

Upper Elementary Homework

Why Homework?

Both a century of Montessori experience and the last thirty years of educational research agree (1) that people learn best when they are learning something that personally interests them and (2) that having some sense of control over one's learning is a prerequisite of personal interest. Moreover, coercing someone to "learn" something in which they have no personal interest may have, while it may seem to work in the short term, can have unintended consequences in the long term. The negative emotion that accompanies being coerced to "learn" is likely to remain permanently attached to the subject of the "learning" and may obstruct future attempts to learn that subject. Moreover, repeated experiences of this sort typically lead to passivity in the learner and frequently to the development of a negative self-image with regard to one's ability and fitness to learn a broad range of subjects and skills. These are among the main reasons why Montessorians typically do not give assignments and, in particular, why we do not assign traditional homework.

On the other hand, the freedom to choose one's work and to go as deeply as possible into a few subjects means that the learner may need to spend more time learning in order to get a well-rounded education. The school day is short, and there is simply not time for most children to cover all the bases during the school day. For this reason, elementary guides depend on their parent partners to provide at home a rich learning environment where the child can build on the work they began at school. Without this, the child's development may seem delayed, and the education may seem spotty or shallow.

In the absence of traditional homework assignments, it may seem that the parents of Montessori students are not as directly involved in their children's homework as parents of traditionally educated children. On the contrary, Montessori children have more work to do at home than anyone, and their parents must be highly involved and highly resourceful. It's hard work, but good work – just like guiding an elementary class.

In summary:

Homework is **not optional** for Montessori students.

The school day is **too short** for learning to end there.

The absence of screens and social phone calling on school nights creates the **time** for homework.

Assignments are not very effective and may be harmful.

The homework list, to which the child and parent may add similar activities, offers the important element of **choice**.

What Homework?

If homework is not assigned reading, worksheets, and projects with deadlines, what is it? What we are looking for are many opportunities for the children to both consolidate and expand the

knowledge they are working with in the classroom. Inevitably, these real world experiences will also spark new questions and other interests which the child will bring back to the classroom, enriching both their own classroom work and that of the other children. We want to foster this sort of “virtuous feedback loop” between school and home to the benefit of both and to the great benefit of the child.

For learning to be assimilated and integrated, it must be repeated in another setting. It must go from school to home and be recalled, revisited, repeated. Recalling, revisiting, and repeating in the same setting is not as effective.

We are looking not for worksheets and assignments but for *learning as a way of life*, both at home and at school. And, of the two, the home will ultimately have a far greater influence on the child’s future way of life than will the school.

In summary:

Things begun or done at school should be **recalled, revisited and repeated**.

The homework idea list, to which the child and parent may add similar activities, offers the important element of **choice**.

Montessori homework seeks to inculcate **learning as a way of life**.

Guidelines for Home Work

In order to better support learning as a way of life, we are providing the following guidelines for the child’s work at home.

1. The child should spend at least **three hours per day** on Montessori homework. Three hours a day of homework allows the child to spend time each day on a **wide variety of activities**: physical exercise, service, intellectual activity, household responsibilities, the arts, etc.
2. At least 30 minutes of that time must be spent **reading** from books on the Terra/Nova Reading List. Parents of older readers who exhaust the Terra/Nova Reading List may ask the school for a copy of the Adolescent Community reading list.

Montessori Home Work Ideas

Creative Arts / Construction

- Knit, crochet, spin, weave, sew, quilt, hook rugs, embroider, tie-dye, beadwork, paint, sculpt.
- Make pottery at Clay Ways Studio, 459-6445. <http://www.clayways.com/kidsclasses.html>
- Learn new art projects by reading in books or taking an art class. Prepare an art project to teach to the class in the fall.
- Take weaving classes at Hill Country Weavers.
- Get a good book on tying knots and learn as many knots as you can.
- Work with a knowledgeable adult to build a fence, a doghouse, a bike ramp, a bookcase, a bench, etc.
- Find an adult who has a lot of tools and likes to build or repair things. Learn the names of all the tools the adult has. Learn to write the names as well as say them. Learn what each tool is used for.
- Learn photography – how to take a really good picture.
- Learn how to operate a video camera. Make your own movies. Document a week in the life of your family using a cam-corder or camera. Write a paragraph about each family member and what they will be doing for the summer. Mail the package to your grandparents or some other relative or friend who would like to receive the update.
- Practice your musical instrument or learn new songs to sing. If possible, take private music lessons on your musical instrument.
- Learn a new song to teach the class. Bring a copy of the words when you teach it to us.
- Learn to dance.
- Get a copy of *Curve Stitching* by Jon Millington and work your way from front to back. You'll be ready to invent your own curve stitching designs next year!
- Visit one of the art museums in town. Visit the gift shop after you've toured the museum. Buy postcards of your favorite works, and try to copy them at home with colored pencils or watercolors.
- Take art classes at Laguna Gloria, Daugherty Art Center, UT Informal Classes, etc.
- Go to symphony concerts and concerts of folk music from other countries. Save rock concerts for when you are much older.

