

Family Connection

NOVEMBER 2023

“There are many who hold, as I do, that the most important period of life is not the age of university studies, but the first one, the period from birth to the age of six. For that is the time when man's intelligence itself, his greatest implement, is being formed. But not only his intelligence; the full totality of his psychic powers.”

—Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, p.21



Sensitive Periods

BY HEATHER WHITE

Through her years of study and careful observation, Maria Montessori discovered developmental windows during which a child has a heightened ability to obtain knowledge or master a skill quickly and with ease. She referred to these phases as sensitive periods.

Dr. Montessori identified six sensitive periods occurring from the age of 0 to 6:

1. LANGUAGE

During this time, children acquire language by watching the mouths of those around them, babbling, and mimicking what others say. This is the best time for learning languages, as children are naturally inclined to absorb the languages heard at this young age. Around 3.5 years old, a child may develop an interest in writing followed by an interest in reading around the age of 4.5.

2. ORDER

From birth to around age 5, children have an innate need for order and predictability. They love routine and structure. During this sensitive period, children may become more interested in cleaning up and arranging things in a particular sequence.

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3. MOVEMENT

Initially, from birth to 2.5 years, children learn how to crawl, pull up, and walk. They also develop fine motor skills by engaging in repeated activities that strengthen hand and finger muscles and improve hand-eye coordination. From 2.5 to 4.5 years old, children refine and coordinate their movements, using both hands for more complex movements like holding and correctly using a pencil.

4. REFINEMENT OF THE SENSES/ SENSORIAL EXPLORATION

Young children love to explore their world sensorially through taste, touch, sight, smell, and sound. Around 2.5 years old, children begin to use these experiences to classify objects within their environment.

5. SMALL OBJECTS/TINY DETAILS

Around 12 months old, children become fascinated by small objects and tiny details. They will likely be mesmerized by tiny pebbles, seashells, and ants or maybe even a speck of dust!

6. SOCIAL BEHAVIORS

Starting around 2.5 years old, children begin to take an interest in manners. This is what Maria Montessori called Grace and Courtesy. Children will begin moving from independent play towards wanting to build friendships and playing with others.

Montessorians have continued studying and identifying additional sensitive periods occurring through age 6 including toileting, music, mathematics, spatial relationships, reading, and writing. Others have recognized sensitive periods in older children, as well, for reading, writing, mental arithmetic, age of reason/abstraction, morality and intellectual independence, acquisition of culture, herd instinct, and repetition via variety.

Sensitive periods do not appear in a linear fashion; there is no set timeline of when sensitive periods appear or how long they may last. The timing of sensitive periods is unique to each child and a child may experience multiple sensibilities at one time. These periods are transitive; once the aim of a particular sensibility is accomplished, the period disappears.

Although sensitive periods may never be regained, children are still able to learn these skills and obtain knowledge at a later time. However, it is likely that the process will involve much less joy and require more time or effort on the child's part to reach mastery, similar to that of an adult attempting to learn a second language. Montessori teachers are trained to identify sensitive periods as they occur in order to prepare the child's environment to offer them the experiences they are seeking to promote their growth and development. After all, as Dr. Montessori reminds us, "The sensitive period: It comes for a moment but its benefits last for a lifetime."



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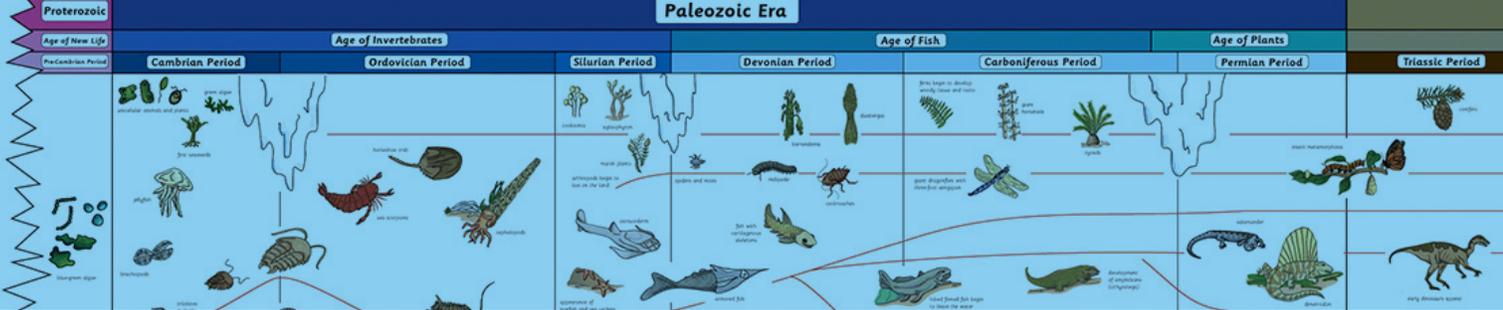
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PEEK INSIDE:

