



Reminder: There will be no school on Monday, October 13th

Dear Lighthouse Families,

When I first began teaching, basal readers were the norm and were consistent with the reading instruction I received as a child. Children read short passages with connected practice in fluency, vocabulary, phonics, and reading comprehension. What this approach lacked was the opportunity for children to read whole texts that were rich, high-interest and required deep, sustained reading. The basal readers did little to develop joy around reading or encourage a child's exposure to beautiful, authentic texts.

In the 1980's the whole language movement took hold and moved toward reading entire texts. The focus was on reading words by sight, context, or picture clue, as opposed to decoding words based on letter-sound relationships. The whole language and phonics/basal reading approaches were often at odds with one another and led to a period referred to as the Reading Wars. Some might say that the "war" is still on as the recent focus on the science of reading has come with sharp criticism of the "balanced literacy" approach that has dominated elementary schools over the past few decades.

Having instructed students in the different approaches, earned a masters and many hours of professional development in literacy, completed certification as an Orton-Gillingham practitioner, and raised two avid readers, I have spent a great deal of time pondering, teaching, and researching the different philosophies and how to best support the kaleidoscope of reading abilities that characterize most classrooms. Because reading is not an innate skill, and children benefit from explicit, systematic instruction, educational researchers and studies in neuroscience advocate for direct phonics instruction and a multisensory approach that helps children connect the auditory, visual, and kinesthetic pathways of the brain.

Pairing direct phonics instruction with classrooms that are full of rich, authentic texts for read aloud, research purposes, and genre studies or literature circles allows children to develop foundational skills in reading, while also cultivating a love of books and stories. If we focus on direct instruction or discrete skill development alone, children miss out on the opportunity to get lost in a beautiful story or an informational text full of fascinating facts and how-tos. Joyful experiences with literature build children's reading stamina, exposure to print, vocabulary development, fluency, and their desire to read more.

With all of this in mind, Nantucket Lighthouse School recently adopted a new

literacy curriculum in the early grades (Kinderclass – Grade 2) to ensure a consistent scope and sequence and to build foundational skills in phonics (letter-sound relationships) and phonemic awareness (the ability to identify, hear, and manipulate individual sounds in spoken words). Instruction in phonics helps children to decode new and unfamiliar words, as opposed to attempt to read words by sight alone, a highly inefficient, and impossible, task. Through second grade-ish, children learn explicit skills on how to read, and as they transition into third grade, the focus shifts to reading to learn.

Over the summer, Emma, Kerry, and Stephanie participated in a 30-hour training through the Institute for Multisensory Education. Their training is in the Orton Gillingham approach for classroom phonics instruction. In their classrooms, lessons are active, hands-on, and engaging, and they are infused with sensory-rich experiences and highly decodable texts that allow children to practice newly learned skills. At the same time, high interest literature is shared throughout each day, and rich, juicy stories can be found all around the classroom.

Emma shared the following in her September newsletter:

The Orton–Gillingham (OG) approach is a structured, multisensory way of teaching reading, spelling, and writing. Originally designed for children with dyslexia, it's now recognized as one of the best methods for teaching all early readers.

At its heart OG is:

- **Explicit** – Skills are taught step by step, with nothing left to chance. For example, each letter sound is taught clearly and directly.
- **Systematic and Sequential** – Lessons follow a carefully ordered path, moving from simple concepts (like individual letters and sounds) to more complex ones (like blends, digraphs). Each new step builds on what students already know.
- **Multisensory** – Children learn by seeing, hearing, touching, and moving. They might trace letters in sand while saying the sounds aloud, use hand motions to remember spelling rules, or tap out the sounds in a word before blending them together.

The goal of OG is for children to master reading and spelling to the point of automaticity—so they don't just recognize words but truly understand how language works. This deep foundation supports confidence, fluency, and a lifelong love of reading.

We are excited by the children's engagement in the lessons and their interest in diving into new activities and books. If you have any questions or want to learn more about the program, please connect with classroom teachers and continue to explore their weekly emails and monthly curriculum newsletters.

I hope you enjoy the long weekend.

Warm regards,

Emily

Happy, Thoughtful Kids Grown Here

Research shows the importance of teaching children specific ways to stay safe—so they can recognize when something doesn't feel right, respond assertively, and ask for help when they need it.

This week, I had the pleasure of visiting each classroom to talk about safety as part of our ongoing focus on caring for the whole child. Guided by Second Step's Child Protection program, we explored three simple but powerful strategies:

- **Recognize** – Notice if something feels unsafe.
- **Refuse** – Use strong, clear words to say “No.”
- **Report** – Go to a trusted adult for help.

