"Education is the best weapon for peace." - Maria Montessori

The Montessori morning handshake - it's not what you think.

Each morning as I stand outside greeting your child and you, I think about the trust of you handing your child to VMS for the day. The handshake in the morning and in the afternoon has such a strong meaning around this "handing over" your child and the respectful way we greet him/her and then return them to you in the afternoon. To be greeted by myself or your child's teacher with a handshake and a few words is a simple ritual and personal contact offering the safe and caring transfer of the child from parent to school or teacher, opening up the opportunity to form attachments and develop new relationships. The handshake, in the Montessori world is a form of inviting a connection and to show respect for your child.

The handshake is unique because it establishes some physical contact without imposing artificial or unwanted intimacy. Some children prefer to greet their Montessori teachers with a hug. Some. Not all of them. So it would be inappropriate for Montessori teachers to use a hug as a ‘standard’ greeting. A handshake is a nice balance – it offers a gentle touch but it respects the child's personal space. If a child wants to move from the handshake to the hug (as so many of them do!), then this is warmly welcomed!

The handshake is also special because it is an individual greeting. When you wave at someone it is quite a broad gesture – you could be waving to a whole group simultaneously. Approaching a child to offer a handshake says, “I am here for you.” It is very personal (but, again, without being intrusive) and makes a child feel seen, known and welcomed as an individual.

Have a safe and joyful December recess, Miss Debbie

January Calendar

**Tuesday, January 1:** No School Happy New Year!

**Wednesday, January 2:** School Resumes

**Thursday, January 10:** Dine to Donate at Offshore Ale (Lunch 11:30-4
or Dinner 5-8:30) Dine in or take out and VMS will receive 20% of sales! [Click here to download your coupon] Reservations are recommended and coupon must be presented when paying (print it out or show it on your phone).

**Tuesday, January 15:** Coffee & Conversations (8:45 - 9:30 am) Join Ms. Debbie in her office for coffee and conversations. Engage with other VMS families while discussing topics related to your child’s development and education.

**Friday, January 18:** No School Closed for Professional Development Day

**Monday, January 21:** No School Closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

**Wednesday, January 23:** Big Night Out Meeting Participate in the first of our monthly planning meetings for our biggest fundraiser of the year held in May!

**Saturday, January 26:** Open House (9-11 AM) Help us spread the word about the wonderful education Vineyard Montessori School provides. Prospective and current parents and students are invited to attend and learn about Primary, Elementary and Middle School Programs.

**Looking Ahead**

**Monday, February 11:** Potluck & Crafts School-wide fun night!

**Thursday, February 7:** Preschool Options Night (5:30-7:00 PM at MVRHS)

**Monday, February 18:** No School Closed for President's Day

**Tuesday, February 19:** Coffee & Conversations

**Monday, February 25 - Friday, March 1:** Closed for Winter Recess

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**Win a one month Mansion House Health Club Membership!**

The **Annual Fund** is underway! Help VMS realize its goal of 100% family participation. Every gift makes a difference and we need your support. If you have not given, please consider your tax-deductible donation at this time.

All families who make a gift by January 31st will be entered to win a one month membership to the Mansion House Health Club, generously donated by VMS board member and Mansion House owner Nili Beth Morgan.

[DONATE NOW]

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**Middle School**

- **Miss Ty**

During your young child’s time at Montessori, he or she has begun the study of Geography, and has begun
to learn the names of the oceans and continents. In the elementary years, more and more “map work” is accomplished, especially political geography including names of countries, their capitals, and the names of major bodies of water.

In the Middle School, Geography continues. We use the globe and maps to study many aspects of the Earth, including: latitude, longitude, map symbols, legends, Earth-Sun relationships, time zones, map projections, elevations, climographs, and regions. Right now Matthew is studying plate tectonics, winds and ocean currents, biomes, ecosystems, and the water cycle. Since he has been attending VMS for 11 years, it’s wonderful for him to see how one subject can be studied again and again, adding more incredible information!

The writing project for the past month has been a short story that Matthew created. This project includes characterization, plot, climax, and denouement. Throughout, he worked on correct dialogue writing, punctuation, and spelling. It was a lot of hard work but the result is a wonderful story.

