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4 CHAPTER

LITERACY COMPETENCE



Literacy competence

Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, express, create and interpret concepts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written forms, using visual, sound/audio and digital materials across disciplines and contexts. It implies the ability to communicate and connect effectively with others in an appropriate and creative way. Development of literacy forms the basis for further learning and furthers linguistic interaction.

Knowledge

The competence involves the knowledge of reading and writing and a sound understanding of written information and thus requires an individual to have knowledge of vocabulary, functional grammar and the functions of language. It includes awareness of the main types of verbal interaction, a range of literary and non-literary text and the main features of different styles and registers of language.

Skills

Individuals should have the skills to communicate both orally and in writing in a variety of situations and to monitor and adapt their own communication to the requirements of the situation. The competence also includes the abilities to distinguish and use different types of sources, to search for, collect and process information, to use aids and to formulate and express one's oral and written arguments in a convincing way appropriate to the context. It encompasses critical thinking and ability to assess and work with information.

Attitudes

A positive attitude towards literacy involves a disposition to critical and constructive dialogue, an appreciation of aesthetic qualities and an interest in interaction with others. This implies an awareness of the impact of language on others and a need to understand and use language in a positive and socially responsible manner.

Foundations of literacy competence in Children House

In the Montessori Children's House, the foundations of literacy are quietly and beautifully laid long before a child begins to read or write. Till the age six, children are in what Maria Montessori called the *sensitive period* for language—a time when they naturally absorb words, expressions, and even the rhythm of language from their surroundings. It is during this stage that the seeds of literacy begin to grow.

The journey starts with spoken language. Conversation is at the heart of everything we do. We speak with children, not to them. We listen to their questions, their stories, and their discoveries. During these exchanges, we are not only building relationships—we are also nurturing vocabulary, sentence structure, and the joy of communication.

You might see a teacher sitting on the floor or by the table with a child, naming objects in a three-period lesson—a key Montessori approach to new vocabulary learning. “This is a bathtub,” she says, introducing the word clearly. The children listen, repeat, and eventually recall it on their own. Through countless such experiences, children build a rich and precise vocabulary that becomes the foundation for later reading and writing.

Storytelling is another vital part of this process. We tell true stories about the world—about animals, nature, people, and faraway places. We also read books that ignite imagination and empathy. Each story becomes an invitation to think, question, and express. Language here is not a subject to be studied; it is a living, breathing part of daily life.

As the child grows, sounds begin to take shape in their awareness. Montessori materials such as the *Sandpaper Letters* help connect sound and symbol—the tactile tracing of each letter allows the child to internalize its form and sound simultaneously. Soon after, something wonderful happens: the child begins to write before they can read.

This writing does not begin with worksheets or pre-prepared tasks. Instead, it springs from the child's own desire to express thoughts and feelings. When a four- or five-year-old picks up the *Moveable Alphabet* and arranges letters to write "I love my dog," we witness literacy in its most natural form—language as self-expression.

Our role as Montessori teachers is not to "teach literacy" in the traditional sense. We do not transmit knowledge step by step; we prepare an environment rich in language, conversation, and inspiration. We provide

opportunities for children to listen, speak, write, and eventually read in meaningful contexts. *Grace and Courtesy lessons* guide them in how to use language kindly and respectfully in social life—how to greet, how to apologize, how to express gratitude.

Over time, we watch a beautiful transformation. A child who once spoke only a few words begins to share stories, ask questions, write messages, and read signs around the classroom. They are not just learning to read and write—they are discovering the power of language as a tool for thought, creativity, and connection. In the Montessori Children's House, literacy is not a lesson—it is a living experience that grows naturally within a carefully prepared environment, guided by the child's own curiosity and joy of expression.



4th Great Story as an opening door in 2nd plane to the world of literacy

“Alphabet has influence human progress more than any other invention because it has modified man himself, furnishing him with new powers, above those of nature. It has made man the possessor of two languages: a natural and supra-natural one. With the latter, man can transmit his thoughts to far away people. He can fix them for descendants. He can practically build up a treasure of the intellectual products of the whole of humanity through time and space.” Maria Montessori. Formation of the Man

When children enter the second plane of development—roughly from six to twelve years of age—they begin to look outward. Their minds open to the vastness of the world, and they start asking the most human of questions: *Where do I come from? Why are things the way they are?* They are driven by imagination and a thirst for knowledge that stretches beyond the here and now. In the Montessori Elementary classroom, we meet this great hunger for understanding with the Great Stories. These five key narratives form the backbone of the Elementary curriculum. Each one acts as an invitation—a doorway—to explore the universe, life, human history, and the power of language and numbers.

