



**Saint Thomas' Episcopal School**  
**Lower School Curricular Overview**  
**Kindergarten - 5<sup>th</sup> Grade**

*Forming honorable men and women through a classical education grounded in a Christ-centered worldview.*

Classical education is a long-standing tradition that emphasizes seeking all that is true, good, and beautiful. Typically, the trivium, grammar, logic, and rhetoric stages are considered the core of classical education. In our lower school, students complete comprehensive coursework to lay the foundation for the grammar stage. Lower school students develop the content, tools, and strategies to communicate effectively, problem-solve, and enter more advanced studies. Our middle school embraces the logic stage, in which students build on this foundation and begin to analyze and form arguments. This stage leads to the upper school rhetoric, where students become skilled orators. Outside the trivium, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy are considered the mathematical arts that form the quadrivium. We embrace these areas of study but integrate them into a comprehensive program of mathematics, science, social studies, History, and fine arts instruction.

The lower school is a place of learning and development. The goal of the lower school is to create a warm environment where our students know they are loved. Mistakes are greeted as learning opportunities, each day is a fresh slate, and expectations are communicated. Young children crave structure; as such, we provide clear, concise procedures for our classroom communities and remain consistent in their practice and enforcement. Student discipline is equitable and restorative, and it involves natural consequences. Our classrooms are communities of support, caring, and collaboration where the ultimate goal is for all students to never settle for less than their best and strive for personal growth.

**Kindergarten**

Kindergarten serves as the firm foundation for our lower school program. Phonetically oriented reading instruction, exposure to rich literature, numeracy and problem-solving, and Biblical studies form the core of the kindergarten curriculum. This programming is complemented by integrating social studies, grammar and composition, and science.

## **Sacred Studies**

Our daily Bible study forms the core of kindergarten Sacred Studies. Students profile major Bible stories from both the Old and New Testament. Sacred Studies includes class discussions of the stories, how we can live Christ's love, and integrating fun activities through crafting.

## **Phonics**

A firm grasp of phonics is critical to independence in reading. Traditional methodology is employed to teach students to read and spell. This instruction includes studying all alphabet letters and specific blends, digraphs, and diphthongs.

The phonics program is designed to give the students an understanding of the essence of reading. After mastering key consonant and vowel sounds, kindergartners learn to blend those sounds and then read and write simple words. This process builds throughout the year until the student has learned the sounds of all the letters and the sounds represented by letter combinations. This method is a solid foundation for perfecting reading and writing skills. Reading materials throughout the year include word lists, various class readers, and home-reading material suitable to each student's advancing reading skills.

## **Literature**

Emphasis is placed on building reading comprehension and text analysis skills through enjoying poetry and stories in a read-aloud format. Students are encouraged to participate in book discussions and answer questions about texts orally and in writing as the year progresses. Students are coached in identifying the essential parts of a story, including the beginning, middle, and end, as well as the setting and characters. Students use pictures, objects, projects, and personal stories to build vocabulary and comprehension. Teachers assess student reading progress in individual and small group reading conferences. Literature allows opportunities to integrate social studies and geography themes, profile holidays, and their significance.

## **Penmanship and Spelling**

Writing instruction correlates naturally with the phonics and literature program. Visual, auditory, manual, and oral skills develop simultaneously for each letter sound. The teacher models writing the letter representing that sound on the board; the child sees the letter, hears its sound, speaks the sound aloud, and then writes

the letter. In addition to a phonetic approach, students memorize high-frequency words through weekly sight word practice.

Eventually, this and various similar techniques lead to weekly spelling tests and writing short, simple sentences from dictation. Neatness and form are stressed so that the manuscript is well crafted and spaced appropriately by the end of the kindergarten year.

## **Grammar and Composition**

Students gain a basic understanding of the role of nouns and verbs and the components of a simple sentence. The children learn to precisely identify different types of sentences to discern between a question and a statement. Ultimately, the goal is for students to craft original, simple sentences with capitalization, expression of a complete thought, and proper punctuation. This study culminates in crafting stories that retell fairy tales at the end of the year.

## **Mathematics**

Our lower school math program is designed to build conceptual understanding, application of math skills, and arithmetic procedural skills and fluency. Emphasis is placed on developing math vocabulary and using mathematics language to communicate and solve problems employing various strategies.

