

GERMANTOWN FRIENDS SCHOOL



Lower School Curriculum

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Dear Prospective Parents & Caregivers,

Thank you for your interest in the Lower School at Germantown Friends School. As you search for a program that aligns with your core values and expectations for this important stage in your child's life, we hope that our program, with its emphasis on active learning and community building, will prove a match for your family.

Our school's mission is powerful: "Germantown Friends School is dedicated to reaching that of God in every person. Our mission is to seek truth, challenge the intellect, honor differences, embrace the city, and nurture each student's mind, body, and spirit." In a Lower School context, this means children and adults are in supportive and respectful relationships with one another, sharing the perspectives and truths that give shape to their days. In our classrooms, you will see learning in the form of lively conversation, quiet and reflective thinking, and exploration and inspiration, always characterized by the joy of discovery. Our mission leads us to guide children as they open their eyes to the intriguing world around them. They learn to assume responsibility and imagine innovative change in stewardship of our school, city, and global communities.

At GFS, we believe that engaging in authentic questioning and ongoing learning is the key to shaping the future of our society. In the Lower School, we encourage children—the leaders and change agents of the next generation—to learn in the most powerful of ways, in a community where they will establish deep connections and friendships they will maintain throughout their lives. This booklet only begins to describe our program, so I invite you to visit our campus to learn more. I am always available to answer your questions.

Sincerely,

Deb

Deb Brackett
Interim Head of Lower School

LOWER SCHOOL CURRICULUM

LANGUAGE ARTS

The goal of the Language Arts curriculum is to develop avid, knowledgeable, lifelong readers; strong writers; confident speakers; and careful listeners. From Kindergarten on, we use a wide range of language experiences to nurture critical and reflective thinking. Using a Readers' Workshop model, the students are given explicit instruction in reading skills, from decoding words to inferential comprehension strategies, as they engage with compelling literature throughout the school year. Beginning with our youngest learners, there are meaningful opportunities to enhance their written expression, through journal writing, Writers' Workshop, and research projects. Thoughtful instruction in spelling, vocabulary, mechanics, and handwriting are also key components of our program. Two reading specialists support all students as needed across the grades, through small group and individual sessions.

MATHEMATICS

Our mathematics instruction is designed to ensure that students develop a deep number sense and flexibility in their mathematical understanding. Children work together as a community of mathematicians, employing a variety of strategies and tools to model their thinking. We encourage them to look for patterns and mathematical relationships through investigations in the context of the real world, developing their own conjectures and testing these ideas, and leading to generalizations that facilitate algebraic thinking.

Our students have occasion each day to demonstrate their knowledge of and comfort with mathematical vocabulary

and principles that govern the numbers system. They learn a variety of algorithms and explore why they work. Opportunities to use different strategies help students develop automaticity with basic facts—and underscore how facility with these facts contributes to their accuracy and efficiency as problems become more challenging.

Two mathematics curricula—Investigations in Number, Data, and Space; and Contexts for Learning Mathematics—are used in grades K-5 as a foundation for developing these mathematical skills and capabilities, and we enhance the program with a variety of other resources. Our dedicated Lower School math coordinator works within the classroom and independently with small groups to provide support and enrichment.

SOCIAL STUDIES

The social studies program serves as the thematic center of the Lower School curriculum. Students develop a broad knowledge of and respect for history, geography, and populations across diverse cultures and communities.

Teachers design each thematic unit to provide entry points for students to learn from multiple perspectives. They study local and global communities, paying particular attention to social justice, history, culture, and customs.

There are many occasions to integrate the social studies program with language arts. Coordinating music, art, science, Spanish, and woodshop programs enhances the subjects and provides rich interdisciplinary connections and thematic unity.





SCIENCE

The Lower School science program is highly experiential, with hands-on activities in every period, at all grade levels. We believe that children learn best through a combination of observation and experimentation. With a strong environmental focus, our program builds on children's natural curiosity, covering a wide variety of topics: physical science, Earth science, life science, and natural history.

We teach extended, in-depth units, favoring mastery and competence over broad coverage. Our goal is to lay a foundation for young learners to become scientifically literate in both their knowledge and skills. We make frequent use of the outdoors and take our students on regular field trips to see how the topics they are studying relate to the world around them. We want them to maintain their sense of wonder about their environment and their excitement about studying it, even as they are beginning a more formal investigation of science.

SPANISH

In choosing this particular world language for integration in our program, we demonstrate a commitment to our local Philadelphia community, where Spanish is the second most common language spoken in the home. Early acquisition of a second language has been proven to increase awareness and a deeper understanding of other cultures; and flexibility in problem-solving, creative thinking, and analytic skills across the curriculum.

Beginning in Kindergarten, our expectation is that Spanish is the only language spoken during Spanish class, both by teachers and students. This encourages close observation and listening, pattern seeking, and problem-solving, as students work to develop their skills and understanding. Use of literature, songs, games, and images or objects to provide visual cues help to develop student comfort and confidence in this environment.

COMPUTER SCIENCE

The Computer Science and Technology program teaches students to be creative problem-solvers, creators of digital content, innovative designers, global collaborators, and responsible digital citizens. Technology is integrated throughout the Lower School curriculum. Classrooms are equipped with SMART Boards, iPads, Macbooks, Chromebooks, and other resources that allow students to explore, collaborate, create, and present information using technology. The Lower School Computer Science and Technology teacher serves as a resource for teachers and students, and shares innovative ideas for integrating technology into everyday classroom instruction in meaningful and intentional ways.