The Fourth Great Story, titled “The Story of Communication in Signs,” marks a special moment in a child’s journey. It opens the door to the world of literacy—not through drills or exercises, but through wonder. This story is told as an adventure. It invites children to imagine the earliest humans who, long before paper or pens, sought ways to share their ideas and experiences. We tell of the first marks carved into stone, of messages painted on cave walls, of symbols scratched into clay. We imagine people realizing that they could represent sounds with signs—and that, through these signs, their thoughts could travel across time and space. Through this tale, children discover



that written language is a human invention born from the deepest desire to connect. Every sign, letter, and word is part of an ongoing story—a collective effort of countless people who refused to let ideas be lost to time. The story connects history, invention, migration, and communication, helping children see that the alphabet itself is one of humanity’s greatest tools of cooperation and creativity. In this story, there are heroes: not warriors or kings, but thinkers, dreamers, and problem-solvers—people who shaped sounds into symbols and, in doing so, shaped civilization itself. This idea resonates deeply with the child of the second plane, who is beginning to see themselves as part of a broader human story.

The children recognize that, just like those first inventors, they too are explorers in language. They will face challenges—spelling, punctuation, structure—but, like the heroes in the story, they will find their own solutions. The story reminds them that literacy is not just about mastering rules; it is about using language to share ideas, feelings, and discoveries. What’s truly magical is that, by knowing the sounds of the alphabet, a child gains an extraordinary power: to read the thoughts of others and to express their own ideas in words. With only a handful of symbols, they can unlock the wisdom of books, letters, songs, and stories from all over the world. Isn’t that a miracle of human invention?

Maria Montessori described language as a creation that springs from the three great human gifts: a heart to feel, a mind to think, and hands to work. After hearing this story, the classroom often comes alive with activity. Children might explore ancient scripts, invent their own alphabets, write messages in code, or compose stories inspired by what they’ve learned. The teacher doesn’t prescribe these activities; they arise naturally from the children’s curiosity. Beyond its historical and linguistic lessons, *The Story of Communication in Signs* carries a deeper message. It helps children see language as a bridge between people—a way to understand, to empathize, and to connect. As they grow in their own literacy journey, they learn that communication is not just about words; it is about reaching out to others with kindness and clarity. In this way, the Fourth Great Story does more than introduce reading and writing—it awakens in children a profound appreciation for what it means to be human: a being who feels, thinks, and uses language to share their inner world with others.

Story from the classroom

Inspiration after 4th Great Story

After telling the Fourth Great Story, Communication in Signs, we noticed that children were fascinated by the idea that people across time and cultures have used different symbols to communicate. Their eyes lit up when they saw how ancient Egyptians carved hieroglyphs, and how other civilizations created their own systems of writing. Soon, they were eager to try it themselves—writing their names and small stories in different scripts, experimenting with symbols from both the past and the present.

As teachers, we quickly realized how important it was to prepare an environment that could nurture this spark of curiosity. We added new materials—clay and sticks for carving, brushes for calligraphy, and charts showing different alphabets and guides to help understand hieroglyphs. The classroom became alive with exploration and creativity. One day, inspired by the story and their writing experiments, the children decided to make their own paper. They gathered scraps from the recycling bin, shredded and soaked them, and created beautiful sheets of handmade paper. Later, they used these to make small booklets for their writing projects. Through this experience, we saw how the story had opened not only their imagination but also their sense of purpose. They were not simply learning about writing—they were becoming part of humanity's long and ongoing story of communication.



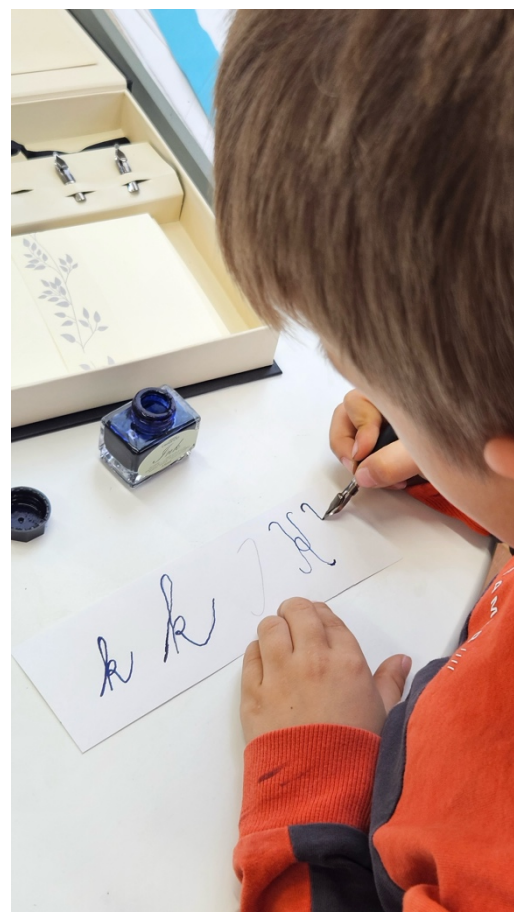
Montessori akademija, Lithuania

Writing skills: from sensorial explorer to expressive writer

Writing is one of the most powerful ways we communicate. It allows us to shape our thoughts, give form to our ideas, and extend our conversations beyond the present moment. Through writing, our inner world becomes visible—and it can reach far beyond ourselves.

