

Classroom Notes November 2020

November 7, 2020

Dear Families,

Thank you for taking time this week to meet with me for conferences. I often learn things from you about your children that help me in guiding them in their decisions during their school day. If you did not have a chance to sign up for a conference, just email me and we will set up a time.

As our class has blended into one, there is a new excitement in the air. Older children have been helping the younger ones with reading activities, spelling charts, perfecting their cursive writing, counting money, etc. This not only gives the younger children more practice in their skills, it also helps the older ones to fine-tune their own skills as they slow down to examine their knowledge before they pass it on. There is also a feeling of empowerment in the older crew from their nurturance of the younger children, as well as a sense of belonging for the young ones when they are taken under the wing of the much-admired older students. I so wish you could be with us to observe this beauty of the Montessori way.

In my conferences with you all, many of you asked for ways to help your children at home. I would like to share with all of you the various ways that came up.

Reading:

The young ones are just about ready to practice reading at home for a few minutes each day. I will send home some simple materials this week for the first graders to share with you. Above all, this needs to be a pleasant experience for both parent and child. If it is not, please stop and we can talk. If you start with just 5 minutes and build up to 15 eventually, this is a reasonable goal. For the children who are established readers, expect them to read at home for 15-20 minutes. Eventually they will get caught up in it and become readers who do not even think about time.

For reading at home to work, you must set limits on screen time; otherwise the reading will seem laborious. Children who have unlimited screen time rarely become committed readers. Unfortunately our culture has become inundated with all forms of devices, so this is a challenge. We now know from the research that reading achievement has a direct correlation with academic success.

A few thoughts on reading material for your children: At school I encourage the children to read half fiction and half nonfiction. There are many popular books on the market for children that have little or no value to your children. These are often connected to video games, and some of them are graphic novels. You can read reviews online at Goodreads to see if something might appeal to you and your child. The children's librarian at Samuels is very helpful to families, so don't hesitate to ask. It is actually good for the children to learn to ask for the kinds of books they want. Reading is an excellent avenue for learning about other countries and cultures through beautifully written picture books and novels. Sometimes reading a novel with a setting in a foreign country will pull a child into reading nonfiction about that country. This is when you know that your child is becoming

a lifelong reader. Read to your child every day. Once they are established readers, this often goes by the wayside, but hold onto it as long as you can. It is a wonderful way to talk about important issues with your children as they get older (and it is just such a fun experience to share!)

Sleeping:

It is obvious that this is still an issue for some students. A good rule of thumb for elementary age is that they should all be in bed and lights off by 9, which means the younger ones should be there around 8. Otherwise, they cannot function maximally at school the next day. Again, screens get in the way of this. TVs, phones, computers, I-pads, etc. do not belong in the children's rooms. Keep these things near you so that you know when your children are on them. Several times now in talking with parents, we have figured out that their children are so exhausted at school because they are on devices rather than sleeping.

Eating:

I encourage all of us to continue sharing meals as a family. It is such a wonderful time for your family to connect with each other every day. It also gives your children a chance to learn proper etiquette, i.e. staying seated at the table, conversing appropriately, eating in a civilized manner, etc.

Your families are all very dear to us. We wish all of you many enriching experiences as you share these precious years of childhood.

Sincerely,

Mona

November 14, 2020

Dear Families,

Yesterday was a special day in our class. It started with a bit of sadness when we realized that some students were treating others unfairly, leaving some of our classmates feeling excluded and uncared for. It also happened to be World Kindness Day, which fit right into some of our topics of conversation on respectfulness. In our class meeting I asked students if any of them had ever tried to leave another person out of their shared time with another friend. After I revealed that I had done that before, and that I am not proud of it, but must admit the truth, many hands went up. They all wanted to share details about their own transgression. After this, I asked them why we as humans would do such a thing? They started talking about how they did it to keep from losing the friend they were presently attached to, recognizing that they had acted out of fear. This led us to pondering how often fear is at the root of misbehavior. We decided to take a moment to speak about each classmate so that each person had a chance to hear something positive about themselves. We included the students who were absent as well. This was followed up by a suggestion from a student that we all write down what we appreciate about each other, which we did during our writing workshop in the afternoon with students drawing names out of a basket to find out who they would write a note to. I think we all felt more nurtured as well as more nurturing by the end of this process. Children asked to revisit the experience periodically to help all of us remember that we all benefit from kindness.

