At my former school, Santa would visit during the week before Christmas. He would ride up on a motorcycle and every child would sit in his lap during the afternoon. In fact, we had two Santas. Both would arrive on motorcycles, one on the east side of the school and one on the west side so the children wouldn’t see them together. The kids would get really wound up, but they loved it. It was a long-standing tradition at that school.”

I was with a small group of school heads last week and we were comparing notes about how wild and wooly it is in schools during the weeks before Christmas. The speaker was formerly head of a conventional K – 8 private school who was recently
appointed head of a Montessori school.
He is just learning about Montessori
education and has been surprised by
how right it seems. He used to think that
Montessori schools were for kids who
were undisciplined and couldn’t “make it”
in conventional schools. “In fact, the
truth is just the opposite. Montessori
kids have a great sense of self-control
and self-discipline, and the classrooms function
with a quiet hum. These are kids who are
incredibly successful when they leave us for
conventional school.”

Getting back to Christmas, he said to the
others, “Montessori schools downplay the
holidays. When we walk into the school,
you’ll see that the children are working
with concentration. T oday is just like any
other.” He looked to me for confirmation
and agreed.

I’ve been thinking about that conversation
quite a bit. Are Montessori schools anti-
fun? Do we avoid differentiating the days?
Are Montessori schools anti-Santa? Do we
avoid Santa-like traditions? Are we
Cathedrals of Calm serving only
Santas on motorcycles.

•

Still others claimed that when students
work together collaboratively, that they are
more engaged. The challenge, of course, is
that most schools are not structured with
any of this in mind except during special
events or extracurricular activities. Most
of the articles acknowledged that truth,
and the recommendations were for ways
to bring in these characteristics around the
edges of daily life in the classroom—special
projects in school where teams of students
work together and have the latitude to lend
some shape to the outcome. Or special
activities that break up the daily routine—
lke Santas on motorcycles.

This line of thinking reminded me of the
research published by Kevin Rathunde
and Milhaly Csikszentmihalyi (2003)
comparing adolescent students in Montes-
soori schools vs. conventional schools. One
of their conclusions was that Montessori
students showed significantly higher levels
of engagement.

What does this look like during the holi-
day season? In one of our lower elementary
classrooms yesterday, six children wearing
safety goggles were tap-tap-tapping with
hammers and nails. Using stencils they
were punching holes in metal plates to
make a snowflake design. I’m quite sure it
was a gift for their parents. I was intrigued
to see the range of hammer skills shown by
the group. Even the child with the longest
wings and the quickest rhythm occasion-
ally hit her hand holding the nail. “Ouch,”
she said without missing a beat. Won’t
she hurt herself? No. In fact, I know how
important it is for her to have active hands
as well as an active brain, and not to fear a
life of active engagement.

At the same time in another part of the
room, the teacher was conducting a read-
ing group with six other children. Across
the room four children sat around a globe
answering geography questions. At other
tables, there were children working on
reports about the planets. Each had chosen
one to investigate in detail. Was the ham-
mering a distraction? No, and I must say, it
was quite amazing.

Other holiday activities throughout the
school during the past week or so have in-
cluded baking and cooking special meals,
and trips to the ballet and the theater. Our
new elementary choir performed carols
from medieval and renaissance times. And
since Post Oak is rich in diversity, with
families of many ethnicities and different
religious traditions, our holiday activities
have included Hannukah, Diwali, and Eid.

On one day two mothers and their daugh-
ters performed classical Indian dances. On
another day two different mothers told
the Hannukah story. In the menorah and
served potato pancakes.

We learn to give and to serve. Elementary
students collected a van load of food and
 toiletries that they delivered to Braes
Interfaith Ministries this week. This is an
important lesson in humility and service.
“Whom much is given, much is expect-

We do celebrate. We do explore and learn
about different holiday traditions. And we
do so in ways consistent with experiential
learning within the context of the Mon-
tessori curriculum. We aim to prepare
children for a life of active engagement.
We do not need to wind them up with Santas
on motorcycles in order to convince them
that school can be fun.
alumni night

Learn about the Post Oak experience from those who have lived it!

