

the montessorian

S P R I N G 2 0 1 7



2 Places, Everyone

4 No Small Plans

6 Art Through the Ages

6 Artist Extraordinaire

7 NNM Graduates

7 Capital Campaign

Places, Everyone: The Anatomy of a Class Play

by JEFFREY LEVINE

By the time an audience gathers in the Little Theatre for a 6-9 or 9-12 class performance, several hundred student-hours have gone into creating the play they'll see. Here's how the process breaks down:

1 theme



Each play begins with a theme, drawn from an area of classroom study. Third-year students often make suggestions—which have included topics as varied as geometry, the Wild West, the age of dinosaurs and Wonders of the World—and lobby their classmates before it's put to a vote.

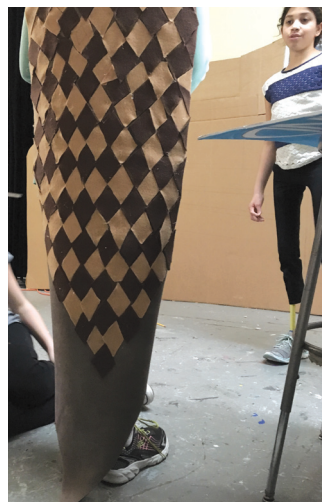


2 research and writing

Once the class selects a theme, the third-years research the subject and work with their teachers to write the script. Besides using narration and dialogue, students look for ways to convey information through blocking, music and dance. This nonverbal content helps bring the subject matter to life for the audience, but also deepens the class's own understanding of the material.



3 visuals



Students complement their script with sets, costumes, props and visual effects, in the process gaining experience in painting, sewing, printmaking, digital animation and other media. Sometimes a notably inventive stagecraft solution presents itself: for their play about national parks, students in Jesse's class salvaged tree branches cut down by a crew working outside the school building and used them to create a forest backdrop.



4 rehearsal

Productions are typically scheduled just two weeks apart, so each class needs to make every minute in the Little Theatre count. While some students are painting sets, constructing and collecting



props or making costumes, others are learning a dance or running a scene. Whatever they're doing, everyone must be ready to drop it at a moment's notice and jump on stage. Production consultant Rich Maisel writes original songs and provides accompaniment for musical numbers; dance instructor Dana Christy is on hand for choreography, unless the students choose to tackle it on their own.

5 invitations and programs

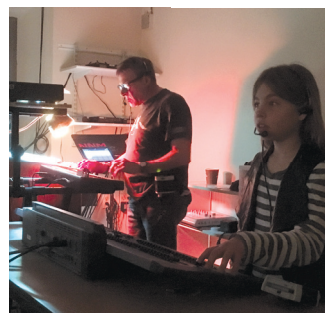


As the date of the show approaches, students reach out and invite other classes to attend. Invitations can take the form of simple handwritten notes, or may be as elaborate as scrolls to be regally unfurled and read aloud. Programs also reflect the character of the performance, often incorporating student-created art. Besides featuring bios for the cast, the playbill acknowledges parent volunteers and members of the staff who made the play possible.



6 tech and dress rehearsal

After six days in the Little Theatre, students are ready to run the full show: costumes, scene changes, songs and all. To assist them, older students, typically classroom alums, take care of lights, sound and any special audiovisual elements, like a short animated segment projected onscreen.



7 performance



The big day includes two stagings: a matinee for the school, then an encore performance at night for parents. A cast party awaits the actors after the evening show to celebrate a job well done.

8 strike

Although the shows are over there's still work left to do. The students must strike the scenery and clear the stage, as soon another class will take over the Little Theatre to mount a production of their own.



No Small Plans

by JEFFREY LEVINE

Starting with Presentation Night in 6-9, Near North students manage a succession of increasingly complex independent projects. The 12-14 Independent Study is the culmination of this process: spanning nearly four months, IS requires each student to select an area of interest, research it, find an adult mentor and learn a new skill from the ground up.

