

Language Arts

Having listened to their nursery and kindergarten teachers tell them stories and lead them in rhymes and verses, our students experience the richness of the English language long before they reach first grade. This experience fosters an appreciation for the beauty of speech and lays the groundwork for fertile imaginations, phonemic awareness and strong, varied vocabularies. In the elementary school, language skills are taught as an integral part of the work in all subjects, as well as in English classes and main lessons.

The Mulberry Grade School faculty is committed to meeting and developing the language needs and skills of students from first through eighth grade. Our Language Arts curriculum endeavors to integrate elements of contemporary reading practice with the Waldorf pedagogy. We believe that it is important to recognize and catch literacy challenges early to provide the most appropriate and positive intervention. Ongoing literacy assessments are administered in the early grades. When necessary students will receive additional support at school or will be referred to a resource and/or specialist outside of the school. There are many different approaches to working with this pedagogy and we believe the following is well suited to our school and community.

When a class is a combination of two grades, the faculty combines the curriculum content for the two grades. Teachers work from the same curriculum content but establish expectations and skill sets that are grade appropriate and meet the developmental needs of the class. Generally, the curriculum and story content of the lower grade is introduced at the start of the year (September to January) and the story content for the upper grade in January through to the end of the year. For example, in a combined grade 3 and 4 class the story content of the third grade is brought from September to January (e.g. 2007) with different expectations and skill sets for each grade, while the story content for the fourth grade is brought from January to June (e.g. 2008) and taken up again in September to January (e.g. 2008). In January 2009, the grade five curriculum content is introduced through to June and taken up again once more from September to January.

The *first grade* begins with an introduction to “form drawing,” during which the children experience straight and curved lines in various combinations through movement, modeling, observations in nature and on paper. Precision and clarity of line, essential to good writing skills, are emphasized. Form drawing helps develop eye-to-hand coordination, the sense of uprightness in space, right/left and up/down orientation, and ability to mirror, all skills that are needed in reading.

After this introduction, the children learn the consonants and vowels in imagery from stories, through the progression from story to picture letter. Next the story is constructed briefly as a class activity and written on the board by the class teacher. Students copy this story into main lesson books. Thus, writing precedes reading, and the main lesson books that the children create become their first readers. Phonics and basic sight vocabulary are learned through song, verse, speech exercises, games and drills. In addition, through the telling of fairy tales and the recitation of poetry, skills in listening, re-telling, sequencing, and diction are practiced.

In the *second grade*, fables and legends from around the world serve as the backdrop for lessons in language arts. Typically, the students listen to a story and illustrate this story in their main lesson books. The next day, they are asked to recall the story in order, in detail, and in their own words. Then it is written on the board, and they copy it into their main lesson books. Thus the students refine their comprehension skills and their ability to sequence events, as well as their reading skills and handwriting. Later in the year, the children write their own compositions, which are corrected and then neatly rewritten in main lesson books. The children also study word families, digraphs and trigraphs and learn to use context in order to read unfamiliar words. A large pool of sight words is developed throughout the year. Students sign books out from the class library to take home to be enjoyed with parents. Students are strongly encouraged to read with parents for at least ten minutes a day. The first grammar lessons are given in second grade, beginning with the introduction of nouns, verbs, and adjectives through

imaginative stories and activities. Every day the class recites poetry, tongue twisters and other speech exercises to encourage clear diction and enunciation. The class also performs a play, sometimes based on a story from their lessons. The children learn cursive writing.

In **third grade**, Old Testament stories and Native American tales form the basis of the language arts lessons. In grammar lessons, the class studies the parts of speech and is introduced to the four types of sentences. Students learn how to form and punctuate complete sentences, and they write compositions in class from their own ideas and/or based on main lesson topics. Time is spent on editing compositions for main lesson books. Spelling is a daily activity with weekly dictation or quizzes. The children read independently and in small groups for in-class reading. Reading at home is expected. Homework assignments may now be given.

In **fourth grade**, grammar studies focus on tenses, syntax, and comparative adjectives. Accurate spelling is emphasized in writing assignments, and spelling is a weekly study. The students also work in varied compositional styles, including journal entries, letters, and book reports. Main lesson books are created from the stories that the class composes together and from independent writing, often based on Norse myths that are the literary theme of the fourth grade year. Handwriting, punctuation, and paragraphing are stressed, and the children learn to revise and edit their work. They also write their first research report during one of the main lesson blocks.

Fifth grade grammar studies become more analytical, and students study the active and passive voices. Composition skills and working from outlines are practiced, as is the appropriate use of direct and indirect quotations. Emphasis is placed upon the complete process of writing, editing, and rewriting, and students write expository essays as well as narratives and book reports. There are regular spelling and vocabulary quizzes. Greek myths form the bulk of fifth grade literature; in addition, the class teacher chooses several books as supplemental reading. Independent reading assignments are tracked by the teacher.

Sixth graders study Roman and medieval history, and the literary focus for the class includes books that deal with Roman history, as well as chivalric tales and medieval ballads. Students are required to complete at least three book reports and should be able to discuss character, plot and themes, while developing summarization skills. Grammar includes the study of compound and complex sentences, as well as independent and subordinate clauses. A grammar workbook is introduced this year. This allows the children to complete exercises on parts of speech, parts of the sentence, prepositional phrases, direct and indirect objects and punctuation. Vocabulary study and spelling practice focus on prefixes, suffixes and word stems. In addition, students strengthen their expository writing skills through the preparation of precise, sequenced reports based on observations of the physics experiments done in science class.

In **seventh grade**, students are guided in their growing ability to read critically. They keep reading logs on books from an extensive outside reading list, and write several book reports, in which emphasis is placed on plot summarization, character development, and theme analysis. The class also works on skills in note-taking, preparing outlines, and paraphrasing. The Renaissance is the major theme of seventh grade. Short writing assignments have particular goals for strengthening the mechanics of writing-development of varied and complex sentence structure, organization and development of paragraphs, transitions, and sequencing. Writing for science main lessons emphasizes precision and clarity of expression. The class also works with the theme of “wish, wonder and surprise,” expanding their ability to manipulate the English language to meet different moods and modes. Students also study ballads and other poems, thus beginning an exploration of meter and rhyme schemes. Library research skills are introduced at this time, and children write longer research papers. Vocabulary and spelling quizzes are given, and students use *Warriner’s English Grammar and Compositions* as well as grammar and vocabulary books.

In **eighth grade**, folk tales and poetry from various cultures, which were read in the early grades, are now studied from a new perspective. In addition, students read Shakespeare, short stories and epic poetry. They select independent reading, keep reading logs, and write several book reports. Discussion, writing assignments, and quizzes require recall of textual detail, hypothesizing, theme and character analysis, and literary style. Making an outline, note taking, writing a research paper (citing sources and making a

bibliography), paraphrasing, summarizing, the essay, and newspaper and business writing are all addressed. Grammar studies are supplemented with exercises from workbooks, and vocabulary is developed through literature as well as through workbook assignments. Creative writing encourages students to work descriptively with mood, style, and literary forms.