

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GREAT LESSONS

The Five Great Lessons or Stories are fables shared with children in the Montessori elementary class to spark their imagination, inspire interest, and provide a big picture that will help them connect and organize the lessons they will learn during their time in the elementary classroom.

The first story was originally called “**The God with No Hands**”; some people now refer to it as “**The Story of the Universe.**” It introduces the child to the beginnings of the universe, with a focus on laws and facts. It sows seeds of interconnectedness and cosmic tasks. It gives a big picture of the universe to which the child can connect the following:

- Solid liquids and gases
- Atoms and molecules
- Periodic table
- Temperature
- Gravity
- Space and the solar system
- The Earth
- Plate tectonics and mountains
- Land and water forms
- Atmosphere, lithosphere
- Layers of the Earth
- Etc.

The second story is called “**The Coming of Life.**” It introduces life as a solution to an imbalance on Earth. It tells how the waters of the Earth were becoming full of mineral salts, which caused conflict between the sun, water, air, and rocks, who all blamed one another for the imbalance until they found they were each just doing what they were supposed to do by following their own laws. And so, a new kind of particle, a jellylike unicellular blob with new laws, was introduced. One of its laws was to eat, breathe, grow, and reproduce. It did just that and sucked up the minerals in the oceans. Eventually, this particle started to experiment and come together to form multicellular organisms, and gradually life grew and evolved. This story invites the child to use their imagination and see how life started. It is followed by the timeline of life, which shows the child how life progressed through time, eras, and periods. Ideas or topics that the child can connect to this story are:

- Living and nonliving
- Cells
- Plants
- Animals
- Classifications (plants, animals, vertebrates, invertebrates)
- Eras
- Climate (Ice Age)
- Evolution
- Extinction
- Plants
- Body systems
- Biomes
- Ecosystems
- Etc.

The third story, “**The Coming of Humans**,” shows the child how short a time humans have been on Earth compared to other creatures. It emphasizes that humans came with a distinctive set of characteristics different from the previous inhabitants of the Earth. Humans came with a unique mind that can think and imagine—it can imagine the past and the future, and it can abstract. Humans came with a heart that can love—not only its kind but others, including animals, even those it has not seen, and even nonliving things. Humans also came with hands that can work, create, and change their environment. These three gifts empower humans with freedom and responsibility to be agents of change. This story invites the child to become conscious of how they are using, and can further use, these gifts. Some ideas that can be connected to this story are:

- History/prehistory
- Creativity
- Cosmic task
- What is my role? My purpose?
- What unique talents did I bring with me?
- How can I contribute to make the world better?

The fourth story is “**The Story of Communication and Signs**.” This story tells the children of one of humans’ creations, language. It describes it as a solution created by humans to communicate, share ideas, and document history. The story relates the history of the alphabet and other forms of communication and aims to inspire an interest in writing, reading, and communication in general. Some ideas and skills that can be connected to this story are:

- Reading
- Writing
- Historical research
- Sharing of ideas and discoveries
- Exploring languages
- Different alphabets and scripts, pictographs, hieroglyphics
- Making paper
- Calligraphy
- Codes and crypts
- Explore writing instruments, typewriters, history of computers, etc.
- Study of plants and their uses inspired by the papyrus plant
- Debates
- Acting
- Presentations
- Filmmaking

The last great story is “**The Story of Numbers.**” It introduces numbers as a solution created by humans and inspires admiration for known and unknown heroes. It invites the child to see the order and usefulness of numbers. The child will continue to make connections to elements of this story with time, as their mathematical understanding and skills develop. We can help them make connections by referring to the story when we introduce new concepts like:

- Roman and other numerals
- Numeracy
- Operations
- Geometry
- Algebra
- Number patterns
- Number bases
- Geography and science
- Biology
- History
- Language
- Math
- Codes and crypts