

# Cayuga Heights Montessori House

## January and February 2010 Newsletter

***Happy New Year  
Bonne Annee et bonne santé!***



How wonderful to be back with the children at the beginning of a bright new year – the last year of a decade! The Montessori classroom in January is a wonder to behold. After a busy holiday season, the children were eager to return to the peace and simple beauty of ‘their’ space. Their delight was evident as they ran up the path, and joyfully embraced the materials and each other. Without the exciting and busy celebrations of November and December, the Montessori classroom has now returned to its simple uncluttered essence. It is this simplicity and purity that calls to the children so powerfully. Without any need of teacher intervention the children are clearly ready to resume their ‘work’ of constructing the intellect. As we stand back and marvel, we are witnessing explosions into reading, a frenzy of beautiful cursive handwriting, a flurry of activity with the Golden Beads (decimal system materials), and fascination with our cultural studies. Our focus this month, as always was on Peacemakers of the World, in particular Martin Luther King Jr. As we talked about his gentle message the children developed an appreciation for the power of peaceful elimination of injustice. The thread of peace which permeates our curriculum makes our study of peacemakers so concrete and real for the children. The current White House resident is often in our conversations as we track his journey around our Continent rug, especially his journey to Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace prize. We enjoyed many peaceful dances to ‘Shine a light’ by James Taylor, with the children signing the words, and moving their bodies to the joyful words and tune.

*I think it must be very nice  
To stroll about upon the ice  
Night and day, day and night  
Wearing only black and white  
Always in your Sunday best  
Black tailcoat and pearl white vest  
Excerpt from *The Penguin* by William Smith*

**‘Antarctica, Antarctica, you’d better wear your parktica!’** As we look our windows at the white world outside which comes to sparking life with the emergence of the sun ... what better time to begin our study of the wonderful continent of Antarctica? We have been studying penguins, seals and whales, and enjoying the Arctic poetry of William Smith: *The Penguin*, and *The Polar Bear*. We eagerly awaited a presentation by Rowena’s dad, Jamie on this beautiful continent. We were not disappointed! He was a wealth of knowledge, having spent two years there. We were treated to a slide show which included breathtaking shots of the Aurora Australis (ok, there was no T.V. but who needs it with such illustrious entertainment!). We discovered that there really is a “POLE” in the South Pole (one of many, actually). We learned that to go outside, Jamie had to wear 30 lbs of clothing, and that it was VERY strange to have weeks and weeks of nothing but day, and then night. We were fascinated by his infra red camera, which showed us which parts of our body were warm or cold. Ice cubes were used to ‘paint’ our bodies, and Jamie looked so funny when he filmed himself



after drinking hot tea – his whole mouth turned white! We are eagerly awaiting next Friday’s visit, when he will help us to make ice-cream! The number one question? “Did you see any penguins?” Sadly, no, as he was not living near the ocean

Our zoology focus is on Endangered Animals. The Montessori curriculum is centered around instilling in the children an appreciation of, and respect for all living things. We encourage a sense of stewardship for our planet, and this message is absorbed by very receptive hearts and minds with the preschool child. We have many future scientists in the making, talking excitedly about ideas to help the Siberian tiger, the Giant Panda Bear, the Numbat and the Alligator Snapping Turtle. Our Endangered Animal work is very popular as the children work together to lay out the animals on their particular continent. The children are learning that when animals lose their habitat or are hunted too much they can become endangered. This work is tied to the concept of taking care of the planet, preserving habitats like rainforests so animals have homes and food they need.



## Gung Hay Fat Choy

We have also begun our study of China, in preparation for the Chinese New Year! The children love to parade around the classroom under our red Dragon, spreading good luck with spirited roars! Our cultural table has been transformed by splashes of red firecracker ornaments, Chinese masks, flags, fans, dragons and chopsticks! We have been delighted to welcome Yanhua, Anne’s mom, to our classroom many times to Share her cooking and artistic skills. We have been treated to community meals of Chinese noodles with vegetables, spring rolls, nian gao and Chinese dumplings ! Our cultural area is festooned with colorful ‘friendship chains’ and lanterns, and our walls are decorated with the children’s names in Mandarin! The children loved dressing in traditional clothes, and greeting each other with “Guo Nian Hao”(Happy Chinese New Year). We have been practicing their Mandarin song “Wo You Yi Shuang” (I Have Two Little Hands). Thank you so much Yanhua, “*xie xie*.”