Language / Words / Literature

- Schedule a weekly trip to the public library. Plan to spend at least an hour looking through books, looking up things in the catalog, reading magazines, etc.
- Take regular trips to bookstores. Make a list of all the good bookstores in town and try to visit each one at least once so you can learn what sorts of book each store offers.
- Read books from the Terra/Nova Reading List. Keep a list of the books and the number of pages you read in each.
- Consider joining a summer reading program at the public library.
- Write a description of a friend, a friend's house, a pet, a favorite place, a vacation spot, etc.
- Interview your family and relatives. Start a family newsletter.
- Enter an essay, story, or poetry contest. Submit your work to magazines that publish student work.
- Practice telling stories. At the library, look for books of folktales from around the world. Pick a few to learn by heart. Plan to tell them to us on the fall camping trip.

- Find a newspaper article you want to read and discuss with your family. Set aside a specific time and place for the discussion.
- Have a family reading time. Everybody reads whatever they want in the same room. Start small: perhaps for 15 minutes after dinner. Gradually increase the time.
- Have a read-aloud time. One person could read while the others clean up from dinner or do some other simple task. Family members take turns being the reader.
- At the bookstore, look for books of crossword puzzles, anagrams, and other word games. Keep a book of word puzzles in the car to work on whenever you are riding around.
- Play great board games such as Scrabble, UpWords (John's favorite), Boggle, or Word Thief.
- Write with your family. Start a family journal. In the journal, keep lists of things to do around the house, descriptions of special events such as hosting houseguests, notes about phone calls to family friends and relatives, anything you want to record from your everyday life. See Peter Stillman's book *Families Writing* for more ideas and inspiration.
- Listen to books on tape while driving around on errands or on vacation. Some places to borrow, rent, or buy books on tape: Austin Public Library (main branch, especially), Half-Price Books, major bookstores
- Read and write poetry. Memorize a poem a week.
- Choose a story to practice reading aloud. Practice the pronunciations of all the words. Try giving each character a different voice when you read. Try to use your voice to make the story more interesting to your audience.
- Put on some calming music (Bach, Mozart, Satie, Gregorian chant are nice) and practice making the most beautiful cursive or italic letters you can.
- Instead of phoning, write letters to your friends and relatives. Try starting a round robin letter to your friends or relatives. First, make up a list of 3 – 5 people and their addresses; put your name and address last on the list. Write a letter to the first person on the list, and enclose a copy of the list of addresses. The person you wrote to writes a letter and sends it, your original letter, and the list of addresses to the next person on the list, and so forth. Eventually, all the letters will come back to you!
- Write a review of a book you read or a movie you saw. Tell the basic idea of the book or movie and what you liked and didn't like about it. What did the author do well? What did they not do so well?
- Learn to touch type (that is, type without looking at the keys or your fingers).

Math / Numbers / Geometry

- Comparison shopping: figuring price per pound, calling various stores, etc. When you shop at the grocery store, take along a pad and pencil; keep a running total of the cost of items you buy. Check your answer against the cash register receipt you get when you pay for your items.
- Read *The Number Devil* by H. M. Enzensberger. This an especially good book for people who have not yet learned to love math, but those who have will enjoy the book, too. Every Upper El student should read this book.
- Keep statistics. Graph when you go to bed, how many pages you read each day, how far you walk each day, how many ounces of water you drink per day, how often you have friends over, how long it takes you to eat breakfast, how many meters per day you swim, how fast you can jog around the block, how many multiplication facts you can do in a minute, etc.
- Measure things around the house and calculate their surface area and volume. Take trips to the park, etc., to measure things there.
- Help with the family budget. Record the family expenditures for a week. Help your parents write the checks when they pay the bills (they'll have to sign the checks).

- Play good “thinking” games such as chess and go. Learn how to notate chess games. Learn to play chess by mail with your friends (that’s where you mail your moves back and forth on post cards or in letters).
- Make up math problems for yourself to work. Consider making a “Math Workout” for yourself once a week.
- Work on memorizing all your multiplication, division, addition, and subtraction facts, if you haven’t already done so. Once you’ve mastered your math facts, work on speed.

