

Classroom Notes  
October 2020

October 4, 2020

Dear Families,

I keep meaning to include this in the weekly update, but maybe it deserves it's own spot.

One of my favorite things to learn about is the process of reading for children. Reading is such a complex skill, and sometimes a bit of extra one-on-one can make a world of difference, which is why I want to encourage all of you to incorporate a bit of time for your child to practice reading at home.

For reading at home to be successful there are a few guidelines. First of all, keep it friendly. If it is stressful, it will not be effective. To help with this, I will be telling the children tomorrow morning that I am asking their parents to listen to them read at home so that you can enjoy listening to them. There truly are few greater joys than watching a young one become a proficient reader, since along with this skill comes an enormous leap in a child's confidence.

Another guideline is to try to have a regular time that your child reads to you, for example, right after dinner. (I do not recommend just before bed since your child is probably tired.) Look at your schedule and be realistic about which days will be impossible, but try for 5 days each week. If your child is struggling more than usual, it is best to stick to every day if possible. Keep a few books in the car so that when a sibling is in an extracurricular activity, your young reader can get in a few minutes.

How long should a child practice? For a budding reader you might start with just 5 minutes and then slowly work up to 15 minutes. For established readers, 30 minutes of silent reading at home would be the eventual goal, again working up to that point.

If your child is already reading at home, you can relax. Just every now and then ask if you can hear a bit. Your responsibility in this case is to keep quality books around the house. Strong readers can sometimes get in ruts with their reading choices. Going to the library every couple of weeks to bring home new material can help. In a fun-spirited manner, explore non-fiction selections with your child. When you hear conversations about specific topics, find a well-written book to further inspire your child.

Occasionally, read about books online with your reader, and let him/her select one to order. It is a fun process for them to read reviews and narrow down their options.

If you need help with finding the right books, just give me a call. Also, the children's librarian at Samuel's Library is happy to work directly with your child to make selections in reading material. Fortunately, Samuels is well-stocked with excellent children's books.

Have fun!

Sincerely,  
Mona

Dear Families,

In a class meeting this week, we discussed how we are doing at becoming a working classroom. We all agreed that we have made great progress and talked about how to continue to grow in this way. The older students are aware that they are responsible for the care of their classroom and for the choices they make. They realize that there are expectations of practicing lessons they have received so that they will be ready for future lessons. They also know that the lessons they receive give them more options for intellectual and creative explorations, making their days more enjoyable and fulfilling. In other words: they are "the creators of their own destiny."

This week younger students have continued to explore numbers through the millions, adding to their repertoire division with racks and tubes, which helps them to have a solid understanding of division and all the steps of grouping, subtracting, bringing down the next category, etc. This is all accomplished with tubes filled with thousands of beads in categories from units through millions. Students love it!

Grammar box work has begun with both younger and older students. Reviews of various parts of speech for the more experienced students have been going on, while the younger ones are learning about nouns, adjectives, and articles. Our new but older students have jumped right into the action and are exploring prepositions as well.

Learning to add fractions with both like and unlike denominators has been a frequent activity this week. It is often confusing - until it isn't. Fortunately, we have our lovely box of fraction insets to help us have complete understanding.

Our music studies continued with the introduction of stories about Bach and listening to Yo-Yo Ma playing The Cello Suites. We will be listening to various works by both Bach and Vivaldi for a couple of weeks. If you have CDs of either, we would be most grateful to borrow them.

Our classroom for younger students has been rearranged to give the students more freedom of movement. They no longer will have their own private table but will have the chance to work at any place in the classroom. Masks will stay on, and mask-free times will be managed by having silent reading with 6-feet between students. It would be helpful if you could share this information with your children so that they are prepared for the change when they arrive tomorrow morning.

Picture Day for elementary students is this Wednesday.

Sincerely,

Mona

October 11, 2020

Dear Families,

One of the strengths, tools, and beauties of elementary children is the reasoning mind, which means that they can participate in self-reflection. We have begun doing this as a group about the development of our class. This week we talked about respect and how that can manifest in our classroom. Students gave a number of examples: helping someone learn something new, helping a child who is struggling with a concept, reaching out to someone who is sad, etc. I have noticed over my years with elementary children that they will indeed try out rudeness. Dr. Montessori termed these years "the Age of Rudeness", but she did not mean that it will just pass. During the years from 6-12, children need adult support with learning social graces. Often, they just need it brought to their attention that the particular misbehavior they have exhibited is an example of rudeness. Sometimes they copy actions they have seen on screens, thinking it makes them cool, rather than meaning to be offensive.