In the Montessori elementary environment, we help children develop the confidence and self-trust to make their language visible. Writing is more than forming letters or following rules—it is a way for children to share what they think, feel, and discover. We nurture the belief that their ideas matter and can live on through the written word. As described in the previous chapter, the foundation for writing is laid in the Children’s House. When children arrive in the elementary classroom, they usually already know the connection between sounds and symbols and have experienced the joy of expressing themselves with the moveable alphabet. Now, the focus shifts to refining these abilities and expanding their expression.

We introduce the art of handwriting—learning to write on lines, using alphabet charts, and exploring calligraphy. These activities refine fine motor control and develop a sense of care for the written word. Through varied experiences, children build the mechanical confidence to express their thoughts freely and beautifully on paper. But we do not stop at the skill itself. Once children understand how to write, we open the door to why we write. We explore the many



ways writing can express the human spirit—poems that capture emotion, fairy tales that expand imagination, reports that organize knowledge, or posters that share information about animals or historical figures. Writing becomes a bridge between self-expression and communication with others.

In our classrooms, writing is never confined to a notebook or done only for a teacher's approval. It is meant to be shared—with classmates, families, and the wider community. Children read their poems aloud, publish small booklets, and present their research to peers. Through these experiences, they discover that writing is not an isolated task but a living exchange of ideas. Our goal as Montessori educators is to support children as they move from sensorial explorers to expressive writers—individuals who write not because they must, but because they have something meaningful to say.

Story from the classroom

The School Newspaper Project

At Jolly HOME SCHOOL, something wonderful happens every quarter—the creation of our vibrant school newspaper. But this is no ordinary publication; it is a living celebration of literacy, creativity, and collaboration among children of all ages. The process begins with the youngest students, who bring the newspaper to life with their stories, drawings, and imaginative ideas. Their enthusiasm fills the classroom with excitement as they share what they want to write about—animals, playground adventures, favorite books, or classroom discoveries. Their contributions form the heart and soul of the newspaper, reminding everyone of the pure joy of expression.

As the younger ones dream and create, the older students step in as guides and mentors. They help edit the texts, organize the layout, and prepare the final design for printing. This partnership between age groups fosters not only literacy skills but also leadership, cooperation, and patience. Everyone has a role—writers, illustrators, interviewers, editors, and designers—and the workflow unfolds naturally, reflecting the Montessori spirit of purposeful collaboration.

When the newspaper is finally ready, the entire school community gathers to celebrate. Children beam with pride as they see their names in print and eagerly share the finished copies with parents and teachers. Families are often amazed at how thoughtfully their children express themselves, while teachers witness the growth of confidence, voice, and connection among their students.

Each edition of the Jolly HOME SCHOOL newspaper explores many forms of writing—news articles, opinion pieces, poems, stories, and interviews. Through this ongoing project, children discover that writing is not just a skill learned in isolation, but a living means of communication. They learn that their ideas can inform, inspire, and unite others.

More than a publication, the school newspaper has become a symbol of our community's shared purpose—a reminder that when children work together, guided by curiosity and respect, their words can shape something beautiful and lasting.

Jolly HOME SCHOOL, Slovakia



Comprehensive reading in Montessori classroom

In the Montessori elementary classroom, reading is much more than decoding letters on a page—it is an act of discovery and understanding. Maria Montessori used the term “*total reading*” to describe this deep level of comprehension, when a child not only reads the words but truly understands, feels, and interprets their meaning. Our goal is to help children reach this stage, where reading becomes a window into human thought and imagination, not just a mechanical exercise.

The journey toward total reading begins with strong foundations built in the early years. Through sensorial exploration and oral language activities, children develop phonological awareness—the ability to hear and recognize sounds in words. They play language games such as I Spy or listen for the first, middle, and last sounds of words. They stretch words aloud, blend sounds, and match them to letters using tactile materials like sandpaper letters and moveable alphabets. These experiences prepare the mind and hand for reading, helping children “crack the code” between symbols and sounds.