On more technical matters:

Next week some 4th-5th grade students will be taking the IOWA achievement tests. If you have signed your student up for this, please make sure they have eaten a high-protein breakfast and have had adequate sleep. The tests will take place M-Th, with make-ups on Friday.

All 3rd-5th graders who need keyboarding skills can sign up for a free program called Typing Club. It is highly effective and children love it.

The reading materials I promised parents of 1st graders will come home this week. This will include fluency drills, which you can just have your child read about 1/3 of at a time until more can be handled; cards of phrases and/or short sentences, and booklets of words with digraphs or blends. You can start with 5-10 minutes per day and work up to 15-20 minutes each day. Please remember this needs to be pleasant for both you and your child. Let me know if you need guidance.

Sincerely,

Mona

November 24, 2020

Dear Families of 1st and 2nd Graders,

Here is a plan for your child for the next two weeks. Please use it as a guide. Your child will come home today with materials to work with. If your child is a self-starter and gets involved in work, please do not stop them to make sure you cover everything. The ultimate goal is for your child to find activities that interest them. We have plenty of time to make sure everything is covered. Above all, enjoy this time with your child. If you have challenges, please send me an email immediately, and we will figure out a solution together.

Sincerely,

Mona

Plans for November 30 - December 11, 2020

Language

Grammar work: (Use the pages marked grammar in your packet.)

Parents read the passage and then recognize the nouns, adjectives, and articles. Write a list for your child to copy. Find about 10 nouns first and underline them. Child writes them. Go back to each noun and see if there is an article with it (a, an, the.) We call the article the little word that tells us a noun is coming up. Next see if the noun has an adjective (we call this the word that describes the noun.)

Writing:

Have your child write every day. Choose from the following:

- Writing a poem about something in nature
- Writing a paragraph about someone they love, either family or friend
- Writing a short story
- Writing a list of nouns from a particular topic (Thanksgiving, things in their room, things that are purple, etc.)
- Writing a list of things, they are grateful for
- Writing the names of people, they know, using a capital letter
- Practicing writing letters or words that you write first.

(Do not correct spelling unless your child asks you to and then only sparingly. There is time for that later. Do ask your child to write in cursive. Keep it fun.)

Reading:

Your child is bringing home 8 books at their level to practice each day. Two or 3 short periods are much more useful than a long stretch.

We are also sending digraphs for the children to read and write. Some of this each day is extremely helpful to both reading and spelling.

Read to your child every day, including fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.

Mathematics

We are sending home math fact sheets for each child. Do not time your child unless they specifically ask you to, and then it is for one minute. Do one sheet each day, the top half in one session and the bottom half a couple of hours later. If your child wants to do the whole sheet at once, that is fine.

We are sending home a roll of register tape for children to count and write on. This can be by ones, twos, threes, fours, or fives. Start with ones, then 2s or 5s. Work alongside your child until they are on the right track. They can do this for as long as they want. You can use pennies to help your child. I suggest using pennies in groups of whatever number your child is counting by to help with money concepts at the same time.

Money:

Go over the names and values of the penny, nickel, dime, quarter.

Play games of writing down an amount (12 cents) and making it with your child.

Geography

We are sending home a blank map of the United States and a map with the names of the states on it. See which ones your child knows. Write those states in cursive for your child to copy onto his blank map. Each following day help your child learn 4 or 5 new ones and label these once they have it. By the end of the two weeks they will know many more states. As they learn a state, have them color it with colored pencils (not markers.)

Science

We are sending home some suggestions for science experiments for you to choose from. Try two or 3 each week.

