

Overview

First grade is a wonderful year of growth, both inside and outside the classroom. Students are a part of a strong classroom community, and they learn to develop a respect for individuality, as well as a love of learning and exploration. The social curriculum is as important as the academics, and *how* children learn is equally as important as *what* they learn. In this way, first graders encounter many opportunities to share their thinking with others, reflect on their successes and areas of growth, and interact with their peers in productive ways.

Using the guiding principles of the *Responsive Classroom* approach, teachers and children work on creating a safe and welcoming environment. These endeavors occur daily during Morning Meetings, Share Time, or while the group participates in a collaborative activity. Teachers also utilize the *Open Circle* curriculum to teach social and emotional skills. This program provides a structured format to create a cooperative classroom culture, build positive relationships, and learn the problem-solving process. *Open Circle* also provides a forum for discussion of other issues important to the class.

In each of the academic subjects, instruction occurs in whole-group, small-group, or individual contexts. The goal is for first graders to work towards independence within each subject, and teachers carefully tailor instruction to provide this scaffolding. Students often work with partners or in small groups to explore topics and to practice skills. For example, writing partners meet often to share drafts and provide feedback, ask questions, and give tips to each other. Throughout the year, children engage in discussions with their teacher to set goals for meta-cognitive growth and to identify how they learn and think.

In the first-grade year, teachers work to create a strong partnership with families in order to share student growth and goals. First graders are responsible for at-home reading each night to become familiar with the homework routine and to continuing to practice their reading skills.

Language Arts

Reading

Reading is one of the most important academic aspects of first grade. Therefore, teachers focus on encouraging lifelong readers who can engage in reading skillfully and joyfully. The classroom environment is rich with print and contains a leveled library which provides first graders with many opportunities to develop their reading skills. Within Reading Workshop, the team of reading teachers instruct through whole-group modeling and mini-lessons, small-group strategy lessons and *Guided Reading* groups, and one-on-one conferences involving feedback and coaching. Students also receive daily phonics instruction through a systematic approach and practice these skills in multi-sensory ways. While first graders are developing their decoding skills, they also learn to use critical thinking and comprehension skills. Some of these skills include previewing the text, asking questions about and beyond the text, and activating prior

knowledge. Students learn to engage in the books they read in meaningful ways and enjoy discussions about their reading.

Writing

Handwriting begins with a review of uppercase letter formation and then transitions into lowercase practice. Students are introduced to groups of letters that are formed similarly and work towards developing correct formation and neatness through frequent practice and instruction. Handwriting is taught using the *Handwriting Without Tears* program.

First graders develop writing skills through participation in Writing Workshop. They learn to recognize themselves as writers who can make meaning of their lives through written work. Students engage in the writing process daily and develop skills in planning, drafting, revising, and publishing pieces. Writing is shared in many ways, through partner work, whole-group celebrations, and also at lower school assemblies. Teachers implement units of study developed by the *Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project*, including narrative, information, opinion, and poetry units. First graders also reflect on various school events, performances, and field trips in their journals.

Word Work

The *Project Read* and *How to Spell* curricula provide a multi-sensory, systematic, and sequential framework for teaching phonics and spelling in first grade. Children learn how to spell words correctly by applying spelling generalizations and patterns. They continue to build their repertoire of high-frequency, phonetically irregular words through daily practice. First graders progress from being phonetic spellers to spelling conventionally.

Reading Workshop occurs daily for 50 minutes; Word Work occurs daily for 30 minutes; Writing Workshop occurs daily for 45-60 minutes five times in a six-day cycle.

Math

The first-grade math curriculum, *Investigations in Number, Data and Space*, offers a strong foundation of mathematical skills. There is a heavy emphasis on problem solving and articulation of mathematical thinking. Teachers present topics through direct instruction, modeling, and guided exploration. Opportunities for hands-on experiences and math activity time reinforce concepts, and students have ample time to review and practice skills. Discussions that focus on children's mathematical thinking and a daily written assignment typically follow each lesson.

