

Classroom Spotlights

Mrs. McDermott – September 6th

This week marks a significant milestone as we proudly unveil the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium within our Montessori classroom. Our Primary Montessori students have been deeply enriched by their daily participation in Mass, and the addition of the Atrium will further elevate their spiritual journey. The lessons offered in this sacred space are thoughtfully designed to connect the children's real-world experiences with their spiritual growth, underpinning the importance of faith in their everyday lives. This nurturing environment fosters a deep, personal understanding of spirituality through engaging, hands-on learning experiences.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Lisa Brett-Reeves for her generous contribution of materials, which laid a strong foundation for our CGS Atrium. This week, we introduce the prayer table, a central element in fostering a deeper connection to faith. As we continue to build our sense of community, we warmly invite those skilled in woodworking, sewing, and other creative arts to contribute their talents to the ongoing development of the Atrium.

Our Primary Montessori students will continue their cherished tradition of attending Mass with their Prayer Partners, now enhanced with teachings in the Atrium every Friday. The CGS Atrium invites students to deepen their love for Jesus, providing them with a richer understanding of Catholicism and guiding them in their pursuit of a virtuous life. Together, in prayerful collaboration, we will continue to enrich this sacred space within "The Children's House," the Montessori educational setting for children aged 3-6.



In the spirit of mentorship, our Pre-K 3 and 4 students look up to the kindergarteners, who have taken great care in creating a classroom environment they can truly call their own. With input from teachers and board members, the kindergarteners have selected beautiful artwork to adorn the Montessori classroom, reflecting their unique spirit.



Last week, we also welcomed Mrs. Torrence as our Room Parent, and we look forward to continuing our partnership with all parents! Additionally, our students have enjoyed participating in Art, Physical Education, and Music outside the Montessori classroom, with a special highlight being PE with substitute teacher Mrs. Cimino last week!



We are filled with optimism for the opportunities the Atrium presents for our students to grow in faith and community, and we eagerly anticipate the continued development of this enriching space. We hope to see everyone at the Rooted in Play pop-up on September 21st!

Mrs. Miller – September 13th

1st & 2nd Grade News from Mrs. Kristee Miller

Our 1st/2nd graders have been working hard and playing hard! We are becoming more familiar with our abacuses and learning fun math games.

The students have really taken an interest in our science discussions. We spent the first two weeks of school focusing on insects. A lovely ant castle was donated to our classroom so we may watch our busy little ants work.



From the ground to the sky, we have begun to soar with the birds! We've learned Florida's bird is the Mockingbird. We have discussed other birds as well, including owls. There is another donation heading our way...owl pellets!

Our 1st/2nd graders are energetic sponges soaking up lots of information!



Miss Oswald – September 20th

3rd & 4th Grade News from Miss Oswald

With a month under their belts, 3rd and 4th graders have made some fast progress and some even greater discoveries. In our Spirit of Truth books, we have been dissecting what it truly means to be made in God's image. How are we called to be Priest, Prophet, and King? What separates us from plants and animals? All questions that we have acted out, discussed, written about, and brainstormed extensively in the classroom.

As further support to these claims of our faith, we have been learning in depth the life cycle of flowering plants: What a seed is composed of, what it requires in order to properly germinate, and the idea of seed dispersal and its effects. Students “planted” their own kidney and pinto beans last week, and we have been documenting the growth daily. Students also made a beautiful connection between a bean sprout reaching towards the sun and Adam reaching toward God in Michelangelo’s fresco, *The Creation of Man* — how Our Lord is our source of light and Life and how we are striving to be perfect like our heavenly Father is perfect (MT 5:48).





Within these past two weeks, our 5th and 6th graders had the opportunity to step out of their role as students and into the role of teachers! Working in groups, our students developed presentations centered on experiments that showcased the various aspects of erosion. They took diligent notes so they could develop cohesive scripts and methods of showcasing their work for the Montessori students.



All involved learned from each other in ways that typically would not be available to them. I am glad to say that they did very well presenting their knowledge and speaking in front of others. This is not an easy feat, even for some adults, but by working together they did a fantastic job.