Botany: Draw plants from observation with your child. This can be from plants they dig up and bring in so that they can draw the roots as well. Do this once each week and more if your child chooses.

Zoology: We are sending home some info on reptiles. Read and discuss with your child. Look at more reptiles online and draw them.

History

We are sending home some information on Egypt. Read a bit each day. You can also draw anything related to Egypt with your child. They can also write a few sentences.

Music

We would have been listening to music by Tchaikovsky these two weeks. Please read the info we are sending and listen to various works, especially from "The Nutcracker." You can also listen to the story and watch a ballet performance online. Aim for listening at least a few times each week. This can be done while your child is drawing.

November 24, 2020

Dear Families of 3rd - 5th Graders,

Here is a plan for your child for the next two weeks. Please use it as a guide. Your child will be bringing home some materials to use. If your child is a self-starter and gets involved in work, please do not stop them to make sure you cover everything. The ultimate goal is for your child to find activities that interest them. We have plenty of time to make sure everything is covered. Above all, enjoy this time with your child. If you have challenges, please send me an email immediately, and we will figure out a solution together.

Sincerely,

Mona

Plans for November 30 - 11, 2020 (Each child is to keep a record of their work each day.)

Language

Grammar work:

In your packet are copied pages to find parts of speech. Each is labeled with which parts to look for. Students have done this work before. If they get stuck, they can call me.

Writing:

Have your child write every day. Choose from the following:

- Writing a poem or haiku about something in nature
- Writing about someone they love, either family or friend
- Writing a story
- Writing details for a topic, then writing a paragraph. They have been practicing topic sentence, supporting sentences, and conclusion.
- Writing a list of things, they are grateful for
- Writing a letter to a grandparent, aunt, uncle

Reports: Each child will come home with resources to work on a report on a self-chosen topic. They can begin by writing down all they know on their topic. For the following three days they should just be reading on their topic and will most likely come to you to share the info that amazes them. The 4th day they can start making notes. This will probably take 2 or 3 days. The final step is to actually write the report. Some of them will be able to organize their notes; others will need your help. Throughout this process they can produce drawings on their topic. We will all share when we return in January.

Twice a week help your student to make spelling corrections on one of their creations. We will send their spelling dictionaries home with them if they have one at school. All writing should have periods, commas, and correct capitalization.

Reading:

Your child should be reading about 40 minutes to an hour each day. This should include fiction and nonfiction. Books will come home with them. Two or 3 short periods are much more useful than a long stretch, but if your child is absorbed in reading, you will not have to worry about time. Once they are proficient readers, they may need help keeping a balance between reading and their other work.

Read to your child every day, including fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.

Spelling:

We are sending home some pages for breaking up multisyllabic words. Three days each week for this is sufficient, but students can do more.

Typing Club: Students can do this program a bit each day.

Mathematics

We are sending home math fact sheets for students who are still working on these. They do the top half in the morning and the lower half a couple of hours later. The lower half is timed for one minute. If your child passes their goal, they move to the next sheet the following day.

Money:

Play games of writing down an amount (12 cents) and making it with your child. If your child is proficient at this, have them count change back first from a dollar, then from five dollars.

Each child will come home with a packet of math work.

Fifth graders can work on their Saxon math each day. If they have gotten through test 12, they are in fine shape.

Geography

We are sending home a blank map of the United States and a map with the names of the states on it. See which ones your child knows. Write those states in cursive for your child to copy onto his blank map. Each following day help your child learn 4 or 5 new ones and label these once they have it. By the end of the two weeks they will know many more states. As they learn a state, have them color it with colored pencils (not markers.)

Science

We are sending home some suggestions for science experiments for you to choose from. Try two or 3 each week.

Botany: Help your child learn the names of plants in his yard. Draw plants from observation with your child.

Zoology: Students will come home with some reading in this area.

History

We are sending home some information on Egypt. Read a bit each day with your child or have them read it. They can also make drawings to increase their knowledge of Egypt.

Music

We would have been listening to music by Tchaikovsky these two weeks.

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