



MONTESSORI OF MACON

EDUCATING THE WHOLE CHILD FOR A WHOLE WORLD

SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

Session #2 | October-December 2023

DECEMBER 2023

- 8..... Last Day of Session #2
- 11-15..... Winter Camp
- 18-JAN. 1 Winter Holidays
No School

JANUARY 2024

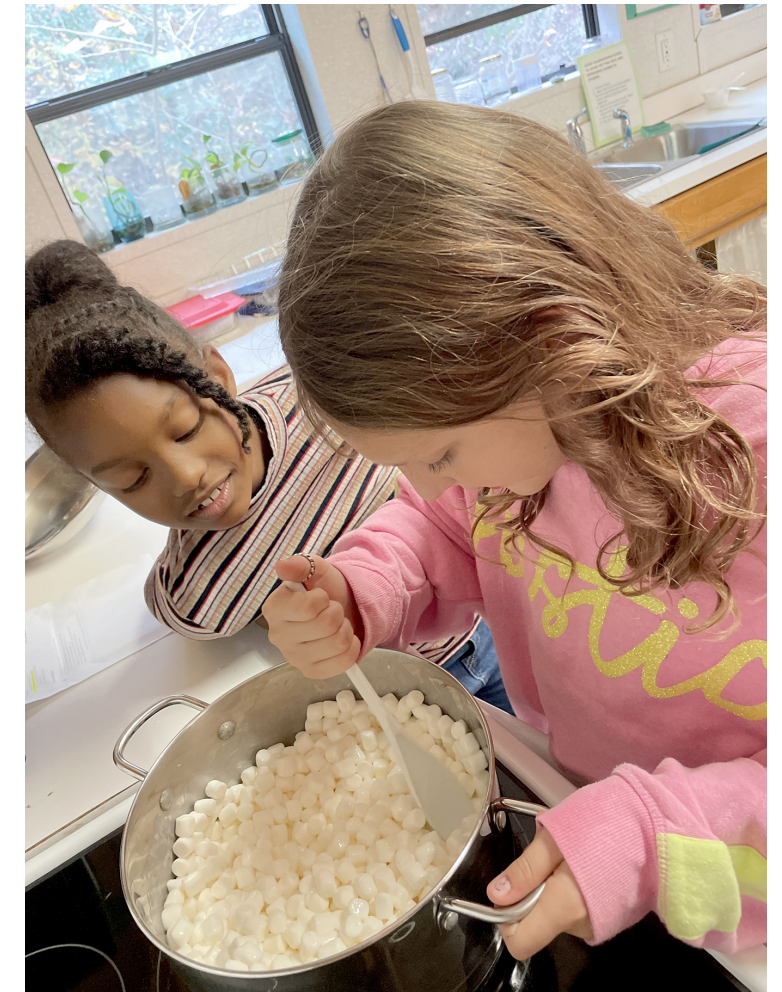
- 2..... First Day of Session #3
- 15..... MLK Holiday - No School
- 25..... Tour Of Lessons
- 29 24/25 Financial Aid
Applications Open

FEBRUARY 2024

- 26..... Financial Aid Applications Due

MARCH 2024

- 1..... Last Day of Session #3
- 4-22..... Spring Camp
- 25..... First Day of Session #4



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Montessori Education Methods Are Recommended By Researchers And Backed By Brain Science.



Welcome to our session 2 newsletter highlighting our Montessori language curriculum! As you know, I was a Montessori of Macon parent. Some of my early glimpses into our language curriculum, when my oldest daughter was in Primary, was realizing she was learning cursive and asking her teacher many questions about why cursive. I also remember when she was learning her sounds. As with anything a child “figures out,” they become fixated on that new skill and love sharing their abilities with you! There was lots of sounding out the first sound in a word around my house. We had a “d d d dog” and a “b b ball,” etc. I also remember when she was in kindergarten, and one afternoon, on the ride home from school, she asked if we could name all the nouns we saw on the way. I wasn’t sure if she actually knew what that meant, so I asked her. She proudly relayed that a “noun was a people, place or thing.” So off to naming nouns, we went!

