

# Cornerstone Monthly Newsletter

January 2026

**Dear Families,**

This time of year I have a lot of conversations with prospective parents about how Montessori children do in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, after they leave Cornerstone. The answer I usually give is that Montessori children do well in most any situation: the children's main complaint on going to a new school is that they have to ask to go to the bathroom or that they wanted to finish their math work and were annoyed that it was time to switch to science. This year, when things are so unsettled in Minnesota, Dr. Montessori's words from *Citizen of the World* resonate even more deeply: "The obedience which is expected of the child both in the home and in the school – and obedience admitting neither of reason nor of justice – prepares man to be docile to blind forces." She goes on to say that the inability to make independent choices in childhood later, in adulthood, "takes the form of discouragement and submissiveness, of incapacity to put up the slightest moral resistance" (118). While there is a big leap from needing permission to move around in class to standing up to injustice, both are centered in an individual knowing who they are and what they need for themselves and their community.

With the events of this winter at the forefront of our minds, as the guides have described in their updates below, the ability of our Montessori children to recognize right and wrong and to feel empowered to speak up is truly revolutionary. I have been floored, time and again, in the past six weeks by the generosity of our families and the kindness and care of the children. It's easy to forget showing the children how we show up when things are hard is big work all by itself and I am proud to be in a community where we are showing up in such meaningful ways and where our children have the capacity to put up more than the slightest moral resistance.

Alyssa

## Toddler Community

With the sub-zero temperatures throughout the month of January, the Toddler Community has spent most recesses indoors in the lecture room turned into what we call the "large motor room." During indoor recess they have enjoyed activities such as helping each other (and us adults!) on the balance beam, hanging "like a monkey," throwing balls, and playing with our wonderful Upper Elementary helpers. For fine motor activities this month the children have enjoyed activities such as banana slicing, orange juicing, cutting with scissors, and on one occasion using stamps to make cards for our classmates who have not felt safe traveling to school in the recent weeks. At lunchtime when we sing our song of thanks, we finish by thanking everyone who is there and everyone who is not, keeping those who have been gone in our hearts and minds every day. We look forward to the day that we can thank each child in person for their presence in our lives.





## Children's House 1



Hello Families,

I hope you are all staying warm and well. Thank you for your continued support and trust.

I know many of us are feeling the heaviness of everything happening right now. Please know that our classroom continues to be a safe, calm, and loving space for your children.

This month, the children have been baking biscuits, giving small presentations, and singing with instruments. They have also been working hard with the golden beads, building their understanding of

numbers and place value in a hands-on way.

It has been wonderful to see their growth in confidence, independence, and kindness.

As always, please reach out if you need anything. I am here to support you and your family.

With appreciation, Claudia



## Children's House 2

We've been feeling some feels in Children's House 2 as we navigate lots of cold icy days stuck inside and responding to the heaviness of current events. It has been heart-warming to see the children find peace in scrubbing and polishing activities and caring for each other. Older children helping littles get tucked in for nap and the ever-beloved activity of preparing afternoon snack. We've been reading social stories that validate all the feelings and remind children that their trusted adults are always there to listen.



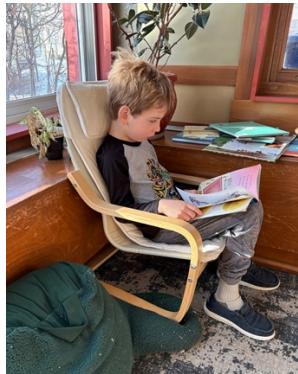
## Lower Elementary – Garden

One of the most important key characteristics of the elementary child is their development of justice and morality. This past month has been intense and difficult for our greater community but children have been finding ways to support each other within our school community, while also advocating for what's right. Children have demonstrated action through making posters, creating encouraging messages on paper bags for Stone Soup, reading books about community, singing and signing to songs that celebrate togetherness, and sharing love and laughter with each other. It's truly a joy and a privilege to spend every day with these young people who will be the leaders in making our world a more peaceful and better place.