As a family, you can make a huge difference in your child's thinking. They are simply trying things out to see what kind of person they want to be. They will all use some tactics that surprise and disappoint us. We have to remember they are learning and need to hear feedback. They love to have a chance to talk about behavior that makes their lives happier. I invite all of you to open up this conversation with your children. You can find the most fruitful times for your own family, which may be during mealtime as long as it is friendly and non-stressful, or it might come up when watching a show in which children may be depicted dishonorably. You can even follow the same pattern we used: defining respect together, brainstorming how it is present in your own family, figuring out some ways to create more respect with one another. You may be amazed at the difference this can make!

We had a lovely week of getting started on a timeline about George Washington for the younger students who will visit Mount Vernon soon and a timeline about James Towne for the older students in preparation for their upcoming field trip. We have also practiced editing skills and spelling patterns to upgrade the quality of their finished work. Younger students are learning multiplication with the checkerboard while the older group has been practicing the distributive law of multiplication.

Please send an email or give me a call if you have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Mona

October 17, 2020

Dear Families,

One of the highlights of our week was studying Jamestown by making a timeline. Students are in the process of writing paragraphs about the main events, i.e., departure from England, arrival in North America, Powhatan's reaction, John Smith's contribution, etc., They will create drawings for each paragraph to go on the timeline. This work will continue after our trip to the Jamestown Settlement on Monday for the older group.

To follow up our study of atoms, we drew a generic atom with protons and neutrons in the nucleus, surrounded by the orbital paths of the electrons. We also began our discussions of specific elements, starting with hydrogen and helium. Students who received this lesson shared it with others, inspiring more use of our element cards which children manipulate to form the Periodic Table of Elements.

In writing workshop, we worked on personal narratives, brainstorming stories (one shared begets 10 more!.) We also had mini-lessons on capitalization. For 2 days I wrote paragraphs, leaving out all the capitals but giving them a number for the mistakes so they would know how many to look for. (They were concerned I might get used to making mistakes with capitalization if I kept this lesson up.) We also worked more with onomatopoeia.

In math students continued practicing addition and subtraction with unlike denominators. Some expanded this work using mixed numbers. We also worked with the distributive law of multiplication. Division was a common theme for all ages from grasping the concept to dividing by a 2-digit divisor.

In geometry we worked with intersecting lines, making perpendicular lines and labeling them correctly. We also labeled angles from making the intersecting lines, practicing making them exactly 15 degrees, 60 degrees, etc. The exactness required for this work is challenging, but brought students to the general consensus that yes it was hard work, but fun!

Grammar boxes were used by all ages this week with young students focusing on articles, adjectives, and nouns and older students receiving presentations or review lessons on prepositions and adverbs. We also had a few sessions of reading nonfiction, since most children do not do this enough. Sometimes we follow this up with writing a 4 or 5 sentence paragraph about what we learned. To help with spelling, we practiced turning words such as make into making. We did the same with -ed added at the end of words making the (t) sound, such as jumped, cramped, etc. Our classroom is adorned with the children's beautifully illustrated posters of this work.

In art we worked on botanical drawings of pumpkins, brought in from Audrey's garden. We studied some drawings by professionals in botanical drawing books noticing the various colors and fine details which make a drawing effective. This lesson was a great success - one that spread to others with many students repeating it multiple times. This means we will be

drawing pumpkins and various other specimens for a few weeks. (See Melina's drawing in the newsletter.)

To continue our focus on respect, we talked about the importance of greeting people when we first see them. It is easy for children to get in the habit of simply walking by the people they love but take for granted without extending a proper greeting. We also practiced sitting near a friend without flopping one's body down and invading someone's space. Feel free to continue this work at home.

We are all enjoying the chance to move from one elementary class to the other (with permission.) We are back to more children teaching each other and enjoying the various ages of our class, making each day richer, more productive, and lots more fun!

Sincerely,

Mona