VMS Bake Sale

Saturday, December 19th

The elementary class will hold their

Annual Bake Sale

10 a.m.—1:00 p.m.

In the park next to the

Vineyard Haven Movie Theatre

We need your help. Please drop off a baked good, in the office at the school, on Friday December 18th. If you don’t have time to bake, feel free to stop by and purchase something “yummy”.

All proceeds raised the day of the bake sale are used by the elementary students to purchase books and puzzles which they donate to the Vineyard Haven Public Library children’s area.

“It is interesting to see how little by little, children become aware of forming a community which behaves as such…Once they have reached this level, the children no longer act thoughtlessly, but put the group first and try to succeed for its benefit.”—Dr. Maria Montessori, The Absorbent Mind, pg. 232

◊ Banking is every Thursday.

◊ The next PTO meeting is Tuesday, December 15th from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Child watch will be available.
Primary with Miss Chris and Miss Holly

“There is a great sense of community within the Montessori classroom, where children of differing ages work together in an atmosphere of cooperation rather than competitiveness. There is respect for the environment and for the individuals within it, which comes through experience of freedom within the community.”

As I observe the class throughout my day, I see many interactions between children of varying ages. Some interactions are working and playing together, some are helping one another and some are creating collaboratively on an idea. The children aren’t noticing that there is an age difference between them or that there may be different skill levels, they see other children as peers and classmates, all being part of one classroom community. Each child has unique aspects of themselves that they share with others without fear of judgement due to the respectful atmosphere found within a Montessori classroom.

The new month has brought a new unit of study, fibers, to gardening. Miss Emily will be working with the children, showing them where wool comes from and how it goes from sheep to sweaters. The children were able to feel raw wool and Emily showed the children how to wash the wool. It was a wonderful sensory experience to feel the oils in the wool when dry and then wet.

A big thank you goes out to River and his family for taking such wonderful care of our guinea pig, Nutmeg, during the recent break. Nutmeg came back to school looking happy and healthy and I heard from River that he had fun taking care of our furry friend. Thank you!!

Primary with Miss Ty and Miss Rebecca

This week in my class the children continue to work joyfully. Rebecca and I often stand off to the side and marvel at some children who had previously been so in need of us for help with their lessons now working independently and with great proficiency.

One of the nice additions this week was the bouquet of beautiful pink gerbera daisies brought in by Adrian’s mom, Sylvia Vogt. Flower arranging has once again become a popular choice! Another lesson that has caused great enjoyment in the class is a small set of Russian Matryoshka dolls that my husband brought back from a trip to Europe. These little wooden dolls have been treated with great care and respect by the children as they carefully take them to the rug, disassemble them, line them up in order, and then return them into their original nesting position.

Blossom the Guinea Pig was happily welcomed back to the class after the Laird sisters took care of her over the Thanksgiving holiday. Along with the return of the cage and squeaking little cavy, a beautiful handmade book arrived that documented Blossom’s days with Ava and Elise. Stop in and see it sometime! A big thank you goes out to the Lairds, and to their very talented and artistic Nana.

Miss Emily spent some time this week with the class, introducing a unit on WOOL. On Tuesday she allowed each child to feel raw wool, and then to wash it. This wool will be dried and saved for future lessons.
Late Day with Miss Weezie and Miss Cristina

Monday was our last art class for the season with Pam Benjamin. We are grateful for this unique and rich experience for our Late Day students. Each week Pam and her able assistants provided a creative and developmentally appropriate project for us. This week, students explored the concept of patterns using pre-cut potato prints, tempera paint and large lined paper. Students were encouraged to print a row of matching designs and continue to the next row using an alternate print dipped into a new paint color. The print designs included hearts, stars, waves, houses, dinosaurs and candy canes. Some of the older children were able to create their own design patterns using colored pencils. The impressive results will be saved for an Art Show at a later date.

One rainy day project we introduced this week was beading with yarn and brightly colored beads. We extended the concept of patterns that we practiced in art class on Monday. This activity helped to develop greater dexterity, eye hand coordination fine motor skill and joy in the creative process. Books this week included: Millions of Cats, If the Dinosaurs Came Back, Outside, I Like Old Clothes, and Those Darn Squirrels.

