



## Curriculum Outline: A Parent's Guide Lower Elementary Level (6-9 Year Olds)



*Our Mission:  
At MCHD we nurture our children's natural desire to learn and empower them to become self-directed by providing a dynamic environment responsive to their individual needs and gifts.*



*Everything invented by man, physical or mental, is the fruit of someone's imagination. In the study of history and geography we are helpless without imagination, and when we propose to introduce the universe to the child, what but imagination can be of use to us?*

*Maria Montessori*



MCHD offers your child six years of an advanced and exciting elementary curriculum that touches the imagination, puts the world at reach, and fosters cooperation and inquiry in an interactive environment.

The two levels--Lower Elementary and Upper Elementary--are linked in many ways throughout the curriculum: for example, in the natural and sensitive progression from concrete to abstract in mathematics, and in the complete story of life on Earth from the Big Bang to in-depth studies of American History.

We create an environment in these important elementary years that fosters self-initiative while providing structure and sequence. Students love learning, care for each other, and learn their own strengths and areas for growth in a caring and joyful classroom. They become competent artists, careful researchers, excellent writers, and responsible citizens during their years here.

We hope everyone who joins us for Lower Elementary will seriously consider moving on into our amazing Upper Elementary classroom for grades four through six. The continuity provided between the two levels gives our students a seamless, high-level elementary school experience.



Jim Coleman, Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Professor of the Practice of Law, Duke Law School, says:

"The academic foundation our two children have gotten here at MCHD has been extraordinary: Among other things, our five year old--who is completing MCHD's first three-year cycle--is reading, doing multiplication, and is engrossed in the natural sciences. Our nine year old--who has progressed through MCHD's first two cycles and has just begun the third--is doing triple digit division, fractions, and factoring, and is reading J.R.R. Tolkien and Brian Jacques. Most wonderful is that they are both thoroughly engaged and enthusiastic about all of their work!

We credit this to MCHD's special and unfailing commitment throughout the curriculum and nine-year program to Maria Montessori's developmental philosophy, teaching methodology, and materials, all of which combine to assure within a formal structure that children learn and absorb all that their potential allows, and conversely, that they are not disabled from reaching that potential by standard expectations.

While this foundation is itself invaluable, undoubtedly we are also committed to the fact that MCHD envelops them throughout their development in a warm and loving community, which reinforces daily the essential values of care and respect for each other, the natural environment, and the world at large."

### Practical Life

The use of the hand is involved in all aspects of the school day. Skills are developed in cooking, sewing, carpentry, classroom care, animal and plant care, and personal hygiene. Close attention is given to developing habits of respect for each other and the work environment, for the world of nature, and for oneself. MCHD has a particularly strong practical life curriculum in all levels of its program.

### Art

Without question, our school has one of the most exceptional art programs available anywhere. Students at this level take a structured art class for half a morning once a week with our experienced art teacher in the specialized art room. Through carefully designed lessons, they study aspects of shape, line, form, color and texture, as well as techniques of famous artists. They work in small groups by age, moving through a continuum of studies that blends formal lessons and personal exploration. Each regular classroom also has an art table and supplies for free exploration during the day. Our students develop a strong sense of their ability to express themselves through art.

### Music

Students enjoy a formal study of music theory, rhythm, and composition with a weekly lesson and related practice. Each classroom also has a keyboard with headphones and rhythm instruments for daily use, and song is incorporated into the morning circle time.

### Physical Education

Lower Elementary students participate in a weekly off-site P.E. class which rotates over the year through a number of engaging areas: swimming, hiking, non-competitive games, yoga, and sports skills. They also enjoy 45 minutes of active outdoor play daily on the playground, which often involves team games as well as their usual creative play. A 3-day rustic camping trip in the mountains at the end of the year is an integral part of the P.E. and practical life curriculum.

### Spanish

All students participate in Spanish lessons and assignments every week in small groups by ability level. Lessons are given through a structured video program supported by written assignments and teacher oversight. This video series was adopted to allow all students to work at their own level and receive a strong program of review and incremental advancement. Teachers support vocabulary and conversation through daily use, and several cultural experiences are enjoyed during the year.

### The Role of Computers

At this level, computers are used in each classroom for the final stages of creative writing projects when students publish their stories. They are not used for instruction or Internet access.



### Special Needs/Tutoring

Although MCHD does not have trained staff for special needs, we work closely with outside agencies and therapists to accommodate tutoring into the class day either on or off site, and to adapt lessons and assignments to the special needs of the child whenever possible.

