

MONTESSORI NEWS



Whole Child ★ Whole World

5099 7th ST NW, Rochester, MN 55901
www.rmschool.org 507.288.8725

The Great Lessons: What You Need to Know

By Andy Saunders, E1 Guide

A fascinating aspect of the Elementary One curriculum is the presenting of the **Great Lessons** to the second plane child. As the child enters the second plane of development, they become extremely interested in what goes on in the world around them or how certain things came to be. The Great Lessons help children by giving them answers to these “BIG” questions. The Great Lessons consist of five stories:

- The Creation of the Universe
- Life Comes to Earth
- Humans Come to Earth
- The Story of Language
- The Story of Mathematics

These wonderful stories, (told by the guide to the entire classroom every year, lay the thematic framework for the entire Elementary One curriculum (Mathematics, Language, Cultural Work, etc.). They also give children a greater appreciation for those that came before them.

In addition to the Elementary One curriculum the children are also given opportunities to leave the school through “Going Out” activities such as to the local theatre, Quarry Hill, planetarium, and other places outside of the city as well. This year, each child has the opportunity to also perform community service outside of the school by participating in the Meals on Wheels program, and delivering meals to those in need.

An exciting event for the children each year is the Writer’s Café, in which the children share stories that they have been working on for many months. They also have the opportunity to show what they have been learning in their Spanish class as well.

Freedom

Montessori talked a lot about freedom. Sometimes it is easier to start with what freedom does not mean. Freedom does not mean do whatever you want. Freedom and responsibility are the opposite sides of the same coin. The freedom that we talk about only exists within the structure of responsibility. It must be freedom within structure. When things go wrong with children or don’t seem to be working, we do not look at what is wrong with the child, we first look at what is wrong with the structure.

Staff Development

This year the staff has had a great many school sponsored development opportunities. An internal staff committee organizes activities for the five calendar days that we have set aside for staff development. This year the committee has focused on several areas - Montessori awareness, outdoor/nature awareness, personal awareness, and community resources.

We started off the year with a visit from P.D. Shortridge, a nationally known Montessori speaker and teacher trainer. She led two sessions for the staff, one each for the Guides and for the specialists/assistants. The Guides engaged in a workshop call "Montessori Leadership" in which they covered a wide range of material revolving around being a professional in the Montessori world. The points covered in this session included how to work with non-trained people in the profession, how to work with parents, and how to work with one another. The Assistants and Specialists had a workshop called "The Core of Montessori." This was an overview of all that is Montessori that served as grounding for some and as a refresher for others so that we could get back to the basics, back to what is the most important, and back to what works.

On our second staff development day we had the honor of traveling to Wabasha to visit the National Eagle Center. While there we were treated to a workshop that covered the amazing characteristics of our nation's boldest and most recognizable symbol, the bald eagle. The NEC has a great many educational displays and several eagles (all of which have been injured and would not be able to survive in the wilderness). The staff had time to peruse the displays, see the eagles, and make some purchases for the classroom.

On our third staff development day, we treated ourselves to a day of personal renewal - a crucial task when working with children. In the morning we had a wonderful yoga session. This was followed by some light snacks of yogurt and fruit (yoga is hard work!). For lunch, we continued the theme by having some delicious Indian food. The afternoon time was spent talking about the preparation of the adult in relation to working with children. In Montessori it is the preparation of the adult that determines the efficacy of the method. It is our belief that one must remove pride and anger from the heart in order to see the child for who (s)he is and will be.

Most recently, we reached out to the community to explore the resources available at the Rochester Public Library. This connection is important because RMS is not an official stop for the infamous Bookmobile. Any resources that the library has can be ordered and delivered to us via the Bookmobile. This is a great opportunity for us and increases our access to what the library has to offer. The afternoon time was spent working in classrooms and preparing for the Multicultural Day Celebration.