Our class would like to welcome our new student, Madeleine Clatworthy, who started this past Monday. Madeleine is in 4th grade and her younger sister, Emily, is in Miss Chris’ class. Everyone is so excited to have a new person joining our elementary community. She went to work seamlessly on lessons with other students and in group lessons with myself. She is already familiar with the violin and enjoys theater so she now has a part in our December play. She is learning group songs for violin that the students will perform during our bake sale to benefit the library on the 19th. Welcome Madeleine!!!

On Tuesday our class went to the Visitors Center at Long Point which is a property owned by the Trustees. Molly Peach, their education director, talked with the students about their prior knowledge of weather and the instruments used to record, track and predict it. We then took an anemometer, barometer and an outdoor thermometer out to the beach to record our findings of the days weather. They recorded the readings of the air pressure, wind speed and temperature and then took readings a second time to check for changes and accuracy. We returned to the visitors center to compare our findings to those of the weather station which we viewed on the computer.

Molly followed this up with another activity which revealed the importance of the salt marshes at Long Point and on other parts of the Vineyard. She and the students created a model of a sand island with salt marshes (sponges), buildings, rivers, vehicles and proceeded to pour water into the bay area to simulate erosion in areas that did not have the marshes. Our third and fourth grade students will use this knowledge as they work on their Imaginary Island studies this year.
Social Curriculum within the Vineyard Montessori Environment

Parents and other adults the staff and I regularly encounter, for example on field trips or in the community, often remark how kind, mature and collected our preschool and elementary students are. This is no accident: Montessori places a major emphasis on intra-personal and inter-personal skills in a part of the curriculum called grace and courtesy.

At first glance, a Montessori preschool classroom may not look like the most social environment: often, younger students choose to work by themselves at tables or mats. Yet Montessori students do develop strong social skills. What explains this apparent contradiction?

Dr. Montessori believed that each child develops according to a natural time table built into this very being. She observed, over and over, that children ages 3-6 typically prefer to work by themselves for a good part of the day. They might work right next to each other, but usually, they weren’t interested in collaborating. She also observed that as the child gets older and enters elementary school (ages 6 and up), children naturally began to become more social, interested in learning with and from each other.

As a Montessori school, we respect the developmental needs of children. Although, I have observed many examples of developmentally advanced social skills every day within the primary classrooms and have experienced and witnessed the remarkable role models that each elementary student in Irene and Cristina’s classroom has developed into. That’s why in our preschool programs, children are left alone to work by themselves when they so choose – and why our elementary school program is structured around regular work in pairs and small groups. This is the direct opposite of traditional education, where preschoolers are expected to spend much of their day engaged in large group activities, and elementary aged children are expected to work by themselves!

In the classrooms, children do learn social skills, usually as part of whole-group activities. Children learn to become good citizens in our environments by practicing specific skills and following the rules of our community.

They learn, for example, to:

- **Greet the teacher and each other**, to shake hands, to look each other in the eyes.

- **Use words to express their feelings**, and to speak politely to both teachers and peers alike. Hitting, biting or other physical force in the Montessori classroom are rarely seen. These types of violent behaviors rarely occur because of the benevolent, respectful atmosphere.

- **Respect each other’s personal needs and workspaces**. Montessori preschoolers learn that others have needs, such as to not be interrupted when they work, to not have their activities disturbed or snatched away. One key classroom rule that prevents arguing is simple: activities may only be taken from shelves, not handed over to another child and must be returned to their proper spot once completed. This allows a child to have their full turn with the lesson and restoring it back to it’s original “state” is their way of preparing it for their classmate to have their full experience.

- **Work together to maintain the class community environment**. From a young age, each student embraces his role as a community contributor.

- **Follow directions and participate in (often voluntary) group activities**. Children join in group time at the end of morning work period, or may come together for small-group activities throughout the day. This is where they learn to listen politely, sit properly, and take turns speaking in a group.

These lessons are always encouraged and supported in the outside learning environment as well. Although, a time for free play and joy outside, the same grace and courtesy curriculum is expected, guided by the teachers and followed by the children. The preparation at VMS is not simply for within the classroom, its intention is that it becomes a part of their soul for life.

Below is a quote I have taken from The Absorbent Mind, the works of Dr. Maria Montessori:

> "What is social life if not the solving of social problems, behaving properly and pursuing aims acceptable to all? [It is not] sitting side by side and hearing someone else talk…"

– Dr. Maria Montessori, page 225, *The Absorbent Mind*