



# The Lamplighter

SPEMS Monthly Parent Newsletter



November 2013

The Montessori Way:

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**Calendar Change:  
School will be open  
as normal on  
Friday, Nov. 15.**

## Learning grace and courtesy

November brings shorter days, lower temperatures and Thanksgiving, the most indigenous of our holiday at which we give thanks for our blessings. Expressing gratitude or thanks is one of the lessons covered in the Practical Life area of grace and courtesy. Many parents are surprised that grace and courtesy or (social convention) should be part of the curriculum. The name itself conjures up a wonderful quaint and old-fashioned idea, maybe little girls in frilly petticoats sipping tea, that little finger delicately cocked and little boys with starched shirts and greased down hair. However grace and courtesy is far from old fashioned.

Learning how to work and play together with others, in a peaceful and caring community is perhaps the most critical skill that Montessori teaches. Short lessons, taking 15 seconds to a few minutes, are given to the children in areas that will help them learn directly the skills needed to get along with others. These range from nose blowing and other aspects of personal hygiene and care, to things like opening and closing doors quietly, not disturbing another's work, table manners and how to offer an apology.

Montessori showed that it could not be assumed that the child's understanding of social rules and moral behavior will somehow be absorbed from somewhere, and therefore, it makes sense to teach them in short, clear lessons. Children do not automatically know how to be respectful, how to be a good friend, these are demonstrated through role-playing and modeled by teachers and older students. Such lessons are the foundation of the classroom and set the tone of respect and kindness.

How and when do we go about teaching these necessary lessons? Here are some skills listed by age.

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## Grace and courtesy *(continued from page 1)*

### **Toddler**

#### **Eating habits**

- Using fork and spoon correctly
- Chewing food with mouth closed
- Asking to be excused from a meal
- Sitting quietly in the chair during a meal

#### **Toilet training**

- How and when to go the bathroom
- Proper hygiene
- How to wash hands
- How to brush teeth correctly
- How to blow nose

### **Primary**

#### **Social Skills**

- How to greet people, using titles of respect when indicated
- How to shake hands when greeting someone

#### **Manners**

- How to excuse oneself when walking in front of someone
- How to interrupt when necessary
- How to say "please" and "thank you"

#### **Care of the environment**

- How to care for a pet
- How to water a plant
- How to clean up a spill
- How to open and shut a door quietly
- How to pick up and carry a chair

### **Elementary**

#### **Social Skills**

- How to work with another person
- How to resolve conflict
- How to mediate between friends
- How to help a younger child

#### **Manners**

- Writing a thank you note
- Speaking politely to friends, family and teachers
- Being kind to others (treating them the way you want to be treated)

#### **Environment**

- How to care for plants and animals
- Setting a table for a meal

First impressions are lasting impressions and so it is important that children understand the rules of social engagement. Manners are not just about cute behavior; good manners allow us to show our empathy and respect for other people, and are important life skills which determine how we are perceived in every area of our life, and, ultimately contribute to our success.

Being mannerly makes you a better person, more relaxed and confident, less nervous and insecure. Not only will you like yourself, others will like you too. It's easy to like someone who is an all-round nice person. Treating others with respect shows you respect yourself. Everyone benefits.



Grandparents are invited to join us for breakfast and a short musical presentation by primary and elementary students on Thursday, Nov. 21, from 8:30 a.m. to 9:15 a.m.

*[Parents are welcome too!]*

Grandparents are also welcome to stay and visit their grandchildren's classrooms after the breakfast!

**Grandparent's Breakfast Celebration**

### **November Food Drive**

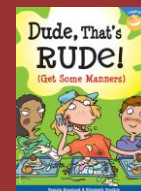
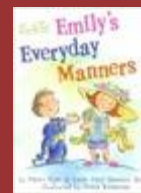


Help teach our children about sharing and caring by donating canned or dry boxed goods to the food pantry collection this month. Collection boxes are located in each classroom.

## Books on Manners

### Primary:

- *365 Manner kids should know* by Sheryl Eberly.
- *Emily's Everyday Manners* by Peggy Post.
- *Excuse me!* by Karen Katz.



### Elementary:

- *Dude that's Rude! (Get some manners)* by Pamela Espeland and Elizabeth Verdick..



Lower Elementary students visited the historic Quadrangle at Fort Sam Houston.

## News from Lower Elementary: A prepared environment-opening to the wider world

One of the tenets of the Montessori approach is educating the child in a prepared classroom environment. The classroom must be clean, open and accessible to all the children. Montessori viewed exploration as a fundamental behavior of human beings from their beginnings. The elementary classroom is one of the first points of exploration into the real world. In preparing the environment, we establish a clear, ordered pattern for the materials. The child discovers a logical and cohesive flow to the materials for learning mathematics or grammar.