Marie Dugan Visit

In October of 2008 we had a very special guest visit our school for a day and half. Her name is Marie Dugan. She is currently a trainer at the Center for Montessori Teacher Education in New York and the current Living Legacy for the American Montessori Society, an honor bestowed upon individuals involved in AMS from the beginning. In the past she was a Children's House Guide, Head of School, AMS President, and is one of the founders of the International Montessori Council, an organization that desires to serve all Montessori communities worldwide. It was quite an honor to have her visit our school! The purpose of her visit was to observe how the school operates as part of our Executive Director's (Patrick's) continuing education in Montessori Administration. She observed in several classrooms, spoke with several staff members and parents, and consulted with Patrick. She left very impressed with our school and had several important observations about how we could continue the development and improvement of our programs. Her visit will be followed up in the future with another visit by Britta Weis, a past AMS Living Legacy. We are fortunate to have such wonderful individuals working with us in the service of the child.

Peace, Love, and RMS: Springtime Revelry 2009

It's that time of year again! But this year is even better, it's Rochester Montessori School's 40th anniversary! Come celebrate and support the school at Springtime Revelry 2009, 'Peace, Love and RMS.' Any form of peace-wear and Sixties attire is encouraged.

WHO: RMS community members, past and present (No kids, though - what a concept!).

WHAT: Springtime Revelry 2009, 'Peace, Love and RMS'

WHEN: Saturday, April 25th, 2009 from 6:00. Silent auction to start, music begins at 6:30, 7:15 p.m. buffet, presentation, live auction, dance to follow.

WHERE: Rochester Golf and Country Club

WHY: To raise funds for RMS and to celebrate 40+ years of Montessori Education in Rochester.

HOW: There are many ways RMS community members can get behind this wonderful anniversary event. Among them:

Attend: Last year we had roughly 60 parents and guests. Let's get more people bidding and on the dance floor this year.

Give: We'd love each family to make at least one gift to Springtime Revelry, whether it is a handmade sweater, babysitter hours, or even a weekend at a vacation home. The best gifts come from families! Last year, we had a good core of parent gifts but nowhere near 100% participation. You can make the difference this year.

Sponsor: Both individuals and businesses can donate, or they might consider a sponsorship.

Ask: If you know of a business or person who might like to donate or sponsor, we can give you the tools to solicit. The best ask is from someone the donor knows.

Eat, drink, bid, dance, celebrate: Self-explanatory!

Among the highlights of the event will be:

- Anniversary classroom art projects at the live auction
- A presentation of future plans for RMS and its capital expansion
- RMS luminaries past and present;
- General neo-Sixties silliness.

Event contacts:

General questions: Ana Folpe, 252-1871, ahfolpe@charter.net, and Marina Ramirez de Berglund, 285-9797, ramirezalvarado.marina@mayo.edu)

Auctioneer/co-chair: Lisa-Ann Wuermsler, 529-1681, wuermsler.lisann@mayo.edu,

Board Fundraising Chair: Rich Wright, 252-4716, rwright69@charter.net

Family giving contact: Elizabeth Yan, 206-4899, esparney@hotmail.com

Sponsorship/business donation contacts: Ana Folpe, 252-1871, ahfolpe@charter.net and Suzanne Brady, 281-9320, sbrady@charterinternet.com

Kid art/classroom liaison: Marina Ramirez de Berglund, 285-9797

Event designer: Claudia Tabini, 536-9563, ctabini@gmail.com

RGCC/ liaison: Ginger Carson, 251-4529, gingerr@pitel.net

Event volunteers: Bridget Leenstra, 289-6458, bridget.e.leenstra@wellsfargo.com and others, hopefully!

Thank You to Michael Cleary of MCP, Michael Cleary Photography, for his donation of time & talent toward the RMS school calendar. If you haven't purchased your calendar, be sure to stop by the office and pick one up! Calendars are \$20 and all proceeds go to RMS!

Green Committee

RMS Green Committee continues a Reduce, Reuse, Recycle emphasis by asking children to be aware of the amount of waste they produce at lunch. We are hoping to join 250,000 children nationwide in IXG & Green Education Foundation's National Green Week activities including a Waste Reduction program. This gives parents a wonderful opportunity to discuss appropriate food portions with their child/ren. We encourage parents to purchase foods in larger quantities and use re-usable containers in order to eliminate packaging waste. In anticipation of the new construction this spring, the Green Committee has also brought to the attention of the RMS Board the value of seeking LEED Certification (Leadership in Energy Efficient Design) through the US Green Building Council for our new school addition. Information can be found at www.buildgreenschools.org.