Montessori Timelines

By Cynthia Brunold-Conesa

Children in the Montessori Elementary classroom are introduced to the concept and passage of time through the use of timelines—an essential material in the Elementary classroom. Timelines are used by children in their studies of biology, geography, geology, history, and even math and language.



What makes the timelines so central to the Montessori Elementary curriculum? Montessorian, Aimee Allen, outlines their value:

- ❖ They plant the seeds of learning
- ❖ They fuel the fire of imagination
- ❖ They anchor the stories and lessons
- ❖ They're big, inspiring a sense of awe and wonder
- ❖ They are a revered and remembered part of the curriculum

Let's take a closer look. The youngest Elementary students may create their personal timelines (using one photo to represent each year of their life), thereby visualizing the passage of time through the lens of their personal development. While they also learn to “tell time” from clocks, and solidify their understanding of the days of the week and months of the year through linear and cyclical visual representations, they utilize other circular and linear timelines to imagine greater, and more abstract, intervals of time—ages, epochs, periods, eras, and eons.

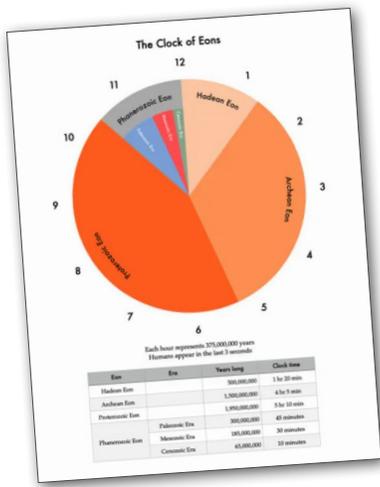
Some of the most utilized timelines include:

The Long Black Ribbon

A 100-foot black ribbon representing the passage of time from the Big Bang to the birth of the solar system, the origin and development of Earth, the evolution of life, and finally, a tiny strip of white at the end symbolizing the time of human habitation relative to Earth's entire history



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The Clocks of Eon

A circular timeline based on the Geologic Time Scale, wherein each of Earth's eons is given a relative period on a 12-hour analog clock

Timeline of Life

Illustrates the evolution of life on Earth, from the first complex life about 540 million years ago to the appearance of early humans, about 2.8 million years ago

Timeline of Humans

Reflects the evolution of early to modern humans, spanning approximately 2.8 million years

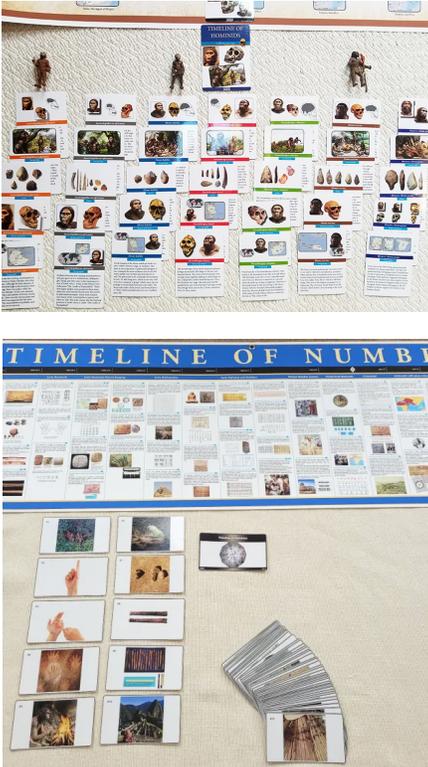
Timeline of Communication

Represents the development of written language (symbols) spanning approximately 3200 years

Timeline of Numbers

Illustrates the development of numbers and mathematics, spanning approximately 3400 years

The timelines show the relative timespan of one event to another and help children imagine thousands, millions, and billions of years.



The timelines ... cross multiple content areas ... and connect learners to the world beyond their classrooms, and they do so within a larger, integrated narrative about the creation and evolution of the universe and of the unique role humans play within it.

–Catherine McTamany, Ed.D

www.montessoridaoshi.com/single-post/2019/01/04/The-Timelines



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