When children arrive in the elementary classroom, many are already able to read basic words and phrases. Here, our focus expands from how to read to what reading means. We nurture comprehension, interpretation, and reflection. Reading becomes a conversation between the child and the text. To make this connection alive, we use hands-on materials and activities that transform reading into an experience. *Command cards*, for instance, invite children to act out what they read—“Stand near the window,” or “Draw a triangle and color it blue.” Through such exercises, reading becomes active and joyful, and



comprehension is deepened through movement and experience. Even grammar lessons are brought to life: instead of memorizing parts of speech, teacher presents it with experience, that one word can change meaning, like “Sing silently” or “Sing loud”. Grammar is not abstract—it is lived in the classroom and experience also through text. The choice of text also matters. Children must find meaning in what they read. Dry passages filled with information are replaced by stories, descriptions, and texts that invite connection and reflection. We guide children to visualize, to ask questions, to relate what they read to their own experiences or to the wider themes they are exploring in class. When a child reads about the migration of birds, for example, we might step outside to observe the sky or draw parallels to human journeys. Through such connections, comprehension becomes grounded in experience.

Reading in Montessori classrooms does not happen only in the language area—it flows through all subjects. A story about an ancient civilization may lead to a discussion about geography and culture. Reading about plant life may inspire an experiment in biology. Each subject area offers materials and reading cards at different levels of complexity, allowing every child to find texts that match their ability and curiosity. In this way, the classroom becomes a community of readers, each progressing at their own pace but united by shared enthusiasm for discovery. Group discussions and story work encourage children to interpret meaning, make predictions, and explore emotion within text. They begin to recognize subtlety, humor, and metaphor. Reading becomes not only a skill but also an intellectual and creative experience.

At the heart of it all is a love for books. Our classrooms include cozy reading corners and small libraries where children can read freely—alone, with a friend, or in small groups. They are invited to spend time with books at any moment of the day, not only during lessons. Through this freedom, reading becomes a lifelong companion, a source of comfort, curiosity, and joy.

In the Montessori classroom, comprehensive—or total—reading means more than understanding words. It means understanding life through words. It is about awakening the child’s heart and mind to the beauty of language and the endless world it opens before them.

Story from the classroom

A Culture of Reading at Home and in School

At Montessori Akademija, we believe that a love of reading begins long before a child reads independently—and that this love is nurtured both at school and at home. For this reason, we invite families to become active partners in creating a culture of reading that bridges home and classroom life. We encourage families to build reading traditions at home, turning reading into a warm, shared experience rather than a task.

We share a small Family Reading Guide with parents—a gentle invitation to make reading part of everyday family life. We suggest a few simple but powerful habits:

- **When to read:** *Families are encouraged to set aside a specific time each day for reading, such as in the evening before bedtime. Reading, like any meaningful practice, needs rhythm and intention. Without planning, it is too easy for the day to pass without it.*
- **Where to read:** *A cozy, inviting space helps turn reading into something to look forward to. A soft blanket, a favorite corner, or a comfortable sofa can make this time special. We remind families to keep books visible and within reach—beautifully displayed rather than hidden away.*
- **With whom to read:** *Reading is a family affair. Everyone reads—parents, older siblings, and even the youngest children who explore picture books. When children see adults reading, they absorb the message that reading is valuable and joyful. These shared moments create lasting memories and associations of warmth and connection.*

*To strengthen the bridge between home and school, we bring the children's home reading experiences into the classroom. Every month, we have a **Book Recommendation Corner**, where children share books, they have enjoyed at home. They present their favorite stories to classmates, encouraging others to discover new titles and authors.*

*For children who find joy in reading the same series or topic, we form small **Readers' Clubs**. In these groups, children read the same book at home and come together later to discuss it—sometimes guided by the teacher, sometimes simply as peers sharing ideas. These*

conversations often grow into deeper projects, such as researching the historical period or scientific concepts mentioned in the story.

To celebrate and inspire others, we also organize a **Reading Photography Exhibition**. Families send photos of their reading moments at home—snuggled on the couch, reading under a blanket, or exploring books in the garden. These photos are displayed in the classroom, serving as a joyful reminder that reading is alive in every home and every heart.

Through these shared efforts, reading becomes more than an academic goal—it becomes a way of life. The classroom and home connect through a common rhythm of stories, curiosity, and love for books. Together, we cultivate not just readers, but a community that finds meaning, comfort, and inspiration in the written word.



Montessori akademija, Lithuania

Oral language foundation and communication between each other

“Language is something living — it is something that has life within itself. The child constructs it little by little, and the work goes on like a happy game. It is a game of transformation, of invention, a game which the human intelligence plays with itself.”

Maria Montessori. The Absorbent Mind

Maria Montessori often described language as a *living thing*—something born and grown within the child through joyful exploration and human connection. She also called language an “instrument of collective thought,” meaning that it is not simply a natural phenomenon, but a human creation—something invented so that people could think, share, and build together. Through language, humanity has created culture, science, art, and community. Language is the voice of the human mind and the thread that connects us all.