Special Events Committee

The Special Events committee was busy during Staff Spirit Week last fall. Going with the theme of "We Rock", we put together a staff timeline showing how long some of us have been rockin' here at RMS. The committee loved decorating the staff room with Lava lamps and costumes for "Bob" (the school's skeleton)! Each day was a different music era and a different outfit for "Bob". The staff Guitar Hero contest was the hit of the week! Andy was the winner...rock on Andy! There was also BINGO for the front parking space and a raffle. The week ended with Patrick dressing up in 70's gear and singing karaoke in front of the school for Fun Friday.

Our last week in December started with a staff luncheon that went off without a hitch! On the other hand, a gift exchange was planned for that last Friday before vacation, but Old Man Winter had other plans for us!

The committee also acknowledges staff birthdays (like Patrick's 40th!!), new staff and other staff accomplishments.

Looking ahead at '09 our plans are many. We are attending PTSA meetings to enhance communication and collaboration. We'll be organizing more BINGO and game nights. With the Oscars coming up there will be Oscar contests. Sometime we'd like to arrange a trip for the staff out of town for an evening or weekend. Our main aim is to keep our staff happy!

Fun Fridays

The children were treated to a special visitor on a Fun Friday we had last fall. The visitor was not a person but a bald eagle from the National Eagle Center (well, she came with a person!). For about an hour, the children attended a presentation on the bald eagle which included things like the bald eagle population depletion, being put on the endangered species list, the population recovery, and removal from the endangered species list. The children also learned a little bit about eagle habitats, habits, characteristics, as well as current issues facing eagles today. A special part of the presentation was watching Angel (the eagle) feed on a dead rabbit that was brought in!

More recently, a Fun Friday talent show was held. On this day, a host of children chose to share with the others a special skill they have. We were treated to a host of musical performances on the piano, the cello, the guitar, and xylophones. There was also singing, tumbling, gymnastics, martial arts, magic tricks, dancing and more! A great time was had by all.

Educating for Peace and Social Justice

Every year the American Montessori Society, of which RMS is an Associate Member, has several small regional conferences and one large national conference; this year the national conference is in the city of New Orleans. The theme for this year's national conference is "Educating for Peace and Social Justice" and will showcase world renowned speakers including Greg Mortenson, founder of Pennies for Peace and Spike Lee, director of several films focusing on issues of social justice and equality. Marie Dugan (p.2) will be giving the keynote address at the conference.

Our Executive Director, Patrick, will attend this year's conference and, in conjunction with a great many other Montessori schools, will present Greg Mortenson with the proceeds of our own Pennies for Peace campaign that we ran at the end of 2008. **We will be presenting him with a check in excess of \$700! This is a combined total of the pennies children brought in and a generous matching donation by one of our RMS families.** This is a great opportunity for our school to participate in the greater Montessori community and contribute to greater peace and social justice in the world, part of our vision of Whole Child * Whole World.

In 1994, Pennies for Peace was inspired by students at Westside Elementary School in River Falls, WI, where Greg Mortenson's mother, Jerene, was principal. After hearing about Greg's activities overseas, the students collected thousands of pennies through a program they called "Pennies for Pakistan."

Since then, the program (now Pennies for Peace) has grown to include more than 3,000 schools, organizations and individual efforts.

In 2008, children on every continent except Antarctica collectively raised \$900,000 - that's 90 million pennies, one penny at a time - to help build schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Even in the dangerous, war-torn countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan, Central Asia Institute (CAI) schools built with these pennies are not attacked by extremists. That's because CAI works hard, sometimes over a period of years (one cup of tea at a time), to gain resounding community support. Once the school is built and girls and boys enrolled, the villagers protect the school with their lives.

Educating girls to a fifth-grade level reduces infant mortality, reduces the population explosion and increases the well-being of the individual, and the children she may have, and the society itself. Greg Mortenson said, "We can drop bombs, we can build roads or we can put in electricity. But unless the girls are educated, the world won't change."

