Her lips compress into the shape required to voice the sound “w.” Sitting alone at a little table, this just-turned-six-year-old Primary student has chosen to work on “the parts of a butterfly.” The card she is examining is part of a series, each one highlighting a single physical feature of a butterfly. The word “wings” is written at the bottom.

“Wings,” she says to herself. Still looking at the card she repeats, “wings.” She lays the card on the table, picks up a small piece of paper and a pencil, and writes in a neat cursive script, “wingz.” Writing the word, not by copying letter for letter, but rather from the memory of the sounds; she chose the wrong letter to make the “zzz” sound at the end of “wings.” There’s time to get that right. That error is not the issue now. She is working on reading and writing and building vocabulary.
Primary children are voracious in their acquisition of language, and in the Montessori classroom they learn the names of, the parts of, and the kinds of many things: flowers, trees, fish, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, geometric solids and plane figures, the continents and the countries of the world, famous artists, musical composers, presidents, planets, and on and on.

Beyond this content, they learn to work. They learn to make choices, to direct their own learning, and to develop individual interests. They learn to concentrate deeply and to lose themselves in an activity. Dr. Montessori observed that this experience of deep concentration transforms the child. Our six-year-old finishes drawing a butterfly, highlighting the wings. Then she moves on to the card featuring the head, then one showing the eyes. Most of her twenty-five classmates are working on other activities; some walk from place to place in the classroom; there is a low level of conversation in the room; and I stand three feet away on the other side of the classroom window, fully visible to her if she looks up. She does not. She was working on this project when I approached the window and continues for the fifteen minutes I stand there. She is working with sharp focus, with a sense of purpose, oblivious to everything but the work itself.

Dr. Montessori noted that the child goes through a process learning to achieve this state of deep concentration, and that the result is a joyful, peaceful learner. She called this process “normalization.”

Decades later, the chair of the department of psychology at the University of Chicago, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, began a study of creativity in artists and scientists. What he discovered was a state of deep concentration he named “flow,” a state very familiar to observers of Montessori classrooms. After twenty-five years of research, Csikszentmihalyi published a book for general audiences: Flow: the Psychology of Optimal Experience. I was fascinated to see that the first chapter is called “Happiness Revisited.” What is the relationship between flow and happiness?

Contrary to what we usually believe, moments like these, the best moments in our lives, are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times—although such moments can also be enjoyable, if we have worked hard to attain them. The best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something that we make happen. For a child, it could be placing with trembling fingers the last block on a tower she has built, higher than any she has built so far; for a swimmer, it could be trying to beat his own record; for a violinist, mastering an intricate musical passage. For each person there are thousands of opportunities, challenges to expand ourselves.

Such experiences are not necessarily pleasant at the time they occur. The swimmer’s muscles might have ached during his most memorable race, his lungs might have felt like exploding, and he might have been dizzy with fatigue—yet these could have been the best moments of his life. Getting control of life is never easy, and sometimes it can be definitely painful. But in the long run, optimal experiences add up to a sense of mastery—or perhaps better, a sense of participation in determining the content of life—that comes as close to what is usually meant by happiness as anything else we can conceivably imagine.

What a moment I had observed: a six-year-old in a state of deep concentration while mastering reading and writing, tools required for full participation in human life. Was the task easy for her? No—her face betrayed the effort she was making. Yet she had actively chosen this work, was deciding how to structure it, was determining how long to continue it, and was designing the product that would communicate what she was accomplishing. Ironically, the papers with her writing and drawing will go home, but the state of happiness and inner peace will not, and that is the greater accomplishment. If they look closely, perhaps her parents will catch a glimpse of her wings.
The Post Oak Fund continues!

To date, your gifts and pledges total $215,000 and 88% parent participation. Thanks to parents, board members, and employees who have shown their generous support of the school. Thanks, too, to all the Class Captains who have worked hard to get strong participation from each class. Campaign Chairs, Kim and Michael Callahan, along with John Long and members of the board of trustees will be reaching out to remaining families to encourage 100% participation. A great characteristic of our school is the tremendous level of annual fund participation we have received year after year – let’s keep this trend going! Our fundraising goal is an important part of the school’s finances, and it is critical that we meet our $250,000 goal. We can’t do it without YOU!

Please pledge today (due 5/31/12), or submit a gift online at www.postoakschool.org.

Thank you!  
—Christina Kapanidis-Cantu, Development Director

Congratulations to Tamara Basham’s and Miriam Winton’s classes for reaching 100% parent participation in The Post Oak Fund! Thank you for your support!
Braes Interfaith Ministries food drive at Post Oak

As the Holidays approach, our thoughts turn to those who are in need of our help. We have initiated a Community Service Project in which the children and families in Upper and Lower Elementary can participate.

The Braes Interfaith Ministries is a group of several churches and denominations in the South Braeswood and West Belfort area of Southwest Houston. They serve the most urgent needs of a wide cross section of people in our community.

We will be filling our class boxes during the week of December 5 through December 9, and we will deliver the donations on December 12.

