

## Overview

Fifth grade is the top rung of the lower school ladder and the precursor to the DCD middle school experience. In preparation for this transition, the fifth-grade year focuses on students' developing more autonomy and responsibility while still being supported by the familiar routines and practices of the lower-school community. Fifth graders strive to think more critically and independently. At the same time, they continue to refine their skills with cooperative learning and conflict resolution. As students at the highest level of the lower school division, fifth-graders act as role models for younger students. This is a year for enhanced academic, social, and personal maturation, which will serve as a solid foundation for moving on to the middle school.

Teachers present appropriate challenges in all areas of the curriculum, offering support where needed but also pushing students to reach their highest potential and encouraging the DCD motto: "Learning Is a Way of life." Fifth graders receive nightly homework assignments to reinforce concepts studied in class. At times, they will manage such longer-term assignments as book reports or social studies projects. The students practice the time management and organizational skills needed for middle school while enjoying appropriate scaffolding from their teachers. Fifth graders have 1:1 access to Chromebooks at school. Each student also receives a DCD Google Drive account, which allows them to access their work from school or home and is particularly handy for ongoing projects. They also practice keyboarding skills using a cloud-based typing program they can access at school on their Chromebooks as well as on devices at home.

In addition to fostering strong academic skills, the fifth-grade program emphasizes strong interpersonal skills and community building. Incorporating elements of *Responsive Classroom* and *Open Circle* curricula, the teachers create a cooperative classroom environment and help students build and maintain positive relationships. Through frequent class meetings and such structured activities as role-plays, read-alouds, or written reflections, students build skills in cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.

Many events make the fifth-grade year special, including participating in interscholastic sports competitions, long-term studies of ancient Egypt and ancient Greece culminating in the students' oral storytelling production of *The Odyssey*, field trips to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the New Bedford Whaling Museum, and a four-day stay at Stone Environmental School in New Hampshire.

## Language Arts

### Reading

Fifth graders continue the transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." They develop metacognition while being active, thoughtful readers, and they encounter more complex texts

and thought-provoking themes. Fifth-grade reading selections represent a variety of cultures and races and include both male and female protagonists. Titles change periodically, however, the following books are fifth-grade favorites: *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry, *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt, and *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis. Students read independently and in small groups and benefit from frequent teacher read-alouds. In addition to assigned texts, students read independently at home and at school on a daily basis.

During reading class, fifth graders experience a balance of reading, discussion, and writing. Comprehension strategies focus on the students deepening their literal and inferential comprehension skills. They tap their prior knowledge, predict, question, visualize, monitor for understanding, summarize, and synthesize. During class discussions, students may discuss story elements such as characters, setting, plot, point of view, and theme. Written assignments include responding to questions or prompts in a reading response journal, writing diary entries or interior monologues from a character's point of view, rewriting scenes, or summarizing main ideas.

### Writing

Fifth-grade students hone their skills in creative, narrative, and informational writing. Building upon skills from earlier grades, they continue the process of planning, organizing, drafting, and revising their written work. They develop their understanding of sentence and paragraph structure and write five-paragraph essays. There is a focus on topic development, and students are encouraged to cite text evidence to support their ideas. Creative writing assignments include poetry, fairy tales, and stories. Expository writing assignments include essays, summaries, blogging, and research projects.

### Mechanics, Spelling, & Vocabulary

Fifth graders learn writing mechanics through explicit instruction and practice exercises as well as through proofreading and editing their own writing. Topics covered include punctuation, capitalization, spelling rules, and parts of speech. Vocabulary development occurs implicitly through experiencing and studying rich texts and also explicitly through the use of *Wordly Wise 3000* lessons.

Language arts classes meet daily for 90 minutes total, in homeroom groups for language arts and in smaller groups for reading.

### **Math**

In fifth grade, students begin to encounter more complex and abstract concepts of mathematics. The fifth-grade math curriculum incorporates many activities from the *Investigations in Number, Data, and Space* math program. They use a wide variety of manipulatives and mathematical

tools to model concepts and solve problems. Engaging in rich, thought-provoking experiences, they develop their ability to express their understanding verbally and in writing.

### Numbers and Operations

Fifth graders improve computational fluency and hone their skills in the four basic operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. They build upon their understanding of place value from the millions to the thousandths. Fifth graders investigate factors, multiples, prime, composite, and square numbers. They are introduced to exponents and the order of operations.

Fractions, decimals, and percents are a major topic in fifth grade. Students learn to see the relationships among these representations, make comparisons, recognize equivalents, and add and subtract decimals and fractions.

### Geometry

In order to develop their understanding of 2D shapes, fifth-graders examine and classify the characteristics of polygons, with special attention to triangles and quadrilaterals.