“Maria Montessori talks about big work, so the bigger in scale the better and more meaningful for the students,” Jr. High Director Chris Ambroso says. “If you think of all the skills that they’re practicing—time management, organization, executive function, communicating with adults who are experts in their field—it’s a great opportunity for the students to take on a large project, but one based entirely on their own interests.”

Some students dive deeper into topics they’re already familiar with, Mr. Ambroso says, while others get out of their comfort zone and learn something completely new. And, as in real life, a seemingly straightforward process may turn out to be much more circuitous, and richer.

“I always like it when students run into speed bumps or roadblocks, since it’s a good part of the process,” Mr. Ambroso says. “It speaks to the larger need to accept that things don’t always go as planned. Are you flexible enough, nimble enough, positive enough to work your way around these problems?”

Phoebe Kamar American Sign Language

8TH GRADE · MS. BROZ

We may think of language as a sequence of sounds or letters forming words, but that’s not always the case. Phoebe Kamar is experiencing this firsthand as she learns American Sign Language for her IS project.

“Signing is interpreted, not translated,” Phoebe says. “It’s not a version of English. Some words don’t have a sign, so you spell them out. You also use your facial expressions to explain what you’re saying in sign language, even something as simple as raising your eyebrows. To convey emotion you might sign faster, and your facial expressions would be different.”

Starting with the alphabet and basic signs, Phoebe has slowly built her vocabulary to the point where she can sign with her classmate Olivia Freudman. They’ve been able to teach one another, and she likes the idea that they’re working on it together.



Although Independent Study concludes at the end of the school year, Phoebe plans to continue developing her fluency: “I’d like to keep learning throughout my life so one day I can communicate with someone who has ASL as their first language.”

Alan Menninger Architecture

7TH GRADE · MS. BROZ

For Alan Menninger, a longtime love of Legos and Minecraft developed naturally into an interest in architecture.

This year Alan and his IS mentor, architect and NNM parent Wayne Zuschlag, found a real site—an empty triangle-shaped lot near Alan’s house—to use for the hypothetical house they’re designing together. Although there’s no budget, Alan relishes the challenge of working within the constraints of Chicago zoning and building codes while gradually refining his vision via brainstorming, scale drawing and finally 3D modeling.

“First we figured out what we wanted inside the building and then we figured out the height and shape,” Alan explains. “When I looked at the plot I thought it should be a triangle, but my mentor said it could be a circle or a square or anything else. I wanted a lawn for dogs, so we put it on the roof to maximize space.”



In addition to the rooftop dog run, Alan's design includes a bedroom overlooking a park, a Ping-Pong room with adjoining balcony and—why not?—a full-size two-story basketball court.

Carolina Mohr

Boxing

8TH GRADE • MS. CASTIGLIONE AND MR. CLEMMONS

When she decided to take up boxing for her Independent Study, Carolina Mohr was not only following in family footsteps—both her father and uncle spent time in the ring—but also forging her own path. "Boxing is a sport that men play, and while there are famous women boxers, they're not as famous," Carolina says. "I thought that I would box because as a girl I wanted to break the boundaries."

Starting with the basics—stance, footwork, offensive and defensive moves—Carolina is learning to string these elements together in real time to create a flow, a process she compares to her previous experience studying ballet.



"If you look past the brutality of the sport, it requires a lot of grace, even though the point of the game is to punch someone."

Citing the examples of Joe Louis and Muhammad Ali, who used their fame to speak out on issues of race and equality, Carolina sees boxing both as emblematic of American culture and as an act of defiance. "Boxers have influenced the world in so many ways beyond boxing, and it's opened my mind to history."

Ben Corral

Parkour

8TH GRADE • MR. MADGIAK



Ben Corral describes parkour, the subject of his IS project, as extreme gymnastics in an urban setting.

A relatively new sport originating in France, parkour places participants in an obstacle course, whether on city streets or in a specialized gym, and asks them to get from one point to another in the most efficient and creative way they can. It's up to the individual to improvise their own path—climbing, swinging, vaulting and otherwise turning their surroundings into their means of propulsion.