In Small School through Grade 3, we also introduced the 8 Never-Never Rules—guidelines that help children make safe choices in everyday situations:

- Never ride on wheels without a helmet.
- Never cross the street without checking all ways.
- Never play with fire.
- Never touch a dog without asking the person in charge.
- Never use a sharp tool without an older person's help.
- Never touch guns.
- Never ride in a car without a seatbelt.
- Never go in water without an older person watching.

In Grades 4 through 7, our conversations focused on how safety awareness shifts as children gain independence and spend more time on their own.

Thank you for your continued partnership in supporting your child's growth and well-being. These conversations at home and at school help children feel confident, cared for, and capable.

Warmly,

Julia

Important Upcoming Dates:

Monday, October 13: Indigenous Peoples' Day-
NO SCHOOL

Thursday, October 16: Picture Day

Wednesday, October 29: Parent Teacher Conferences-
NO SCHOOL

Now Accepting Applications for the 2026–2027 School Year

We are excited to announce that applications are now open for the 2026–2027 school year. Current families do not need to reapply enrolled students, but we are pleased to offer **priority admissions to siblings**.

If you have a child who will be **2 years, 9 months or older by August 31**, we encourage you to reach out to Julia and submit a free online application through our website. Early admissions decisions for siblings with completed applications will be

[Complete Our Application](#)

DON'T MISS OUT ON NEW LIGHTHOUSE MERCH



Youth Hoodies: \$50

Adult Hoodies: \$60

Adult Sweatpants: \$60



Adult T-Shirts: \$20



Limited sizes remaining



Yuletide Fair

Saturday, December 6th 2025

Family Volunteers Needed:

Yuletide Committee Members

Bake Shop: Bakers & Wrappers

Day of Volunteers



Reach out to get involved

PICTURE DAY!



THURSDAY, **OCTOBER 16TH**
STARTING AT 8:30 A.M.

INDIVIDUAL AND CLASS PHOTOS TAKEN BY
CARY HAZLEGROVE PHOTOGRAPHY



Nantucket
Lighthouse
School

Extended Day is LIVE

Our Extended Day Program run Mondays through Fridays
(except on holidays/faculty workdays) from
2:30pm-5:10pm.

Sign your child up for Extended Day using the link below.

[Extended Day Sign Up](#)







Community Events

It's Down Syndrome Awareness Month!!

One in seven hundred children are born with DS and we are one of the Lucky Few who get to celebrate our sweet Mae every day!!

We hope you'll join us on Nantucket, October 13 at Sanford Farm at 10:30am to walk for the MA Down Syndrome Congress!!

This is a day of celebration and awareness - sharing the magic that our friends with DS bring to our lives. Too often people with disabilities are left out of important conversations around health care, education and basic human rights. The MDSC is working tirelessly to advocate for people with DS and preserve basic rights and comforts that many of us expect and take for granted.

We hope you'll join us in person!!!
Here's to some smiles and sunshine on Monday!!

Warmly,
Susie, Andrew, Drew, MAE & Ellie

AFTER-SCHOOL FALL SERIES I & EARLY RELEASE DAYS WITH THE MARIA MITCHELL ASSOCIATION

FOR GRADES K - 5
September 16 - October 23



EACH DAY OF THE WEEK OFFERS A UNIQUE SET OF
NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES, CRAFTS, AND ADVENTURES
AS WE EXPLORE NANTUCKET ISLAND TOGETHER!

AFTER-SCHOOL FALL SERIES I DATES:
TUESDAYS - SEPT. 16, 23, 30; OCT. 7, 14, 21

WEDNESDAYS - SEPT. 17, 24*; OCT. 1, 8, 15, 22*

*REGISTER for September 24 & October 22 under
NPS Early Release Day Option

THURSDAYS - SEPT. 18, 25; OCT. 2, 9, 16, 23

THIS DAY-SPECIFIC PROGRAM INCLUDES TRANSPORTATION FROM LOCAL
SCHOOLS:

- Nantucket Elementary School & Intermediate School – pickup at 2:30 PM
- Nantucket Lighthouse School – pickup at 2:50 PM
- Nantucket New School – pickup at 3:00 PM

REGISTER NOW

NPS EARLY RELEASE DAYS:

We are excited to offer FREE early release day programming from 12 - 3pm
on Wednesday, September 24 and October 22.

AFTER-SCHOOL FALL SERIES II COMING SOON!



Learn more at mariamitchell.org/afterschoolandearlyreleaseday

Nantucket Lighthouse School | 1 Rugged Road | Nantucket, MA 02554 US

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