Kindergarten focuses on building number sense by recognizing and writing numbers, developing cardinality, learning to count to one hundred by ones and tens, knowing the relative positions of numbers, and comparing and ordering numbers. After establishing number sense and a base understanding of place value, fluency in addition and subtraction facts is developed.

Additionally, students focus on geometry by learning and constructing two- and three-dimensional shapes and partitioning shapes to understand that fractions are parts of a whole. Identifying, generating, and explaining patterns, using money, telling time, measuring, and basic data analysis through charts round out our mathematics work.

## **Science**

Students participate in science laboratory classes each week. These classes focus on developing observation skills using the five senses and basic tools. Additionally, the children nurture a sense of wonder about God's creation. Students participate

in supervised exploration of science concepts through workstations and document their work in science journals.

### **Ancillaries**

Our full-day program allows ample time for activities that enrich the student's school experience. These include crafts, workstations and center time, art, music, library, and Spanish. Students engage in two movement blocks daily: recess and Highland dancing or physical education to develop gross motor skills.

This rich program establishes the skills and content fundamental for our lower school program.

### **First Through Third Grades**

Our STE curriculum has a twofold purpose. It seeks to provide a solid foundation in literacy skills and concepts, grammar and composition, history and social studies, science, and mathematics while exposing students to the Christian worldview through worship and Biblical studies. In addition to academic subjects, children are taught art, music, library use, Spanish, highland dancing, and physical education.

First through third grades continue to develop the primary skills established in kindergarten while exposing students to a more diverse range of subjects and disciplines to broaden the school experience in preparation for fourth and fifth grades.

### **Sacred Studies**

Students learn the Chapel service and, after a few weeks, can recite much of it from memory. The service includes singing hymns of praise and focusing on being attentive, reverent, and enthusiastic in chapel responses. Chapel service also consists of reading and discussing major Bible stories and a time to offer petitions for others.

Our Biblical study program introduces students to a wide range of Bible stories from both the Old and New Testaments. Furthermore, Sacred Studies programming in lower school offers ample opportunity for memory work and recitation of prayers, verses, and poems.

Moral training is emphasized throughout the lower school curriculum and reinforced through studying the Bible, Psalms, Aesop's Fables, and other texts.

### **Phonics and Spelling**

Phonics training begins in kindergarten and continues through formal phonics and spelling instruction in the first through third grades. By the second semester of the first grade, most children can read any book or story suitable to their interests. Students continue to learn traditional spelling and phonics rules to decode words and understand spelling patterns. Spelling exercises are completed regularly, and tests are given weekly.

### **Literature**

Students are exposed to great books and stories of notable women and men in history through picture books, poetry, and novel studies. Emphasis is placed on building reading comprehension and text analysis skills by enjoying poetry and stories in a read-aloud format.

Students are encouraged to participate in book discussions and answer questions about texts orally and in writing. They are also coached in identifying the plot, setting, characters, literary elements, the author's purpose, and theme. Students use pictures, objects, projects, and personal stories to build vocabulary and comprehension. Teachers assess student reading progress in individual and small group reading conferences, comprehension assessments, and reading projects.

Outside classroom literature studies, students read home readers nightly to practice fluency and gain exposure to different genres.

### **Vocabulary**

Outside of studying vocabulary in context through reading selections, our students participate in explicit vocabulary teaching, which teaches word meanings, to share ideas and engage with words in writing and speaking activities. This program of study includes word-learning strategies such as analyzing word parts, studying Greek and Latin roots, and multiple-meaning words to help students build their vocabularies.

## **Grammar and Composition**

Instruction in composition begins with a consistent and thorough examination of the structure of the complete sentence, progresses to the paragraph, and ultimately culminates in essay writing. Students learn to write using the correct style, complete sentences, and proper capitalization and punctuation.

Although kindergarten and first-grade students are instructed in grammatical topics, the formal study of English grammar begins in the second grade by studying the parts of speech, usage, dictionary skills, the syntax of simple sentences, and related topics. Sentence parsing and sentence diagramming are essential instructional tools.

## **Cursive Writing**

Cursive writing begins in first grade. The early introduction of cursive writing provides students with a research-based method for written expression, enabling them to produce a greater volume of work in precise form and allowing for more excellent retention of content in note-taking. Cursive writing is used throughout the lower school years.