### Readiness for Upper Elementary

Students are assessed early during the third year for their readiness for Upper Elementary. It is sometimes appropriate for a student to remain in Lower Elementary for an extra year to gain an advantage in maturity or to complete the continuum of studies. Teachers and parents work closely together to determine if this is to be recommended.

Third year students participate in an extensive Imaginary Island study which brings together much of their previous studies in a creative application.

All three years participate each semester in an in-depth study of a continent. This study involves cultural experiences, reading, research, parent presentations, and practical life, hands-on projects.

### History

First year students begin with the study of measuring time: personal timelines, calendars, the year and its parts (days of the week and months of the year). They begin the study of the origin of the earth with creation myths and experiments, and explore the history of writing.

Second year students learn more about measuring time with the BC/AD timeline, the common era, and study of the clock. They continue the study of the origin of the earth with creation myths, story and experiments. They are introduced to the Long Black Timeline (an impressionistic lesson on the history of earth before the presence of humans), the Clock of Eras, and the Timeline of Life.

Third year students review much of the past history work as they begin the expanded study of the Timeline of Life and its eras. Third year students prepare a dramatized performance of the creation of the Earth for parents and classmates to demonstrate the history and companion science lessons they have internalized.

The study of the fundamental needs of humans is integrated into many of the cultural lessons as students learn the forces of cultural development through history and establish a personal link with these studi



### Biological Sciences

Our science curriculum at this level is based on the evolutionary development of life on Earth. In the first year, students review the five animal kingdoms, enjoy a detailed study of the external parts of animals and plants, begin independent research of animals and plants, study shells, leaves and tracks and the layers of the ocean. They participate in a number of science experiments to support these studies. They study the five senses of humans.

Second and third year students study the body functions of animals, nutrition, and the five kingdoms of animals in more detail. They continue with research and more detailed experiments. This work is integrally tied to the history curriculum and its timeline studies.

### Earth Studies

All ages participate in these studies together, with varying levels of assignments depending on ability. The Earth Studies include:

- Astronomy:* solar system, constellations, space nomenclature
- Composition of the Earth*
- Geology:* fundamentals of rocks and minerals, layers of the earth, atmosphere

Earth studies are also tied closely to the biology and history curricula as the big picture of the universe and the beginnings of life are studied together.



*The child of six-to-nine* is moving into an expanding world of the imagination--a world that is limitless, exciting, mysterious. The child is motivated by the big questions of life: Where did the earth come from? What is right and wrong? How big is the universe? The Montessori curriculum is shaped around this thriving imagination through its focus on giving the "big picture" before the individual facts: this is what is known as the Montessori Cosmic Education focus. Basic skills are developed alongside the more expansive studies, to prepare the child for a successful, life-long journey of discovery.

### The School Day

At this age, consistency of the day is still important. We preserve the basic components of a morning circle with songs, an extended work period with group and individual lessons, outdoor play, group story-reading, and end-of-day circle. During the course of the week, groups of students also may leave the classroom for other classes: art, Spanish, drama, P.E., and music.

### Student Choice/Teacher Direction

The overall goal is for students to be able to initiate good choices, seek help as needed,

and successfully complete work with a minimum of teacher intervention. This process evolves over the three-year cycle in the Lower Elementary classroom. Students have a weekly work plan prepared by the teacher, to which they may add free choices. At the end of the week, the teacher meets with each student individually to assess progress and make recommendations for the first work for the following week. Students who have uncompleted work must complete it before making free choices the following week. Over time, students learn to gauge the time needed for assignments, ask for the support they need from teachers or fellow students, and complete their work effectively. This guided self-empowerment helps to develop life-long learning habits.

### Evaluation, Testing and Grades

Grades are not given at this level, but all work is checked for accuracy and corrections are required for most work. Many classroom materials have self-correction built into them so students can strive for accuracy independently, which helps keep the learning cycle uninterrupted. Teachers play an active role in observing students at work to assist where needed, but refrain from giving external rewards as students learn to acknowledge their own level of success. Parent-teacher conferences are held twice during the year. Parents are asked to observe in the classroom twice a year and to review their child's work at the end of each week.

A nationally-normed achievement test (Metropolitan Achievement Test) is given to all 3rd-year students. Traditionally our school's scores have been very strong, averaging in the 85th percentile or above. Students spend some time a few weeks before the test learning the skills of test-taking: careful reading of the questions, selecting the most appropriate answer, following directions, and checking for errors.