This month, we read the most recent installment of the Skunk and Badger series, *Rock, Paper, Incisors*. Our protagonists, Skunk and Badger, are unwittingly fostering two rat pups named Zeno and Zephyr. The rodent duo find themselves in way over their heads as these two feisty rat pups are growing fast...and like to get themselves into mischief. (Just ask your child what kinds of trouble they got into!) Meanwhile, Badger is also struggling to achieve a work-life balance as he is agonizing over a deadline for an "Important Rock Work" article to his editor at the *Rock Hound Weekly*. With the help from a network of well-

organized chickens, Badger manages to finish his article but soon encounters other obstacles that he did not anticipate along the way.



## 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 to communicate, that tendency we have to convey our needs, thoughts, and emotions with other human beings.

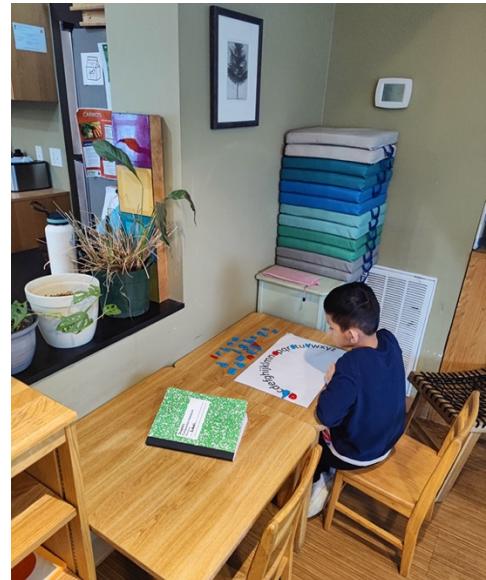


To encourage this tendency, the adults all work together to help children learn the mechanics of

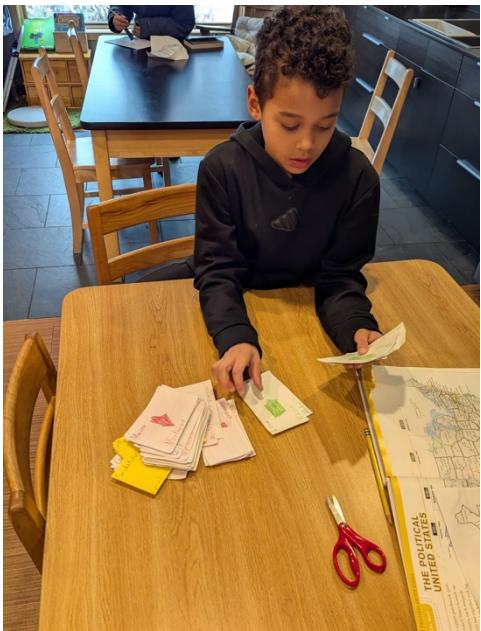


communication, whether it be learning letter sounds to be able to communicate with others through reading and writing, how musicians use higher and lower notes to call attention to an important part of the song, or how to use your words to try to resolve a conflict.

Beyond the how of communication, it is often beautiful to see the why of communication. Drawing a picture to emotionally process a scary event, making a heartfelt apology because you want to make amends and reconnect, writing a letter to make your voice heard. And of course, to share joy, in singing together, in reading together, in dancing together, in being in community with one another.



## Upper Elementary - Forest



January in Forest was full of so much beautiful work! We have seen a particular interest in geography recently with many children choosing to memorize their states and capitals and challenge themselves to see how quickly they can name all of the capitals in the United States. A few children have mastered that and expanded the work to begin memorizing the countries and capitals of continents, or the provinces and capitals of Canada. There has also been a strong interest in sewing and handwork. Children are giving lessons and demonstrations to each other on how to crochet, fingerknit, weave, craft, and use the sewing machine. One of the beautiful things we see in a Montessori environment is the children learning from one another. A lesson given to a few children can quickly spread, and soon many children have learned a new skill! What a joy to witness!