## **Mathematics**

Our lower school math program is designed to build conceptual understanding and apply math skills to create relevance, value, and adaptability through arithmetic procedural skills and fluency. Emphasis is placed on developing math vocabulary and using mathematics language to communicate and solve problems employing various strategies. We promote standard mathematical practices so that our students can confidently sense problems and persevere in solving them. Additionally, we encourage modeling, using tools strategically, and making sense of the structure of mathematics.

Mathematics instruction throughout the lower school emphasizes computation and reasoning. Manipulatives are utilized to conceptualize place value and the base ten systems. Particular attention is given to the structure and mechanics of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division and their relationships. Students are challenged to talk through their mathematical thinking and critique classmates' reasoning constructively and productively.

Saint Thomas' students memorize all addition, subtraction, multiplication, and related division facts. By the end of third grade, our students have mastered all four arithmetic functions using whole numbers.

Mathematics instruction in the lower school also includes studying time and calendars; measuring length, mass, weight, and liquid volume; money, fractions; and geometry. Additionally, extensive practice solving word problems provides ample opportunity to develop mathematical concepts, logic, and reasoning.

## **Science**

Science in lower school is grounded in the framework of enjoying, exploring, and understanding God's world. Hands-on activities teach basic concepts in life, earth, and physical science.

Students learn about plants and animals and their interdependence through an understanding of elementary ecology. They are also introduced to their planet, the sun, the moon, and the relationships among them. Physical science studies include an introduction to the scientific method, measurement, and different ways to record data.

Students often have extensive opportunities to explore STEM concepts through collaborative activities and workstations. They use various lab tools to observe specimens and design their experiments with teacher guidance.

## **History and Social Studies**

Students focus on social studies topics and early American History in early grades. The goal of these studies is for students to gain an awareness of their world and understand how they can participate in it and make healthy, informed decisions while also gaining a preliminary understanding of our nation's founding and its early development. Our curriculum encourages active inquiry while introducing concepts of civics, economics, geography, and history. Students develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills for engaged civic life.

Lessons encourage active citizenship by using biographies to celebrate the contributions of many. Students read about the diverse people who made history and reflect on essential citizenship qualities, such as respect, determination, patriotism, respect for the rights of others, honesty, and courage.

History lessons are literacy opportunities as students profile primary and secondary sources in their studies. Routines help students read text closely, analyze information, and communicate well-defended ideas while building vocabulary and language skills. Paideia seminars are also integrated to reflect and evaluate primary and secondary sources.

Geography is an important component of these studies. Second graders become familiar with many types of maps. All third grade students learn the regions of the United States, the locations of the 50 states, and their capitals.

### **Fourth and Fifth Grades**

In the fourth and fifth grades, we continue to build on the foundation in the early lower school grades while preparing the students for the challenging liberal arts curriculum in middle and upper school. As the children learn and mature, they take on greater personal responsibility for keeping track of and completing their school work.

Students learn to organize their material and thoughts using note-taking and graphic organizers as they understand how to study and how the brain works to retain information for recall.

Starting in fourth grade, students with excellent academic achievement and conduct for each quarter are recognized in Chapel and included on the Honor Roll and Dean's List.

### **Spelling and Phonics**

Spelling is a formal subject through the fourth grade. Students review the rules of phonics and word usage and apply them to words found in general subject matter and formal spelling lists. We stress correct pronunciation as an indispensable part of correct spelling.

### **Reading and Vocabulary**

The literature study in the fourth and fifth grades helps improve the art of reading. Through the study of literature, we profile a number of literary devices as tools of writing. Time is devoted to understanding the author's purpose and craft, genre-specific elements, and strategies for comprehension and understanding. Class texts include a variety of novels, poems, and short stories. As the demand for

reading in a variety of content areas increases, students learn strategies for the understanding of more complex material.

Vocabulary development accelerates when students learn Latin roots for words in literature. We emphasize determining meaning from contextual clues. The goal is to perfect articulation and interpret words within paragraphs.

## **Grammar and Composition**

Beginning in the second grade, the formal study of grammar expands through intensive instruction in all parts of speech, diagramming, the syntax of simple sentences, usage, punctuation, and capitalization. Students examine the types of sentences by means of sentence patterns. The patterns provide an analytical tool that the student uses to develop a high degree of grammatical sense and discrimination.