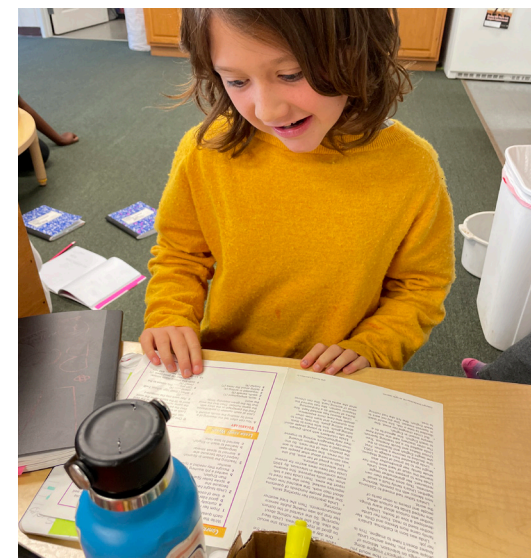
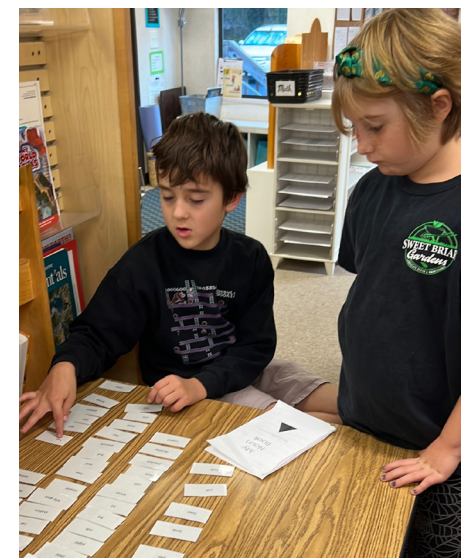
As you will see in the following pages, our toddler language curriculum is based on building and expanding toddlers’ verbal language skills. Our primary language curriculum is still expanding spoken language and vocabulary while teaching students how to read and write. If you followed the news in 2022 about the debate on how students learn to read, please know our Montessori curriculum has always taught students to read using phonics. If you are unaware of the debate that has been going on, check out the New York Times Article – In the Fight Over How to Teach Reading, This Guru Makes a Major Retreat (<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/22/us/reading-teaching-curriculum-phonics.html>). I also



highly recommend the Podcast “Sold A Story: How Teaching Kids to Read Went So Wrong” (<https://features.apmreports.org/sold-a-story/>). If a deep dive into reading curriculum around the country and the science behind how our brains learn to read does not interest you, rest assured our Montessori of Macon students are being taught to read in the way recommended by researchers and brain science!

In our Lower Elementary classroom, our language curriculum includes parts of speech, grammar, spelling rules, and so much more! Our Upper Elementary classroom continues to reinforce those earlier skills and adds in components of writing – sentence structure, paragraph structure, parts of an essay, etc. In Middle School, our students continue to refine their skills while becoming more proficient at analyzing and synthesizing information. Their writing is more complex as both the skills and topics evolve with the older students.

If you typically scan these newsletters and maybe only read your child’s classroom article, I encourage you to go back through and peruse all the articles in this edition. Each classroom has provided a snapshot of one material or concept in their language curriculum. We hope that through these articles, you expand your understanding of our Montessori of Macon language curriculum.



TODDLER 1

18 mos. - 3 years old
Ms. Whitney & Ms. Deidra

CIRCLE TIME

THE BEST SETTING FOR TODDLERS TO CONNECT WITH LANGUAGE



A toddler's brain is a sponge soaking up everything they see and hear. In our toddler learning environment, this is something we take advantage of using every opportunity we can to introduce new vocabulary. One of the most important parts of our day for language acquisition is group time. During this time, the children can work on their social interactions, build listening skills, and gain confidence in

speaking. Group time is, without a doubt, one of their favorite times of the day.