### Measurement

Fifth graders learn to calculate the perimeter of a variety of polygons and to calculate the area of triangles, quadrilaterals, and irregular shapes. Students also learn how to classify and measure angles.

### Data Analysis and Probability

Exploring probability by conducting experiments and graphing the results on line plots allow fifth graders to put their understanding of fractions, percents, and decimals to practical use. Students calculate theoretical probability and interpret the experimental data using different measures of average.

### Patterns and Algebraic Thinking

In addition to using number patterns to identify factors, multiples, and primes, fifth-graders often use algebraic thinking in problem-solving. They represent inequalities for whole numbers, fractions, and decimals.

Math classes meet daily for 45 minutes in groups of eight to ten students.

## **Social Studies**

Fifth graders engage in a year-long study of ancient civilizations with in-depth studies of Egypt and Greece. They investigate the geography of the regions as well as the culture, religion, and lifestyle of the people in each location. A variety of resources and literature are used to explore the civilizations, and many of the activities are hands-on and project-based, such as building a shaduf, designing tomb paintings, participating in an annual Athens-Sparta debate, and creating

Greek god posters. The students also enhance their comprehension skills by reading a variety of nonfiction materials, taking notes, and gathering information through research and other activities. Fifth graders practice test-taking strategies as they prepare for their move to middle school history classes.

Each year the class takes a field trip to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston for a guided tour of the Egyptian collection.

Social studies classes meet every other day for 45 minutes.

## Science

Science in fifth grade focuses on ecology. The units of study typically include ecosystems and the myriad of ways in which their biotic and abiotic features interact, endangered, invasive and keystone species, adaptations in living things and climate change. Hands-on activities, experiments, and engineering projects occur during most classes and are sometimes ongoing. For example, groups of students engineer a prototype for capturing an invasive species. Students maintain lab notebooks to document their work. They create and label scientific drawings, collect and document observations, both in writing and in data tables, and make thoughtful inferences. Students use microscopes and triple-beam balances among other tools. Chromebooks are also used to document their work, do research, create projects and use the simulation software *Habitactics*.

Fifth-grade students also participate in Growth Ed classes. This unit offers children the opportunity to have their questions, confusions, or fears about physical and emotional changes occurring in their bodies addressed in a safe and supportive environment. A variety of activities and homework assignments are used to foster conversation and learning among students in class and with their parents at home. The fifth graders meet by gender groups for several sessions.

Science classes meet every other day for 45 minutes.

## Spanish

The fifth-grade Spanish program is based on a thematic curriculum utilizing multi-sensory activities and materials. The primary goal of this class is to develop positive attitudes and excitement toward learning to comprehend and speak the Spanish language. At the same time, the curriculum is designed to address specific readiness skills to continue language development. Risk-taking in self-expression is encouraged and class incorporates brain breaks, movement, and song whenever possible. All students are actively engaged and learning as they practice comprehension and speaking skills through games, music, art, role-playing, and

spontaneous conversation. The use of English is kept to a minimum. Grammar is learned indirectly, rather than through direct instruction.

Spanish classes meet once for approximately 45 minutes once every six days.

## Library

Fifth graders continue the tradition of a library curriculum based on author studies. A major portion of the year is spent reading *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and examining the life and times of the author, Lewis Carroll. During the course of the year, students study other literature based on this original children's fantasy. These include selections by L. Frank Baum, Roald Dahl, and J.K. Rowling. Later in the year, the students create book trailers using iMovie on their iPads, incorporating sound and video in these productions. They choose one of their favorite books for the book trailer. During this unit, there is much discussion of copyright while planning their trailer. Fifth graders share their trailers with the rest of the lower school students during a morning assembly.

Library classes meet once for approximately 45 minutes every six days.

## Music

The fifth-grade music curriculum centers around the study of contemporary classical and popular music. Through listening and studying different ways of organizing music, from traditional compositional techniques to serial and chance music, students begin to create themes and longer-form compositions. In preparation for their class play, the students work in small groups to create themes, lyrics, and melodies that can be used for the production. In addition to the class play, each fifth grader participates in either the Lower School Chorus or the Lower School Band. Fifth graders also attend an annual performance of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

### Lower School Band

Fifth graders who choose to participate in band build their musicianship through instrumental ensemble work. Participation in band fosters teamwork and ensemble listening skills, allowing students to develop their skills as part of a large ensemble. Students learn a variety of traditional concert band repertoire as well as experiment with simple jazz tunes and improvisation. The Lower School Band performs each year at the Holiday Assembly and the Lower School Visual and Performing Arts Assembly

### Lower School Chorus

Fifth graders who choose to participate in the chorus build their musicianship through choral work. Students practice two- and three-part choral pieces that center around seasonal themes or concepts. Singing in an ensemble fosters teamwork and allows students to practice their

musical skills while being part of an ensemble. The Lower School Chorus performs at the Thanksgiving Assembly, the Holiday Assembly, and the Lower School Visual and Performing Arts Assembly.

