

# Waldorf School - General Curriculum

## Grades One, Two and Three

### *The First Grade In A Waldorf School*

The morning begins for the First Graders with the group recitation of a *Verse*.

After the morning exercises, the children go on to what is known as the *Main Lesson* period, which occupies the first two hours of the morning and is devoted to a single subject for two to four weeks. The first Main Lesson subject is *Painting and Drawing*, until the children have a facility in handling crayons, paints and paintbrush, as writing, reading, numbers nature study and handwork are all taught in ways involving colour and design.

*Letter Writing* is presented in a lively, pictorial way with the help of fairy stories. "S" may be a fairy tale snake sinuously slithering through the grass on some secret errand; the motion of the sounds becomes dynamic. The teacher shows on the blackboard drawing how the letter is embedded in the picture, how perhaps the "W" is hiding in the drawing of the waves. The children draw the letter in the air with their hands and on the floor as a large pattern to move on with their feet; their whole being participates in the writing experience. Then the children make their own pictures of waves, then "W"s, creating an illustrated book as each letter is presented.

When the children have mastered the sounds and can name them, they are ready for their first reading experience. The episodes of a story are illustrated by a series of pictures drawn on the blackboard by the teacher and in notebooks by the children. The class composes short descriptive sentences to accompany each picture. The wording is then copied from the teacher's model. Through these activities, the children learn word and sentence structure without conscious effort and have the joy of creating their own illustrated books for reading material.

*Exploration of Numbers* begins with solving riddles such as "What is one thing in the world that there can never be more than one of?" ("Me".) So the characteristics of one, two, three, etc. are explored in the children's inner experience and in nature. Children take delight in counting, especially when the strong, rhythmic choral speaking of the numbers is accompanied by stepping and clapping. Through activities, the children befriend themselves with the form and movement of the number element, and then begin to practice the four arithmetical processes, always proceeding from wholes to parts.

*Nature Study* takes the form of an experience of hearing the world speak, talking of life and its adventures. The child learns the true fact of nature, but always in vivid, dramatic, story form.

*Handwork* serves several important purposes. *Knitting* is an indispensable First Grade activity, as there exists a close relationship between finger movement, speech and thinking. *Modelling* is done with honey-fragrant beeswax. Music periods are devoted to singing and playing the pentatonic recorder flute, which also helps develop finger dexterity.

The imitative genius of early childhood is still active in the First Grade child, making this an ideal time to learn through hearing and speaking two *Foreign Languages*, chosen for their appropriateness to the time and the school's location.

*Eurythmy*, an art of movement developed by Dr. Steiner, is taught by specifically trained teachers. Exercises affect the children's grade of movement, sensitise hands and fingers, heighten drawing and modelling ability, relieve strain and tension, and stimulate musical, poetic and dramatic senses.

## *The Second Grade In A Waldorf School*

According to the Waldorf plan, the teacher progresses with his pupils from First to Second Grade, in fact, he continues with them through all eight years of their elementary schooling wherever this is feasible. The class teacher who can look back on all his pupils' previous learning experiences and build step by step on his own foundation can endow his teaching with real unit. Primary aged children, who are very sensitive to readjustments and changes, are given the security of knowing one personality and method intimately and thoroughly.

English now becomes a special subject assigned its share of main lesson periods. Based again on the spoken languages, *Fables* satisfy the children's' deep interest in the animal kingdom while Legends offer lofty striving and highlight the noblest human qualities. These fables and legends are now the focus of writing material. The children learn cursive writing by joining up the printed letters of last year. The flowing script pictures far more truly than printing the movement of the breath as it streams through sound after sound and links them together in smooth continuity. *Grammar* is introduced with liveliness and humour by acting out stories in which the children can experience the contrast between doing words, naming words and describing words.

In *Arithmetic*, the children carry out more complicated operations with the four processes. Imaginative stories still form the basis of these problems. Through rhythmic counting, accompanied by accented clapping and movement of the whole body, they learn to count by twos, threes, fours and fives and can begin learning the multiplication tables.

*Nature Study* continues in connection with poetry, legends and imaginative descriptions of natural processes.

*Painting and Modelling* are drawn into constant service in other activities in the *Main Lessons*. *Crocheting* is introduced and small projects of the children's' own creating always observe an important principle - that handwork products be useful and functional, as well as beautiful.

*Foreign Languages, Singing and Flute* lessons continue to be taught as in the First Grade with *Eurythmy* leading the children into a more conscious forming of vowels and consonants.