For traceurs, as parkour enthusiasts are known, the challenges are both physical and mental.

"I get nervous when I do it," Ben says. "I'm not the most athletic kid and I have a fear of heights, and we have to climb walls and jump off of them. It's nerve-wracking. Sometimes I'll just fall off a wall and think I can't do it. Then I'll think through it more and try again."

Ben has discovered that practicing parkour has changed the way he views his environment. He says he now walks around, sees objects and thinks to himself, "Yeah, I could vault that!"

Art Through the Ages

by JEFFREY LEVINE

Students learning about geology in one 6-9 class use watercolors to visually represent glaciation. A 9-12er studying Jackson Pollock sets up tarps before recreating the process of drip painting. From diagrams of ancient ruins in history reports to whimsical illustrations dotting the margins of math papers, the arts are integrated into all aspects of the Near North curriculum.

“Art is a part of your education,” Elementary Director Anne Matern says. “It’s a way to enhance your work and to learn differently. It’s another way to explore and display your understanding.”

The fundamentals of art are introduced to students in their toddler and 3-6 classrooms, helping them build a repertoire of techniques and skills. By the time they arrive in 6-9, students have the freedom to investigate ceramics in open studio, which functions as an extension of the classroom where children can pursue their own creative interests.

The 9-12 fine arts electives present an important opportunity, allowing students to build on capabilities they already possess but also to explore art forms they may never have tried. Students rotate through a variety of disciplines, including painting, drawing

and calligraphy, as well as electronic media like musical composition using GarageBand and digital video production.



The arts are also a profound way to collaborate and connect with others. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Artessori, the student-parent arts program. Begun as a supplement to classroom art before a formal arts curriculum was introduced, Artessori has since evolved into a way to further broaden students’ exposure to artistic approaches and techniques.

Each class works under the guidance of parent-artists—some nationally recognized, some developing their skills alongside the students. The artists spend several weeks together in the classroom conceiving and executing their pieces, which are then hung for display in the school’s main hallway. Later the works are moved to a gallery space for a silent auction. Following this year’s event, held at the gallery owned by parents Kavi Gupta and Jessica Moss, the Artessori pieces were re-installed one last time at the homes of the evening’s lucky bidders.



Get to Know Sue Rodwan, Art Instructor



If your shelves and walls at home are covered with ceramics, fairy gardens and glitter art, chances are you have art instructor Sue Rodwan to thank.

Sue, who has been at Near North since 1995, holds afterschool ceramics classes three days a week and Artists’ Workshop twice a week. She also teaches art to students in the 9-12 classes and walks stay-uppers to the Farmessori.

Her art room is full of all sorts of things to get a young artist’s mind working—donated bags of ribbon and fabric, foam, cardboard tubes, sticks collected on trips to the Michigan woods, corks, tiles. “We just use everything,” Sue says. When a load of scrap wood turned up, students made birdhouses, which taught them how to build structures that will support weight.

Outside of Near North, Sue is a painter. “I have a little frame shop and workshop in a three-flat in Bridgeport.” After earning a Bachelor’s of Fine Arts from Michigan State and a teaching certificate from the University of Michigan, she relocated to Chicago in 1981. “My favorite place is the Art Institute,” she says. “It’s one of the reasons I moved here from Ann Arbor.” Her two sons, Eric, 33, and Theo, 30, are Near North alumni. Sue says that her favorite artists are the Impressionists; Theo was named after Vincent van Gogh’s brother.

Sue’s biggest challenge at Near North: “Telling the kids it’s carpool time. They will not leave. That’s the hardest thing, to get them out of the art room.”

—Brad Dorfman

NNM Graduates on Their Own Paths



When she graduates from DePaul University law school this spring, **Alexandra Lipman ('01)** will already have her sights set on a new challenge: running for alderman of Chicago's 44th Ward, which covers most of Lakeview, including Wrigleyville, Boystown and the Southport Corridor.