We had a few field trips with Upper Elementary in the past month: the Cranberry Bog on Lambert’s Cove Road, Polly Hill Arboretum, and South Mountain Company’s workshop. We also had a wonderful hike on a very chilly but sunny day to Cedar Tree Neck.
Elementary II Classroom  
- Miss Irene

Despite the chilly temperatures, the Upper Elementary students have taken a couple of field trips outdoors to learn some more about plants. Our first trip was to Polly Hill with Kendra Buresch. We met with her in the Polly Hill classroom to watch a slideshow on how plants have evolved over the years. It also included photos of some of the Polly Hill workers and what they do to preserve Island species. She then showed us their cataloging system of all plant specimens found on the Vineyard by their workers and volunteers. They have a special room that is dry and stays at a certain temperature to protect the specimens which are dried and pressed. They are then labeled with their scientific names, dates and locations where they were found, and finally put into large volumes which are categorized by plant type. Next to that room is a beautiful laboratory where much of their work is done. The real treat was getting to touch prehistoric plant fossils, some of which are over a billion years old. A tour of the grounds to look at several species of trees, which have been on the planet since prehistoric times, followed. If you visit Polly Hill Arboretum, you can find these trees by searching for tags that have a dinosaur on them.

The following week we met with Carol McGee at Cranberry Acres off of Lambert’s Cove Rd. The cranberry bog is owned by VOLF (Vineyard Open Land Foundation) and is part of an ongoing restoration project. They are still raising money to restore other parts of the bog. The cranberries grown there are picked by machine and sorted by hand with the help of a couple of small machines, which were used there years ago at the original site. Our students were able to collect several bags of cranberries that the machine couldn't reach. We didn’t hike around the three ponds that are there near the Wakeman Center due to hunting season but we did go into the barn. This is where all the sorting and bagging takes place. Students learned to identify poppers, dead and healthy cranberries as they came down the conveyor belt.
The organic cranberries are sold at several locations in the fall. Back in our classroom we made cranberry sauce with some brown and white sugar, apple juice and chopped apples. It was delicious!

Students have started researching life during the Renaissance period for history. Their latest writing assignments have included fiction stories, sample MCAS open response questions and a writing piece for their parents as a gift.

To get some exercise we hiked Cedar Tree Neck and played tag around Ocean Park and the Tabernacle, getting a glimpse of the beautiful holiday decorations.

Upon our return in January we will continue with Art, Spanish, Island Grown, the Jabberwocky renovation project, and Island hikes for our afternoon specials. Enjoy your vacation time with your families!
Elementary I Classroom
- Miss Nora

December has been a busy month with many new and exciting experiences. We were able to begin art classes at Pam Benjamin’s Sense of Wonder studio. We made pinch pots, sculptures and worked on the pottery wheel. We will continue another session in January, continuing to hone our skills and move onto the next phase of pottery making.

With Tim at Island Grown we progressed with our science studies in botany in many exciting ways. We took soil samples from different parts of the playground and analyzed what type of soil it was. There are three types: sand, silt and clay. The children then added water and covered them. They sealed the samples and are following their development. We also took some soil from the Upper Elementary garden plot and planted individual pots of lemon seeds. The plants have been brought to the greenhouse for the winter for germination. We are hoping to have some bright sunny fruit when the weather gets warm. The following week Tim brought in microscopes so we could look at different types of bacteria and invertebrates in soil that are not visible to the naked eye. That was especially exciting because we were able to use real scientific tools. Levi commented, “It’s like another world down there!”.

We went for a wonderful long hike through Menemsha Hills. It was a perfect day starting in the woods with all the berries then up to the overlook. At the top was a beautiful clear blue sky over the ocean; the intense crisp color you only get to see in the winter.

With MV Museum we continued our unit on Whaling. Miss Beth read the Legend of Moshup about how the Gay Head Cliffs got their color. We learned about life on a whaling ship and saw the real diary of Laura Jernegan (who is related to Miss Debbie’s family and whom her daughter was named after), an island girl who sailed with her family on a whaling boat. Her father captained the boat while her mother home schooled her and her brother on a three year voyage.
Primary 2 Classroom  
- Miss Chris and Miss Carrie

We have started some new work in our Geography area showcasing different wild animals and identifying the continents on which they can be found. I brought out a felt map of the world with many animals cut out of felt. The children took turns placing each animal on the corresponding continent. We also have a basket of molded plastic animals that the children can place on to the puzzle map of the world. The children can also create booklets of the animals of the continents. These activities are extensions of the world puzzle map and its nomenclature.

