individual but is also a collective experience for the whole group of children.

Early connection to Cornerstone

- Mercurie (wearing the red jacket below) was one of the children who helped break ground for the renovation and construction of our very own Montessori Center of Minnesota and Cornerstone back in 2008!
- Rachel was the Montessori 3-6 Course Assistant throughout the time that Montessori Center of Minnesota moved from their former location to the current one and opened Cornerstone Montessori School. She's thrilled to be back after 13 years away during which she worked as a Children's House guide at Creekside Montessori School and Lake Country School in Minneapolis.

Best thing about working at 1611 Ames

- Mercurie has hundreds, maybe thousands of best things! She's thinking of asking for a lesson on Checkerboard Multiplication to count them all. In the meantime, what comes to mind is how beautiful the pond and the outdoor spaces are, and how restorative it is to be able to spend time outside every day.
- Rachel feels inspired by the work of children and adults on this campus every day, and grateful to be part of a community that works so hard in the present in service of the future.

A favorite quote from Dr. Maria Montessori

- Mercurie: "Respect all the reasonable forms of activity in which the child engages and try to understand them."
- Rachel: "We shall walk together on this path of life, for all things are part of the universe and are connected with each other to form one whole unity."



If you see Mercurie or Rachel around, feel free to share your own Montessori fun facts with them!

From the Montessori Center of Minnesota

Montessori Center of Minnesota (MCM) is excited to announce the expansion of our Montessori teacher training programs to the Chicago area with the launch of Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) Blended 0-3 and 3-6 Diploma Courses!

Starting in the summer of 2025 and in partnership with Countryside Day School, these satellite courses offer a remarkable opportunity for individuals in the region to join a transformative learning experience grounded in the principles of AMI Montessori education.

For more details, please contact Kate Conners, MCM Course Administrator, at kate@mtcm.org or call 651.298.1120. We're thrilled to bring these top-quality AMI programs to Chicago and to continue our mission of expanding access to Montessori education!



MCM is excited to announce two new Blended Montessori teacher training programs in the Chicago area with the launch of 0-3 and 3-6 Diploma Courses! These will start in the summer of 2025. Enrollment is opening soon.

montessoricentermn.org

Coming
TO NORTHBROOK, IL
Soon!