Nature / Plants / Animals

- Check out the many Austin area summer camps at http://news8austin.com/content/living/summer_camp_guide/
- Check out the camps and courses offered by Terry Cortes-Vega at her MasterSchool in Manor. 512-272-9910, <http://masterschoolkids.com/index.htm>
- Whenever you travel to a new city, visit the local zoo and aquarium or the local natural history museum.
- Check out the camps and activities sponsored by the Austin Zoo, 288-1490. <http://www.austinzoo.org/>
- Before you travel to another part of the country or to a different country, read about the biomes there. Read about their climate, animals, and plants. While you’re there, look for things you read about.
- Go camping with your family or friends.
- Learn more about nutrition. Visit <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/pyramids.html> to learn about the Harvard Food Pyramid. For a week, keep a journal of what you eat. See if you are in balance with the Harvard Food Pyramid. Pick one or two things you can do to start moving your diet closer to the recommendations of the pyramid.
- Make a botany map of your back yard. Place each plant in its place on the map and label each plant with its common name and scientific name. (You might need some help from a library book or a knowledgeable adult gardener.)
- Go berry picking on a local farm such as Sweet Berry Farm (www.sweetberryfarm.com)

History / Geography

- Help plan the family vacation. Research the landmarks, geography, culture, special attractions of the area you’ll be visiting. Map out the route you’ll take.
- Make a map of your house and gardens. Make a detailed map of your room.
- Study world religions. Pick a religion you don’t know much about. Read about it in books you check out from the public library. See if you can find a local group that practices that religion. Plan with your parents to visit their church, temple, synagogue, mosque, or other place of worship. Good religions to start with: Baha’i, Buddhism, Christianity (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant), Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Unitarianism.
- Check out the classes and events at the Asian American Cultural Center to learn more about Asian languages and cultures. (www.asianamericancenter.com, 336-5069)
- Visit the Texas History Museum and the Texas Memorial Museum on the UT campus.
- The website at <http://www.kryo.com/dinek/histlink.htm> links to scores of other sites on ancient civilizations.
- Pick a continent you’d like to know more about. (If you can’t decide, work on Europe first.) Using an atlas, make flash cards of all the countries in that continent. On one side of the card

have the country's name; on the other side, the country's capitol city. Memorize all the countries and capitols in that continent, then do the same for another continent.

- Interview someone from another country. Ask them about their country's history, landmarks, cities, agriculture, industries, religions, festivals, form of government, famous scientists, famous artists and writers, etc. Ask them for permission to tape the interview. From the tape, make notes. From the notes, write a summary of what you learned about the person's country.

Science

- Check out Family Science Nights at Austin Nature and Science Center.
- Check out the astronomy programs at Wild Basin Preserve or Canyon of the Eagles Lodge. These are sponsored by the Austin Astronomical Society (www.austinastro.org), and the AAS keeps a calendar of events on their website.
- At the library, look through the children's books on science. Choose one that has experiments you can do at home, such as the books by Janice Van Cleave. Try some experiments at home with your parents.
- Consider the books and kits available from Terrific Science (www.tsbkm.com/).
- Try some of the activities from the San Francisco Exploratorium website: www.exploratorium.edu/explore/handson.html The Exploratorium is John's favorite science museum – and he's been to a lot of science museums!
- Explore the *Life on Earth* site at the University of California – Berkeley. <http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/exhibits/historyoflife.php> This is pretty advanced stuff, but, boy, is it cool!

Sports / Exercise

- Play on a team. Practice a sport or physical skill.
- Hiking, biking, skating, swimming, walking, caving, climbing, canoeing, snorkeling, running, gymnastics, basketball.
- Spend as much time outdoors as possible.
- Work on developing the habit of drinking enough water each day. To find the minimum amount of water your body needs to avoid dehydration, use the following formula:

$$(\text{your body weight in pounds} \div 10) \times 2 = \text{minimum ounces of water you need each day}$$
 You'll need to drink more than that if you are exercising in the heat.
- Download a free book of cooperative games at <http://freechild.org/gamesguide.pdf> . Try these with your friends.
- Check out the rock climbing at Full Court Fitness Center or elsewhere.
- Go canoeing on Town Lake. (You can rent canoes.)
- Check out activities sponsored by Austin Nature and Science Center: caving, canoeing, rock climbing, etc.
- Learn to skate at Sk8 School at Austin Recreation Center, 554-4034, www.motorblade.com

Community Service / Activism

- Keep a scrapbook of newspaper articles on issues you care about in the community or world. Write letters to elected officials (congresspersons, senators, the President, city councilors, etc.) expressing your opinions about issues you've read about.
- Participate in an environmental clean up. This might be as simple as going to the park with your family or friends and filling up a big trash bag with all the trash you can pick up. Save recyclable bottles and plastic in a separate bag to recycle later.

- Help younger children learn to do something they want to do.
- Visit an elder. Look for opportunities to assist the elderly. Some children call out bingo at a retirement home every other week.
- Volunteer at a local animal shelter or zoo.
- Volunteer at Meals on Wheels.
- Offer to help neighbors with pet sitting, picking up their newspaper when they're out of town, etc.

Household Service

- Help out more with the household chores since you have more time at home. Learn to do some new things such as washing clothes, ironing, folding laundry, polishing furniture, vacuuming, mowing the lawn (if your parents agree). Work alongside another family member whenever possible.
- Cook together with your family. It can be more fun than cooking by yourself.
- Be responsible for one or two meals per week. Plan the menu with your parent(s). Make a shopping list. Do the shopping. Cook the meal with your parent(s). Try not to use a microwave oven when you cook!