



## *Middle School Developments*

*November, 2023*

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Welcome to our monthly Middle School newsletter, written by our Middle School Program Director Peter Oviatt. We'll cover developments with our new program and tie them to the theory and science behind Montessori education for adolescents. You'll get the practical and the pedagogical.

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## Housekeeping

This will be a monthly email, at least until next summer, when we'll switch to a more interactive format.

In one form or another, you all have expressed interest in our Middle School. You might be a prospective parent, or have a newly enrolled child. Maybe your child attends our Woodstock Campus, and you're eager to volunteer on our farm. All are welcome!

Please [email me personally](#) if you don't want to be on this list, or if you know of others who want to join.

Included below is a digital version of our admissions folder, in case you need it or want to share it with a friend.

[Admissions Folder](#)

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## Calendar

- **Dec 2:** Middle School Campus Tour
- **Jan 13:** Middle School Campus Tour
- **Jan 27:** Middle School Campus Tour
- **Feb 10:** Middle School Campus Tour

[Learn More & Schedule Your Tour](#)

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## New Hire!

This newsletter features a topic close to my heart: **music!**

I am very pleased to announce Sam Hall, our Music and Digital Media Guide. Sam wrote a brief bio for this newsletter:



Sam Hall (They/He) is a jack of all musical trades, from songwriting and composition, to recording and mixing, to releasing and promotional content. However their heart lies in creative education, hence you can find them teaching guitar and drum lessons at Ethos Music Center, as well as running a songwriting and production class for SUN Schools. They're overjoyed at the opportunity to guide Sunstone students through a comprehensive approach to the creative process using digital media next school year. In particular, Sam looks forward to jointly cultivating a community among students that practices collaboration, experimentation, and acceptance with the goal of learning how to make some very cool art. When Sam isn't working, you'll find them playing with their band Terra Moya, bingeing the X-Files, or spending time with their family. They live in North Portland with their roommates, a shared cat named Juniper, and many plants.

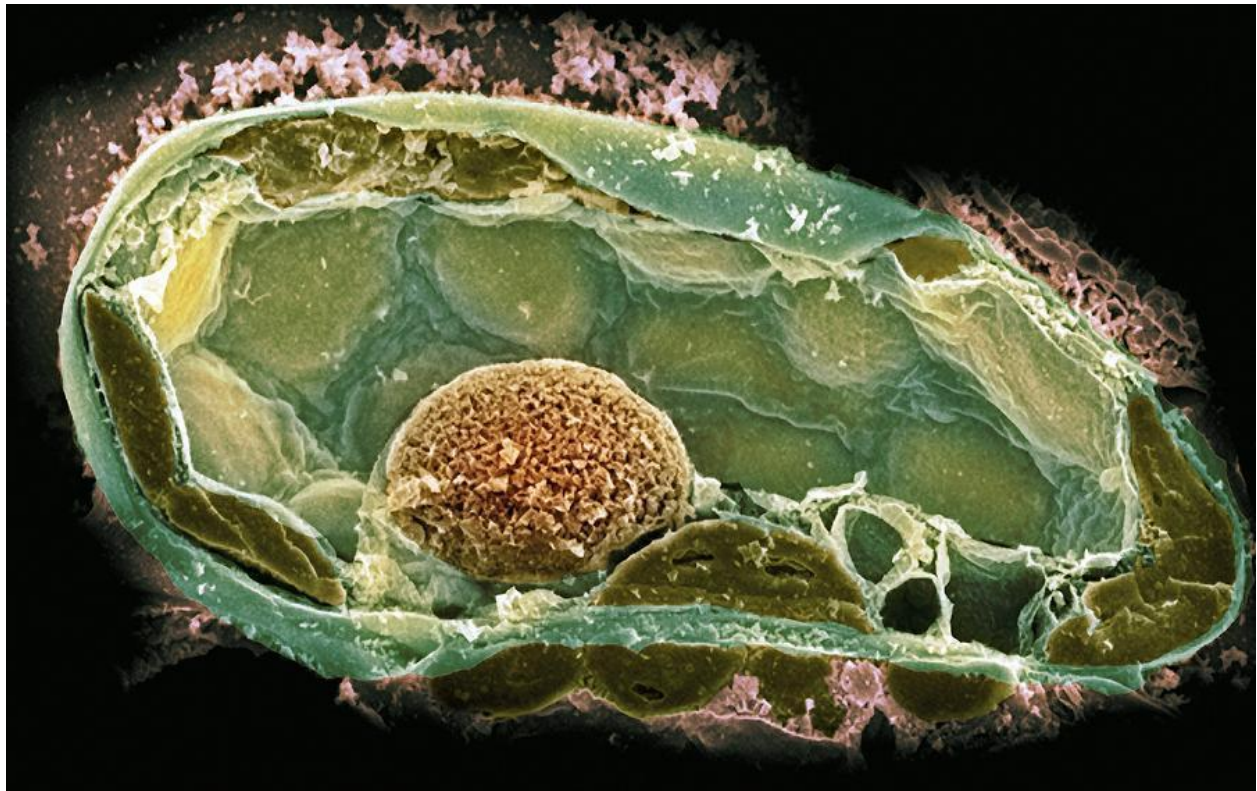
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# Music & Digital Media Program