## *The Third Grade In A Waldorf School*

Quickened physical growth takes place during this transition period in which the age of dream is passing and a new age is beginning to dawn. Now there is a shifting emphasis as the child's relation to the world around him changes. This occurs to the extent to which the child feels separate from the world he seeks knowledge of and his studies will now have a more realistic, practical character.

In this transition to realism, *Social Studies* are now introduced into the *Main Lesson*. The children learn how the kingdoms of nature mutually support and complete one another and visit a farm for concrete experience of the dependence of man on plants and animals. They study shelter and house building, contrasting their home with those of other times, peoples and climates. All teaching is done through the teacher's spoken word and direct experience from excursions, thus keeping the learning warm and human.

*Arithmetic* becomes practical, applied to "real life situations", such as measuring, cooking and money. *Rhythmic reciting and stepping of tables* continues with added mental gymnastics.

Stories and poems of the Old Testament dealing largely with real persons and happenings who drama parallel the 8 year old's own experience are the children's' first introduction to *History*. Their own illustrated book soon emerges from the Old Testament drama with stories retold in the children's' own words. *Grammar* studies continue, often expressing parts of speech in colours suitable to their nature. Spelling receives much attention: *Painting, Drawing, Modelling* continue in connection with all Main

Lessons rather than as a separate period. In *Music*, they begin to learn notation. *Simple Sewing* is introduced and useful articles are crocheted and knitted.

Unifying these first three years is the child's need for living pictures requiring the teacher to become an artist at knowledge, engaging the activity of his own being, developing in the child the capacity for inward picturing out of which at a later age thought is born. Stories here are the teacher's chief means of making learning live.

## **Grades Four and Five**

### *The Fourth Grade In A Waldorf School*

Inner and outer worlds are no longer one world for the 9 year old. The greatest care must now be taken to bring the outer world to the child in a way that makes it possible for him everywhere to discover its human meaning.

In their study of Man and Animal in external form, the child can now model the heads of man and animals he is studying. Because this is an age of hero worship seeking an inspiring picture of human nature, *History* looks at the *Finnish and Norse* sagas with their stress on strength and boldness rather than cunning. These poetic forms offer vivid contrasts to enrich and develop his intensified inner life. In *Composition*, simple narration of the child's own real experiences begins with continued work in Grammar and the introduction of letter forms.

*Fractions* are introduced with concrete objects to demonstrate truths before forming mental concepts.

*Social Studies* begin with familiar things of the child's own time and environment and lead him gradually to an experience of less familiar places and events. Simple map drawing of travel routes, home and school is followed by a study of the Okanagan and Kelowna areas with visits to historical sites in Kelowna and the surrounding area.

Now the children begin to write as well as speak two *Foreign Languages*. Their understanding of grammar progresses to the point that they can consciously grasp rules underlying the construction of these languages.

In *Music*, the child's newly strengthened individuality now gives him the ability to hold his own in Part-Singing as he could not have done successfully before; canons and rounds form a natural bridge to this exciting new skill. He shows his first real delight in harmony and the minor key answers a deep-felt need leading inward in self-discovery.

At this crossing point in development, *Handwork* takes up Cross Stitch. The children design and execute an original cross-stitch pattern in addition to *Embroidery and Sewing*.

### *The Fifth Grade In A Waldorf School*

The Fifth Grader has enhanced his recent gains in consciousness and grown more accustomed to being an isolated self, seeing the world in a new perspective. Yet, like the Third Grader, he is about to leave another phase of childhood behind him and to cross a new threshold of experience. The curriculum must therefore not only continue to build on already established foundations, but introduce certain new elements to prepare him for his next step forward.

*History* had until now only a pictorial and personal nature and no attempt was made to introduce exact temporal concepts or to proceed in strict sequences. Now, however, History becomes a special *Main Lesson* subject, as does *Geography*. *History*, telling of man's deeds and strivings, stirs the child to a more intense experience of his own humanness. *Geography* does exactly the opposite; it leads him away from

himself out into ever-wider spaces from the familiar to the unfamiliar. History brings the child to himself; Geography brings the child into the world.

*Ancient History* in the Fifth Grade starts with the childhood of civilized humanity in ancient India, where men were dreamers. The ancient Persian culture that followed the Indian felt the impulse to transform the earth, till the soil, domesticate the animals while helping the sun god conquer the spirit of darkness. The next great cultures were those of the Chaldeans, the Hebrews, the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Egyptians. Next comes the civilization of the Greeks, with whom Ancient History ends. Every means is used to give the children a vivid impression of these four ancient cultures. They read translations of poetry, study hieroglyphic symbols of the Egyptians, sample arts and crafts of the various ancient peoples, trying their hands at similar creations. History is here an education of the children's feelings rather than of their memory for facts and figures, for it requires inner mobility to enter sympathetically into these ancient states of being so different from our own.