Oftentimes, one of the best ways to see if you know something is to see whether or not you are able to teach it. At St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, our students help one another by teaching and learning from each other.



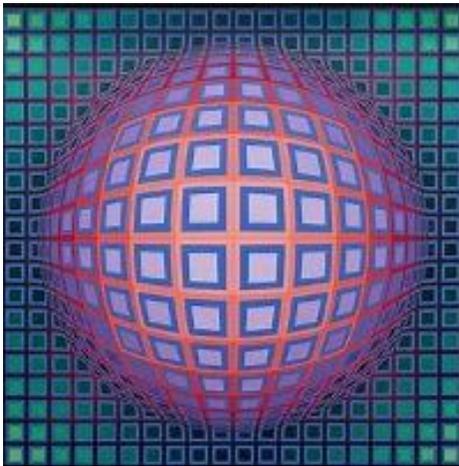
Mrs. Maurer - October 4th

Extra, Extra: News from the Art Room!

During these past two weeks, the students have been learning about two elements of art: line (contour lines specifically) and shape. We have discussed examples in detail that show how contour lines are used by viewing these two examples:



Gustave Dore's "The Descent from the Cross" and Rembrandt's "Christ healing the sick". The students have also learned basic information about these works of art and the artists.



We also discussed geometrical shapes and geometrical paintings created by Victor Vasarely.



In addition, we are learning about organic shapes while observing the painting create by Caspar David Friedrich "Cross in the Mountains" (Tetschen Altar).

We learned that if we use the same shape over and over again this is called repetition

(for example, using the same circle, or just triangles). Using shapes, color or texture that are alike but not the same are called related shapes like in the work by Vincent Van Gogh's "Still life Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers".



This week the 5th and 6th grade students are going to be working on creating a work of art that includes geometrical shapes with the inclusion of an organic shape being optional. They will use sharpies and markers on drawing paper. The 3rd and 4th grade class practiced contour lines outside last week by drawing the trunk of a tree. This week they are going to be working on creating their own Van Gogh vase with flowers to practice organic and related shapes using black construction paper and pastels. 1st and 2nd grade students are practicing the creation of shapes (organic and geometrical) using construction paper and learning about symmetry and negative space in the process. The Montessori class will be practicing how to create shapes by completing the other half of a simple shape and by creating their own shapes using construction paper.

Using beautiful works of art not only helps the students understand the concepts of art, but also to appreciate the great artists and their work.

Mrs. McDermott - October 25th

Mrs. McDermott's Montessori Update

As the Primary Montessori classroom approaches the conclusion of the Month of the Rosary, we pause to reflect on the many blessings brought to us by the

hands of our community. A heartfelt thank you to Mrs. Miller, Miss Cimino, and Miss Oswald for their kindness and unwavering dedication to our students and school. They moved nearly all the Montessori furniture and materials into our new space, filling the classroom with excitement and energy. We are also grateful for the beautiful donations this month related to the Rosary, with special thanks to the Lopez and Fisher families for their generosity.

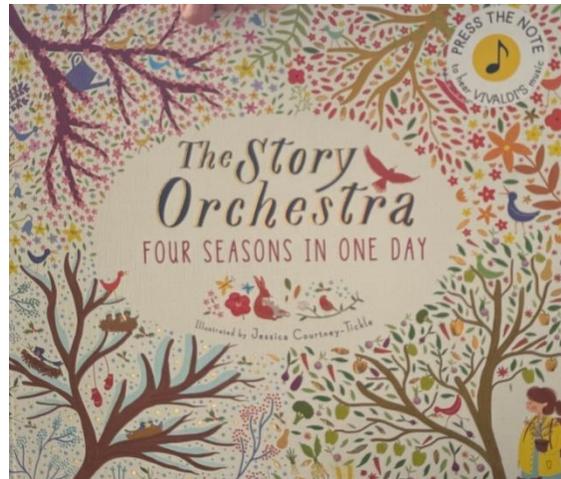


Montessori students enjoying a picnic lunch!

