

by Aurora Zosman

**"A CHILD IS
MYSTERIOUS AND
POWERFUL;
AND CONTAINS
WITHIN HIMSELF
THE SECRET OF
HUMAN NATURE."**



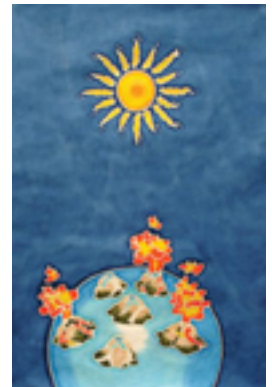
POP! A black balloon

explodes and confetti stars and glitter fall to the floor, twinkling in the silent darkness; the child's wide eyes speak of his fascination and it is possible that at this very moment a great curiosity has ignited, one that will set off the lifelong contemplation concerning the grandeur of our universe. The Great Lessons have the power to illuminate creation so significantly, it will stir your soul; especially the fantastic tales of how we came to be, as understood across various cultures throughout time.

This I speak of refers to *Cosmic Education* and is the way in which Maria Montessori exposed the children to an imaginative and reasoning exploration of the universe. It sets the child off on the journey that ponders his 'cosmic task', that is, the special task that each individual contributes to the continuation of life while keeping nature in a harmonious state of purity. Maria Montessori saw the child as the one cosmic agent through which our full progress as human beings is possible. The child's role in cosmic creation is through education and begins from infancy. The young child needs the freedom to explore and absorb the environment as their impulse drives them, resulting in love and joy, with love being the spiritual essence

of humans from which we build ourselves. Cosmic Education gives the child not only the world, but also the universe, and a vision of the cosmic role in the creation and maintenance of our earth. The curriculum is implemented in such a way that makes it natural to relate all areas of knowledge to the concept of cosmic task and our relation to it, while sparking in them the awe of this process, so as to take ‘the next step toward the ultimate goal of the spiritual union of humanity’. Montessori felt that capturing the inherent imagination of the child of this age and sharing the stories known as “The Great Lessons” could accomplish this. Appealing to a child's sense of wonder and imagination, these stories take us from the beginning of the universe to the present, with grand visions of the cosmic task of every living thing that ever existed. In her book *To Educate the Human Potential*, Maria Montessori wrote:

“Since it has been seen to be necessary to give so much to the child, let us give him a vision of the whole universe. The universe is an imposing reality, and an answer to all questions. We shall walk together on this path of life, for all things are part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity. The idea helps the mind of the child to become focused, to stop wandering in an aimless quest for knowledge. He is satisfied having found the universal centre of himself with all things.”



The “Great Lessons” are a series of five impressionistic lessons that commence every year. They provide a “big picture” view and are intended to wow the child as he moves on to more specific studies. The first Great Lesson, *God Has No Hands*, or *The Story of the Universe*, tells of the origins of the universe and leads to the study of astronomy, chemistry, physics, geology, and geography. The second Great Lesson, *The Coming of Life*, tells how life came about on Earth and leads to the study of

biology, botany, biomes, ancient life, and animals. This lesson revolves around the Timeline of Life, a long chart with pictures and information about microorganisms, plants, and animals that have lived (or now live) on the earth. The third Great Lesson, *The Coming of Human Beings*, tells the story of how and when humans first appeared, and leads to the study of history and culture. It involves a timeline with a tool and a human hand to talk about the three gifts that make humans special: a mind to imagine, a hand to do work, and a heart that can love. The fourth Great

COS•MIC

1. Of or relating to the universe, especially as distinct from Earth.
2. Infinitely or inconceivably extended; vast.

Lesson, *Communication in Signs, or The Story of Writing*, tells the story of the development of the written alphabet, how humans first began to communicate, and leads to the study of reading, writing, language, and structure [of

language]. The fifth and final Great Lesson, *The Story of Numbers*, tells the history of mathematics, leading to the study of mathematics, geometry, and application. The Great Lessons have a unifying theme and as the child continues further with his studies, he begins to see just how all things fit into the “big picture”.

As Montessori caregivers, we can nourish this interest of the cosmic questions and mystery of life by presenting the child with a glimpse of the whole universe and its contents. We can spark his imagination and send him on a path of discovery while simultaneously developing the realization that all living things and everything in the galaxy is part of a greater whole. Thus, they should approach life with the grandeur of their messages in mind.

If we approach the wonder of the unknown in a more unified way, as the Cosmic curriculum aims to do, we will allow the child to discover his true nature, for it is in the experience of his very existence. Upon this discovery, we will no longer feel the need to answer the questions of our being, for we already possess our true nature, we are already living it, through constant exploration, it is merely a matter of recognizing it. Through unity, the display of Oneness, we can do just that. Cosmic Education leads the child to gain the concepts of peace, conservation, gratitude, openness, amongst other values, and makes way for his understanding of the cosmos, along with his place within [the universe].