Students in grades 2-5 have a dedicated computer science class. They investigate how computer hardware works and are exposed to many software applications, with an emphasis on teaching a digital fluency that will allow them to independently and confidently master the new digital tools they encounter. Students learn computer programming skills, including problem-solving and computational thinking, and apply programming concepts to writing their own code. They work in teams to take on challenges using technology, and to design, test, redesign, and retest computer programs with patience and persistence.

The school uses Google's G Suite for Education apps to create content, such as documents, spreadsheets, digital drawings, and websites, and to organize digital information. Students also learn to think critically, behave appropriately, and participate responsibly in our digital world through lessons, discussions, and queries about digital citizenship and online safety. They practice communicating electronically in respectful and responsible ways that are an online extension of the school's community and Quaker values.



QUAKERISM

Germantown Friends School's Quaker identity fundamentally influences the Lower School program. The study of Quaker values guides young children of diverse religious backgrounds to learn to express themselves honestly, to listen well to others, to solve conflicts peacefully, and to be good members of the community. The faculty and staff in the Lower School establish warm relationships with the children in an environment that promotes mutual respect. The practice of weekly Meeting for Worship, a time when our entire Lower School comes together in silent reflection on issues and beliefs that are important to us, highlights the value we place on taking time out and thoughtfully considering our choices and responsibilities as community members.

The Lower School Quakerism Committee, comprised of dedicated Lower School faculty, has developed an informed curricular program, which guides students in developing ownership of the six Quaker values known as the "SPICES": Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship. Each year, the Lower School focuses on two of these testimonies to guide our work.

ART

Students in the Lower School art studio are given the opportunity to explore a variety of different mediums. They are encouraged to experiment, engage, and create using paint, clay, collage, sculpture, and digital media, in a structured and supportive environment. The studio work is closely tied to studies in the classroom as well, from prehistoric to contemporary art. Our students develop a series of sequentially taught skills throughout their Lower School art experience, including color mixing and theory, tempera painting, clay, claymation, paper collage, watercolor, monochromatic printing, and oil pastel. Students attend art class in half-classroom groups in Kindergarten–Grade 1, then participate in a one semester art intensive (paired with a Woodshop intensive for the other semester) in grades 2–5.

HEALTH EDUCATION

Health education in Lower School is designed to familiarize students with basic anatomical and physiological systems relative to the total framework of a healthy body. This includes providing information on nutrition, healthy life habits, and sexuality. The classes provide age-appropriate opportunities to discuss information about growth and sexuality as it pertains to physical, emotional, and social development.

Health topics are integrated into the curriculum and activities in Kindergarten–grade 2, and we add specialized health instruction in grades 3–5.

LIBRARY

The library serves our student population in a variety of ways. Our collection consists of fiction and nonfiction titles that support and enhance the Lower School curriculum; and stimulate interest in various topics. We hope to instill in our students a love of the written word and to create a generation of lifelong readers. At the end of the school year, students are given a list of suggested summer reading and are encouraged to participate in the Summer Reading Club, a program designed to promote recreational reading and book discussions during the summer break. All Lower School students visit the library once a cycle during the school year and are always welcome to exchange books when needed.

MUSIC

Our comprehensive music curriculum helps students become skillful, enthusiastic music makers and appreciators. Folk songs representing a variety of cultural traditions, rounds, hymns, spirituals, and contemporary children's music form the basic repertoire throughout the Lower School. Instrumental activities are introduced as appropriate throughout the grades, including 10 weeks of small-group violin instruction in third grade and recorder instruction in fourth and fifth grades. Games involving

song and movement lay the foundation for dance work. Kindergartners through fifth graders have scheduled music classes several times a week, but singing and performing are incorporated throughout the curriculum, from weekly Kindergarten sing-alongs to regular assemblies.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The goal of the Physical Education department is to provide developmentally appropriate activities that are inclusive, stimulating, and safe for all students in Kindergarten-Grade 12. Our emphasis is on leading students to discover and develop their individual movement skills and interests through participation in co-educational classes at each grade level. By providing opportunities to develop the social skills requisite for successful group work, competence in movement skills, and an appreciation for the diversity of movement activities, fitness, and skill levels, we hope that students will participate enthusiastically in class activities and beyond. Lower Schoolers attend PE classes at least three times a week, using our indoor and field facilities.



WOODSHOP

Lower School Woodshop begins in second grade and offers a highly interactive, hands-on experience with tools and materials. Students develop manual dexterity, confidence in problem-solving, and an understanding of how things fit together. A variety of techniques, such as carving and shaping, joinery, mechanical fastening, and applying finishes, are explored in the program to give each student a broad understanding of the scope of woodworking.

KINDERGARTEN

Kindergarten is first and foremost a social experience with an emphasis on nurturing and developing character, values, and a sense of community. We encourage both autonomous thinking and cooperation with others. Students come together in small and large groups, and work collaboratively with teachers to create a safe and joyful classroom community. Each child's experience of success in Kindergarten builds self-esteem, which in turn enhances a love of learning.

Kindergarten is also an opportunity for intellectual challenge; at this age, our youngest students are learning how to learn, and academic expectations are matched appropriately to each child's development. We encourage independent critical thinking and problem-solving, and provide an integrated multidisciplinary curriculum that links together learning experiences of language arts, math, science, and social studies. Our students develop an independence of spirit and a feeling of responsibility to themselves and to others; they become children who, able to think for themselves, are confident in what they learn and know.

FACULTY

A diverse group of outstanding teachers, our faculty is a wealth of experience and expertise. They are dedicated professionals who continue to study the best practices in the realm of educating young children. A collective hallmark of our faculty is the strong relationships established with the students. Our teachers value and encourage strong partnerships with families and caregivers.





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Visit germantownfriends.org

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