This year we have challenged the children of every class to each bring a donation. Please help us make this a meaningful experience for the children of Post Oak and a welcome gift for the families in our community who need our support.

TOILETRIES:
• Bars of soap
• Shampoo
• Toothpaste
• Toothbrushes
• Hand lotion
• Deodorant
• Talcum powder
(They request that these items be individually packaged)

FOODS:
Non perishable canned and packaged items which might include:
• Boxes of cereal
• Packaged pasta and pasta sauce
• Canned vegetables/meats etc.
• Rice and/or lentils and beans
• Evaporated or condensed milk
• Tea and/or coffee/sugar
• Cookies/crackers
• Packaged soups/broth
• Dried fruit and nuts

Thank you!

Treats for UNICEF

To mark the occasion of United Nations Day, the delegates of the Montessori Model UN Program chose to carry UNICEF Collection boxes with them when they went out to ‘Trick-or-Treat’ on Halloween. This effort was spearheaded by delegate of Mauritius. The students have together collected a total of $703.70 which will be donated to the UNICEF Fund this week. We congratulate them on their determination, enthusiasm, and desire to help the less fortunate children of the world.

—Maya Pinto, Lower Elementary Teacher
Middle School Arizona Trip

by [name] and [name]

Middle School students

Last week the Middle School went on a trip to Arizona to study Human Origins. The temperature in Arizona was freezing and there was snow everywhere. We studied various things having to do with archeology and geology. We went to places like Montezuma’s Castle, Elden Pueblo, the Museum of Northern Arizona, Lowell observatory, Tuzigoot, and the Grand Canyon. We also got to dissect owl pellets which are owl’s unneeded food that they regurgitated. In the owl pellets we found skulls and other small rodent’s bones. At first most people were grossed out by the owl pellets and thought they were grotesque, but after a while we eased up and began to see the fun in it. (See photo on next page, bottom left)

Montezuma’s Castle and Elden Pueblo are where the Sinagua people lived. Some southern Sinagua people lived in Montezuma’s Castle. The site is high up in the rocks and you would need a ladder to get in it. Next to Montezuma’s Castle is Beaver Creek which would be very convenient for the ancient people. Elden Pueblo is where some of the northern Sinagua people lived. Elden Pueblo was used as a trading place and a home for almost 300 people.

The Grand Canyon was breathtakingly beautiful. Our day at the Grand Canyon started out by learning about the rocks that make it up. Then we started to walk towards the Grand Canyon. When we were close but could not see it, we got in lines and closed our eyes. We were led by the teachers out to the edge of the Grand Canyon. The teachers counted to three and we all opened our eyes. IT WAS BEAUTIFUL! It was the most amazing thing we had ever seen. We could even see the layers of rocks we had just learned about.

We went to a site to see American Indian art. We saw 900-year-old petroglyphs which are carvings in a rock. We looked at them and we all started to say they looked like something we had in the present day. Even though we were sure we were seeing pictures of suns, turtles, centipedes, and people, there is no way of knowing what they actually are. Nevertheless they were beautiful. We learned that some of the plain circles on the wall were actually to tell the seasons of the year. You would know what season it was by the way the sun shined on them.

Our trip to Arizona was a great experience and we learned so much from it. All of us would be glad to get to go again. We would like to say a special thank you to our tour guide Tom Woodall and the teachers for making this trip happen!

Photos by Shikkola Gray. More photos on the next page, as well as Facebook.
Middle School: photos from Arizona
Calling all volunteers

Join one of the opera subcommittees to help create this biennial production.

COSTUMES
Michelle Munn

CREW
Erin Stus

HOSPITALITY
Paula Mey

MARKETING
Amy Kirchner

SET & PROP
Elise McClain

DONE IN A DAY
Suzan Samuels

Moon Maiden has been cast!

Opera preparations are underway and the students are so excited. A successful opera comes together because of the work done by the performers and the crew.

We have gone through all of the forms, sorted them by choice, completed all the auditions, and have now cast all of the roles. Your Elementary-aged student will be coming home today with his or her assignment for the opera.

Auditions were held the past two weeks and we want to thank everyone who participated. Each student did a fantastic job!

Thank you to the students who selected crew as their first choice and want to offer their talents for the set, costume, marketing, and other crew-related work.

Each group from the first grade chorus to the huntsmen to the jasmine flowers to the pandas is vital to the overall story told in the opera.

Every role in the opera was assigned by the audition judges and reviewed by the faculty before they were given to your child today.

Work begins the week of November 28!

Tanya Gee and Jane Greenberg, 2012 Opera Co-Chairs

T-shirt order form online

Order Moon Maiden t-shirts online now via the link on the left-hand side of our homepage, or pick up a form from the front office.

T-shirts are $15 each and the deadline for orders is January 6.

Opera dates

Remember to mark your calendars with the new Opera dates:

OPERA WEEK
January 30–February 3, 2012

PERFORMANCE
February 3, 2012 at 7 pm
Welcome to New Employees
Additions & Transitions (part three)

We are pleased to have Marcela Menjivar as Sarah Moudry’s assistant in HDIC and part of the Primary Home Environment team this year. Marcela has a BS in education from Evangelic University in her native country, El Salvador. She holds a master’s degree in Spanish Civilization and Culture from Spain. Marcela has 11 years experience working with children, including teaching Spanish and music. Presently, she is taking classes at the Culinary Institute LeNôtre to become a pastry chef.