As children enter the Elementary level, much attention is given to reading and writing, yet it is crucial not to overlook the importance of spoken language. Oral language is the foundation upon which all literacy is built. It is through speaking and listening that children first learn to form thoughts, communicate ideas, and collaborate with others. Every reading, writing, and grammar experience in the Montessori classroom is rooted in this living, spoken exchange. In fact, even before children work with grammar boxes or sentence analysis materials, they must have a strong foundation in oral expression. Every Montessori presentation—whether in mathematics, geometry, or history—includes conversation. The teacher’s words guide the child to reason, reflect, and imagine. Language is never mechanical; it is a bridge between thinking and doing. To nurture oral language in the Elementary classroom, we appeal to the child’s imagination—the primary learning tool of the second plane of development. Through storytelling, we invite children to travel through time and space using only the power of words. When we tell stories of great inventions, early civilizations, or discoveries in

nature, language paints pictures in their minds. It awakens curiosity and emotion, encouraging children to ask questions, to share their own ideas, and to build knowledge collectively.

Equally important is how language is used among the children themselves. The classroom is a small society, and within it, children constantly practice communication: negotiating, sharing opinions, resolving disagreements, and expressing gratitude. These moments—whether in group work, classroom discussions, or casual conversations—are essential exercises in language development. We also prepare children for real-world interactions beyond the classroom. During *Going Out* experiences, they must speak with bus drivers, museum guides, shopkeepers, or librarians. Such moments give real purpose to language. They help children understand that words are not just for school—they are tools for life. Grace and Courtesy lessons play an important role in this process. Through simple but meaningful demonstrations—how to greet a visitor, how to make a polite request, how to listen respectfully—children learn to use language thoughtfully and with kindness. These skills become part of their daily interactions and build the foundation for empathy and respect within the classroom community.

In the Montessori environment, oral language is everywhere: in the stories we tell, the questions we ask, the debates we hold, and the quiet conversations between friends. Whether a child is presenting a research project, acting in a classroom play, or discussing a moral dilemma, they are not just practicing speaking—they are discovering the power of language to connect, to express, and to understand. When we help children cultivate the art of communication, we are doing more than teaching them to speak well; we are guiding them to think deeply, to listen with care, and to contribute their voice to the shared story of humanity.

Story from the classroom

Gratitude Circle – A Montessori Moment of Connection

Most schools have a circle time — a special part of the day when children and teachers gather together to share. In the Montessori classroom, this moment takes on a unique form known as the Gratitude Circle, and it truly holds something magical. At Jolly HOME SCHOOL, we have been practicing the Gratitude Circle for some time. Just as children take turns signing up for various classroom duties, we also have a Master of Ceremony who leads the circle. This is an important role, and we are often moved to see even the shyest children step forward with courage and confidence to take it on.

The Master of Ceremony invites everyone to gather — sometimes with a gentle voice, sometimes with the sound of a musical instrument — and opens the first part of the meeting: sharing how we are and how we feel. As each child speaks, we listen attentively, learning to understand one another's emotions and experiences — why someone feels happy, sad, tired, or excited. This moment nurtures empathy and strengthens our sense of community. The second part of the Gratitude Circle is about acknowledgment — expressing thanks to someone or something. It is always heartwarming to hear children thank a friend for helping them, their parents for spending time together, or even the sun for shining that day. Finally, the teachers or adults in the environment share practical information about what will happen next — plans for the classroom, upcoming events, or simply words of encouragement and reflection.

The Gratitude Circle is practiced across all age groups, from 6 to 15 years. As students grow, so does the depth of their reflections, the richness of their vocabulary, and their ability to express gratitude thoughtfully. It becomes a cherished part of the day — sometimes in the morning, often at the close of the day, and always on Mondays, when we begin our week together with intention and connection.

The Gratitude Circle reminds us that learning is not only about knowledge, but also about being present, listening deeply, and appreciating the people and world around us.

Jolly HOME SCHOOL, Slovakia



Finding order and structure in language

“The child, when interested in words at a certain age, can utilize grammar to good purpose, dwelling analytically upon the various parts of speech according as the processes of his inner spiritual growth determine. In this way he comes to own his language perfectly, and to acquire some appreciation of its qualities and power”

*Maria Montessori
Advanced Montessori method II*

In the Montessori Elementary classroom, language study becomes a journey of discovery—a way for children to uncover the hidden order behind the words they speak, read, and write. At this age, children’s minds are naturally drawn to classification and structure. They seek patterns, rules, and connections that help them make sense of the world. Montessori described this as a *human tendency to seek order*, and it becomes the driving force behind their exploration of language.