*Geography* emphasizes contact as *Canadian Geography* is studied. Every consideration of the earth's physical features is linked with a study of the way human life has been lived in the region, the human uses made of natural resources, the industry and produce.

As a continuation of their study of the living earth, the Fifth Graders begin a study of *Botany*, the plant world. After discovering some of the secrets of the plant life found in his own environment, the child's attention is drawn to vegetation in other parts of the world.

Fractions and Decimals continue to be the chief concern of *Arithmetic* study in the Fifth Grade.

Regular *Choral Singing* is practiced in the Fourth and Fifth Grades with the C-Recorder flute being used in relation to the main lesson. Many children begin studying a Stringed Instrument in the Third or Fourth Grade and participate in Orchestra within the school day. *Woodworking* is begun with carving, and *Knitting* now uses four needles. *Eurythmy*, *Foreign Languages* and *Physical Education* also continue.

## **Grades Six, Seven and Eight**

### *The Sixth Grade In A Waldorf School*

Between the tenth and eleventh years, the imaginative thinking characteristic of early childhood undergoes a metamorphosis from which it re-emerges as the ability to form abstract concepts. Thought before this time has had a pictorial rather than a conceptual nature. Thought then is literally imagination's child, accounting for the emphasis placed on the cultivation of the child's imaginative powers in the elementary school curriculum. Rather than forcing the thought capacity into premature birth and functioning, the Steiner schools are based on his ripening in time. The thinking that emerges as a ripened power from the matrix of a healthy imagination is a warm and mobile thinking, the fruit of the living pictures with which the world has been brought to the child. They have awakened his whole enthusiasm for the world around him. The curricula of the next three years are shaped to provide experiences fitting to this new ability.

The *Physical Sciences* now begin with the study of acoustics, heat, magnetism and static electricity. Acoustics or Sound Theory leads from familiar experiences in tone and speech to experimentation with sound phenomena of other kinds. Sounds in music and nature lead to experiments by which they discover harmonies of relationship made by subdivision in strings. Expressed in fractions, these relationships are revealed as number harmonies; concord and discord are perceived to be mathematical order and disorder. From these experiments, the children proceed to problems of tone conduction and then back to the human organism to a consideration of the structure and functioning of the ear and larynx. Optical studies follow directly, beginning, like acoustics, with familiar experiences in the realm of beauty. Each colour is studied for its own special attributes and then observed in relation to other colours. Study of colour in the world begins with the sun, giver of light. Experiments with artificial light

and shadow in the classroom lead to rainbow and prism, then experiments to determine laws of light refraction; the lens and camera are studied. In all these studies the *principles* underlying the various light and colour phenomena are arrived at as end products *generalized from concrete experiences* rather than stated theoretically before the experiments are made.

Sixth grade *History* begins with the transition from Ancient to *Modern History*, from poetic consciousness to a search for truth in the form of scientific concepts because the 11 year old himself is involved in such a transition. He is now able to grasp History as temporal sequence of cause and effect relationships – through the decline of Greece, the rise and fall of Rome to the effects of these two great cultures on European civilization up to the beginning of the Fifteenth century when once again a great stirring of man's soul drove him to seek new physical and spiritual horizons.

*Geography* studies the earth's configuration and contrasts – distribution of oceans, seas, continents and mountain masses with introduction of climate studies and first astronomical concepts. These are applied specifically to European and African Geography.

*Geology*, the study of the mineral world, turns to the structure of the earth and proceeds from the study of the flora and fauna of the geological ages to minerals, metals and finally gems and crystals, leading to the functions of mineral and metallic substances in the human organism.

*Botany* continues with an introduction to horticulture.

*Mathematics* introduces percentage, interest, profit and loss, ration, proportion, estimation and introduction to algebraic equations. Geometrical design is now done with the utmost accuracy with instruments. Families of geometric figures are constructed and studied for the numerical laws they embody. Theorems are visually demonstrated, but not taught; perspective drawing is introduced in connection with geometric drawing.

Black and white drawing, shadows, landscapes and colour contrasts are taken up in *Painting*. In *Handwork*, the children sew stuffed animals and carve wood to shape an animal and a spoon, developing their skill with tools. *Singing* focuses on two and three part choruses, songs of the minstrels and middle ages, records in descant, alto and tenor voices and Roman music. *Eurythmy* introduces simple musical forms, with greater depth in alliteration, geometrical forms and transformations. *Foreign Languages* continue with reading of simple texts, humorous stories and free translation.