The recent school closure on Friday, October 11th presented a timely opportunity for me to visit St. Jerome Academy, a Catholic classical school in Hyattsville, MD. Montessori Director, Annie Scheetz, facilitated an observation of their three beautifully prepared 3-6 Montessori environments, each with its own Atrium—much like ours! St. Jerome Academy, which has grown exponentially from humble beginnings, also integrates Literacy Essentials. Their Montessori work cycle was inspiring, including a “Walk Around the Sun” lesson, followed by a peaceful conclusion in the Atrium with song and prayer.



Soon we will celebrate our own “Walk Around the Sun” honoring the beauty of birth and renewal while wishing Mr. Daniel Fisher a very happy 4th birthday! The timing couldn't be more perfect as Mrs. Castiglione, one of our parents and our Monday Mystery Reader, shared *The Story Orchestra: Four Seasons in One Day*, featuring Vivaldi's music, exquisitely connecting themes of change and growth.





In the Atrium, we've highlighted lessons regarding liturgical colors (including a song for the liturgical colors - see button below for the song!) to deepen our understanding of how the Catholic faith, like nature, follows its own seasons. This reflects the "spiral model" often referenced in classical education, symbolizing the interconnectedness of all things. At St. Thomas Aquinas Academy we believe that all things are connected through Him, with Him, and in Him.

[Liturgical Color Song](#)

Mrs. Berg - November 1st

PE Update from Mrs. Berg

As we prepare for the Martinmas celebration, our first through sixth graders are learning the Virginia Reel in PE class with Mrs. Berg and special guest teacher, Mrs. Nury Siekkinen.



The Virginia Reel is a folk dance which originated in the 17th century and gained popularity in America between 1830 and 1890. With its roots in Scottish country dance, the reel was performed by our founding fathers at social gatherings and parties. Mrs. Siekkinen led the instruction this week as she taught the students how to properly address their dance partners, with a bow or curtsy.



STA students and teachers look forward to performing the dance, as well as presenting recitations, songs, and artwork at our Martinmas celebration on November 8th at 6pm in the Social Hall!

Miss Zupco – November 8th

Miss Zupco's Music Update

What a whirlwind! Since the start of school there have been many challenges, yet the Glory of Our Lord Jesus proves strong each day! Grades 1-6 have been taught the importance of proper vocal placement, rhythm, note value while learning how to sing traditional Catholic hymns, Gregorian Chant, and a sweet children's song called Morning Prayer. Students are enjoying their time practicing the hymns for Martinmas and will soon prepare for the Advent Concert held in December. Meanwhile, the Montessori class learns about the Joy and Love of Jesus through Bible songs and hand motions – their favorite song is *I'm in the Lord's Army (Yes, Sir!)* equipped with marching. What a joy it is to sing for Jesus and to teach children the beauty of holy music!

Mrs. Miller – November 15th

1st and 2nd Grade Update from Mrs. Kristee Miller

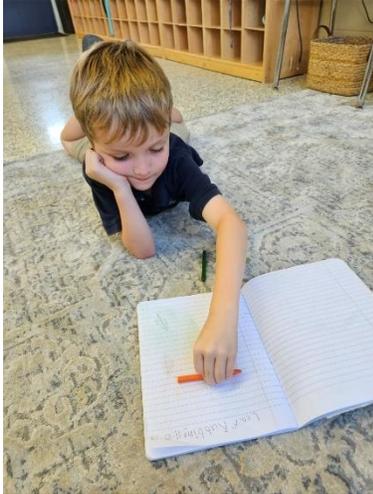
Our first and second graders have been busy learning how to pray the Rosary. During the month of October, we prayed one decade a day to focus on a different mystery each day. We have learned the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Fatima Prayer. The students have enjoyed learning about the beads and following along as we pray as a class.



Our class welcomed Joseph, a new student, and everyone made him feel like he fit right in. Joseph is excited to get to know his classmates better as he becomes part of the Aquinas community.

Welcome to STA, Joseph!

For nature study, the students did some leaf rubbings. They observed and discussed different traits and characteristics of the leaves from different trees. The students love combining nature study with art and being outside!



