March 2014

INSIDE THE WOODS

Le Cirque de l’Imagination

Just a few more days . . . and then . . !

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Edited by Eloise Rochelle

NOTICE: THE BOOK DISCUSSION ORIGINALLY SET FOR FEB. 27 HAS BEEN RESET FOR APRIL 8. SEE THE CALENDAR, PG. 8, FOR COMPLETE INFORMATION.

On the evening of March 7 at 6:30 PM, you will enter a slightly surreal atmosphere which you will find thoroughly enchanting. Our circus-themed entertainment will be provided by Swopesters Entertainment.

The gala will take place at the Omni Hotel Galleria and will include a truly scrumptious array of dinner selections. These will be offered at strategically-placed food stations. To top it all off, there will also be stations for dessert crepes. Yum-Yum. Can’t resist that!

Don’t forget those irresistible auction items which will knock your socks off.
Hooray for Valentine’s Day . . .

Always a fun day — here are groups caught in the act of enjoying their valentines and treats.
A suggestion for Spring Break---go see Monet and Magritte!

by Lise Lawrence and Kathleen Packlick

In the art room we have two birds, Monet and Magritte. They were named after two artists whose work is featured in two different museums in Houston.

The work of these artists will be on display during Spring Break (week of March 17-21).

**MONET.** Monet’s work is included in a show at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston called “The Age of Impressionism: Great French Paintings from the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.” The MFAH is located at 1001 Bissonnet. This is a special exhibit; it ends on Sunday, March 23, then goes away forever.

There is a fee for this show. The fee for adults is $23 on Saturday and Sunday and $20 during the week. For children between 13 and 18 the fee is $15.50 on the weekends and $12.50 during the week.

However, the exhibit is free if you visit on a Ty (that’s the day that admission is free for everyone, courtesy of Shell Oil); and if you are a MFAH member or a child 12 years old or younger.

There is a general admission fee for the MFAH, but here the exceptions:

- You are age 12 or younger. This age group receives free general admission every day.
- You are age 18 or younger and visiting on a Saturday or Sunday with a library card from any public library in Texas. The library cardholder receives one free general admission; offer does not apply to ticketed exhibitions or events.

For more information, go online- www.mfah.org.

**MAGRITTE.** Magritte is featured in an exhibit that just opened at the Menil Museum. The Menil Collection is located at 1533 Sul Ross Street.

The Menil Collection is open Wednesday through Sunday from 11AM until 7PM. This museum is a treasure and is always free.

For more information: www.menil.org.
Pro-social Values in the School

by Elizabeth Stepankiw

“Cosmic Education teaches children to recognize the fundamental needs we all share and to respect the cultural differences by which we meet those fundamental needs. Such an education can lead us to a future of true peace such as that sought by Maria Montessori.”

...Michael Duffy

Maria Montessori had a vision not only of enhancing the academic abilities of children, but also enhancing their social lives and their ability to contribute to the world community.

Montessori often wrote about the unity of humankind and the important role it will play in our future, but the idea of the “survival of the fittest” also came from the science and social policy makers of her time and has been applied to human society for the last 100 years. It is an idea often used to justify the common practices in our traditional school system.

However, its claim that competition is at the core of the fundamental nature of humans is being turned on its head in light of recent research findings. Many new studies in biology are finding that, in reality, it is cooperation that is more the norm in nature.

It is fitting that a modern-day scientist has taken his research into the classroom to apply the lessons learned about cooperation and then test the results. David Sloan Wilson is a biologist who was studying the evolution of altruism and cooperation when he realized he should be applying these principles to his own community.

His book, The Neighborhood Project, describes how pro-social values were applied to a school in his community. As a result, students made improvements in their academic scores, as well as their feelings of belonging and well being, without extending school hours or the school year. Montessori classrooms naturally have these pro-social values built into the organization of the environment.

Foremost, students need to feel that they are part of a group and that the group has a purpose. The cosmic education embedded in the Montessori curriculum helps children understand their place and their own value in the larger world as well as in their smaller community. Community meetings in the classroom build unity in the group, give each child an opportunity to contribute to the group, and solve classroom problems as they come up, using consensus decision-making. Shared contributions and shared benefits are part of the daily routine. Each person is expected to participate in a shared responsibility to maintain the classroom order.

Because of the emphasis in the classroom on grace and courtesy, behavior is taught both by example and by the habit of addressing problems and feelings as they come up in the regular course of the school day.