All of the above information comes from the CAI publication "Journey of HOPE". For more information, visit www.penniesforpeace.org



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From the Director

At RMS we are fortunate. The staff is fortunate to have such an incredible environment in which to carry out their work. From the smallest pieces of material, to the classrooms themselves and the building, from the patios and gardens to the surrounding acreage, the physical environment is continually being optimized for child development. The governance and exceptional staff continue to work together and strive for greater things; not only for the children currently here but also for children of the future. RMS families are constantly challenging themselves with developing a greater understanding of their children's needs and the RMS staff is more than happy to share ideas. And then there are the children - of course they are most the fortunate in all this. They are the most fortunate not because of the staff, the physical environment, or even because of interested family involvement. They are the most fortunate because of the dynamic harmony that exists between the three. One of Montessori's most powerful ideas was the idea children suffer most when adults are unable to resolve adult issues.

Things are tough for a great many people these days and historically, it is the children that pay the greatest price for the economic, social, and political woes of the adult world. At RMS, the children are fortunate to have the physical environment but they are more fortunate to have prepared adults dedicated to their protecting their needs as children. Unquestionably, the pressures of educational standardization, the force of competition, and the futility of greater rigor are powerful adult motivators. Purposeful resistance can be trying if not impossible for many adults. Purposeful resistance for us is simply paying attention to the needs of our children by paying attention to them as the future of humanity, not by paying attention to the hype of the current ebb or flow in the edupolitical landscape. The children at RMS are fortunate that they have a place where childhood is revered and purposeful development is prioritized above all else.

The more that we as adults can protect the sanctity of the child's world today the better our children will be at dealing with the issues that we leave for them.

THANK YOU!

On December 15th, about 30 RMS families participated in the annual staff cookie "exchange." We had a wonderful variety of treats, and each staff member received a fantastic assortment of cookies, a mug, and a packet of hot cocoa. There were about 35 boxes assembled and filled to the brim with goodies.

Thank you to Deb Kuch for organizing this great thank-you to the staff, and to Radhika Damle and Sherry Jester for assisting Deb with filling the boxes.

About Us

Rochester Montessori School is a nondenominational, not-for-profit organization serving children from 18 months to 12 years old. Our diverse community is open to children of all cultures and backgrounds and we frequently serve children from the international community. We are alive with the spirit of acceptance and inclusion. We currently have approximately 160 students from 120 families and 28 staff members to serve them.

Newsletter Contributors

- Patrick F. Sheedy III
- Janine Yanisch
- Ana Folpe
- Christina Wentz
- Sarah Field
- Tricia Christensen
- Sharri Juhnke
- Andy Saunders
- Sara Werner



Future Growth and Development at RMS

This year's registration material included a letter from the Board of Directors inviting you to a meeting that took place on January 8th. At this meeting, the Board presented their vision for the future to the RMS community. On a macro level, their vision is single-purposed - provide more services to more children. The Board of Directors firmly believes that what we offer the community is so important that steps must be taken to assure not only its continuance but also its growth and development. If what is good for one child is good for all children, it is the Board's obligation to provide for that.

Of particular interest in the Board's vision is the expansion of our facilities to accommodate current and future program expansion. While we continually improve upon what we currently offer, we also strive to offer a wider variety of programs, and that includes expanding to the Junior High level.

The Board of Directors is working diligently on building plans and financing options to support this growth, while the administration and staff are beginning to speak more in-depth about what program and personnel changes are involved. Keep your eyes open in the coming weeks for more information about our future plans.

Multicultural Day 2009

Multicultural Day was on January 24, 2009. Many families showed up for this celebration. The day started with a program of songs from the elementary students. Following that, there was a Parade of Nations. Children enjoyed the games in the gym where they could win small prizes. Many families brought in small dishes from their native countries. There was also ice cream that was donated by KEMPS. Over all, Multicultural Day was a big success!

A special thanks to Liz Carson and Elena Cattaneo who co-chaired this event! Thank you to Lori Forstie who consulted with Liz & Elena. And of course, to all of the staff, students and parents who worked so hard to make this day special!!

THANK YOU

The RMS staff thanks the PTSA and parents. The PTSA has organized classroom parents to provide food for the staff on Staff Development Days, which is greatly appreciated. It makes these service days even better!