This month we have been reading the second book in the *Tristan Strong* series by Kwame Mbalia. This book, titled *Tristan Strong Destroys the World*, has Tristan fighting against The Shamble Man in an effort to save his grandmother and all of Alke (the land of African folk heroes and gods). There are great themes of standing up for justice, persevering even when things seem impossible, and how trauma and pain affect everyone in different ways. Tristan is challenged to approach his enemies with empathy and to find a way to help others cooperate with each other when they have different perspectives.

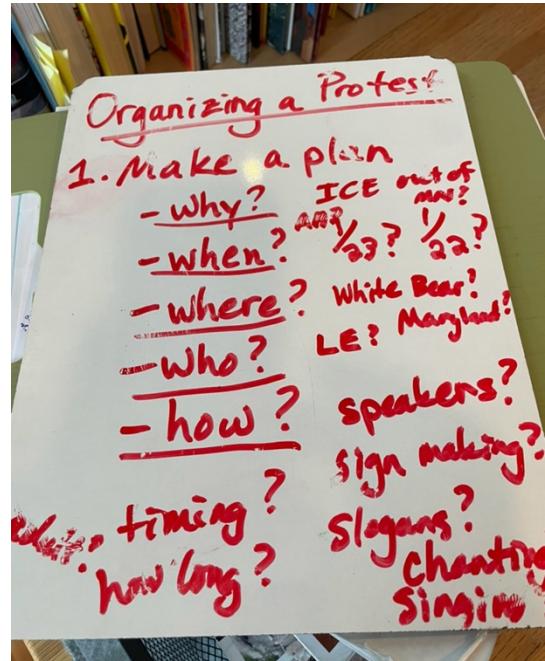


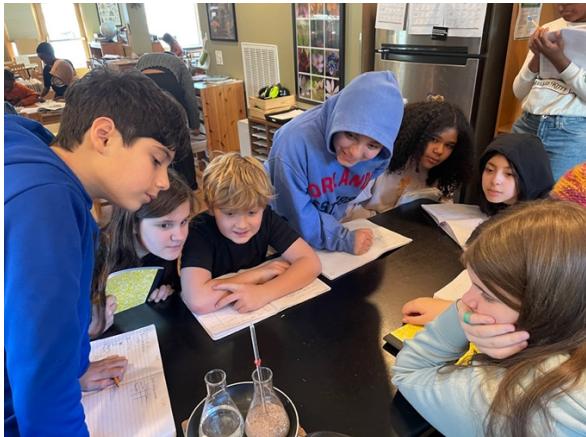
## Upper Elementary - Marsh

Generally, January is a great month to hunker down, do big projects, and settle into a strong routine. This hasn't exactly been the case for January 2026 though! Extreme cold, frozen pipes, flexible learning day, water issues - all these things were significant, but also overshadowed by the turmoil in our city and community. Students in upper elementary took action! While their planned walk-out to protest the presence of ICE in MN became a powerful rally due to temperature and safety concerns, they were proud of this accomplishment. Children made signs, wrote poems and statements, and chanted together.



Protesting was just one kind of big work in Marsh in January. Games and character development continue to be popular and the sixth years launched a large Imaginary Island project that will carry through the next several months. Work with mapping, scale, biomes, air, climate, wind, currents, and weather are all topics sixth years are reviewing as they create their own islands. Students new to Marsh this year have begun working on The Story of My Name essays to add to our class anthology. Fraction work continues to be popular and children are reading and passing around favorite books. Our current read aloud is *Freewater* by Amina Luqman-Dawson, which is historical fiction about two escaped slaves who discover a secret free community in the swamps near their plantation.





## From the CMES Board of Directors

Three board members are rolling off the Cornerstone Board of Directors this summer, including a parent member. If you have any interest in joining, please reach out to Alyssa, Chris, or Julaine Roffers-Agarwal, our board chair.

In addition, it is open enrollment season! Please share with your friends, family, and neighbors the opportunity to enroll in our wonderful program for the 2026-27 school year. Applications can be found at [www.cornerstone-elementary.org](http://www.cornerstone-elementary.org) or at the office. If you are able to place flyers in your community centers, etc., we would love to give them to you, as well!