Miss Oswald – November 22nd

3rd & 4th Grade Update from Miss Oswald

Hello STA Families! As we approach the end of Ordinary time, it is fun to reminisce on all that 3rd and 4th Grade has accomplished, as well as look ahead at where the Advent season will take us.

This November we focused on praying for All the Souls of the Faithful departed, naming St. Gertrude the Great as our Patron for the Month. It was told to her by Jesus in a vision that should we Pray the Prayer of St. Gertrude, that 1000 Souls would be released from purgatory. What an amazing thing! We have dedicated one of our classroom walls to her, as her image watches over us in conjunction with our "All Saints Army" we made in October.





In Literature, we continue to learn more about virtue and the lack thereof in *Johnny Tremain*, our Quarter 2 Novel; this story inspires Great American Pride within us, yet warns against the Pride of Spirit, as we follow the young, haughty Johnny Tremain and his adventures in Revolutionary America.

Looking ahead into the Advent season, 3rd and 4th Grade will be diving into the salvific history of our faith as we explore the Davidic Line through the traditional "Jesse Tree." Starting in December, this will be a daily discovery for our classroom as we prepare the way for the coming of Christ.

I am very proud of all the hard work the students have put in thus far, and they continue to amaze me. From recitations to math fact memorization, this group of students has truly leaned into their studies; I am hopeful for a great end to 2024 for us!

Mr. Proctor – December 6th

From Mr. Proctor's Desk

Advent is a season of preparation. That preparation is not simply of our homes or of the holiday meal, but instead of our minds, hearts, and souls. All so that we are ready to celebrate Christ's coming into the world once more. For our class one of the ways we are doing that is by taking time for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament once a week during these next few weeks. Allowing ourselves to reside with Christ in silence, so that He may be more clearly heard by us as we endeavor to listen to Him.

While the time of Advent is most surely a time in which we endeavor to hear Christ, it is also a time where we try to connect with our fellow man. One of the ways we're trying to develop this skill in class is by putting ourselves into the shoes of our protagonist Davie from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*. Taking the opportunity to reflect on what we've read of his story so far and attempting to see how we would have felt in his situation. Developing a sense of empathy, that will ultimately help us as we help usher in Christ's light to the world.

Of course, part of empathy is the ability to make connections between events and people by means of logic. Something that our current study of mathematics is well disposed to do, especially as our 5th and 6th graders study arithmetic and geometry respectively. Drawing connections between concepts they're already familiar with and those that they encounter for the first time and helping each other in understanding those ideas more clearly.

All of which is necessary as they undertake the challenge of communicating ideas to their peers and sharing what they've learned in class with their junior classmates. All skills and endeavors that are honorable and worthy in their own right but are made more so by their orientation towards Christ.

A blessed advent and a merry Christmas to you all!

Mrs. Maurer – December 13th

News from the Art Room

The month of November was a busy one in our Art room! We have been learning the elements of art. So far, we have studied lines and organic and geometrical shapes. Currently, we are learning about form, defined as “three dimensions of an object that takes up space”. The students also learned that there are methods of perspective that create the illusion of form in a two-dimensional work of art. We have studied some of those methods observing paintings like Rembrandt’s *Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee*.



Last week all the students made Christmas ornaments to contribute to the St. Nicholas Market. This week, Montessori sculpted caterpillars and chrysalis from the book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, 1st and 2nd grade sculpted blue jays and nests, 3rd and 4th grade completed their beehive shapes project, and 5th and 6th grade worked on several 3D geometrical forms.

I have been holding onto much of the students' artwork so that it can be displayed at our Art Showcase during Catholic Schools Week in January. I look forward to sharing their beautiful creations with you!



Miss Zupco - December 20th

News from Miss Zupco's Music Class

Let those who fear the Lord say it, "His love is everlasting!"

Psalm 118:4



As we grow closer to the conclusion of Advent Tide, a fundamental question presented amongst the students during music, “Who is Jesse?” Some of us may think nothing of it since we are, hopefully, accustomed to referring to Jesus as the Rod of Jesse’s Stem, stated in Isaiah 11. This question gave the class an opportunity to discover the significant role that Jesse plays in the lineage of Jesus Christ’s birth and led to their learning of the seven Names that are given to Jesus as we sing O Come, O Come Emmanuel and pray the O Antiphons of Advent.