When children begin to explore grammar in the Montessori classroom, it is not presented as a set of abstract rules to memorize, but as a living system to see, touch, and understand. Grammar symbols—small, color-coded geometric shapes—bring the invisible architecture of language to life. A black triangle stands for the solid, dependable noun; a bright red circle represents the verb, full of energy and action. Through play and discovery, the child begins to see language as an ordered universe, full of relationships and meaning. As children work with these materials, they begin to recognize how words function in sentences. They notice how each word contributes something essential—how a noun names, a verb moves, an adjective describes, and a preposition connects. This visual and tactile experience builds the foundation for *functional grammar*—understanding the *purpose* of each word and how together they create meaning.



Later, through *sentence analysis*, children dissect language like young linguists. They learn to identify subjects, predicates, and modifiers, seeing how phrases and clauses fit together like the parts of a machine. But rather than feeling mechanical, this process sparks curiosity: *Why did the author choose this word? How does this sentence work? What happens if we change the order?* Such analysis refines both reading comprehension and expressive writing.

Through this growing awareness, children discover the *functions of language*—how we use words to inform, persuade, entertain, question, or express emotion. They begin to see that language is not static; it changes depending on purpose and audience. One day, a child might write a factual report about volcanoes, using precise, objective language; another day, they might write a story, letting their imagination and emotions guide their word choice. Gradually, they learn to shift between *different styles and registers*—formal and informal, poetic and scientific—understanding that the way we use language shapes how others receive our message.

In the Montessori classroom, children also encounter a wide *range of literary and non-literary texts*. From ancient myths to scientific articles, from poems to biographies, each type of text reveals new possibilities for expression. Reading and discussing these diverse forms expands their awareness of tone, structure, and purpose. It teaches them to listen for voice, rhythm, and meaning—the essential skills for literacy competence.

Language, then, becomes not only a subject of study but a tool for thinking, creating, and connecting. The order children find within grammar gives them the confidence to build ideas clearly and beautifully. As they learn to organize words, they are also learning to organize their thoughts. The visual clarity of Montessori materials and the logical beauty of grammar empower children to express themselves with precision and artistry. Ultimately, *finding order and structure in language* gives Montessori students more than linguistic skill—it gives them a way to understand the world and their place in it. They begin to see that language, like the universe, is full of patterns waiting to be discovered. And once they recognize its structure, they can use it to communicate ideas that are both logical and deeply human.

Story from the classroom

Same Patterns in Different Languages

At Montessori Akademija, our bilingual classrooms offer a unique opportunity for children to explore the structure of language across more than one tongue. In these classrooms, the same lessons on language order and grammar are taught in both languages, allowing children to see that the parts of speech—nouns, verbs, adjectives, and more—serve the same functions no matter which language they are using. This understanding helps children create a mental framework for language, making it easier to learn and switch between multiple languages.

Unlike traditional matching activities, we do not use the color-coded symbols simply as a puzzle to complete. Instead, we invite children to imagine and internalize these symbols, turning them into vivid mental pictures. For example, the verb, often represented as a red circle, is described as the sun that gives life to everything in the sentence. This imagery helps children understand the verb as the word of action, the part that sets events in motion.



By connecting imagination with grammar, children are better able to analyze sentences, see the function of each word, and recognize the same patterns across languages. This approach allows them to build a strong foundation in both their first and second languages, fostering confidence and fluency.

Through this work, children learn that all languages follow similar patterns and structures, giving them a sense of order and predictability in their minds. More than just memorizing rules, they are constructing a deeper understanding of how language works—a tool that empowers them to communicate, create, and think across cultures.

Montessori Akademija, Lithuania

Contextual learning and research skills in their Big Work

In the Montessori Elementary classroom, language is not confined to the language shelves. It lives in every corner of the environment—woven through stories of the universe, explorations of geography, biology, and history, and in the conversations that arise during group projects. This interconnected approach, known as *Cosmic Education*, helps children see that language is everywhere: in the scientific names of plants, in the poetry of geography, in the symbols of mathematics, and in the stories of human civilization.

When children engage in their *Big Work*—extended, interdisciplinary projects born from curiosity—they naturally encounter new words, ideas, and ways of expressing themselves. A child researching volcanoes learns not only about tectonic plates and magma but also expands their vocabulary with terms like “eruption,” “pressure,” and “lava flow.” Another group studying ancient Egypt learns to read maps, analyze hieroglyphs, and craft written presentations to share their findings. In this way, vocabulary is not memorized in isolation—it grows organically through meaningful, contextual learning.

The role of the Montessori teacher, or guide, is to nurture this process. Rather than providing direct answers, the teacher models how to search for and collect information. They might introduce reference books, digital tools, or field resources, demonstrating how to evaluate sources, organize notes, and synthesize information into clear presentations. Over time, children internalize these *research skills*—they learn to ask precise questions, follow curiosity with discipline, and communicate findings with accuracy and creativity.