### *The Seventh Grade In A Waldorf School*

As children of this age are charged with emotional vitality, questioning everything and seeking to overthrow authority, Seventh Grade *History* is an intensive study of the Renaissance, bringing all previous cultural achievements to a glorious flowering and ushering in a new age of wide scientific inquiry and exploration. Alive with drama and colourful figures, these are times when history is at its most story-like. The Arthurian legends and voyages of discovery round out this period, providing historical novels, biographies, ballads and tales of adventure in *Literature*. *Composition, Grammar* and *Spelling* continue.

*Mechanics* begins in *Physics* with the lever principle as found in the human arm. From their experimentation, the children learn the basic mechanical concepts and their application in the machinery of ancient and modern times. *Inorganic Chemistry* is introduced as a study of the combustion process. From the beautiful legend of the bringing of fire to earth by Prometheus to a study of combustion in the human organism in the digestive processes, fire can be observed externally in the breaking down of substances by oxidation. *Physiology* is introduced as the study of life processes in man; blood circulation, respiration and nutrition in connection with health and hygiene. *Astronomy* in the Seventh Grade is extended to give a picture of world space. From their own place on the earth, the children observe the solar, lunar, planetary and stellar phenomena which lead them to a picture of world spatial relationships.

*World Geography*, which now runs parallel to *History*, takes up the theme of adventurous exploration and covers the whole globe. The children's knowledge of *Astronomy* is called upon to further their understanding of climate, tides and other influences on cultural and economic life of the peoples of the earth.

*Mathematics* introduces negative numbers for the first time, venturing into mathematical thinking that has no relation to physical perceptions, making real demands on the child's imaginative powers. Square and cube root and ratio are introduced. *Algebra* and *Business Arithmetic* study continue. Geometrical, perspective and black and white *Drawing* are continued in more complex form.

*A Capella Singing, Motets, Madrigals, Ballads* and *Renaissance Music* are introduced. *Recorder* continues. *Eurythmy* explores poems with contrast, wonder, surprise; ballads with quick dramatic movements, drama and tragedy. In *Handwork*, the children sew hand puppets/slippers and embroider. *Woodworking* and *Clay Modelling* continue.

### *The Eighth Grade In A Waldorf School*

The task of elementary education is to give children an understanding of man and the world they live in, to offer them knowledge so rich and warm as to engage their hearts and wills as well as their minds. Such an understanding is the basis of all real efficiency in later years. With the completion of the Eighth Grade, the children should have a well-rounded general picture of man and universe. This last year should not only bring all previous experiences to a new peak, but also enable the children to enter fully and potently into the life of their own time.

*History*, therefore, is an intensive study of the *Industrial Revolution* to the modern day, focusing as well on the outstanding individuals such as Napoleon, Lincoln, Jefferson, Edison and culminating in *American History*. *Geography* takes up the same theme, showing the role played by every part of the earth in modern industrial civilization. A comprehensive picture is given of the relation of mineral resources and plant and animals life to the life of human beings in various regions of the world (*World Economic Geography*.)

*Physics* lessons complement these historical and geographical surveys. The practical uses made of man's new knowledge of all the physical sciences are thoroughly explored. In addition to further studies in *Acoustics, Thermodynamics, Mechanics, Climate, Electricity* and *Magnetism*, the children are now introduced to *Hydraulics, Aerodynamics* and *Meteorology*. *Chemistry* is also considered in relation to industry. *Organic Chemistry* (fats, sugars, proteins and starches are identified) is studied for the role it plays in the building of organic substance. *Mathematics* also emphasizes the practical applications of *Arithmetic, Algebra* and *Geometry*. Demonstrations in plane and solid geometry lead to problems in the measurement of surfaces and volume. The study of graphs is introduced. Man is again the subject of nature study through the study of *Physiology* of the human organism, observed from the standpoint of form and movement.

*Literature* focuses on the theme of human freedom in the short story, letters and Shakespearean drama. *Painting* concerns itself for the first time with highly conscious studies of highlights and shadows in portraits and landscapes. In their two *Foreign Languages*, the children begin a study of poetry and metric forms. Machine sewing, darning, artistic hand-sewing projects and carpentry devoted to big projects requiring real skill and imagination culminate *Handwork*. *Music* takes up Elizabethan music, American music, Symphonic form; *Eurythmy* complements other studies with exploration of poems with tension and relief and contrasting moods.

\*\* The above descriptions are paraphrased from "Teaching As A Lively Art" by Marjorie Spock.