The elementary classroom uses the prepared environment, and like the children at this stage of development, the classroom opens to the world beyond the self. In the elementary classroom, learning experiences must incorporate the world outside the classroom, as well. We extend the work into the outside world by incorporating outdoor work, neighborhood walks and field trips.

For example, last year, we studied geometric shapes. When we worked on quadrilaterals, we took a walk to nearby Fort Sam Houston to visit to the historic Quadrangle. The children benefitted in many ways through this outdoors extension of the classroom. They learned that the limestone fort walls were built in 1863. They absorbed the history of Geronimo's famous prison and fed the resident ducks, deer and peacocks. The older children measured the length of the enormous walls to calculate the area of this spectacular quadrilateral shape.

This year, we will continue to extend our musical education by attending the SA Symphony Youth Concert Series. We will also enhance our knowledge of the community by visiting Dixie Flags, the Carver Community Theatre and make other trips(to be announced). In past years, we have explored the Rainforest at the Witte, visited Egypt at SAMA, dug into ancient civilizations at The Institute of Texan Cultures, viewed art at the McNay Museum, found rocks at St. Mary's University Geology Department Museum, and hiked at Diversion Lake.

At other times, we open the classroom by inviting guests to share their expertise. This year, we were visited by Viktoriia Sanchez, who shared the culture and history of her native Ukraine. Austin Theater director, Bonnie Cullum, worked on Greek Myths and plays with us. In the near future, poet Jenny Browne will help students write verse for our "Afternoon of Poetry" held in the spring. Pat Hammond will bring us science magic with her Wonders of Physics.

The best example of true Montessori learning was a recent field trip inspired by a reading of *A Cricket in Times Square* by George Selden. The students, themselves, organized a trip to SAMA to see a traveling exhibit of cricket cages. Similarly, after reading of *The Trumpet of the Swan* by E.B. White., a student arranged for her grandfather, musician Jim Cullum, to give her classmates a private concert. In each case, students were motivated to extend the classroom and continue the learning experiences they enjoyed.

A prepared classroom environment invites exploration. A prepared guide invites understanding. These two parts are essential for the development of the whole child.

- Ms. Blanca and Mr. John

## Scholastic Book Fair set for Nov. 18-24



The Scholastic Book Fair takes place November

18-24. Books will be displayed in the Parish Hall commencing Monday, the 18th and students will have opportunities to view and purchase books during the week.

We need parents (and grandparents) to volunteer to set up and cashier. (Sales times will be 8 to 9:00 a.m., and 2:30 to 3:30 p.m.) Please contact the office, if you can help or need more information.

All profits from book sales will be used to purchase books for use in the classrooms and library.

# News from the toddler room

The toddlers are adjusting well to the new year. They are busy working and having fun in the classroom. As we approach the cooler weather, it is time to change out their extra clothes for long sleeves and pants. We do go outside everyday, with the exception of rain. When it gets colder, please remember to send hats and mittens with your child. It does get cold on the toddler playground.

## Here is the prayer we say before snack:

Thank you for the world so sweet. Thank you for the food we eat.  
Thank you for the birds that sing. Thank you, God, for everything.  
Amen.

## Recipe for Earth Playdough™

1 cup flour, 1/2 cup salt, 1 cup water, 1 tsp. cream of tartar, 1 tbsp. vegetable oil, and 3-5 drops of food coloring.

Mix all ingredients over medium heat. When combined, remove from heat, and knead on lightly floured surface. Keep in a tight lid container.

-- Ms. Renee and Ms. Crystal

## Plan to observe your child prior to November parent-teacher conferences

Parent/Teacher conferences will be scheduled during November. Watch for information from your child's Guide, giving details of the schedules.

You are also invited to observe your child in his/her class prior to the conference. Your observations will help you see the unique ways your Montessori teacher interacts with your child while guiding him/her through a lesson. It may also prompt questions from you, which can be addressed at the conference.

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## Scenes from the recent SPEMS Fall Fete and Art Auction

~Photos by Roberta Barnes



**Above:** Kathleen Weir-Vale and her daughter, Auction Chairperson, Laura Vale-Moore. **Below:** Veronica Peterson, Lynne Wilkerson and SPEMS HOS, Jennifer Davey.

*Below from left: Artist, Mark Menjivar, Jenny Browne and Artist, Scott Martin.*



**Above:** Laura Mijangos-Rapp, Yvette Benavides and Jen Morey. **Below, from left:** Roger Graham, Josie Fauerso and Rev. Ray Cole.



Many thanks to all those who helped organize and support the event. The event raised more than \$25,000 for SPEMS.

