



## **MONTESSORI MESSAGES FROM E1**

At the very beginning of every school year, the children receive “The Great Lessons,” this can be very confusing to both children and parents as they are not really lessons at all. Below are answers to questions you and your child may have been thinking about.

### **WHAT ARE THE GREAT LESSONS?**

The *Great Lessons* are the cornerstone for the entire Montessori curriculum. Throughout time people have asked themselves the same questions, “How did the universe start?” “Where did life come from?” “Where did the first humans come from?” These great questions about humanity have resonated in the minds of people throughout time. The *Great Lessons* attempt to aid in answering those questions. The *Great Lessons* are divided up into five different areas, with some having more than one story. The *Great Lessons* are: *The Story of the Universe*, *The Coming of Life to Earth*, *The Coming of Human Beings to Earth*, *The Story of Language*, and *The Story of Mathematics*.

### **WHY DID THE GREAT LESSONS START?**

There has always been a need in humanity to answer the big questions people had been asking themselves about the universe. Being a doctor and devout Catholic, Montessori spent a lot of time thinking about those big questions. She did not want these great stories to adhere to any one particular religious view on the creation of the universe. In fact, the *Great Lessons* are comparable to many religious and theorists’ views on the story of creation. Montessori did not call these stories the *Great Lessons*; a Montessori guide later named them.

## **DID THE STORIES ACTUALLY HAPPEN?**

The main idea behind these great stories is not to tell children the absolute truth. We want children to see the big picture of the universe, and see what possibly could have happened. There have been, for many years, ideas as to how certain things were created in our universe, but we will never actually know. The main idea is to illustrate our point for telling the children these stories. Children do not often realize that there was a time in human history when humans did not have the modern conveniences that we have today. Many great things, such as the creation of language and numbers or for that matter the universe, had to happen first.

## **FOLLOW-UP WORK**

Follow-up work for these great stories should be minimal. While they may be called *Great Lessons*, there is no real work involved. The purpose of these great stories should inspire children to want to do more work. Assigning work will only take away from the experience. If follow-up work is assigned, it should remain in the artistic area in the form of art, dance, etc. Since these stories provide a holistic view, the entire curriculum is actually derived from the *Great Lessons*.

## **GOALS OF THE GREAT LESSONS**

The goals of these *Great Lessons* along with the lessons that result from them, are to give children a global view of education. The means and path by which this goal is achieved is what Montessori called “Cosmic Education.” Quoting Montessori, Paula Polk Lillard writes in Montessori Today, “A global vision of cosmic events fascinates children and their interest will soon remain fixed on one particular part as a starting point for more intensive studies... Thus, the way leads from the whole, via the parts, back to the whole... This is the very thing to organize their intelligence and to give them a better insight into their own place and task in the world” (p. 75).