While much of our curriculum overlaps the North Carolina Curriculum Standards and other traditional measures, it also goes far beyond it in almost all content areas. The individualized teaching method and the hands-on, concrete orientation of our lessons in the early years is not appropriately measured by traditional testing methods. We find that students in their third year are ready to practice the skills of test-taking by traditional methods as they begin to think more abstractly.

### Curriculum Overview

Lower Elementary studies build from the five Great Lessons of the Cosmic Curriculum: the story of the universe, the history of life, the fundamental needs of humans, the story of communication, and the story of number. Giving the students the "whole before the parts" in this manner allows them to fit their acquired knowledge into the framework of the "big picture", freeing the imagination and inspiring creative thought.

Traditional academic studies--mathematics, reading, grammar, geography, etc.--are individually adjusted to the student's level and sequenced for uninterrupted progression, providing appropriate activities for both the child who needs extra support or a slowly paced timetable, and the child who advances rapidly with independence. Thus, there is not a strict first, second, or third grade curriculum.

### Handwriting

Students have lessons and daily practice with manuscript writing until they are active readers, and progress to cursive writing as they develop their writing skills and speed, usually early in the second year.

### Spelling

Weekly dictation with the movable alphabet for phonetic word groups is complemented by the Word Wall program of sight word spelling and basic spelling rules. Students are able to use inventive spelling for creative pieces, journaling and personal expression, but are expected to spell correctly for most classroom work. A homophones homework program typically begins in grade three.

### Grammar

Knowledge of the functions of words is a key to effective writing, so the nine parts of speech are introduced early. Using distinct symbols, grade one learns the functions of the article, adjective, noun, verb and preposition, and grade two learns the adverb, pronoun, conjunction and interjection. Students learn to parse literature passages at varying levels of difficulty, and begin the study of sentence diagramming in grade three.



### Writing

We focus on writing as a critical means of engaging students in the learning process. Personal journals are a daily practice, creative writing is reinforced through a peer editing and publishing process, and independent research involves a full editing process by grade three.

The mechanics of writing (punctuation, paragraphs, main ideas, and sentence structures) are taught in isolation and then brought into the editing process as writing develops.

### Reading

Most students have begun to read by the time they enter Lower Elementary, although this is not a requirement for first grade. We continue with lessons on the mechanics of reading: sound recognition, blending, and building sight word vocabulary. Students read most of their completed work to a teacher as part of their assignments--this includes math problems, research, spelling, grammar, and handwriting practice.

Daily reading time is a treasured part of the school day. While we do not use a reading textbook, we do use a structured reading program which involves group discussion of books progressing in difficulty, regular teacher-assessment of skills and comprehension, and sustained silent reading.

Beginning in 2004, MCHD will add a Reading Specialist to the teaching staff to ensure that each child receives the support needed to become an active and engaged reader. Quarterly evaluations, one-on-one guidance, and supplemental instruction will complement the already-strong reading program.



### Mathematics

The study of mathematics is the most individualized part of our curriculum. Based on the Montessori concrete materials, the curriculum is sequenced in small, interdependent steps. Students are taught individually or in small groups according to readiness, and progress at their own rate through a selection of math booklets and exercises.

Over the three year period, the math sequence includes numerous activities in the following areas:

*Number-numeral association*

*Operations with various materials, moving from very concrete to abstract calculations (addition, multiplication subtraction, and division, in that order)*

*Memorization of math facts*

*Squaring and cubing of numbers*

*Multiples of numbers*

*Binomials and trinomials*

*Analysis of a square*

*Square of a decanomial*

*Division research*

Each year, all students also progress through a sequence in the study of money, culminating in the operation of a school store in the spring, which is open to the school community. This is an exciting application of their knowledge.

### Geometry

Beginning with solid geometric figures and progressing through plane figures to the study of construction with triangles, students receive a foundation in geometry that is very strong. They learn the fundamentals of congruency, similarity and equivalency using plane figures, they study kinds of triangles and quadrilaterals, and learn the vocabulary of shape, line and angle in detail.

### Geography

Students enter Lower Elementary with knowledge of the names of the continents and seas using the puzzle maps, and recognition of six or more land and water forms. We review and then build on that knowledge in Lower Elementary in year one to study 38 land and water forms, learning their vocabulary and definitions. The Sun and Earth and their movements are studied as well.

Year two focuses on political geography with research, review of land forms, study of the weather, composition of the Earth, and the nature of the elements.

Year three expands on these studies to study the atlas and almanac, the work of wind and water, land and water forms of the world, composition of the earth, and nature of the elements.