The school policy is to address conflicts when they occur to help children learn from these experiences. They are usually resolved quickly and in a fair manner. Rather than stressing
punishment, consequences are related to the problem in a logical manner.

A hallmark of the Montessori classroom is the autonomy of the students. Established throughout the curriculum and routine is the freedom to make choices and to organize the day and the week. It includes quiet areas in the classroom, noisier areas, and freedom to work with other children.

The classroom supports children in learning to make choices, promotes independence, and teaches the skills children need to be able to do things for themselves. Children are taught problem solving skills and encouraged to learn to solve problems independently as well as identify when they need to ask for help.

Montessori schools put stress on the effort the child puts into the work he has done, rather than emphasizing some predetermination concerning their abilities. Mistakes are considered to be part of the way we learn. The lack of grades and conventional tests help build a sense of intrinsic motivation in the students. Work becomes its own reward. Because the work and materials in the environment are set up so children can self-check or get immediate feedback from the teacher on their work, they are able to develop self-confidence through their achievements. The more confident the children are, the better they become at forming healthy relationships.

Mixed age groups give children a model of behavior that is a little above their own developmental level. These positive examples build good behavior. The willingness that often comes from older children to help younger ones is an excellent model for empathy. Collaboration in which each student contributes is highly valued.

Exploration of ideas and opportunities to make self-discoveries are built into the structure of the materials and the social environment. These principles are applied throughout the school, during regular classroom time, art, music, play time, and the after school program.

In research results, Montessori children are described as having the ability to adapt to changes and solve complex problems. They also display better abilities on social and behavioral tests than children in traditional schools. They were more likely to choose "positive assertive responses" for dealing with difficult social situations. They see their school as being a positive community for learning and their classmates as being respectful, helpful, and caring.

Parent, author, and Montessori advocate Trevor Eissler sums it up very well:

We know exactly what our children should be learning. They should be learning to love to read. They should be learning to love to work with numbers. They should be learning to be independent, responsible, disciplined, empathic, and helpful to others. They should be learning to be good leaders, to work well with others, and to lead happy, fulfilling, and productive lives. They should be learning to be curious about the world around them. They should be learning how to identify problems and fix them. All these crucial skills can be observed and recognized by an "untrained" parent. But none of these skills can be accurately analyzed on a standardized test.

Sources for this article:

Krista Tippett host of the On Being radio show on June 21, 2012, interview with David Sloan Wilson http://www.proutglobe.org/2012/10/is-human-nature-competitive-or-cooperative/

Michael Duffy http://www.forsmallhands.com/newslettercustom/index/newslettercustomdetail?id=16

Trevor Eissler, Montessori Life Magazine, volume 22 number 2, Summer 2010, pg. 39
Understanding Core Emotions

In her book, *Animals Make Us Human*, Temple Grandin asks the question: What does an animal need to be happy?

Grandin lists five freedoms animals should have when in an intensive animal production situation.

- Freedom from hunger and thirst
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom from pain, injury or disease
- Freedom to express normal behavior
- Freedom from fear and distress

Grandin says that to create optimum situations for animals we have to start with the animals' emotions. If we get the emotions right, we'll have fewer problem behaviors.

Citing Dr. Jaak Panksepp's work, Grandin describes "blue ribbon emotions" that animals have: SEEKING, RAGE, FEAR, PANIC, CARE and PLAY. When referring to these emotions the words are in all capitals to help with specific meaning.

SEEKING is "the basic impulse to search, investigate, and make sense of the environment."

RAGE gives a captured animal the huge burst of energy necessary to get a predator to loosen its grip and be able to then run away. Frustration is a mild form of RAGE. When an animal feels trapped, RAGE takes over.

FEAR is an emotion that probably doesn't need a lot of explanation, but is in response to not feeling safe and feeling that one's survival is threatened.

PANIC refers to the social attachment system. When babies are separated from their mothers, this system kicks in and we hear distinctive separation cries from the babies.

CARE is about maternal caretaking and love.

PLAY system produces feelings of joy and is associated with the spontaneous activity of the animal.

With her research and work with pigs Grandin saw that environmental deprivation created hyperactive pigs and that when the SEEKING system was not satisfied abnormal brain development occurred in the pigs.

What makes an environment stimulating? Grandin tells us, "The only guide people have to judge whether an environment is good for an animal is the animal's behavior, which gives us insight into its emotion."

These insights into animal behavior may help us illuminate some of the essential elements of our human behavior, both child and adult.

When we experience physical or mental distress, certain core emotions are involved that create problem behaviors. We have to observe behavior and think about the emotion that is driving it, and the need behind the emotion.