As research deepens, the guide supports children in learning how to *formulate and express their ideas*—both orally and in writing. They practice giving short presentations, writing reports, or creating visual displays that communicate their discoveries. Discussions and feedback circles help them refine their ability to speak

with confidence and listen with respect. They learn that convincing arguments are built not on opinion alone, but on evidence, reasoning, and awareness of context.

This process of research and presentation naturally cultivates an *attitude of collaboration*. Montessori



classrooms are communities of shared inquiry, where children exchange knowledge, discuss differing viewpoints, and support one another's discoveries. Language becomes a bridge—a means of connection, not competition. Through group projects, children learn how to express ideas clearly, ask thoughtful questions, and respond with curiosity rather than judgment.

As their explorations expand, so does their *knowledge base and vocabulary*. Each new topic enriches their linguistic landscape: scientific terms, historical expressions, cultural idioms, and artistic language all find a place in their growing repertoire. Because these words are linked to real experiences—experiments, field trips, or creative work—they are remembered deeply and used meaningfully.

Ultimately, *contextual learning* in the Montessori classroom teaches children that language is not just a subject but a living tool for discovery. Through Cosmic Education, they come to see how words connect everything—how science, art, history, and human experience are all part of a single, interconnected story. In this way, research becomes not just an academic exercise but a journey of wonder, empowering children to explore, understand, and express the world around them with both intellect and imagination.

Story from the classroom

Questions charts about Civilizations

At Montessori Elementary, learning history and cultures is not just about memorizing facts—it's about exploration, curiosity, and working with text in a playful, meaningful way. One classroom activity that brings this to life is the **Questions Chart about Civilizations**, designed for children aged 6 to 12.

For the youngest children, the activity begins with a set of cards featuring simple questions and answers about prominent human cultures, such as the Romans, Greeks, or Mayans.

The Practical Activities of the People				
What kinds of natural resources were found there and how did people use them?	What tools and techniques did they have? What kind of technology did they use?	How did they satisfy their physical needs for food, clothing, shelter, transport and defence?	How did they find their country and how did they make it more habitable? What kinds of consequences did these changes have?	What did they produce? What types of work and occupations were there?

Children read each question and select the correct answer, building confidence and familiarity with written information. This playful approach turns reading into a discovery process, helping them practice comprehension in a structured yet enjoyable way.

As children grow older, the activity becomes more complex. From around age seven, carefully selected books and texts on human cultures are introduced. Children browse freely, exploring material that matches their reading level, and use these texts to answer questions on the boards. Here, the activity shifts from simple recognition to purposeful research: children learn to formulate specific questions, navigate books, and extract the information they need.

Through this process, children discover how to evaluate texts critically. They learn to accept information that answers their questions and set aside material that is not relevant. This fosters independence, analytical thinking, and an understanding of how knowledge is organized and connected.

The main goal of the Table with Questions activity is not merely to learn about ancient cultures—it is to teach children how to work with text confidently and joyfully. By blending structure with freedom, the activity helps them develop literacy skills, research abilities, and a sense of order in their learning. Children leave this work with more than historical knowledge: they gain the tools to explore any subject through reading, critical thinking, and self-directed discovery.

Literacy as service for school community

In Montessori education, literacy is never a competition. It is not about who reads the most books or earns the highest score. Instead, literacy is a tool for connection, communication, and service—something children use to help others and contribute to their community. When children read to classmates, explain a story, or share ideas through writing, they are using language to support, guide, and inspire.

At Montessori schools, there are many ways to make literacy visible and meaningful in the life of the community. One of the simplest and most powerful is a **school library**. Even in a small school, a dedicated corner filled with books can become a hub of curiosity, exploration, and shared reading. A library invites children to discover new stories and ideas and to share them with classmates. Another approach is to **host reading events**. Storytelling sessions, book fairs, or visits from authors allow children to celebrate literacy together. Students can share favorite books, poems, and personal stories with peers and families, creating a culture of reading that extends beyond the classroom walls. **Family Literacy Nights** are another opportunity to connect school and home. These workshops invite parents and caregivers to learn strategies that support reading and writing at home. Families practice hands-on activities, share books, and see how literacy can become a joyful, everyday part of family life.

Literacy can extend beyond the school through **community collaboration**. Children can participate in “going out” experiences, visiting local libraries, bookstores, or literacy organizations. They might host reading workshops, participate in local reading challenges, or invite authors to share their work. By connecting their literacy skills to the wider community, children experience the joy and responsibility of using language to help others learn and grow.

In Montessori education, literacy is a gift meant to be shared. When children use their reading and writing skills to serve others, they not only strengthen their own abilities—they build a caring, thoughtful, and connected school community.