Thursday, January 8, 2015 at 6:30 pm

Join us as we welcome back former students to reflect on their experiences at The Post Oak School. Parents of current students, as well as prospective parents, are invited to attend.

RSVP to Jessica Jackson, 713-661-6688, or jessicajackson@postoakschool.org

‘Tis the Season to be Sharing

This year, the Post Oak Family continued our tradition of holiday giving. We collected food and toiletry items for Braes Interfaith Ministries in donation boxes that were located throughout the school.

On December 12, several elementary students had the opportunity to deliver the much needed items to Brae’s Interfaith Ministries. It was a great way for the kids to see first-hand how these acts of kindness impact the community.

Thank you for your support in helping families in need and making this a meaningful experience for our children!

GALA PROJECTS IN THE WORKS!

A parent volunteer works with primary students on Danielle Dalsey’s Gala project

GALA INVITATIONS: COMING SOON!

Your invitation to Gala will be arriving in the mail in early January, at which point online ticket ordering will also be available through the Post Oak website.

We do anticipate that, as in years past, this event WILL SELL OUT.

Be sure to RSVP as soon as possible to guarantee your red carpet appearance in March – We can’t wait to see you there!

The Gala program is one of the only ways to advertise to our Post Oak community. If you would like to purchase a family or business ad in the program, please contact christinacantu@postoakschool.org.

The gala program will be distributed to each couple at the event. We anticipate a sold-out event with 450 guests.

GALA PROGRAM RATES:

Full page color ad: $750
Full page B/W ad: $500

POST OAK PARENTS & BUSINESS OWNERS:
PLACE YOUR AD IN THE GALA PROGRAM TODAY!

The Gala is the Post Oak School’s most important annual fundraising event. Join us for an evening of fun, food, and dancing at the Houstonian Hotel on Saturday, March 7, 2015.

For more information about how to get involved, please contact cristinacantu@postoakschool.org.
As everyone is searching for the perfect gifts for their children (or relatives!) for the holidays, I’d like to share with you some much buzzed about new titles which support our Post Oak curriculum at home.

Primary children are learning about artists in their classrooms, and there are some truly beautiful picture books out this year that celebrate artists. Both *Aviary Wonders, Inc* by Yuyi Morales and The Inedible Bird, A Book about Florian Matisse by Patricia MacLachlan are getting mentioned as serious Caldecott contenders. *Mix It Up* by Herve Tullet, is an interactive book that asks kids to be their own artists and teaches color mixing.

Picture books aren’t just for under 6! *Iridescence of Birds: A Book about Henri Matisse* is a catalog of automaton birds, from a future where all the bird species are extinct. It encourages research into the world around us, and some kids truly blossom as non-fiction readers. *The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus* is a non-fiction picture book biography of the man behind it. The Upper El kids have already gotten their hands on it, and they love it. The collage illustrations make each page something to pore over. (ages 7-10)

*Separate Is Never Equal* tells the story of one family’s fight for desegregation for families of Mexican descent in California. (ages 7-10)

Montessori curriculum strongly encourages research into the world around us, and some kids truly blossom as non-fiction readers. If you have one of those in your house, this is their year. *The Family Romanov* is one of two titles agreed to be in a neck-and-neck race for the Newbery. It tells the story of the fall of the Romanovs from the perspective of the palace and the streets. It also incredibly visually appealing. *The Port Chicago 50: Disaster, Mutiny, and the Fight for Justice* is a highly acclaimed graphic novel memoir about growing up deaf. *Rain Reign* is a chapter book about an autistic 5th grade building relationships and navigating her life.

Separate Is Never Equal tells the story of one family’s fight for desegregation for families of Mexican descent in California. (ages 7-10)

It’s also incredibly visually appealing. *The Port Chicago 50: Disaster, Mutiny, and the Fight for Justice* is a highly acclaimed graphic novel memoir about growing up deaf. *Rain Reign* is a chapter book about an autistic 5th grade building relationships and navigating her life.
Q. What’s your favorite thing about POHS?
A. The emphasis on self-directed learning.