Being part of and participating in a group setting has many advantages for young children. It allows them to learn to take turns, share attention, and engage with others. Interacting with peers and adults provides an opportunity for back-and-forth conversation. This time



fosters their communication and language skills. Being in a group setting motivates toddlers to use language to connect with others through gestures, sounds, words, and simple sentences.

Our group songs, stories, and games provide a social context for using and practicing language; they also expose children to new words and concepts, expanding their vocabulary and reinforcing language patterns. This input is crucial for building their own language abilities. Sitting in a group requires toddlers to focus their attention and actively listen. Strengthening these skills lays the groundwork for understanding and using language. The group setting gives them a safe space to practice expressing themselves

verbally, take linguistic risks, and get feedback, all of which encourage language production. Being part of a group motivates toddlers to communicate so they can participate. This provides an authentic reason for them to talk and interact with one another.

The interactive social environment, exposure to new vocabulary, and focused attention during planned group times provide an optimal setting for nurturing toddlers' blossoming communication abilities with adult guidance and peer interactions. The group context taps into a toddler's natural motivation to connect with others and learn new words and concepts, making this a valuable part of a toddler's day.

You Can Teach Them Language Through Active Conversation.

One of the most important ways a child develops language is to associate it with what they see, hear, and do. As caregivers, we play a critical role in helping children develop speech and language skills.

Experiencing active communication with other people is a valuable tool in language development, and there are many opportunities to implement it during the day through daily chores and activities. Allow your child to tag along and discuss the activity you are doing, and make time to join your child's play, using language to illustrate your actions. For example, if your child is rolling a car, engage them in conversation about it. Who's driving the car? Where's the car going? Feel free to suggest answers if your child needs help!

Young children understand more than they can communicate with words. We can encourage using words by using self-talk, where you talk about what you hear, see, do, or feel when you are with the child and repeat the words and ideas often. For example, when putting on shoes, you can say, "I'm putting on shoes" or "Shoes on."

You can also use parallel talk, where you describe with words what the child sees, hears, or does, and repeat the words often (be sure to keep it simple). For example, "Jill is painting a picture. You are putting on your jacket."

Comment on what the child tells you, and add more information to their sentences to teach them to expand their language and vocabulary. If a child says, "Hold doll," we can say, "You are holding a doll." If a child says, "Drive car," we can say, "We drive the car to school."



We can also expect children to use language, not actions, to communicate their needs. To build vocabulary skills, it is helpful to not accept gestures like pointing to receive what they want. If the child points to a ball, suggest they say, "Want ball," to receive it. If they want more food, suggest they ask for that with words. Requiring perfect speech isn't necessary, and you don't need to battle the child over your wish for them to use words. If a child is unwilling to repeat the words, suggest that they use them next time. Explain that it's easier for us to understand what they want if they use their words to tell us.

Children must hear new words or short phrases spoken clearly, plainly, and very often. Celebrate and acknowledge every attempt they make at saying the words, no matter how inaccurate they may be. The child will learn through repetition when we use simple vocabulary and word order.

Emphasize the meaning of words to teach different concepts and encourage speech. During group time in class, we play a game involving a toy cow and a basket. We have the children place the cow in different ways around the basket and encourage the

children to tell us where they put the cow. "The cow is under the basket. Repeat "under." "The cow is behind the basket. Repeat "behind." Associating the word with the action reinforces language building, and repetition helps them retain it.

Include the child in new experiences, like going to the library. Talk with them before going and again while you are there, and then discuss it further after you have left. Repeated discussions are great for developing speech and language skills.

Children love listening to stories and looking at books. Engaging books for young children tell a story with large, colorful pictures instead of words. If a book is too wordy, you may use your own words to simplify the story and tell it in your own words.

Also remember, young children need time to process what we say to them. It takes at least nine seconds for them to hear our words, so give them time to process and respond before prompting them again. When talking with young children, keep your words simple and repeat them often, and watch their language skills continue to grow!

phonics

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It has always been the foundation of successful reading in the Montessori classroom.



According to the Education Department's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), or "The Nation's Report Card," roughly one-third of American fourth graders read at or below the basic level. This has been the case since 1992.