Story from the classroom

A Night with Andersen

*For six years, our school has hosted a special event for Elementary children called **A Night with Andersen**, inspired by a tradition that began in 2000 at a public library in the Czech Republic. Originally, children spent the night at the library, reading stories, playing games and puzzles, and falling asleep as the Good Night Elf and Borrowbook Fairy guided them to rest. Over time, this magical idea has grown into an international celebration, bringing schools, libraries, and social institutions together in countries such as Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, and many others.*

*At our school, the event is eagerly anticipated each year, usually drawing between 20 and 40 children. The guides carefully prepare activities, while the children bring mats and sleeping bags and participate in preparing supper and breakfast. This year, the theme celebrated the 75th birthday of the internationally acclaimed children's book writer and illustrator **Petr Sís**. The children explored his book *Ptačí sněm* (*The Birds Assembly*), following the story from afternoon into evening.*

As part of the experience, children handcrafted their own bird masks and ventured into the park to engage in activities inspired by the magical birds in the story. Each bird had its own unique characteristics, and children explored them through games and imaginative play. Back at school, they shared a communal supper, continued reading—either more works by Sís or other favorite authors—and discussed the stories they explored. The evening concluded with guides reading aloud to help the children settle for the night.

*The main purpose of **A Night with Andersen** is to nurture reading with comprehension. By focusing deeply on a single book, children develop the ability to analyze story ideas, interpret meaning, and share their thoughts with peers. This experience lays the groundwork for seminar-style discussions, which are an essential tool in Montessori adolescent programs.*

Other goals of the event include:

- **Introducing new books:** *Children encounter a variety of literature, expanding their interests and imagination.*

- **Building community:** Students from different classes collaborate, share ideas, and create memories together.
- **New adventures:** Sleeping over in the school building, exploring unusual spaces like the attic, and cooking and dining together strengthen community bonds and foster independence.

Through this joyful, immersive experience, children learn that reading is not just an individual activity—it is a shared adventure, a way to think, imagine, and connect with others.



Montessori School Andilek, Czech Republic

How literacy is visible in Montessori Elementary classroom?	
Essential knowledge	
A broad range of vocabulary	Children encounter rich vocabulary through nomenclature of materials, stories, Cosmic Education topics, and hands-on research projects or Big Work projects. Vocabulary grows naturally through reading, storytelling, and oral discussions.
Functional grammar	Color-coded grammar symbols and sentence analysis exercises help children see the function of each word in a sentence, supporting understanding and use of grammar in writing and speech.
The functions of language	Students practice using language to inform, persuade, express emotions, and collaborate during classroom debates, presentations, role-playing activities, and Going Out experiences.
The main types of verbal interaction	Children engage in group discussions, peer teaching, seminar-style conversations, storytelling, debates, reading aloud sessions, and real-life interactions during Going Out experiences.
A range of literary and non-literary texts	Students read fiction (myths, fairytales, poetry, etc), non-fiction (history, science, cultural studies), and research texts in the library, during Big Work, or using variety of cards in prepared classroom.
Different styles and registers of language	Children adapt their language for storytelling, writing reports, poems, plays, persuasive texts, or instructions. They learn formal and informal registers through role-play, presentations, and correspondence activities.
Language and culture vary in different contexts	Activities like exploring hieroglyphs and all other kinds of writings help children understand that language, communication, and expression differ across cultures and contexts.
Core skills	
Communicate as a listener, speaker, reader and writer, in a variety of situations	Students read individually and in groups, present Big Work research, engage in classroom debates, write stories, and participate in reading and community events.
Monitor and adapt their own communication to the requirements of the situation	Through Grace and Courtesy lessons, peer discussions, Going Out experiences, and group

	projects, children learn to adjust tone, word choice, and style based on audience and context.
Use and distinguish different types of texts	Children navigate fiction, non-fiction, research texts, poetry, and reports, matching reading material to purpose and understanding differences in format, style, and content.
Search for, collect and process information and to use aids	During Big Work and research projects, students gather information from books, reference materials, digital resources and guides, learning to extract relevant content and organize their findings.
Formulate and express their oral and written arguments in a convincing way appropriate to the context	Students present research, write reports, make posters, or lead discussions using evidence and structured reasoning, often guided by teachers but with increasing independence.
Attitudes (students value)	
A disposition to critical and constructive dialogue	Children participate in discussions, seminar-style conversations, peer feedback, and group problem-solving, respecting multiple viewpoints.
Aesthetic qualities and are willing to strive for them	Handwriting exercises, calligraphy, illustrated research projects, and book-making activities emphasize beauty and care in written work.
Interacting with others	Literacy activities are often collaborative: reading circles, peer teaching, research groups, and community events.
The impact of language on others	Children practice clear and thoughtful communication, noticing how words affect peers during debates, storytelling, reading aloud, or presentations.
Using language in a positive and socially responsible manner	Through Grace and Courtesy, reading for community and collaborative projects, students learn to use language to support, encourage, and connect with others.