Yolanda Bucio has taken on a new role this year as Dinah Chetrit’s assistant in Primary Home Environment. She graduated from Alverno College in Milwaukee with a BA. Yolanda began her teaching career as an ESL teacher abroad in Spain and Ireland. Prior to this year, Yolanda was a substitute for all levels here at Post Oak, and last year was an assistant in Half Day Infant Community.

Grandparents’ & Friends’ Days next week
Monday, November 21 & Tuesday, November 22, 9–11 am
Complimentary valet parking provided

Dear Post Oak parents,

If you have relatives or friends attending next week’s event on either Monday or Tuesday, here are a few of things to note:

• We are limited with space and ask that parents not attend. We promise to take good care of your guests!
• The event starts at 9:00 am and concludes around 11:00 am. Breakfast will be provided.
• There will be parking on campus. All employees will be parking off campus, so it might look like there is no parking because of all the cars on the street. Drive in and use the complimentary valet parking in the peace circle.
• For guests coming to see Infant and Primary students, they will view the students from the observation window. We do this to give grandparents and friends a true example of a Montessori classroom in action. Guests of older students are invited into the classroom to work with those students.
• If grandparents or friends plan on taking the student home, we must have permission from the parent, as is the normal policy.
• Even if an RSVP has not been sent in, we welcome all visitors on both days.

Thank you,
Christina Kopanidis-Cantu
Development Director
SCENES
from
The Post Oak School

1. Peeling apples in preparation for Thanksgiving luncheon on Friday.
2. Stretching a rubber band on the geoboard.
3. Sewing in Primary.
5. Making and reading numbers on the checker board.
High School Open House

Hear the latest about our Museum District partnerships and our building plans

November 29, 2011  7:00 pm

to be held in the main gallery of our Museum District partner

The Glassell School of Art

5101 Montrose Boulevard

The POST OAK HIGH SCHOOL
Transition to Upper Elementary: preparing for more

Thursday, December 1
7:00–8:00 pm

Parents of current third grade students are invited to join the elementary teachers for a presentation and discussion devoted to the transition to Upper Elementary.

Alumni Night
Best night of the year!

Thursday, January 5, 2012 from 6:30–8:30 pm

We are excited to welcome back the high school students, college students, and young professionals who graduated from The Post Oak School as they reflect on their experiences in Montessori. How did their education at Post Oak help prepare them for their subsequent education and for life? Parents of our current students as well as prospective parents are encouraged to attend this event.

Post Oak alum and USC film school graduate Sam Geer will present.

I am grateful for...

that Ms. Miriam teaches us lessons
my brother, Emily, and Ruth
the moveable alphabet
puzzles, my mom
stuffed animals
my baby sister
my mom
my brother

Happy Thanksgiving
school closed November 23–25

Picture retakes

Picture retakes will be on Wednesday, November 30, for those children who were absent on picture day. If you would like to have your child’s picture retaken, please note the follow options:

• You must turn in the original picture by Tuesday, Nov. 29, and accept the retake, even if it does not turn out as well.

• You may keep the first picture and pay for a second package at the cost of $20, which must be paid in advance.

If you choose to have your child’s picture retaken, please contact Debbie Henderson at debbiehenderson@postoakschool.org or 713-661-6688, ext. 135.
NOTICE BOARD

Notes on community
by John Long, Head of School

We have many visitors to Post Oak in addition to the scores of prospective parents who tour the school. This week we were visited by two school leaders from the Montessori House of Children in London, Ontario (Canada). Last week a visiting psychologist shared the following comments while observing a primary classroom in the company of Early Childhood Director Mirani Smith:

“What a lovely school and class community. The classroom environment promotes inclusivity, love, a connectedness with one another, utmost respect, a relaxed atmosphere. I love the buzz of children learning.”

Bearkats basketball

December 6 & 7 at 4:15 pm
Boys play against St. Stephen’s here at Post Oak

Making healthy choices

Mark your calendar: Tuesday, December 6 from 7:00 to 8:00 pm

Join Aimee Taylor, a Post Oak parent and healthy lifestyle consultant, as she presents some of her tips and tricks for helping us help our children make healthy food choices.

Parents with children of all ages will benefit from this evening. Childcare will be provided – please call the front office.

ABOUT THE WEEKLY POST

The Weekly Post appears on most Fridays of the regular school year. You can receive a printed copy from your oldest child, or a PDF version online.

Submit letters, articles, or photos in electronic form by 5:00 pm on the Tuesday before publication to Communications Coordinator Elaine Schweizer (elaineschweizer@postoakschool.org). If publication is on a Thursday due to school closure on Friday, the deadline is 5:00 pm on the preceding Monday.

All photos in The Weekly Post are by Elaine Schweizer unless otherwise noted.

The Post Oak School was founded in 1963 and accredited by both the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS).

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