Now that you know a bit about Sam, it's time to learn about our Music & Digital Media program: What will it look like? How will it fit into our educational programming? Following Montessori philosophy, it will look different for each student. Some may choose to take advantage of Sam's experience writing and recording songs. Others will engage with his knowledge in photography or videography. All will benefit from his experience helping students use these artforms to express themselves, to explore and better understand their feelings. Sam's passion for deploying the arts to help adolescents build emotional intelligence—the ability to understand and positively use emotion—makes us most excited to have him join our team.

Personally, I am thrilled for how this program will mix with other academic programming. For instance, microbiology!

Imagine: A 12-year-old uses a microscope to look at the cell structure of algae and vascular plants from our land, and then uploads these images to a computer in our digital media lab. Using photography software to tweak organelles, this student can see how gradual mutations led to cell evolution. Maybe they'll make cool images to hang in our gallery!



Imagine again: Another student looks at water from our pond under a microscope, and then uploads video clips of an entire ecology of microbes, wagging their flagella and swimming every which way. Could we put music to this scene? Might we write out a microbe drama?



The intersection of microbiology and the arts is just one of many ways to spark the curiosity and enthusiasm of middle schoolers— there's also creative cartography of our new campus, the list goes on...

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## Integrative Curriculum

Interest in transdisciplinary work is not mine alone (although, as a cultural anthropologist who collaborated with biologists, I particularly love this stuff!). Maria Montessori wrote extensively about the need to remove disciplinary silos so adolescents can be awed, and fall in love with the world as it is, not as it has been divided and specialized. An integrated, or cross-disciplinary approach to education is widely heralded as an excellent way to engage students, and to prepare them for the challenges that they will face as adults in the mid 21st century (I know, what a thought!).

A Review Article on the History and Benefits of Integrative Curriculum

# Educational Syllabus

Creativity and integrated academics are critical components of what Maria Montessori called The Educational Syllabus.

The Educational Syllabus maps out the cognitive, social and emotional needs of the adolescent. It is a system of three categories: an educational path, so to say, toward intellectual capacity, social adaptability and overall maturity. Montessori lists the categories in order of importance:

- 1) Self-Expression (language, music, visual arts, crafts, movement, sports)
- 2) Communication (math, language, ethics/morality)
- 3) Preparation for Adult Life (the sciences and humanities)

Why put self expression first? Montessori called adolescents “social newborns.” Current work in developmental psychology (see below) backs up Montessori’s observation that adolescence, the transition from childhood to adulthood, is largely a process of forming a new identity. To be sure, this process is difficult and redundant, and relies heavily on experimenting with new selves. For some this experimentation may veer toward the artistic; for others it may be more physical. As adults, we cannot know how each adolescent will need to experiment and express themselves. We thus provide them with diverse outlets: music, photography, literature, sports, woodworking, dance, and so on.

Self-expression is a precursor to the other categories that Montessori identified: An adolescent needs grounding in who they are (and who they are becoming) before they can confidently and effectively communicate and work within their society, which positions them to meaningfully learn about the world in all of its messy and complex beauty.

I will describe the other two categories in the Educational Syllabus (Communication and Preparation for Adult Life), with a more complete description of Self-Expression, in a future newsletter.

[A Resource on Identity Development During Adolescence](#)

## Stay Tuned!

Thanks for reading. Stay tuned for next month's newsletter, which will include more Middle School developments and Montessori pedagogy for adolescents.

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A graphic featuring the Instagram logo, which is a camera outline, set against a background of vertical stripes in orange, white, red, purple, and blue.

Follow us on Instagram!

A graphic featuring a white play button icon centered on a red-to-pink gradient background.

Watch us on YouTube

A graphic featuring two overlapping circles, one blue on the left and one pink on the right.

View us on Flickr

# Like us on Facebook!



## Our Vision:

Our vision is a community of intellectually curious, independent, and compassionate lifelong learners.

## Our Mission:

Sunstone Montessori School develops the whole child by providing an academically strong, emotionally nurturing and, socially supportive environment in accordance with AMI guidelines for Montessori education.

## Commitment to Diversity:

Sunstone Montessori School welcomes students and staff of any race, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, color, nationality and ethnicity, religion, and family constellation, to all programs and activities at the school. The school does not discriminate in its educational hiring, admission, or school-administered policies. It is our goal that Sunstone Montessori School reflects the rich diversity of our community, including varied cultures, economic status, and individual or special educational needs.

[www.sunstonemontessori.org](http://www.sunstonemontessori.org)

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