As schools look into addressing these deficiencies, phonemic awareness and other elements of the science of reading are getting attention again. Once again, Dr. Montessori was right. Phonemic awareness, the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken language, has always been the foundation of reading instruction in the Montessori Classroom. Our environment provides children many opportunities to develop phonemic awareness through hands-on activities.

In a Montessori classroom, children are immersed in an environment that makes them aware of

the sounds in words. Rhyming, singing, and alliteration lessons aim to teach the sounds at the beginning and ending of words.

Sound isolation is the ability to separate and pronounce individual sounds in a spoken word. For example, a teacher might say "cat" and ask the child to repeat the first or last sound or find objects/words that start with the sound /c/.

After a child has mastered the ability to isolate and rhyme beginning and ending sounds, she is introduced to the sandpaper letters. The sandpaper letters teach the child alphabet sounds using muscular and visual memory. The child is encouraged to trace the symbol repeatedly until the shape of the letter and its sound become a part of the child's muscle memory.

Classroom manipulatives, like movable alphabet letters, give children hands-on practice hearing and manipulating sounds. A child may use the letters to spell simple words or be asked to substitute one letter for another to make a new word. This allows the child to experiment with the phonemes or distinct sound units of language. This process is called encoding or writing words using the movable alphabet.

Sound blending is seeing and combining the sequence of isolated sounds like "/c/ /a/ /t/" to form a whole word. This skill forms the basis for decoding (reading) written words.

In our classroom, these phonemic awareness activities are woven into the day naturally, as the student's interests and development guide them. Repetition provides practice until phonetic skills become second nature. Multi-sensory materials engage listening, visual, and kinesthetic learning channels. By giving children concrete ways to play with language sounds, Montessori sets the stage for later reading success.



PRIMARY 2

3 - 6 years old
Ms. Caitlin, Ms. Emily,
& Ms. Kate

Learning To Read Starts Much Earlier Than You Think

The language area of the Montessori classroom acts as the catalyst for communication and self-expression and aids in understanding our perceptions of ourselves and others. In the primary classroom, three-year-olds experience language by what they are receiving more than how they can express what they are feeling and thinking. Reading and writing are natural and logical extensions of other forms of earlier representations that young children use, including oral language, pretend play, and drawing. Children need to learn to associate sound patterns of speech with written symbols to be able to write and read.