Phrases used to convey a deep emotional understanding and experience with animals are not in most of our experiences.

"Madder than a wet hen". How many wet hens do we see nowadays? But once you've seen one, the expression takes on a distinct meaning, and a deep understanding of a core emotion.

The stories Grandin shares about these core emotions involving pigs, cats, dogs, horses, chickens and wildlife, give us insight into how animals make us human. Living around animals and observing their behaviors provides insight into our emotions in a profound way, and is at risk of being lost.

Learn more about core emotions to better understand your dog, your children and yourself.

Maren E. Schmidt

www.kidstalk.com
Really Good Books for Budding Scientists

**Jumping Penguins**, by Jesse Goossens, illustrated by Marije Tolman. Goossens and Tolman introduce an animal menagerie through gracefully whimsical paintings and offhand descriptions of each distinctive species. On one spread, pandas are seen riding on bicycles and sleeping in the middle of the road in heaps (“A giant panda has no permanent resting place. It just lies on the ground whenever it gets tired”). Other facts: a tiger swims alongside seahorses. Most cats do not like water, but tigers love it. The Sumatran tiger has webbed toes and can swim more than fifteen miles.” Dreamy graphics and quirky content add up to an idiosyncratic look at the animal world. Ages 4–up; 38 pages, October 2013.

**Best Foot Forward**, by Ingo Arndt. Photographs of the undersides of animal feet show how they reflect an animal’s size, speed and travel mode. Its organization makes it easy to see the features that make walking, climbing, swimming, digging and jumping possible. Some of the 24 animals featured are tiger, leaf-tailed gecko, mallard duck, giant tortoise and kangaroo. The snapping claw of a lobster introduces a section on “extraordinary feet.” First published in Germany in 2007, it is a convincing display of animal adaptations from an unusual point of view. Ages 3 up; 36 pages, hardcover, Sept. 2013.

**First Drawing**, by Mordicai Gerstein. Who made the world’s first drawing—and why. This is an imagined answer to this question in a polished tale of a boy living 30,000 years ago with his pet wolf and extended family. Using narrative direct address (“Imagine... / you were born before the invention of drawing”) to effectively bridge the gap between prehistoric times and the present, the story follows the boy’s fanciful discoveries of wooly mammoths in clouds, bears in stones and horses galloping on cave walls. The boy tries to show his family what he sees, but they see only a cloud, a rock and a cave. Ages 2-6, 40 pages, hardcover, Sept. 2013.

**One Gorilla**, by Anthony Browne. The author-artist presents an elegant counting book for small children (from one gorilla to ten lemurs). It is a vivid presentation of primates from gorillas to gibbons, macaques to mandrills, ring-tailed lemurs to spider monkeys. With striking attention to detail and flair for facial expression, every animal’s face has a discernible personality. Hardcover, 32 pages, ages 3 up, Feb. 2013.

**Benjamin Franklin**, by Kathleen Krull. In this Giants of Science volume, the author focuses on Franklin’s passion for science and his drive to make scientific knowledge useful in everyday life. Despite his achievements as a statesman being more extensive he viewed science as his true calling. The author emphasizes Franklin’s experiments and the resulting useful applications—the Franklin stove, the lightning rod, the cure for scurvy, bifocals—and tells readers that Franklin was a “superb networker,” making connections with the best-known thinkers of his day. Grades 4-6; 121 pages, August 2013.

**Pluto’s Secret**, by Margaret A. Weitekamp. People, children especially, have been baffled, bewildered, and even outraged by the fact that Pluto is no longer called a planet. Through whimsical artwork and an entertaining dialogue format, Pluto’s Secret explains the true story of this distant, small, icy world from its discovery and naming to its recent reclassification. This is a fascinating look at how scientists organize and classify our solar system as they gain new insights into how it works and what types of things exist within it. The book includes a glossary and bibliography. 40 pages, 2013.

**Scaly Spotted Feathered Frilled**, Catherine Thimmesh. How Do We Know What Dinosaurs Really Looked Like? This book explores how paleontology artists reconstruct prehistoric creatures from fossil evidence—fossilized bone fragments, plant matter, bits of skin and, recently, feathers, prehistoric “trackways” (dino footprints) and similar physical features in modern animals. Required reading for serious dinophiles.64 pages; ages 9-13. October 2013.

Source: Natural History Magazine, November 2013.

Equipped with his five senses, man explores the universe around him and calls the adventure **Science**.