



An Invitation to Share in the Excitement of the Elementary Classroom

St. Croix Academy

A Montessori School

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Dear Friends,

In the early years of the 20th century Dr. Maria Montessori boldly imagined that one day across the world schools would be built on the principles of children learning with independence and self direction. These schools would create a home-like atmosphere where teachers would engage the children in the joy of learning - for life.

Nearly a century later, the time has come to imagine once again. In the competitive world of 21st century elementary education, St. Croix Academy must be bold.

St. Croix Academy has set sail to reach even higher standards in its goal to create a comprehensive Toddler through Elementary Montessori program. We are gearing up to enhance our Elementary program for the purpose of investing in our students. We have a talented faculty, and our fifteen acre school campus provides an environment that is unmatched by any other school in the Saint Paul east metro area.

As more people seek a St. Croix Academy educational experience, we have to prepare for the growth of our Elementary program. Join us in promoting St. Croix Academy.

Sincerely,

John Kupris
Head of School



We're excited about next year in the Elementary classroom at St. Croix Academy. We'll be building upon the great things we have done in the past years to have a great learning experience in 2005-2006.

Lessons for the returning children will pick up right where we left off the last day of classes. New students will begin with the first of a series of "Great Stories." These stories introduce the study of geography, geometry, language, math, history and art.



Botany, Zoology and the Natural World

Our first field trip of the new school year will be to view a restored prairie. Based upon that experience, we will be doing dozens of experiments and activities in conjunction with our own "Prairie Restoration" in the area to the east of the soccer field.

By taking care of the plants in our environment, we add to our knowledge with in-depth lessons in botany.

Care of the Alpacas and chickens is shared by the whole school. In our Elementary classroom, the children experience the responsibilities for the health of our guinea pig, the corn snake, the gecko, and our fish. We feed wild birds at the bird feeder and learn about them through lessons, direct observation, bird identification books and an audio CD.

For our last field trip of the year, every Elementary student will spend a week at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center. This has become an annual event ever since Fiamma introduced the school body to the excitement of Wolf Ridge. Due to her interest and inquisitiveness, Fiamma has made it possible for Kurt Mead, noted author and naturalist, to take the older students on a search for and study of dragon flies.

Art and Music



Fiber and Spinning In 2005-2006, we will have enough alpaca fiber to let every child spin enough fiber to be able to knit or felt an item. To gain a better understanding of life in early America, each child will make a knotted hot pad or small rag rug. To connect geography and art, Fiamma will continue teaching how to make Japanese Kumihimo cords. Last year, we had an outside visitor show us rope making. In 2005-2006, we will have lessons about making cordage in the method of early people using milk weed stalks and grasses.

These activities teach an appreciation for life in the past as well as build hand strength and dexterity! We will visit the "Textile Center" in St. Paul to learn more about fiber arts of the world.

Another field trip will be to the Minneapolis Art Institute to introduce the study of African masks and village life. The Art Institute also offers a multitude of other interesting exhibits for the students to research.

Following our study of Chinese culture and popular folk tales, this year we enjoyed the play "The Monkey King" at the Children's Theatre. Afterwards, we ate at an Indian restaurant that the class had enjoyed last year. We will continue to learn about other cultures as we learn how to speak and write their languages.

In 2005-2006, we will again enjoy singing songs, playing instruments, learning music theory and music appreciation. We will have lessons about rhythm and tempo, scale, pitch and dynamics.

In the visual arts, a number of lessons are given concerning color, hue, light, line, perspective and texture. During elective time, children can paint at the easel or draw. They often combine work in other subjects with art, such as illustrating stories or diagramming the anatomy of an earthworm.

Language Skills, Reading, Literature, and Writing

St Croix Academy Elementary students work with grammar boxes following lessons on parts of speech, identifying the parts of speech in their own writing and leading to analysis of sentences.

We will have a local author visit and discuss her children's books. Literary discussion is an important way of understanding an author's messages as well as the process of writing a book.

This year we took children to the Woodbury Library every three weeks. Next year, thanks to the generous support of our parents, St Croix Academy will have its own library with substantial numbers of books for the children, as well as computers for finding the needed resources and learning information retrieval skills.

Throughout the year, children do creative writing several times a week as well as research on various academic topics. Key lessons are given in the use of the dictionary, encyclopedias and how to use indices and tables of contents. Students learn research methods through this work, as well as learning other structured writing techniques.

History

In conjunction with the prairie restoration, we will study a time line designed by Fiamma based on animals and people who may have lived on the St Croix property. The study of local history is enhanced with field trips and research. American history is presented through timelines and stories of how people lived as well as tales of important events.



Geography and the Study of Peoples of the World

Before the December break, all St Croix classrooms participate in a "Festival of Nations" where each classroom presents an informal presentation about a country they have chosen. This includes simple food, maps, art, and research about their country. They prepare and participate in some activity that represents that country. Past countries studied by Fiamma's classroom have included Denmark, India and Venezuela.

This year Fiamma has developed new lessons about Native Americans and thirteen (mostly older) children have been working on research projects about their particular tribes. This work will result in research reports and dioramas made by the children.

This May, the older thirteen children visited Jennifer Easton, Bradley and Alex's grandmother, to learn more about Native Americans. She has many, many lovely and rare items to show and tell about.

On June 2, we will visit Gibbs Museum to learn more about Prairie Restorations and about the lives of Dakota Indians in the 1800's.

Math and Geometry

Maria Montessori has given us an excellent map for teaching math and geometry to children. We will use the manipulative materials to continue the study of math, geometric elements and figures. The math study will include multiples and factors, divisibility, long multiplication, long division and operations with fractions, including decimal fractions.