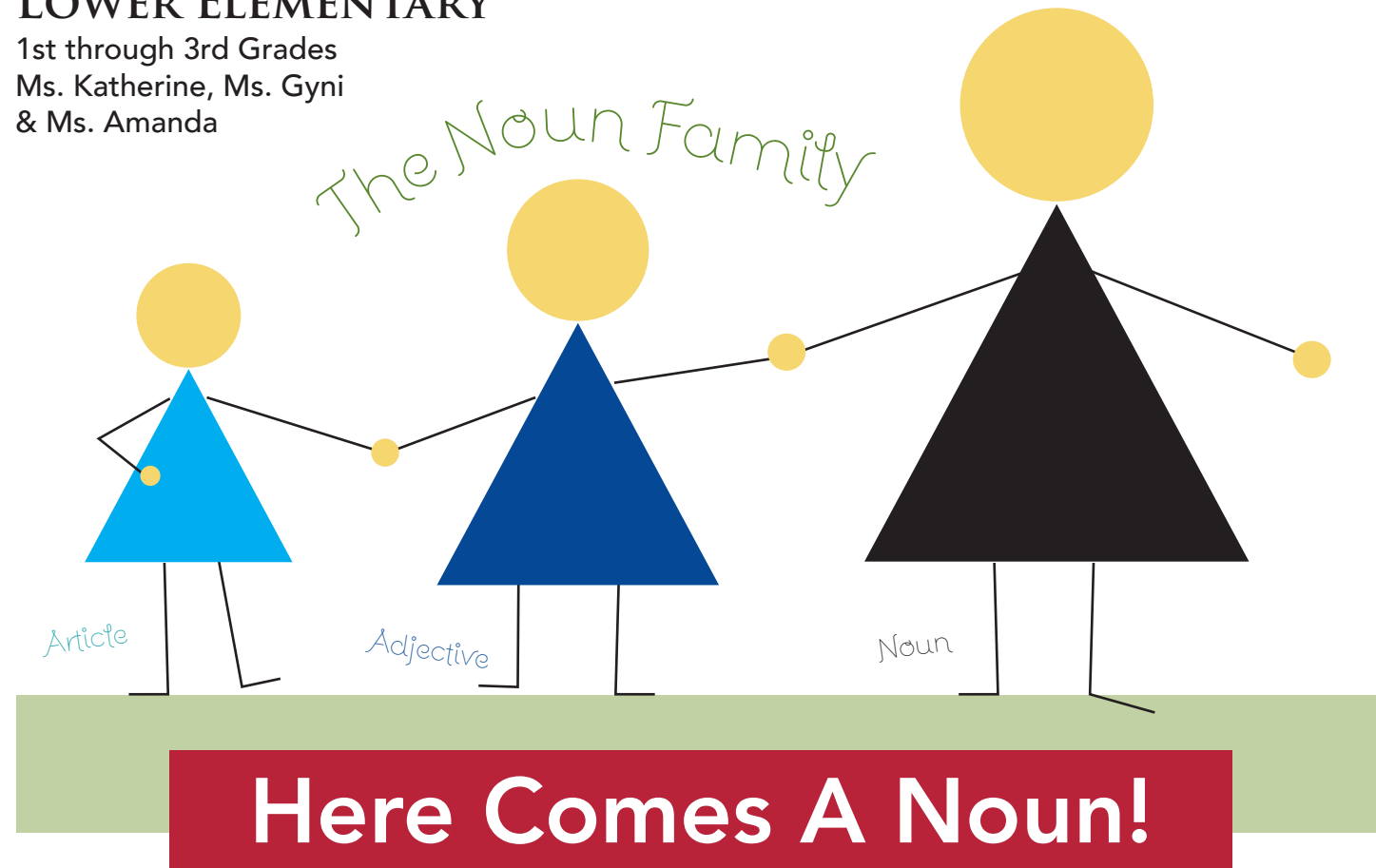
In our Montessori classroom, a vital role of the teacher is to provide stimulating language development exercises that provide the skills the child will need later on for reading and writing. Some examples of exercises that offer readiness for reading and writing are oral and auditory storytelling, sequence games, rhyming games, and teaching time and space vocabulary. The simple act of creating an opportunity for children to participate in conversation is an excellent tool for learning how to express oneself and show the child's ideas and opinions are valued. Maria Montessori discovered that a beautiful way to demonstrate auditory recognition and sharpen the child's memory of phonetic sounds of letters is through play with small objects.

With the guidance of the teacher, the beginning sounds of each object are isolated and heard first before learning the name of each object. Sound games, object-to-object matching, object-to-picture matching, and picture-to-picture matching are all lessons in the pre-language section of the classroom that promote the child's natural progression from auditory/visual discriminatory activities to phonetic reading and sound recognition of the alphabet. Once these pre-language materials are introduced and mastered by the child, the child shows readiness to move beyond object-sound identification to learning the alphabet phonetically with sandpaper letters.



LOWER ELEMENTARY

1st through 3rd Grades
Ms. Katherine, Ms. Gyni
& Ms. Amanda



The study of grammar in the Lower Elementary classroom is exciting and fun. Just as she did with her approach to math, Maria Montessori created concrete language materials that simplify the concepts to be studied. Each type of word is assigned a memorable symbol.

Dr. Montessori observed that infants' first words were almost always nouns – things in their environment that could be named. She reasoned that the earliest words humans used were probably nouns and symbolized them with something ancient and solid: the pyramid. She chose to color it black because that is the color of coal, something also ancient and familiar to her pupils. Our students take great joy in their first language lesson. They like going about the room creating lists of nouns to “symbolize” with a black triangle, the two-dimensional representation of the pyramid. In their following lessons, students learn that an article (a, an, or the) says, “Here comes a

noun!” The symbol for articles is a small, light blue pyramid. They begin to link appropriate articles and nouns together. Later, adjectives are added to the mix and represented by a medium-sized dark blue pyramid. Together, these three elements make up “The Noun Family.” Later, pronouns are introduced and characterized by a tall purple pyramid or triangle.

