

I want to welcome you to our Parent Education night. I'm Joan Young, coordinator for the primary level here at Providence. For those of you not familiar with our structure here, primary classes have children from ages three through six. Lower Elementary has students from ages 6 through 9, and Upper Elementary works with children ages 9 through 12.

Some of you are new to Montessori education, or maybe you would like to learn more about it. That's what our parent education nights are for – to give you an idea about just what your children are learning and how they are taught. Tonight we're going to look at geography, an important part of Montessori education that often isn't explored in the same depth in more traditional forms of education.

Before we start, a little bit of background. The Montessori system of education was created by Maria Montessori, an Italian doctor, a little less than 100 years ago. In a very tiny nutshell, Montessori believed that children learn first by doing – by touching, tasting, exploring things. She also believed in showing the big picture first, and then working down to specifics. So keep that in mind as we start looking at geography.

Geography is the study of place and how we, as human beings, adapt to the place we live in. Why learn about geography? It's important to know about the world we live in, especially as the world keeps shrinking. Montessori also believed that our children could bring peace to the world we live in. And the more they, and we, learn about other places and other people, the more understanding we have about different cultures, the better our chances for a peaceful world.

In primary classes, children learn about geography in two different ways – physical geography, or what our Earth looks like on the outside, cultural geography, or how people live on our Earth. It's two sides of the same coin.

Our job is primary is to give children the big picture, the outlines of this wonderful world around them. That outline will be refined in the elementary classrooms.

So children first are introduced to geography by holding and touching our world. The sandpaper globe has the Earth's large areas of land in sandpaper. The children are taught this is land, the blue areas are oceans. We move from that big idea to the smaller parts. All of our world, our Earth, is made of land, air and water. You can see this land, air and water, here, in these bottles. You can go outside and touch the water and feel the land and breath the air and look at them here in these bottles. You can look at this representation of the land, air and water that make up our earth and decide where different animals live. And you can learn the language you need to identify the different types of land and water forms, and you can make your own lakes and peninsulas and islands and isthmuses and see and touch them. These concepts are repeated over and over again in different ways. Here are the physical land and water forms. Here are puzzle land and water forms that you can trace. You can make a book identifying the different types of land and water forms.

In primary, children also learn the language to identify the pieces of land that make up our land. Once again, we start from the whole – our continents globe, that has all the major pieces of land on our Earth in different colors to help make them easy to identify.

All these pieces of land have special names. These are their names, and this is the piece of land – the continent – that you live on. Montessori understood that children love puzzles, so she designed maps that are essentially puzzles. Children can take the pieces out, learn the names, and fit them back again. We start with the world map with the seven continents on it. Children can match the pieces of what we call a control map, a black and white outline of the map itself. One of the favorite activities is to bring pieces of the puzzle map to the control map and back again. When students know the names of the continents, they can make their own map of the world by tracing and coloring or by using construction paper cutouts.

Once the world is mastered, children move on to North America, where we live, and learn the names of the countries in that continent. There are puzzle maps for all the continents (except Antarctica).

Equally as important as the physical world, though, are the people who live in it. So we also try to show our children that our way of life is not the only way to live. That there are other people in this world who speak different languages and wear different clothes and look different than we do, but who live on the Earth just like we do and who inside are just like we are.

There are many ways we do that. One way is what we call cultural baskets – objects from other countries that children can touch and hold and look at. Here is a cultural basket for the world, and one for Asia.

We listen to music and look at musical instruments from other countries. We read stories about other children and how they live. We eat food from other countries – if we are studying Africa, children might learn how to make hummus. If we are studying South America, we might smell coffee beans. All of it is hands-on and using the children's sense of smell, taste, touch and hearing and seeing.

And we learn about symbols that countries choose to represent themselves – flags. Children love flags! They match them to countries and make paper models of flags or color them.

We have some time now for you to look around at the geography works we have out. Please touch them, work with them and ask if you have any questions. We'll move onto the Elementary classrooms in about minutes.