

Elementary News

December 2020

“How often is the soul of man – especially in childhood – deprived because he is not allowed to come in contact with nature.” Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori firmly believed that, “There must be provision for the child to have contact with nature, to understand and appreciate the order, the harmony and the beauty in nature.” In our elementary group we facilitate time in nature through weekly Forest School sessions, and through creative work in the outdoors.

Forest School



Our Forest School sessions are full days outdoors at a beautiful site within Holyrood Park. By returning to the same site each week, hopefully over several years, we get to know the cycle of the seasons and weathers. As we gather and share experiences in nature, we build relationships with one another and with our environment, beginning to understand our role within it. It was wonderful to be able to retell the story of how life began in the water by the edge of the pond and with an ancient volcano in sight!

“Fishing” in the pond. We caught algae, and children recalled that it was an early form of life – making connections from the timeline of life work in the classroom.



As in the Montessori classroom, the adults work as guides to observe individual interests and group dynamics then build on these ideas, facilitating experiences that enable each person to explore, develop and realise their visions. While joining Forest School might allow someone to experience using tools, campfire cooking or building shelters, it is the process - not the just the skill - that we learn from. Each new challenge mastered develops confidence; each setback provides the opportunity to reflect, build resilience and try again or try a new direction. Like Montessori Education, Forest School allows the holistic development of each individual that lasts far beyond the programme, creating meaningful relationship with nature, with our community and with our sense of self as we continue our journey along our chosen paths.



Top left: learning to use tools. We made bird feeders from branches gathered in the woods.

Top right: children packing away the tarps at the end of the session. Caring for our environment looks different in the classroom and outdoors!

Left: Learning about fire safety, and how to light a fire using a fire steel.

Creative Learning at The Montessori Elementary:

Afternoons in the second half of the autumn term have been filled with making and happy exploring. We have continued to spend most of our time outside, along the beautiful Water of Leith, which delivered colour, magic, wildlife and wonder as the seasons changed. We have been lucky with the weather so far and have three favourite camps at various points along the river, where the children found creative inspiration.

Our sessions continue to follow the children's interests and support the learning that happens in the classroom. Work on the *Story of the Coming of Life* inspired fascinating conversations about how the world might have looked when life began. These discussions led the children to improvise a drama, in which our young friends took the parts of 'water', 'rock' and 'air' - as ever, storytelling has been a great tool to help deepen our learning.



To further the children's knowledge and understanding of the Timeline of Life, we created 3D models of life forms featured on the timeline. This led us to create a giant Tree of Life on the wall of the classroom, to display our models. The children made this tree from recycled materials, giving us another opportunity to think about sustainability in our making. Models were created using a variety of art techniques and materials - the children enjoyed making with clay, recycled materials, nature and plaster.

A particularly popular project was our 'Fossil Shop', which was created by finding objects in nature, making imprints in clay to replicate a fossil from the eras of study, and using plaster of Paris to make a cast. This process required concentration and patience, but the big reveal when we chipped away the hardened clay was well worth it.