Numbers and Operations

First graders work on developing strategies for accurately counting groups of objects. They have repeated practice with counting and keeping track of sets of objects. Students also make

sense of counting numbers other than 1 by counting by 2s, 5s, and 10s. Addition and subtraction work focuses on making sense of the operations, practicing adding and subtracting single-digit numbers, and solving addition and subtraction story problems.

Geometry

Geometry concepts focus on observation, description, and comparison of two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes. Discussions center around attributes that make a triangle a triangle and how they differ from squares. Children also learn about geometric shapes by composing and decomposing shapes.

Measurement

First graders begin to see how measurement is used and when it is helpful in everyday life. They develop a foundation of skills for accurate linear measurement, knowing where to begin and end measuring. They use measuring tools and discuss the importance of standardized measurement.

Data Analysis and Probability

Students sort related objects into groups and describe what distinguishes one group from another. In addition, students create their own representation of the data they collect, and use standard forms to represent the data such as tally marks, picture graphs, charts, and bar graphs. As students interpret data, they are asked to reflect on what information they have learned.

Patterns and Algebraic Thinking

First graders create, describe, extend, and make predictions about repeating patterns and analyze their structure. They work with number sequences associated with repeating patterns and situations that have a constant increase.

Math instruction occurs daily for 45-60 minutes.

Social Studies

The social studies curriculum in first grade focuses on communities and neighborhoods. Prior to the start of the year, first graders complete a "Neighborhood Journal," which allows them to observe and explore features of their own neighborhood. The summer project allows students and teachers a shared experience, in which students learn about significant places and the roles of various people within communities, as well as focusing on building the classroom community. This learning is extended through the use of literature, creating models of neighborhoods, and field trips to various local neighborhoods and town centers. There is also a focus on the school community and learning about important DCD community members who are not typically in the classrooms teaching.

Teachers introduce beginning mapping skills, and first graders learn to identify images and symbols on a map. They also explore the various symbols and significant landmarks of the

United States, such as the Statue of Liberty, Liberty Bell, and American flag. Through hands-on exploration and creating, students become familiar with patriotic symbols and their meaning. Over the course of the year, first graders participate in read-alouds and discussions about important figures in American history, current events, cultural celebrations, and religious and nonreligious holidays.

Social studies classes meet for 45 minutes two times in a six-day cycle.

Science

Science in first grade focuses on the study of insects and their impact on our environment. First graders' curiosity with the natural world makes insects the perfect subject for in-depth study. Through hands-on activities, modeling, and using scientific instruments, students are able to strengthen their ability to make reasonable inferences and become confident, independent learners.

During the first half of the year, first graders study insect body parts, how insects grow, what they eat, where they live, and how insects have adapted for protection from predators. During the second half of the year, they focus on the features and characteristics of different orders of insects. Students collect and view specimens of each order, then construct models of insect bodies. A major highlight of the year is the Insect Museum during which the students lead their families through displays of their insect projects and offer them treats modeled after insects.

Science classes meet for 45 minutes once every six days.

Library

The first-grade library curriculum focuses on fairy tales, both traditional versions and new adaptations. Listening to fairy tales encourages children to use their imaginations and enter a magical realm. By first examining the original version, and then reading newer adaptations, the children are encouraged to discuss similarities and differences between them. Other units center on author studies, such as works by Leo Lionni and Jan Brett. Special emphasis is placed on these authors because they are also illustrators. During the Leo Lionni unit, children put together a small book with pages of their own artwork that is done in the style of Leo Lionni. After they read a number of Jan Brett's books, they make various versions of hedgehogs, the author's favorite animal. While enjoying picture books, the children learn to maintain attention for longer stories. First graders begin to differentiate between fiction and non-fiction. They learn to use the online card catalog for personal book selection.

Library classes meet for 45 minutes once every six days.