So, who is Jesse? He is the father of King David who wrote and composed the Psalms, and great-grandfather of Jesus. Jesse was a wealthy landowner in Bethlehem, who was part of the first tribe established in the land of Israel, the Tribe of Judah. Thus, from the offshoots of Jesse, we have gained Our Lord Jesus who is King of all nations, and most especially, is King of our hearts!

+ May we all make room in our hearts to receive Jesus and give praise to Him in our daily lives. Amen. +

Mrs. Berg – January 10th

Mrs. Berg's PE Update



Welcome to the new year and a new semester of physical education at STA! While last semester's fitness goals centered around body strength and awareness (balance, core strengthening, speed, agility, and eye-hand coordination), perfecting basic calisthenic exercises, and team building as we enjoyed some of the PE classics (relay racing, dodgeball, sharks and minnows, capture the flag, and kickball), this semester we will focus on sport-specific drills and team work, beginning with a basketball unit!



The nutrition unit this term will shift from macronutrients (proteins, fats, and carbohydrates) to fiber - what it is, what it does for our bodies, and why it's so important. Students will learn to identify the foods that contain unprocessed fiber and will learn how to incorporate these foods into their daily meals.

We are also incredibly excited to hold our first St. John Bosco Field Day, which will take place on Friday, January 31st! A parent volunteer, George Fisher, and I are hard at work planning this exciting all-day event and can't wait to share in the fun with STA students. Please stay tuned for more details.

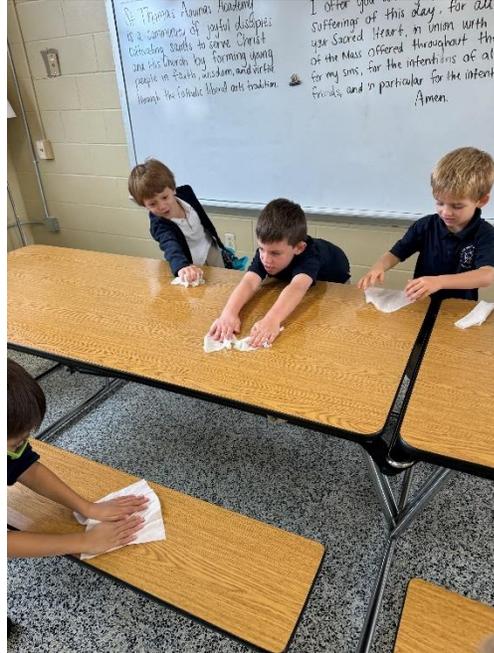
Mrs. McDermott – January 17th

Mrs. McDermott's Montessori Spotlight

The Importance of Practical Life Opportunities Inside and Outside the Montessori Classroom

Folding laundry, caring for plants, and washing tables serve as profound pathways for young children to connect with God while cultivating essential values and refining fine motor skills. Engaging in these everyday tasks allows

children to appreciate the beauty of their surroundings and recognize the divine in the simple act of nurturing their environment.



These activities foster mindfulness and gratitude, enhancing dexterity and coordination through their repetitive motions. Additionally, following simple instructions during these tasks supports the development of foundational literacy skills.

Ultimately, by taking part in practical life activities, children encounter moments of reflection and heightened awareness of God's presence, realizing that their actions—no matter how small—contribute significantly to a larger divine purpose.



Mrs. Miller – January 24th

An Update from Mrs. Miller's 1st & 2nd Grade



It has been an exciting and engaging time in 1st and 2nd grade! Our students have been diving into a variety of fascinating topics. In history, we've been exploring the wonders of Ancient Greece, and in nature study we have been venturing through the solar system and beyond as we learn about our universe and the stars in it.

In math, our 1st graders are mastering addition with 4-digit numbers, and our 2nd graders have been introduced to the world of geometric shapes. To bring these shapes to life, our class received a set of magnetic tiles, which has made learning hands-on and fun!

And of course, our Fun Fridays have been a hit, with new games adding extra excitement to the week. "Play-Doh" has quickly become a class favorite!



