

Overview of the Montessori Reading Program



The Montessori reading curriculum has three essential components: A strong foundation in phonics, comprehension based on visualization, and whole language, or learning to read for meaning and using context clues.

Montessori reading is based on a strong foundation of phonics. This multi-sensory approach is unique in that it has children building words (encoding) before actually reading them (decoding). Developmentally appropriate activities allow children to build their own understanding of how sounds are represented by symbols, and these symbols are joined together to form words.

In the Montessori classroom, by the age of 4, children are developmentally ready and eager to begin the preparation for reading. Along with learning the sounds and tracing their symbols with the sandpaper letters, students simultaneously learn to hold a pencil and control its use with the insets for design.

When children have learned the phonetic sounds, they are ready to begin word building with the moveable alphabet. They begin by building two or three letter phonetic words (those in which all the letters make their most common sound, like dog, pig, ram, bat, etc.). In order to allow the children to work independently, they are given small phonetic objects which represent the words they are to build. Later, pictures of phonetic words can be introduced for variety and additional practice in word building.

After the child has mastered two and three letter word building, he or she can begin matching reading cards with the objects and later pictures, and also begin working on building four or more letter phonetic words. After these are mastered, the child can match four or more letter words with corresponding objects and pictures, in a variety of formats.

At this time the child can begin to read phonetic phrases and sentences, and match them with pictures. Specially prepared phonetic books are then introduced.

The key to comprehension is visualization, and in the Montessori approach to reading, children have lots of practice developing this skill. Visualization is an essential component of the grammar activities where an understanding of the function of words is developed through the use of manipulative activities. Working with these activities gives children further practice in reading and comprehension through visualization.

It is only after children have mastered the phonetic sounds of letters, that they are introduced to the phonograms, sounds represented by combinations of letters like "sh" and "ph", long vowel sounds, and other less common pronunciations of letters. Once the teacher has introduced a new sound, the children can work independently to master the sound in words.

After mastering the phonograms, children's interest will lead them to read any book they wish. We strive with young children to give them beautifully illustrated books about the real world. There are also many reading activities related to science, geography, history and many other topics of special interest, as well as further experiential grammar activities, which the children greatly enjoy.