"I've always wanted to be in politics," she says. "I have the energy and time, and I bring new blood. I can better represent the people that vote." She plans to campaign on improving safety, lowering taxes, and raising the minimum wage. Alex credits Near North for the no-fear-of-failure attitude that it takes to be a 30-year-old political rookie who'll likely face incumbent Tom Tunney, in office since 2003.

"Montessori fosters the belief that you need to figure out what makes you get up in the morning and figure out a way to do just that," she says. Alex is currently serving as one of two community representatives on the local school council at Agassiz Elementary in the 44th Ward; aldermanic elections will be held in February 2019. —*Evelyn Lauer*

"Find joy!" That's what **Skyler Schrempp ('97)** says, and she heeds these words every day. The 33-year-old theater artist works as

an actor and runs the Viola Project, a nonprofit where girls from diverse backgrounds find self-expression and empowerment by performing Shakespeare.

Her own sense of joy in performance came alive at Near North, as her dance teacher Pam Marvel would bring beautiful dresses to class so students could "twirl around in something that made us feel good."

Skyler went to Latin for high school and afterward to Hampshire College in Massachusetts, which she says echoes much of the Montessori philosophy: there are no grades or required courses, and the curriculum is rooted in social justice. She studied performance and costume design, then moved to Brooklyn and worked in film. It was the School at Steppenwolf that eventually brought Skyler back to Chicago, and



there, she says, she learned to be herself and allow that to guide her career. She now has plans to get a master's degree at the Vermont College of Fine Arts in writing for children and young adults.

"Find your creative community," she says. "Do the work; be kind to yourself and others: that's the mission." —*Nawal Qarooni Casiano*

Next Steps to Building Our Future

by **DIANE COHEN**

Last December we shared the exciting news that our school was growing with the acquisition of the lot at 1217 N. Bosworth, across the street from the Big Gym. In addition to more square footage, this land presents a unique opportunity to position our school and, more importantly, our students for long-term success. Great potential exists for us to enhance the impact of our education experience; these investments bring with them additional costs.

At the beginning of the year we engaged CCS Fundraising to assist us with a capital campaign planning study in order to guide future fundraising efforts. The study process included holding conversations with more than 75 members of our extended community, as well as conducting two parent focus groups to provide greater context before moving forward. In reviewing input, the following trends emerged:

- Reflecting community feedback gathered during our most recent strategic planning process, over 75% of interviewees felt very positive about the prospect of using the lot for Farmessori,

new facilities and additional parking. Further, 75% of respondents identified investing in STEAM as a compelling priority.

- Members of our community emphatically believe that Near North has the capacity to be successful with a campaign, and that now is the right time to move forward.
- Almost everyone interviewed expressed a strong willingness to be involved with the campaign as volunteers, advocates, philanthropic contributors or some combination of these. Ninety-eight percent of interviewees said they would consider making a gift to the campaign.

Based on these findings, CCS recommended that Near North immediately transition into the active planning phase of a major capital campaign, which the Board of Directors approved at their March meeting. This phase began in April and will continue through midsummer. We can't wait to share all the progress we've made with your support in the fall.

Moving Up, Moving On

This spring, NNM eighth-graders gained acceptance to the following high schools. Most students were accepted to more than one school, giving them the opportunity to make a choice.

Alcott College Prep

Amundsen International
Baccalaureate

Beacon Academy

British International School
of Chicago

Chicago Academy for the Arts

Chicago High School for the Arts

DePaul College Prep

Francis W. Parker School

GEMS World Academy

George Westinghouse College Prep

Jones College Prep

Jones College Prep CTE
Honors Program

Lane Tech College Prep

Latin School of Chicago

Lincoln Park International
Baccalaureate & Double Honors

Loyola Academy

Lycée Français de Chicago

Northside College Prep

Ogden International Baccalaureate

Senn International Baccalaureate
& Performing Arts

St. Ignatius College Prep

University of Chicago
Laboratory School

Von Steuben Metropolitan
Science Center

Walter Payton College Prep

Whitney Young High School