

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.

Teachers and children work on creating a safe and welcoming environment. These endeavors occur daily during morning meetings, read-alouds, personal story-telling, and through our social-emotional dialogues. Teachers scaffold support throughout the problem-solving process with first graders. First graders are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and to build empathy through perspective taking.

In each of the academic subjects, instruction occurs in whole-group, small-group, and individual contexts. Teachers design lessons to engage learners in a myriad of ways, with the goal of each student building understanding and skills. Students often work with partners or in small groups to explore topics and to support one another in their learning. For example, writing partners meet to share, ask questions, and provide feedback. Throughout the year, children engage in discussions with their teacher to set goals for metacognitive growth and to identify how they think and learn.

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 continue to practice their reading skills. Additionally, they engage in a weekly math activity with their families.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Reading

The goal in first grade is to encourage 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, *Guided Reading* groups, as well as one-on-one conferences involving feedback and coaching. While first graders are developing their decoding and fluency 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 capital 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 throughout 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 shares with other classrooms. Teachers implement units of study developed by the *Teachers College Reading and Writing Project*, including narrative, information, and opinion writing. First graders also reflect on various school events, performances, and field trips in their journals.

Word Work

Students receive daily phonics instruction through a systematic approach and practice these skills in multisensory ways. Lessons provide a sequential framework for teaching phonics and spelling. The phonics skills taught include short vowel sounds, consonant blends and digraphs, silent-e, common vowel teams, simple suffixes, and r-controlled vowels. First graders continue to build their repertoire of high-frequency and phonetically irregular words. Students also develop their phonemic awareness skills through daily practice using *Heggerty Phonemic Awareness Curriculum*.

MATH

The first-grade math curriculum, *Investigations in Number, Data and Space 3rd Edition*, offers opportunities for students to build a strong foundation of mathematical skills. There is an emphasis on problem solving and articulation of mathematical thinking. Teachers present topics through direct instruction, modeling, and guided exploration. First graders participate in hands-on experiences and activities to reinforce concepts. Mathematical understanding is also strengthened through small group learning and 1:1 support. Additionally, first graders with a robust foundation in math are offered extensions to continue building upon their skills.

SOCIAL STUDIES

The social studies curriculum begins with a focus 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. This summer project provides learners with a shared experience, in which they discuss places, the roles of various people within

communities, and significant celebrations that take place. This learning is extended through the use of literature, creating a model of neighborhoods, and field trips to important community spaces in Dedham. Later in the year, teachers introduce beginning mapping skills, and first graders learn to identify features of maps such as the compass rose and map keys. Our discussion of symbols within this unit allows students to delve into the function of various symbols in their lives. First graders explore the idea of where symbols originate and create symbols to represent communities they belong to.

SCIENCE

Science in first grade focuses on a variety of scientific topics. 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.

Students learn about what it means to be a scientist, travel on nature walks, and observe a tree throughout all 4 seasons. Daffodil bulbs are planted and investigated in the fall. They are introduced to computer science, and investigate light and sound waves. During the second half of the year, students study biomes, habitats and the plants and animals that live in them. Springtime brings the planting of seeds and learning about the importance of pollinators. First graders' curiosity with the natural world makes plant and animal life cycles the perfect subjects for in-depth study.

LIBRARY

Students in first grade continue developing their independent reading and book borrowing skills. They learn what a "book talk" is and practice recommending books to each other. We participate in the Mighty Mock Geisel where students explore and read new Beginner Reader Books as part of this annual literary award. For part of the year, first graders learn how to differentiate between fiction and nonfiction books. In a nonfiction research unit, students explore online encyclopedias and practice note taking skills.

MUSIC

In Music & Movement, young learners are introduced to the basic fundamentals of musical composition and are given a safe space to explore using their voice, instruments and movement as a way to express themselves. Students are taught about the Solfège Family early on in the class so that they may begin to understand the concept of music theory, and how the notes they are hearing are written down and relate to one another on a musical scale. We listen to different genres of music, discuss how each is different or similar, and learn about different types of instruments that are used in each. We then work together to learn various songs and musical

games that encourage students to use their voice, express themselves with movement, and work collaboratively to enhance their shared experiences as a musical group.

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. Students also read Ashley Bryan's *Beautiful Blackbird* and create collages in his style. 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.

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 Sea Creature Shelf. Students collaborate with classmates in the studio, extending a hand or a word of advice, encouragement, or 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.

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 their 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.

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 can include walking, running, hopping, skipping, galloping, chasing, fleeing, and dodging. Manipulative skills can include throwing, catching, kicking, collecting, striking, punting, dribbling, and volleying. Gymnastic and rhythmic activities can include balancing, tumbling, vaulting, creative movement, and swinging on ropes. Fitness activities can 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.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

First-grade students participate in teacher-led discussions and activities designed to support Social Emotional development in the classroom. Through a combination of movement, breathing, storytelling, partner activities and group discussions students practice essential skills that include but are not limited to:

- *Concentration, focus, and attention* - breath exercises, movement exercises and age-appropriate mindfulness techniques
- *Self advocacy and self regulation* - considering bringing our best selves to our community and recognizing our individual and collective needs
- *Recognizing strong emotions* - developing calming strategies
- *Increased confidence and self-esteem* - successfully trying new things in a fun, nurturing and joyful environment

STEAM

The primary focus of the first-grade STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) curriculum is hands-on problem-solving and discovery through play. Students use the design thinking process (i.e., think, plan, do, review) through their explorations. They have opportunities to work through an idea and adjust the plan through collaboration with peers and teacher-guided questions. Students explore, make, create, and build with a variety of materials and tools. First-grade students continue developing skills to understand technology as a learning tool. They acquire digital literacy skills through exploration with DCD's technology tools, including iPads and robots. Students develop computational thinking skills with an emphasis on sequencing, patterns, and loops.