We learn that verbs provide the energy for a sentence. They name an action or a state of being. Appropriately, verbs are symbolized by a red sphere. A verb moves! The sphere moves as it rolls across a surface, but there is a more extensive reference here to the sun’s energy. Adverbs come next since they can modify a verb. Their symbol is a smaller orange sphere. This smaller sphere can orbit the larger verb – adverbs can appear before or after a verb or elsewhere in the sentence. On paper, these spheres are represented by circles.

Prepositions are represented by a green crescent: a “bridge” which shows the position of one word in relation to another. Conjunctions are pink rectangles reminiscent of the hyphen, which offers a connection between words. Lastly, the symbol for the interjection is a golden exclamation point.

First-year students in the Lower Elementary class typically work with the noun family (nouns, articles, and adjectives) and verbs. Older students add the other essential parts of speech and practice what they have learned by taking down sentences from dictation and then identifying the function of each word.

Our students also learn about sentence analysis – understanding how groups of words work together within the sentence. They identify the subject and predicate, finding the verb first and then isolating the subject. In additional lessons, they add direct objects and indirect objects. In advanced lessons, supporting phrases are identified and analyzed.

Our students use various materials in the classroom to practice their grammar skills. There is an extensive collection of work stored in cabinets with tiny drawers, which we refer



to as the grammar boxes. We especially enjoy using “miniature environments,” groupings of small items such as a collection of animals, a set of doll dishes, or a tiny campsite to stimulate interest in writing words, phrases, and sentences and identifying the functions of words. This activity can be duplicated away from school with whatever interests the child.

When we give children symbols to represent types of words, we make an abstract concept more accessible. We give them a concrete image to hold in their minds as they compare the different types of words. The fact that related symbols are assigned similar shapes is a clue to how they work together. Ask your LE student to give you a language lesson; you may be surprised at their knowledge!

The Function of Words/ Parts of Speech



PRACTICE, PRACTICE, AND MORE PRACTICE

Creative ways to practice fluency will help students be better readers and writers.

Each year, the Upper Elementary (UE) classroom hosts an event on Halloween called the Wax Museum. While it is a fun way to show off costumes, it's a cleverly disguised learning opportunity to practice reading fluency, perspective-taking, and clear writing. Each student must choose a historical or fictional character to research for this event. Once they have chosen their character and researched, they must record the facts as a first-person monologue, memorize it, and then recite it to an audience. (We even added a little art project by having each student make an "activation button" to start their museum statue.) The students pose - in costume - and recite their monologue when their activation button is pushed.

Fluency, or the ability to read smoothly and use punctuation pauses, can be tricky for students. One way to practice these natural pauses and to become more comfortable speaking is to repeatedly read the same sentences aloud. While they practice their monologues to one another, students naturally become more fluent.

We also offer other opportunities for students to practice fluency throughout the school year.

Another fun practice is perspective-taking. As students write, they must recall that "as the character," they must use the first person. This helps to solidify the concepts of first vs. third person perspective, one of many narrative characteristics taught at this level. Students practice writing and reading narratives many times throughout the school year.

Finally, by having kids write their own monologues for the Wax Museum, they can hear what they've written. In UE, we move from the mechanics of writing, such as punctuation and grammar, to being more focused on style, interest, and content within their writing. Students can struggle to see how syntax or subject/verb agreement helps the



reader understand, so by reading it out loud, they can start to tell where it is choppy or awkward and then adjust the order of their words or sentences to make it read more smoothly.

At the Upper Elementary level, we also see students begin to add emphasis or emotion to their writing. When they first start to write their monologues in 4th grade, we have a typical repeated pattern of placing "I" at the beginning of each sentence. As they practice, they gain more sentence variability in length, organization, and can better see how to organize their facts chronologically or by subject.