Music classes meet for approximately 30 minutes once every six days.  
Band and chorus meet for approximately 45 minutes once every six days.

## Visual Art

Fifth-grade students continue to develop their 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 problem solvers. Students are nurtured and supported through periodic group discussions, through the prominent display of their work, and through community-wide assemblies. A logo project focuses on the power of advertising and teaches the design elements that create strong graphic design. Students also draw from life to develop their observational and drawing skills. Fifth graders develop a deeper understanding of the structure and routines of a working studio. The studio itself is a tool, and students learn how best to utilize and care for space and materials.

Visual art class includes art history as students study the life and work of a particular artist and create a piece in that artist's style. Claude Monet's *Wheatstack* and *Poplar* series are the focus of this project, with an emphasis on composition and the study of light. Leading up to the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Service Day, students view and discuss William Henry Johnson's *Fighters for Freedom* series. Portraits include Booker T. Washington, Harriet Tubman, Marian Anderson, Abraham Lincoln, John Brown, Frederick Douglass, and George Washington Carver. They also watch Marian Anderson perform *My Country 'Tis of Thee* and Dr. King's *I Have a Dream* speech. The subject matter in the *Fighters for Freedom* series is complex, and as students mature, they are able to build on the previous years' discussions and garner new insights and understanding.

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

## Woodworking

For many, the fifth-grade woodworking experience brings together the collective experiences of the past six years. Students embark upon challenging and exciting work in their final year in the lower school. Projects aim to stretch and expand students' understanding of concepts, tools, and techniques. Students explore and examine scale and what constitutes good design, and they develop a working vocabulary of trends and movements within the woodworking field. They participate in both guided group- and individually designed projects. Many fifth graders choose to craft a small bench. Within the woodworking studio, students work at fostering patience, a

spirit of cooperation, and a working knowledge of concepts and techniques. Through conversations and discussions, students will explore and come to a basic understanding of major American trends in woodworking.

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 fifth-grade students. As in previous years, students rehearse for fifteen days and each character has a minimum of twelve lines, and some students will have larger roles. By fifth grade, students read the play about a month before the performance and select about six to eight parts (depending on the size of the class) that they would like to play. Students are then given one of their choices. This gives students ownership over their play, and also allows them to select a role with more or fewer lines, depending on their individual comfort level. Students are encouraged to sign up for a larger role if they have not had one before.

The fifth graders take great pride in being leaders of the lower school and have more leadership opportunities in rehearsals and performances. There are no homeroom teachers helping in the wings for the rehearsals or performances, so the students must practice maintaining their focus in the wings without a teacher present. Fifth-grade students also take on a "directing role" in the play. Students select their own props for each scene and help each other remember the order of the scenes. They think of their own stage positions and offer directing ideas in class discussions. Students will be asked how and where they could stand for each scene, and how they could change their voices to bring more expression to the performances. Fifth graders develop sophisticated acting skills by using more subtle hand gestures to bring their characters to life. They also learn how to engage with other actors on stage in an appropriate way to develop the plot. Fifth-grade students are also introduced to the idea of interacting with the audience to create comedy or drama.

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

## **Physical Education**

### Girls

The fifth grade PE class introduces girls to more advanced strategies and a greater amount of gameplay in a wide range of team sports. PE units for the girls include field hockey, soccer, basketball, floor hockey, ice-skating, badminton, volleyball, gymnastics, yoga, heart health, cooperative games, softball, and lacrosse. Exposure to a wide variety of sports provides students the opportunity to build coordination and strength through the practice of an extensive range of movement. Teachers actively promote sportsmanship, teamwork, and fair play. The class also provides students with an opportunity to try sports that they may choose to continue

playing in middle school. In the fall, the girls play a short schedule of interscholastic soccer and field hockey games. The intent of the program is to encourage students' healthy physical growth and the development of positive attitudes toward health and fitness.

### Boys

The fifth-grade PE class introduces boys to more advanced strategies and a greater amount of gameplay in a wide range of team sports. PE units for the boys include soccer, touch football, handball, basketball, floor hockey, ice skating, yoga, *FitnessGram*, baseball, and lacrosse. Exposure to a wide variety of sports provides students the opportunity to build coordination and strength through the practice of an extensive range of movement. Teachers actively promote sportsmanship, teamwork, and fair play. The class also provides students with an opportunity to try sports that they may choose to continue playing in middle school. In the fall, the boys play a short schedule of interscholastic soccer games. The intent of the program is to encourage students' healthy physical growth and the development of positive attitudes toward health and fitness.

PE classes meet for 60 minutes four times per week in two separate groups: fourth- and fifth-grade girls and fourth- and fifth-grade boys.