Another activity that enhances our Geography area are the flags of different countries. I have recently brought out the flags of North America. Some children are admiring them in their stands, some are matching the flag to their country and others are creating booklets by observing and matching their coloring to the colors on the flags. Our North America box contains pictures, maps and booklets for the children to look at and learn about different people, cultures, landscapes and foods all found in North America. I will be introducing the animals, artifacts and flags of South America after the break.

I have noticed an explosion of pre-writing and writing activities being done throughout our class these past few weeks. Like all Montessori processes, learning to write does not begin with the language curriculum. It starts with practical life activities that prepare little hands, strengthening muscles and the pincer grasp. It also happens within the art lessons. Drawing and coloring helps to develop hand strength which will be necessary when formatting letters and words. In our class, children have been working on writing extensions that enhance the concepts that they have been working on with the concrete materials. Making booklets, tracing letter shapes and coloring have been very popular activities of children of all levels throughout our classroom.

Carrie and I have been observing the "hum" of our class during the morning work period. We notice that there is wonderful energy being put into the children's lessons. They are able to focus for longer periods of time and are using problem-solving skills when they need some help, whether it is with a lesson or zipping a coat. Maria Montessori called this "normalization". Normalization in the Montessori classroom refers to the focus, concentration,
and independence of the children, by their own choice. It means they have acquired the internal freedom to initiate work, be independent, and adhere (by choice) to the rules of the environment.
Primary 1 Classroom  
*Miss Cristina and Miss Rebecca*

This month, the students worked with many new lessons, from writing and math studies to magnets, intricate block building work, and other Sensorial material explorations. The children's independence is blossoming!

Even though it is chilly outside, we appreciate nature year round and take nature walks in the crisp winter air. A popular lesson this month was making snowflakes for our tree that represents the four seasons. The children start by getting a piece of round paper, folding it in half and cutting the edges into different shapes. Then they unfold the paper and discover how it turned out - very exciting! Finally they get a piece of tape and place their masterpiece on the tree.

The children love working with scissors and tape. Using scissors is a complex task to learn. It builds up the tiny muscles in their palm since they have to continuously open and close the hand. Also, cutting enhances hand-eye coordination as they must be able to see what they are cutting while moving their hands out of the way of the scissors!

Making apple sauce proved to be an enjoyable lesson and delicious snack for the class. Children love baking and completing multi step lessons, such as apple cutting or rock scrubbing. It amazes me every time I see a child getting a cloth from our laundry shelf to scrub a table that may be a little dirty or have a smudge of paint from an art project. Sweeping some crumbs from snack into a pile and then picking them up with a dust pan and brush may seem to us
adults like a menial chore, but children in the Primary class are learning a deep respect and love of caring for their classroom.

Care of the environment is a key component to the relationship and connection young children have to their space. Part of my role as a Primary teacher in this area is to help each child develop his or her awareness of the environment by initially providing them with points of interest. For example, I may say, “Oh my! Our plants look dry. We should water them!” or “Look, there is rice on the floor. We should sweep it up!” At this point in the year, many of the children are aware of their environment and take ownership over the space, beginning to truly care for it. This lays the foundation for more complex Grace and Courtesy lessons in the months and years to come.
Late Day
- Miss Weezie

One of the many benefits of a Montessori education is a multi-age classroom. This extends to our afternoon and Late Day programs as well. Many of our afternoon students are no longer napping, however, we encourage quiet rest time on mats for all. Prior to our afternoon snacks, we offer arts and craft activities as well as choices from Practical Life and Sensorial materials.

I have introduced Late Day students to the magical world of puppetry. This teaching technique is an enchanting means of promoting skill development, furthering concepts covered in class and providing joyful learning. Books of particular interest this month: "The Boy and the Whale", "The Tomten", and "Three Billy Goats Gruff".

Outdoor play is essential for physical development, including balance, strength and coordination. Clarified ground rules are constantly reinforced for the safety of all.

Please watch for our holiday artwork contributions in storefront windows along Main Street. Students own words appear on their paintings expressing "what they are thankful for". May you enjoy quality family time during our school break remembering to rejoice in the simple gifts of the season.
Recommended Reading
"At Home with Montessori" by Patricia Oriti (available in the VMS office!)

Book Corner for Parents
"Robot-Proof: Higher Education in the age of artificial intelligence" by Joseph Aoun
"Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4-14" by Chip Wood
"The Six Stages of Parenthood" by Ellen Galinsky

Book Corner for Children
"What Do You Do With An Idea?" by Kobi Yamada
Fostering a lifetime love of learning, one child at a time.