January always seems to hail an AMAZING explosion into reading for many children. I am sure that this acceleration of ability and joy has not gone unnoticed at home, as your children enthusiastically bring book after book home. Amazing though this shift may seem, it is not a surprise to the teachers. From the moment a child enters the prepared environment, often as young as 2 1/2, the magic begins and the foundation is gently and effortlessly prepared. Working in concert with the developmental readiness of the child in all of its sensorial receptivity, the language materials call and entice, and the child responds in kind. When the moment is right, all of those wonderful letter sounds that the child has been tracing and “sounding” come together in the glorious process of reading. Our youngest students are watching with fascination, as their friends read alone or to each other, and seem to sense that their time will come. It is a delightful sight to see tiny children lean over the shoulder of their classmates as they confidently read a book. As for the teachers...we stand back and marvel. Our humility helps us to accept that we merely facilitated this process by introducing powerful elements during



critical 'windows' resulting in a glorious combustion. As always the work is done by the child.

The children's voices now dominate as we come together Wednesday morning to sing our French greetings and winter song to one another. We continue learning simple phrases and vocabulary for colors, pets, furniture, food and family. While lessons are introduced at group, the practicing and absorption of this beautiful language takes place throughout the day as the words are woven into the fabric of the routine. Children at this age are in a sensitive period for language acquisition and that is true for foreign languages as well as their first language.

#### **From Tara in the Art Studio:**

*"...when you know the colors to paint, you can paint most anything!"..... The children have been exploring the concept of the fabulous color wheel. We started out with making our very own personal color wheels... the three primary colors (triangle), continuing with the secondary colors (starting the "wheel" effect), and will be continuing into the tertiary colors where the color blends continue to amaze us. It's so exciting to see the children really understand the power of colors working together and actually mixing their own color blends. Their faces light up as they purposefully take two colors and watch the magic happen. Give them a quick quiz and hopefully they can teach it to you! At the moment we're taking a detour to mix "our" colors as we take a dab of this and a dab of that from red, yellow, and blue to make our own individual skin colors. Inspired by the book "The Colors of Us" this exploration is part of our Peace Curriculum, and our focus on Dr Martin Luther King Jr, during Black History Month.*

#### **News from Jeffra Ruesink, Music Together:**

*I'm writing this after another fantastic and joyful all-family musical morning, and I'm reflecting on the musical growth that I've seen in the children since fall. I had a chance to talk to a few parents today and I was so excited to hear that you are seeing musical changes in your children as well! In discussion with Ailish and Karen, I am hearing anecdotes about the children's love for this musical curriculum and how it is being integrated into the classroom. I wanted to take a moment and tell you a little of what I am noticing, and share some Music Together philosophy with you.*

*In general, we are hoping to foster "basic musical competence" with this curriculum. This means that your children will be able to express themselves rhythmically, with their bodies or their voices; and that they will be able to sing in tune in a variety of keys. Most children can reach competence by age 6. Unfortunately, without musical opportunities or a musical environment, some humans actually get "stuck" before they reach basic competence. This means that they grow into adulthood not being comfortable expressing themselves musically. I know many adults who truly regret their lack of musicality. Of course musical education is not only good for teaching children to sing and move freely. Research shows a whole spectrum of advantages to children who study music: there are social, emotional, cognitive, and language benefits to be had.*

*How wonderful that your children have the opportunity to study music at school! As many of you have seen, these young children have already become pretty sophisticated in their ability to imitate rhythm and melody. We have experimented with a variety of meters, tonalities, instruments, and props. I am continually offering musical challenges, but in a very low pressure, fun environment in which it's ok to explore and make mistakes.*

*So keep having fun, and watch out for musical behaviors and signs of development!*

We are all deeply affected by the suffering in Haiti. Such devastation is difficult for the very young to absorb, and they should not have to. We discussed the situation very briefly, mentioning only that many buildings fell down and the people will need a lot of help. The focus of our conversation was positive and hopeful, as we talked about lots of planes and ships from countries all around the world, were on the way to this tiny country. We held hands around our peace candle and sent loving energy to the children of Haiti. We have placed a 'Help Haiti' box in our classroom, where the children can bring change from home or from their piggy banks.



February is re-enrollment month at CHMH. Please let me know before March, if your child will be returning. In March we will begin Open Enrollment to fill available spots. If you are considering CHMH for your child's kindergarten year, I would be happy to schedule a conference with you. If this is a consideration for you, I would recommend, that you read Montessori for the Kindergarten Year which I will be happy to send home.

**Mark your Calendars:**

- **Winter Recess (No School Feb. 15, 16, 17)**
- **Staff Development Day (No School March 19<sup>th</sup>)**

**Thank You - Merci Beaucoup - Thank You - Merci Beaucoup - Thank You - Merci Beaucoup**

- To Allen, for giving us a lesson on Circuitry
- To Jamie, our intrepid Explorer, for his presentation on Antarctica.
- To Yanhua for helping us to learn so much about the country of China.
- To all of you who attended our Music Together Family Class, being such good sports about singing and dancing with 'gusto'! To those who were not able to attend, please feel free to drop by for our weekly classes