Music

Early childhood songs, rhymes, singing, and movement activities are experiences critical to a child's development. Music greatly enhances a children's self-image when they are given opportunities to manipulate sounds, songs, and pitched and non-pitched instruments in a safe and positive environment. Singing is an extension of speech and denotes a sense of well-being. First graders sing, learn to read musical notation, and play the recorder. These experiences all help to provide students with a strong foundation to build upon in the later grades. Performing in front of an audience is another major part of the vocal music program, and first-grade students participate in the Halloween and Holiday Assemblies, the Lower School Visual and Performing Assembly, and their class play.

Music classes meet for 45 minutes once every six days.

Visual Art

In first grade, students begin to develop a foundation of skills and vocabulary to create and discuss works of art. The lessons garnered in the creative process are more important than the final product. Young artists have the opportunity to think critically, take risks, and be self-reliant when solving problems. Students are nurtured and supported through periodic group discussions, through prominent display of their work, and through community-wide assemblies. Projects in watercolor, bookmaking, and ceramic tile-making allow students to explore the elements of design, such as point, line, form, movement, space, color, pattern and texture. In the spring, students design and produce a comprehensive set for their class play, typically with paint and oil pastels.

Visual art class includes art history as students study the life and work of a particular artist and create a piece in the artist's style. The teacher reads aloud *Linnea in Monet's Garden*, and students examine and discuss a variety of paintings associated with his garden, such as *Waterlilies*, *Japanese Bridge*, and *Irises*. Students then use oil pastel to create an interpretation of their favorite piece. First graders also begin to familiarize themselves with the structure and routines of a working studio. The studio is a tool itself, and students learn to purposefully utilize and care for the space and materials.

Visual Art classes meet for 45 minutes once every six days.

Woodworking

The first-grade woodworking experience builds on the experiences of the previous year's work. Projects contain a grade-appropriate challenge designed to enhance each student's skill base and foster overall growth as a woodworker. A favorite first-grade project is the animal pencil holder. Students collaborate with classmates in the studio, extending a hand or a word of advice, encouragement, and praise. The teacher fosters an encouraging and cooperative

environment where students can work in a positive and supportive manner within a small group. Basic techniques and tool usage are reexamined and reinforced several times throughout the course of the year.

Woodworking classes meet for 45 minutes once every six days.

Drama

Once a year, DCD's drama teacher writes a theatrical play expressly for the first-grade students. This is a project that allows each child to expand his or her creative skills within the structure and support of the larger group. The students receive approximately seven lines each to memorize. Every effort is made to tailor the roles to the ability of the group. This is the first year that students will act on stage without their teachers as narrators. The goal of the first-grade play is for all students to develop confidence in public speaking and to engage in team building with their classmates. They also investigate how to use voice, hand gestures, and facial expressions to create a character. By first grade, the goal is for the students to gain confidence and pride acting on stage without an adult and to create unique characters in order to tell a story on stage.

Drama classes meet for approximately 15 rehearsals prior to performing the class play.

Physical Education

In first-grade PE class, students participate in a variety of team sports, cooperative games, movement activities, dance, and gymnastics. Games and activities are presented in a number of formats allowing students to work individually, with partners, in small groups, or as a whole class. The PE teachers design lessons to help students develop and improve locomotor skills, manipulative skills, body control, physical and spatial awareness, balance, flexibility, and fitness. Locomotor skills include walking, running, hopping, skipping, galloping, chasing, fleeing, and dodging. Manipulative skills include throwing, catching, kicking, collecting, striking, punting, dribbling, and volleying. Gymnastic and rhythmic activities include balancing, tumbling, vaulting, creative movement, and swinging on ropes. Fitness activities include jumping, running, push-ups, sit-ups, and stretching. Teachers actively encourage sportsmanship, teamwork, cooperation, and fair play. The program encourages students' healthy physical growth and the development of positive attitudes toward health and fitness.

PE classes meet for 45 minutes four times in six-day cycle.