

Grade 1 Curriculum Summary

(The text that follows is adapted from the websites of member schools of the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education and the San Francisco Waldorf School.)

First Grade is a bridge between kindergarten and the grades. The child is now ready to begin to work imaginatively in new, more focused and explicit ways with the mind. The first grade curriculum is designed to meet the children at their particular developmental level. First graders learn and live through imagination, feeling, and movement. Therefore, first grade academics foster and utilize these elements to support strong academics, cultivate a love of learning, and foster curiosity for the world around us.

An important task for the teacher is to create a rhythm for the child's school life as a foundation for the learning process. Towards this end the teacher designs a rhythm not only through the seasons and holidays, but also within each day and within each lesson of the day.

The year begins with the discovery that within all forms lie two basic elements: the straight and curved lines. The child finds these shapes in her/his own body, in the classroom and in the world beyond. The straight and curved lines are practiced through walking, drawing in the air and on a neighbor's back and, finally, on paper. These form drawings train motor skills, awaken the child's powers of observation, and provide a foundation for the introduction of the alphabet.

Fairy tales and stories from around the world form the basis of the First Grade **language arts** curriculum. The students begin their exploration of the alphabet through vivid stories and images. Through practice visualizing and reviewing stories, students build strong comprehension skills even before formal reading has emerged.

Through the stories the child is introduced to each letter of the alphabet. In this way the child experiences the development of language in a very concrete yet imaginative way. Images arise from these stories, such as a mountain that takes the form of the letter M. The class composes short descriptive sentences to accompany each picture. The wording is then copied from the teacher's model. Through these activities the child learns word and sentence structure without conscious effort, and has the joy of creating her/his own illustrated books for reading material. By associating abstract symbols with concrete images, students can better master the sound-to-symbol relationship. Through collaborative story writing, pictorial representations combining letters and story, exploration of word families and word patterns, and other literary explorations, students develop the skills and motivation to begin their journey as readers and writers.

In a similar imaginative way, within the **mathematics** curriculum the child first experiences the qualities of numbers before learning the four processes. What is the experience of "oneness"? "Wholeness"? What is there only one of in the world? (Me! You!). Stones, acorns and other natural and familiar objects are used to introduce counting. They develop number sense experientially through movement and hand-on activities in many forms, including stepping and clapping and the rhythmic, choral speaking of numbers. Only after considerable practical experience in adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing are the

written symbols for all four basic mathematical processes introduced. This approach leads to a deeper understanding of math concepts by engaging students creatively and imaginatively in their learning.

In **social studies**, the children learn to understand the rule-making processes in their classroom, school, and community. They learn how to be supportive, positive members of their community.

Science through gardening and nature study. Through weekly garden time and inquiry-based explorations of nature, students develop fundamental scientific skills of observation, curiosity, and reverence for the natural world.

Learning a **foreign language** is ideally suited to the imitative disposition of the young child, as s/he learns through hearing and speaking the language. These classes use language immersion, song, and movement to explore language in an exciting, expressive, and natural way.

The arts. Through frequent music, art, and handwork lessons and extensive integration of music and the visual arts throughout the curriculum, artistic development is emphasized as a key element of the student's imaginative interaction with the world and their personal growth.

The first grade enters the world of **music** through the pentatonic scale. In this scale all notes have a harmonious sound in any order they are played. The playing of the pentatonic flute develops finger coordination, concentration, and breath control. Songs are based on seasonal themes.

Painting in the first grade is intended to give the child an experience of working with color rather than attempting to create formed "pictures." The child's feelings for form are encouraged through beeswax modeling and crayon illustrations. In drawing, the child imitates the teacher's work, drawing whole shapes rather than filling in outlines.

Knitting is a fundamental first grade activity, as there exists a close relationship between finger movement, speech, and thinking. Some classes may choose to make scarves or knitted squares to be joined into a blanket.

Games and movement through circle and singing activities, jump rope, ball games, beanbags, rods, and the balance beam are an integral part of the curriculum as the child develops his/her motor integration and their confidence and joy in movement. There is a close connection between bodily movement, spatial integration, and brain development. Therefore, through daily Circle Time and regular Movement classes, students use music and movement to develop their bodies and minds.

Grade 1 Curriculum Components

- **Math:** Qualities of numbers; introduction of the four operations in arithmetic
- **Language Arts:** Form drawing; pictorial and phonetic introduction to letters; writing; fairy tales from around the world; singing; poetry recitation
- **Science:** Nature stories; nature walks; observations; gardening
- **History & Social Studies:** Multicultural stories and class and school community building
- **Handwork:** Knitting (fine motor skills, concentration, sense of form)
- **Foreign Language:** Introduction to a foreign language through songs, stories and rhymes, imitation and gesture
- **Visual & Performing Arts:** Form drawing; painting; beeswax modeling; crayon illustrations, drama; singing; pentatonic flute
- **Movement/Physical Education/Games:** Eurythmy; circle games; imaginative games; movement combined with music and singing; throwing and catching; rhythmic stepping, balancing