Students learn composition in conjunction with grammar and reading. They progress systematically from the sentence to the paragraph and finally to the narrative and essay. Emphasis is placed on conciseness, organization, and originality. Students learn to write for a variety of diverse purposes and audiences.

## **Mathematics**

Our lower school math program is designed to build conceptual understanding and apply math skills to create relevance, value, and adaptability through arithmetic procedural skills and fluency. Emphasis is placed on developing math vocabulary and using mathematics language to communicate and solve problems employing various strategies. We promote standard mathematical practices so that our students can confidently sense problems and persevere in solving them. Additionally, we encourage modeling, using tools strategically, and making sense of the structure of mathematics.

Mathematics instruction throughout the lower school emphasizes computation and reasoning. Manipulatives are utilized to conceptualize place value and the base ten systems. Particular attention is given to the structure and mechanics of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division and their relationships. Students are challenged to talk through their mathematical thinking and critique classmates' reasoning constructively and productively.

Arithmetic in the fourth and fifth grades strengthens and perfects the computational tools of addition, multiplication, subtraction, and division.

Throughout these grades, word problems get special attention as a tool to sharpen reasoning and critical thinking.

The study of fractions expands throughout the fourth and fifth grades until the student is fully competent with proper, improper, and complex fractions, mixed numbers, and decimal fractions in all arithmetic operations. We give much attention to the ability to interchange fractional and decimal expressions to develop an understanding of the various ways to represent a particular value and to develop a flexible approach to solving mathematical situations.

Additional topics include the metric system, perimeter, area, factoring, primes, multiples, ratios, proportions, and percentages. This coursework prepares students for pre-algebra studies in middle school.

### **History and Sacred Studies**

Our history program in fourth and fifth grade builds on the social studies fundamentals presented in the early grades and prepares students for middle school history.

Lessons encourage active citizenship by using biographies to celebrate the contributions of many. Students read about the diverse people who made history and reflect on essential citizenship qualities, such as respect, determination, patriotism, respect for the rights of others, honesty, and courage.

Social studies lessons are also literacy opportunities as students profile primary and secondary sources in their studies. Routines help students read text closely, analyze information, and communicate well-defended ideas while building vocabulary and language skills.

The focus is on U.S. history, specifically a more in-depth study of the formation and development of our nation. Fourth-grade coursework comprises the study of the United States from its beginnings to the Civil War, as well as a unit on Texas History. Fifth grade reviews the Civil War and continues to profile the nation's development to modern times.

Reading and making maps, as well as the political and physical geography embedded in our history lessons, augment students' understanding of our world and its history.

Sacred Studies in the intermediate grades includes a more in-depth study of the Old and New Testaments, reinforcing the stories and values introduced in earlier grades. Students continue to participate in daily Chapel and memorize Bible verses.

## **Science**

In fourth grade, the students continue studying plants, animals, and ecology. Their earth and physical science studies are expanded, and more attention is given to the details of experimental design.

In fifth grade, students undertake a comprehensive general science course that solidifies their previous science exposure and prepares them for their middle and upper school years. This course begins with the scientific method, measurement, and simple chemistry and continues with life science, earth science, astronomy, and physical science.

The approach is hands-on and project-based. Students maintain laboratory notebooks and a portfolio of their activities and projects.

## **Ancillary Classes**

### **Art (Kindergarten - Fifth Grade)**

Art is universal. Even though visual art requires no words to communicate, it does have its own language. The language of art is expressed through the elements and principles of art. The lower school art program aims to provide students with the skills necessary to use these elements and principles to make art creatively.

All classes meet in a studio art setting, where students can use various media to create their unique interpretations of each assignment. Assignments are all designed for students to succeed while working at their own level. All assignments have enough restrictions to promote creativity while leaving ample space for individual expression. The finished art is displayed in various areas around the school, allowing students to see and evaluate their and other students' work.

Many of the projects are inspired by the artwork of master artists, contemporary artists, and children's book illustrators. This inspiration provides the dual benefit of art history education with studio art experience, allowing students to create their own "masterpieces." Art from various cultures is also introduced to enhance the projects and promote the understanding of cultural differences.

### **Library (Kindergarten - Third Grade)**

A classical education is built upon the foundation of the written word. Our library houses books for all ages and provides access to databases for research. