

VILLAGE SCHOOL 4th- 6th GRADE CURRICULUM 2017-18

Classroom Practice and Community Building

Our day starts at 8.30, with a **class meeting**, led by each of the children in turn. By taking responsibility, the children learn both how to lead a meeting and how to listen to other people's reports and opinions. We begin the year with community-building activities and games designed to foster cooperation within the class and the wider school community. This year we are emphasizing the importance of creating an atmosphere that helps the whole class community to learn effectively. We will also have confidential whole-class discussions, in a formal council meeting, in which children can discuss any problems that arise within the class. One of the most important relationships in the school is that between older and younger reading buddies, in which students from the older classes read once a week to children in the pre-school and K-1 classes. This forms the basis of cooperation between older and younger children in all sorts of activities, both formal and informal.

Theme

This year's theme is the **Middle Ages**. This is a complex theme, rich in social, cultural and political history. As a rough guide, we are taking the Middle Ages as running from 1000 to 1500 CE, and as the very phrase 'Middle Ages' refers to European history, our study will be based mostly in Europe. However, we will refer to other parts of the world and, in particular the Middle East, when we study the Crusades. We will look at the Crusades from European, Byzantine and Arab perspectives. In general, historical events will be presented as examples of the way things were done in the Middle Ages, rather than as a straight narrative.

We began our theme study by reading and decoding the first lines of Chaucer's Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* in its original Medieval English, which helped the children understand the complex roots of our own language. We then looked at social arrangements under the feudal system, before studying castles from a social and military point of view. We will study the art and symbolism of heraldry, and the children will decorate wooden shields with their own coats of arms. Other topics will include cathedrals, the Black Death, and some of the European power struggles, such as the Hundred Years War. We will also study *Magna Carta*, a document celebrated as a significant early step on the road to democracy.

A highlight of the theme will be our class trip to England and Wales in February, when we will visit a number of castles and abbeys, giving children an opportunity to experience medieval buildings directly. We will tour Salisbury Cathedral, which also houses the finest of the four surviving original copies of Magna Carta. We will also spend two days in London, riding the London Eye and visiting the National Gallery (of art), the Tower of London and other prominent sights. This year's trip will also include a performance of *Twelfth Night* at the Royal Shakespeare Company theatre in Stratford.

Language Arts

Reading: Our reading program includes individual books and whole-class and group reading books. Individual books are chosen to be just right for each child's reading level, to develop fluency. Comprehension is developed by discussion of the book with the class teacher and through group and whole-class conversations about the various class and group books. Children have book-bags as a tangible contact between reading at home and reading in class. The children bring their individual and group reading books to and from home every day, and each child should spend at least twenty minutes reading every evening. Every day we have a read-aloud session in which teachers read interesting and challenging books that they themselves enjoy.

Writing: We are beginning the year with a focus on poetry. The children read a wide variety of poems, as a whole class, in groups and as individuals. As we discuss them together, we look at various technical elements

of poetry, as well as the meaning of the poems themselves. Other writing projects will include a short memoir and a non-fiction report on some aspect of the Middle Ages. The children will also write and illustrate short stories for their reading buddies, which will become part of the K-1 class library. We also study aspects of **grammar** - including basic parts of speech and conventions of syntax and punctuation - as part of the writing process, rather than as stand-alone subjects. There will also be regular exercises to reinforce the children's learning. We have begun working with **spelling** assignments for each grade, based on lists of words they are expected to be able to spell. The children will then work in groups based on their own particular spelling needs, in which we will look at particular spelling rules. The children will also have weekly spelling assignments for homework.

Handwriting: In general, the expectation is that all 5th- and 6th-graders will use cursive script as a matter of course for all their written work, from note-taking to final drafts. Fourth-graders will learn (or consolidate) cursive skills, so they can adopt cursive for all their work by the end of the year.

Mathematics

The 4th and 5th grades follow the TERC **Investigations** curriculum, which now covers the Common Core standards, while the 6th grade works with the **Connected Math** curriculum developed from Investigations. The value of these curricula is that children build on their own understanding, and develop confidence in their own mathematical and investigative abilities. The curricula foster an intuitive and collaborative approach to math, in which children often arrive at solutions because they recognize mathematical patterns.

Science

Our focus is to connect children with the natural world and explore major scientific concepts with hands on activities. We will develop theme connections whenever possible. We will develop familiarity with the scientific method through independent science projects. This year's topics include the five Kingdoms of Life, plant and animal cells, DNA, genetics and evolution. We will also study the immune system, and the Black Death in the 14th century. We will study herbalism in the Middle Ages and compare European and Islamic medicine during the Middle Ages. We will introduce the ideas of alchemy and chemistry, including the periodic table, atoms and a basic chemistry experiment. We will also conduct our annual Biodiversity Day survey of local plant and animal species. From January to March, our science lessons will be devoted to the students' Science Night projects. The students use the scientific method to do an independent experiment, write a report using lab report format, prepare a poster explaining the experiment's findings and show their project at Science Night (a non-competitive event).

Art

This year we will be working to develop children's ability to critique their own and each other's work, using both the 'painting of the week' posters, and the children's own art. We will be looking at art of the Middle Ages in both 'painting of the week' and practical art lessons. The children will learn about illuminated manuscript and radial design, a key component of stained glass rose windows, and apply these themes to their own art. Children will use clay to make a miniature castle, based on their understanding of castle architecture, and they will draw from landscape and architecture with pen and ink. The children have a sketch book for informal drawing, and for drawing studies.

Music

The class will sing a mix of theme-related songs and newer tunes with harmony parts and room for improvisation. The class listens to live and recorded music, and will learn basic music theory. Recorders are

an especially important part of the Middle Ages theme, and will be featured in the end of the year play. Students should practice Recorder for five minutes every day. Individual lessons in various instruments are offered after school.

Annual Play

A key feature of the year in the 4th-6th grade is our annual play, which will be performed on May 18th. The play is based on the theme, and the children develop their own plot and characters. Once each scene has been outlined in class, the children write their own versions at home. The class teachers then take lines from the children's individual scripts and develop a composite script, in which every child has a part. The children rehearse over a three-week period before performing the play in public at the town hall. The whole process draws on the children's understanding of the theme and provides a wonderful opportunity for the whole class to work as a community on a single project.

Yoga

Like the rest of the school, the 4th-6th class has a weekly session of yoga, which helps the children to work with attention and to develop awareness of their own bodies. It also helps them develop ways of coming to a state of quietness and wider awareness of themselves and their surroundings. We also work on 'Movements' which consist of series of gestures and postures, following various patterns, which are done to music.

Homework

The core of our homework is a daily reading assignment, which the book-bag system is intended to support. We expect each child to read at home for at least twenty minutes a day. In addition there is math homework on Monday to Thursday, designed to support the class lessons that precede and follow it. There will also be some writing homework, generally to help a child to develop individual writing projects, but sometimes on specific writing topics. Homework assignments should generally be completed on the day they are given, with the exception of some spelling assignments. The total time devoted to homework should be no longer than 45-60 minutes a day, because we believe children need time to follow other pursuits at home. If children forget their homework, they will be given a 'purple slip' which parents should sign and return to the teachers.