Q. What’s your favorite food?
A. Chicken

Q. What are your major interests and hobbies?
A. I enjoy racing my bike.

Q. What’s your favorite Houston hangout spot?
A. Memorial Park

Q. What’s been your favorite J-term or A-term project so far?
A. The EV Car Conversion

Q. What’s your favorite TV show?
A. Key and Peele

Q. What colleges do you plan on applying to?
A. I know that I will apply to Columbia, but I’m looking into other schools too.

Q. What’s your favorite color?
A. Blue

Q. Title of the last book you’ve read?
A. Cold War by John Lewis Gaddis

Q. Out of all of the POHS trips you’ve taken, what’s been your favorite?
A. The 2014 Odyssey Trip to New Orleans

Q. Name someone who has had a strong impact in your life up until this point.
A. The friends I’ve met here at Post Oak
Parenting the Love & Logic Way®

This series of courses offers solutions for families with children from early childhood to beyond adolescence, and is designed to give you practical skills you can use immediately. Previous participants are encouraged to return to share experiences and reinforce skills. Care givers are also welcome. All classes are open to the public.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
Phylis Tomlinson, Post Oak Counselor & Independent Facilitator of Parenting the Love & Logic Way® curriculum
phylistomlinson@gmail.com • 713-668-6558

Please send registration fees payable to Phylis Tomlinson in advance:
4010 Bluebonnet #109, Houston, TX 77025,
or c/o The Post Oak School, 4600 Bissonnet, Bellaire, TX 77401

Please be advised that there is no childcare provided for the classes.
Parents Education Opportunities

Books for Bed and Beyond

by Post Oak Parent Nikayla Thomas

On Friday, November 14, Cory Eckert, Post Oak School’s librarian gave a lively presentation, “Books for Bed and Beyond” for parents during Post Oak’s Families Integrating School and Home (F.I.S.H.) event. She provided the following insightful tips:

- **Go to the library** – children learn social skills, (including respect for others concentration), learn how to ask for help, and practice independence in finding appropriate books. Story times at libraries can also be great learning opportunities for young children (how to sit with strangers, how to follow instructions, and how to participate in the stories and songs). For older children working on research, librarians can assist with culling the information and helping them target good research tools.

- **Talk to your children** – research shows that children who experience success in school hear over 30,000 words before kindergarten.

- **Sing with your children** – children are motivated to enjoy reading by watching parents read for enjoyment. It can also help develop print awareness (i.e. how books and words move left to right).

- **Read to your children** – Read to yourself (e.g. reading books). You can also sing a familiar tune and put in different words. This especially helps children learn syllables.

- **Read to your children** – Choose reality-based materials for children under five. Children under five are still trying to differentiate between fantasy and reality. Books that are fantasy-based can confuse them. Lay a foundation for them in reality and allow their imaginations to take off from there. With picture books, have your child narrate the story.

- **OTHER RESOURCES:**
  - jbrary.com
  - storyblocks.org
  - www.youtube.com
  - www.storyblocks.com

**MMUN China: A Parent’s Perspective**

by Post Oak Parent Kim Yates

Being a newbie to international travel, my recent trip to China for the Montessori Model United Nations (MMUN) conference with my son was quite an extraordinary introduction. I was on board for the trip the moment it was discussed at the New York conference last spring. I, however, was a bit more hesitant. China?! A densely populated, communist country, fourteen time zones away? Not only did we survive (along with the more than 2,800 pictures I snapped), but horizons were expanded, eyes were opened, culture was absorbed, crazy food was consumed, friendships were formed (and cemented) and all the other cliché, yet meaningful triumphs.

The conference itself was held in Zhengzhou, a small, mostly industrial city of close to 9 million, located in north-central China. All proceedings were held in English (wahoo!) and were quite similar to the New York conferences we’ve experienced, including the students’ shy introductions on day one, warming to robust discussions on day two, and laughing and the exchanging of email addresses by day three. And let’s not forget the crazy group dinners – children are still trying to differentiate between fantasy and reality. Books that are fantasy-based can confuse them. Lay a foundation for them in reality and allow their imaginations to take off from there. With picture books, have your child narrate the story.