No one says learning how to write can't be fun. We love creating fun activities that help our students become better readers, writers, and speakers!



MIDDLE SCHOOL

7th & 8th Grade
Mr. Shelby & Ms. Susan



TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Learning to develop voice in writing.

Writing is a powerful tool for changing your mind. It is a way to discover new truths and find understanding amidst the torrent of raging thoughts and emotions. Through the writing process, we can forge meaning out of the raw material of our experiences. Writing can be used to make sense of our lives and serves as a window into the lives of others. Writing fosters a sense of compassion and connection through creating our own writing and reading the writing of others.

It is through this lens that our middle school students began the process of crafting their own personal narratives. A personal narrative is simply a story from your own life. Still, applying various stylistic choices can turn this simple assignment into a fascinating exploration of the past that allows writers to view the past from a different point of view and even extract new lessons from our experiences.

We began by reading superb examples of the genre written by other middle and high school students. These student pieces were winners and runners-up for the New York Times personal narrative contest. Though these examples represented a range of content and styles of writing, what they all had in common was a clear narrative arc with conflict and a main character that changed in some way. They also artfully balanced the story's action with a reflection of what it meant to the writer. These writers took risks, including dialogue and playing with punctuation, sentence structure, and word choice, to develop a strong voice.

During writer's workshops, we would read and dissect the piece to identify these elements of craft and to consider how we can use them in our own pieces. Once we saw some great examples, our students began to develop ideas about stories from their own lives to share in their

pieces. Stories about your first bicycle race, a downhill skateboarding accident, being attacked by a headless turkey, and a family trip to a water park turned from distant memories to a present moment of exploration where we can relive and revel in the past and find comfort and lessons in these stories that we can use here and now.

These stories represent so much more than a simple retelling of past events. This is an active process where our students retell the stories, reflect on the impact these stories had on them, and craft them in a way that is engaging, artful, and deliberate. Through this exercise, our students not only practice the craft of great storytelling but also synthesize their past with lessons to move forward with into the future. Writing experiences such as this are particularly valuable for young adolescents who are building an identity that they will take with them into adulthood. As Maya Angelou once stated: "You can't really know where you are going until you know where you have been."



We caught up with middle school student Eli to talk a little bit about his personal narrative and his creative process:

What did you choose to write about and why?

I chose to write a story about skateboarding. More specifically, me bombing a hill and falling off my skateboard. I chose this story because I love skating, and when you are writing, no one can tell you what you can and can't write about. There is a freedom to writing that reminds me of skate culture. It's all about freedom.

What elements of craft did you employ when constructing your piece?

So, one example is this sentence:

"I can't bail now, I will get hurt, so I kept going and going and going and just like this sentence it.....
Abruptly ended."

The form of the sentence abruptly ends, just as my body abruptly fell off the board and my ride ended. I also kept a humorous tone throughout the story. It was a hilarious story, and I wanted to have that come through in how I told it. I could have gotten seriously hurt, but I didn't take it too seriously.

What lessons did you take from this experience that you reflected on in your writing?

Your mind is the biggest pebble. Pebbles in skateboarding can be a big deal. They are often too small to be seen and when you hit them your board can stop and you get tossed. I didn't want to go on this skateboarding trip. But I pushed past that and had a great time. I didn't want to go down that hill at first, but I did, and even though I fell, I now have a great story to tell.

I also walked away from that experience understanding that sometimes you have to take the good with the bad. Even though it was a painful inconvenience, I still had a good time, and I laughed about it.

Montessori of Macon's Mission

"To Educate the Whole Child for a Whole World."

By the whole child, we mean the social, emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual aspects of being human. By nurturing the wholeness of our children and fostering respect for each other, nature and community we prepare them for a life of continued joy that will contribute positively to a whole world.



MONTESSORI OF MACON
EDUCATING THE WHOLE CHILD FOR A WHOLE WORLD



AMERICAN MONTESSORI SOCIETY*
education that transforms lives
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