**“LET US GIVE [THE CHILDREN] A VISION OF THE WHOLE UNIVERSE...
ALL THINGS ARE PART OF THE UNIVERSE
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ONE WHOLE UNITY.”**

MARIA MONTESSORI

**" IT IS THE SPIRIT OF THE CHILD THAT CAN
DETERMINE THE COURSE OF HUMAN
PROGRESS AND LEAD IT PERHAPS EVEN TO
A HIGHER FORM OF CIVILIZATION."**

MARIA MONTESSORI



Since the dawn of man, humans have observed the regular movement of the Sun and the stars, and wondered about the passage of time. Ancient civilizations looked to the apparent motion of these bodies through the sky, and recording time has been a way by which humanity has observed the heavens and represented the progress of civilization. The concept of time can be perceived infinitely and at the same time, can be reduced to minutes or seconds. Maria Montessori developed the history curriculum with time and the formation of the universe. From the formation of the universe, through life on our planet, to the history of humans and their writing and numbers, the big picture is portrayed. Physics and chemistry are carefully woven through the history lessons as they relate to particles or the universe and the beginnings of life. As children grasp these big concepts, their studies become increasingly specific.

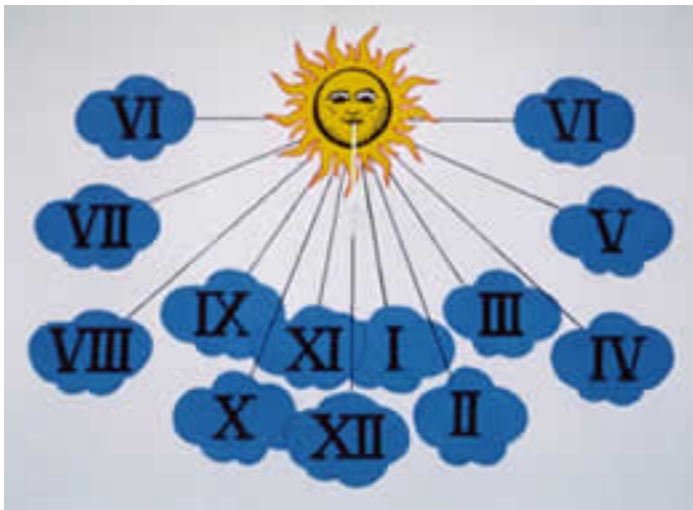
**“The greatness of the
human personality
begins at the hour of
birth.”**

Maria Montessori

The concept of time is an essential component of the history curriculum in the lower elementary classroom. The child develops an understanding of time through presentations throughout the cosmic curriculum. The initial formal introduction to the passage of time is through the study of the

Sun and Earth. The child is first presented with lessons about the movement of the Earth in relation to the Sun—all of which are a naturally occurring phenomenon. On

a grand scale, he begins to understand the difference between day and night through a simple presentation using a globe and a light source. He learns that the orbit of the earth around the sun results in a year, and the rotation of the Earth [with respect to the sun] results in a day. Next, the child is able to gain an understanding that it is the result of one complete rotation around the sun, along with the tilt of the Earth that causes the four seasons. The study then goes further into understanding the causes and circumstances for equinoxes and solstices, and for each season.



This next look shall be captivating to the child, as he learns of the many inventions for measuring and regulating time throughout history, seeing the connections between his astronomical studies, coming to what we now rely on: the clock, the calendar, and time zones. He will learn the history and

etymology of the days of the week and the months of the year, and participate in daily acknowledgements of the year and date. This is a good time to bring concrete representations to this abstract concept. Various calendars, timeline paper, tally marks, counting pebbles (or the like), and daily journal entries, amongst other visual representations can serve this purpose. Daily calendar activities show the days go by, giving them an idea of yesterday and tomorrow. It can also be shown using a piece of yarn or timeline paper to the child that the year is a cycle of time and that once December ends, January begins. The child can go on to make a personal timeline of his life, a family timeline, a family tree, and embark on the studies using the Timeline of Life material. The child will study specific time periods more in depth as he moves to the upper elementary classroom. Birthday celebrations are another fun way to bring understanding of the passage of time. The clock is presented through lessons of the hours, the half-hours, quarters, and minutes, and a

view of elapsed time. Parallel to these presentations, the child learns of the time zones and how the interaction of specific places and peoples gave reason for them to be invented. One can also give the child a visual sense of time through advancements in transportation, architecture, technology, and through studying great inventions and leaders.

For a young child, sense of time can be difficult but it is indeed the foundation of a well-developed historical perspective. It makes real to the child the humans of the past and allows for the recognition that they were people just like us in the most basic sense, living in the way humans do with the similar needs and desires. Let the child understand his place in the world by understanding what has come before him; in guiding his exploration of the past, he is actively creating his future. Let him measure time not merely with a clock or calendar, but with his experiences throughout his existence.