The MMUN organizers planned an amazing three days of guided bus tours for the non-Chinese attendees, which included the Shaolin Temple and Longmen’s Grottoes in Luoyang (thousands of Buddhas carved into a limestone cliff along the Yi River), and the Baogong Temple and the Iron Pagoda in Kaifeng (with many of us climbing the tiny, steeply ascending stairs of the Pagoda to touch the Buddha at the top). The eighteen adults in our Post Oak group acquired several new skills on these tours, not the least of which was securing seats at massive ten-top dining tables at each meal stop (quite a production considering the 350 guests at each meal!). Many in our group continued on after the conference to visit the Terracotta Warriors in Xian (aka the world’s largest jigsaw puzzle), the Great Wall, The Forbidden City in Beijing, the giant pandas in Chengdu, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and the limestone peaks along the Li River in Guilin (which are immortalized on the country’s currency).

and I eventually checked up seven planes, two high-speed trains, one boat, too many buses, seven hotels, nine cities, and two countries (accompanied with a side trip to Tokyo). We are immensely grateful to the students and parents of our China Post Oak group, with the biggest heap of appreciation going to Emil and Maya Pinto who made it all happen, with seemingly effortless grace. Every moment was amazing, hilarious and endearing – even the ones that shouldn’t have been!

On the return flight turns to me and says, “Hey, Mom, there’s a MMUN conference in Rome in May.” Hmmmm, I’ve never been to Rome….
SCENES
from
The Post Oak School

1. Classrooms on both campuses enjoyed a visit from a delegation of teachers from Poland.
2. A child in the Young Children’s Community develops fine motor skills with nesting dolls.
3. An Upper Elementary student works on a long division word problem using the racks and tubes.
4. A Lower Elementary student works on multiplication with the flat bead frame.
5. An older Primary child gives a lesson to younger students in her class.
6. Middle School students work on their recommendations for this year’s Yearbook Committee.
7. Upper Elementary students tackle the colonial-inspired task of making cloth by hand.
8. A Primary student works on her movable alphabet story as a younger child looks on.
9. Young Children’s Community students take turns putting ornaments on a Christmas tree.
10. Upper Elementary students work on a diagram of the differences in parts of plant and animal cells.
11. Working with geometric shapes helps Primary students gain visual memory for shapes in preparation for future geometry work.
### CALENDAR

**DECEMBER 22 – JANUARY 2**
**WINTER BREAK SCHOOL CLOSED**

**JANUARY 4 – 10**
- **Mon 1/5**
  - SCHOOL CLOSED
  - Teacher In-service
- **Tue 1/6**
  - High School J-Term begins
- **Wed 1/7**
  - POPA Coffee/Work Day
    - 8:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
- **Thu 1/8**
  - Alumni Night
    - 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.
- **Fri 1/9**
  - Upper Elementary Spelling Bee
    - 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

**JANUARY 11 – 17**
- **Mon 1/12**
  - Spring ASEP Begins
- **Tue 1/13**
  - High School Admission Open House
    - 7:00 p.m. (Autrey Campus)
- **Wed 1/14**
  - Coffee w/ EL Director
    - 9:00 a.m.
  - Parenting the Love & Logic Way (1 of 6)
    - 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. ($ & reg. required)
- **Thu 1/15**
  - Parenting the Love & Logic Way (1 of 6)
    - 9:00-10:30 a.m. ($ & reg. required)
  - Primary Parent Education Meeting
    - 6:00 p.m.
- **Fri 1/16**
  - Application deadline for new students
- **Fri 1/16**
  - HMI Information Gathering Session
    - 6:00 p.m.

### NOTICE BOARD

**POPA Coffee/Work Day**

**Wednesday, January 7**
**8:45 a.m. – noon**

### HAVE A GREAT WINTER BREAK!

**CLASSES RESUME TUESDAY, JANUARY 6, 2015**

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### ABOUT THE POST

The Post appears every other Friday 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 p.m. on the Tuesday before publication to Communications Coordinator Elisa Schmidt (elisaschmidt@postoakschool.org). If publication is on a Thursday due to school closure on Friday, then the deadline is 5:00 p.m. on the preceding Monday.

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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