We will also study squaring and cubing of numbers and extracting square and cube roots. We will work on negative numbers, and powers of numbers. The more advanced children will be introduced to algebraic equations, ratios and proportions and word problem solving.

This year, building on our knowledge of lines and angles, we will incorporate a study of how to use a compass by practicing "not getting lost" on Turtle Point, Fiamma's and Craig's twenty acres. This will probably become an annual event!

Cosmic Corner

Maria Montessori called her method for the education of the Elementary age child "Cosmic Education". This means that the concept of the universe is presented to the child, and further subjects are presented within this context. For instance, the Big Bang leads to the universe expanding, and matter cools as it expands, so the earth cooled and developed a solid crust (geography), eventually leading to the coming of life (biology) and later the coming of human beings (history). Humans invented language and mathematics. The pedagogy is interdisciplinary, focusing on the vital connections between areas of academic knowledge and expression.

While visiting the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Fiamma got the idea of having a featured item set up in a small corner. Each week a different item will be set up with a recorded description of the object and an invitation to do more exploring. Two children may listen at a time while seated at a small table. They will be invited to write or draw about this new information. We will call this area "The Cosmic Corner."

Focal items being prepared include "Mirror Cloth" from India, embroidery done by children in Mexico, how to use a "wool-winder", an old-fashioned lantern from a railroad crewman, turtles made of wood, brass, wax, cloth, ceramic, glass, ivory and soapstone, baskets made by Ojibway people, items made by Australian aborigines, "Casitas" and baskets from Venezuela and various collections from students, parents and friends. Music from around the world will be a part of this, also.

How is a Montessori classroom different from other classrooms?

The Montessori Elementary environment encourages "spontaneous group work." This type of work is exemplified when a student or several students begin doing research on a subject which has sparked their interest. Their enthusiasm is infectious and encourages others to join in or to start their own work. A few examples from the past several years are one child's interest in Helen Keller and Braille, another child's research on monkeys, several children's study of earthworms this year, two children reading Greek Mythology and making up their own stories.

This is a very social age in life and the classroom is set up so that children may talk and work together. Many short lessons are given in small groups throughout the day. Children are taught to keep track of their work time in a "Work Record". We encourage them to be responsible about doing a "balanced" combination of work during the week. The children take attendance and keep the room in a neat and tidy order.

Improvements in the Classroom and Environment

Following a suggestion from our AMI consultant, we are planning to create a 'hole' in the wall between the larger and smaller Elementary rooms. This will open the classroom, and create a feeling of expansive space within the room. In addition, this will make it easier for Fiamma to keep an eye on the whole class.

Another computer in the classroom will allow us to use CD's such as "Rosetta Stone" for language lessons and Mavis Beacon Typing Tutor for the children to improve their keyboarding skills.

What about "Parent Information Nights"?

We will continue to have several sessions in the evening to answer questions and to share information about our classes. Information will be sent to each family summarizing the information. This will help keep everyone up to date, especially in the case where parents are not able to attend. We encourage all parents, grandparents and friends to visit our classroom!



A bit about Fiamma

This will be Fiamma's tenth year at St. Croix. Her father, a sociologist, encouraged her and her siblings to travel and learn about the people of the world. Her mother was a weaver and received her degree in Library Science at the age of seventy five. While working on her undergraduate degree, Fiamma received credit for her "junior year abroad" by living and studying for a year in Denmark. She specialized in the history of Danish weaving and Hans Christian Anderson's stories and life. In addition, she lived with Mexican families for two summers in Puebla, Mexico. "I wanted to learn more about life in Mexico and to improve my Spanish. My parents hired a wonderful local artist to teach us watercolor painting. We walked with Maestro Marquez to picturesque spots in Puebla. We learned to see color even in old gray water fountains!" She lived for a year in a small village in Sicily near an excavation of the Greek city Morgantina. Fiamma received her Master's Degree from Arizona State University in child development and family studies. Before studying for the Elementary Program, she worked for ten years as an artist of miniature watercolors and was a member of a juried group of miniature artisans. She framed her tiny watercolors with her own handmade frames, including glass covers; they are unique in the miniature world.

What does the AMI Diploma mean?

Maria Montessori founded AMI to uphold the highest standards of teacher training. AMI Teacher Certification is a rigorous process leading to a deep understanding of all the subjects of instruction as well as child development theory and practical techniques. Fiamma's Elementary training with AMI includes all the lessons for grades one through six in art, botany, geography, geometry, history, language, math, music and zoology. Anyone who has earned an AMI elementary diploma is well-trained and well-equipped with handmade materials. We have our own hand-illustrated and self-typed albums, one hundred hand-painted charts to illustrate lessons, six Time Lines, an illustrated set of "Kingdom Animalia" and "Kingdom Vegetalia" folders, music materials, booklets and cards for botany, geometry and zoology. Fiamma's more than thirty years of experience teaching all levels of students has made her an expert in classroom management. Her sense of humor is enjoyed by all.

Brooks also holds an AMI Elementary Diploma, and actually learned from the same instructors as Fiamma! Brooks will give several lessons each week in math, geometry, music, structured writing and physics.

Jennifer will be moving to a full time role in the Elementary Program, providing valuable assistance with the many goals and learning objectives we have for the year. Jennifer is a Minnesota certified teacher with an undergraduate degree in history. She brings great enthusiasm for and knowledge of American History. Her talents add to the quality of the program, and the 2005-2006 Elementary community will benefit from more of her time.