

### Introduction – new classes, new schedule

This year the oldest Village School class has a new, two-grade, configuration (as do the 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grade classes). We also have a new daily schedule, arranged around three one-hour teaching slots, so that in each of the three 1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade classes, we can split into two groups for math. As before, our day starts at 8:30am, with a **class meeting**, run by each of the children in turn. By taking responsibility for the meeting, the children learn how to lead a meeting and how to listen to other people's reports and opinions. We have **math** at 9:00, with snack at 9:55, and **recess** from 10:00 to 10:30. Two one-hour lessons follow – mainly **readers' workshop** and **writing** – followed by lunch and recess between 12:30 and 1:30. Afternoons are largely devoted to the **theme, science** and **art**.

There are various aspects for **community building**, beginning with the daily meeting. Included among them are **room jobs** which class members take turns to perform every day. Children do these jobs in pairs, so they learn how to cooperate in simple tasks. We will have regular class **council meetings**, in which individuals may talk about issues that are important to them, safe in the knowledge that the council is entirely confidential. We are currently experimenting with **dialogue** sessions, to help children learn to talk and listen together to some purpose.

### Theme

This year's theme is **Ancient Greece**. We began by looking at Greek geography, and the children colored maps and then made 3D relief maps using modeling clay. We looked at how the geography of Ancient Greece affected social development and myths – particularly the way sea voyages feature in so many Greek stories. We followed this by looking at the Greek alphabet and how our language has been shaped by Ancient Greek. This will be a recurring strand throughout the year. We have now begun reading and examining Greek myths, particularly relating to the major gods and goddesses. We will also read the story of Troy and look at the archeological evidence behind the legend. Rosemary Sutcliff's retelling of the Odyssey will be a class reading project. We will visit the Greek exhibit at the MFA in Boston, where a wide variety of myths is illustrated on Greek pottery.

We will study the social and political heritage of Greece - democracy, juries, theater, etc – and will learn about - and contrast - the cities of Athens and Sparta. We will also sketch in some political history and the relationship between the Greeks and Persia. We will learn about Alexander the Great and use a children's biography of Alexander as another whole-class reading project. Later, the class will work in groups to study a particular Greek scientist or philosopher, and report their findings to the whole class (See *Writing*, below).

Finally, our **annual play** is a key part of our theme study (and our writing and reading curriculum), which draws together various aspects of the children's understanding of the year's theme. The children write the play together and everyone has a speaking role. This is a major cross-curricular activity, involving theme, writing, art, performance and music.

### Language Arts

**Reading:** Our reading program has two main strands: individual books, and whole-class 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 individual book with the class teacher and through group and whole-class conversations about our various whole-class readers. Children have book-bags as a link between reading at home and reading in class. Students should bring their individual and group reading books to and from home every day, and spend **at least** twenty minutes reading every evening. Our class meetings will include book reports in which children describe and recommend books to each other. Read-aloud books are a regular feature of the day, in which the children hear a variety of exciting and challenging books, and (we hope!) share in the teacher's own enthusiasm.

**Writing:** This year one focus of our writing is to produce written responses to reading (one of the Common Core State Standards) and we are using journals mainly as readers' notebooks. The children have written responses to the whole-class reading book we are currently studying and they are writing about the poems they choose for themselves. This will form the foundation for the children's own **poetry** writing. Other writing projects will include **memoir** and a **non-fiction** report. The **play** is a major writing project in which all students write their individual scripts, based on agreed scenes and plot, and work together to produce a single combined play script which they then perform.

We will also study aspects of **grammar**, beginning with basic parts of speech and conventions of syntax and punctuation. Grammar lessons will feature every week as part of a year-long series of mini-lessons covering many aspects of writing. There will also be regular exercises to reinforce the children's learning. Children learn various general **spelling** rules in class and will be taking home a weekly list of ten words to learn. These will sometimes be related to the children's individual needs, based on class-wide spelling assessments, and at other times the words will be taken from the list of words each grade should be able to spell. Weekly assessments cover the week's listed words, plus four more from previous lists. **Handwriting:** The expectation is that all 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>-graders will be using **cursive script** as a matter of course for all their written work, from note-taking to final drafts.

## Mathematics

In the 5<sup>th</sup> grade we continue to follow the **Investigations** curriculum, which enables children to build on their own understanding, and develop confidence in their own mathematical and investigative abilities. The curriculum offers students opportunities to have varied experiences with mathematical concepts, through games and other hands-on activities. Children are encouraged to use multiple strategies to solve problems and engage with peers to stretch their thinking. The Investigations curriculum fosters an intuitive and collaborative approach to math, in which children often arrive at solutions because they recognize mathematical patterns, while at the same time learning a range of math skills. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade we work with the **Connected Math** curriculum, which is based on the same principles as Investigations. We have now invested in new versions of both math curricula, which have been revised (and improved) to incorporate the Common Core State Standards

## Science

Our focus is to connect children with the natural world and explore major scientific concepts with hands-on activities. We explore the scientific method through independent science projects. The science curriculum is

planned throughout 1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade so that topics can be introduced at a time appropriate to the theme and to children's development. When a topic does not fit well into any theme, it's sandwiched into the curriculum.

During the fall, we will be studying earth and space topics. We have started by making a geological timeline and we are in the process of adding prehistory cards which will show types of organisms from each major geologic time period. We will work on a plate tectonic flip book, a convection lab, study the rock cycle using peanut butter bars, and do a rock lab. Then we will turn our attention to space, and make a model of our solar system in our classroom. We will have a star watch early one evening, and take a field trip to the Amherst College Planetarium and Natural History Museum. In the spring we'll do a lab on the Archimedes Principle, we take part in Biodiversity Day, and have classes on the human body.

We will start independent science projects for **Science Night** in January. Students use the scientific method to do an independent experiment, write a report using lab report format, prepare a poster explaining their experiment's findings and show their project at Science Night (a non-competitive event) in March. This is a class-based activity, with students doing most of their research in the classroom. We will have a scientific conference during the process so students can give input on each other's projects.

### **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. The children will learn about the art and architecture of Ancient Greece while continuing to develop their art making skills. They will learn how to do a perspective drawing that includes architectural elements of Ancient Greece. Children will use clay to create a vase or jug that shows a mythological scene using red and black slip. The children have made a personalized sketchbook for informal drawing, drawing studies and planning.

### **Spanish**

Spanish is taught through movement, stories, games and songs, and is based on the TPR (Total Physical Response) system. Students actively participate in each class, learning basic conversational skills and telling simple stories, aided by movement and acting as they learn to understand and respond to the language.

### **Music**

The 5<sup>th</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> grade music program will draw on a variety of modern and traditional music. Building on skills developed last year, students will learn rounds and harmonies, with an emphasis on singing in parts. Students will also develop their understanding of rhythm and math in musical notation. We are already looking at symphonic works, and we are arranging to hear a live symphony concert. Recorder lessons include learning to read music and play by ear on both soprano and alto recorders.

### **Yoga & Movements**

Like the rest of the school, the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> class has a weekly session of **yoga**, which helps them to work with attention and to develop awareness of their own bodies. It also helps the children learn ways of coming to a state of quietness, and a wider awareness of themselves and their surroundings. The class is also resuming

work at '**movements**', rhythmic dances and exercises, performed to music that involve a combination of physical and mental attention. Both these classes are now held in a studio close to the main school building, which gives us much more space than we had before.

## **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 a **minimum of twenty minutes a day**. In addition there is math homework on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and 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. The total time devoted to homework - including reading - should be no longer than 45-60 minutes a day, because we believe children need time to follow other pursuits at home.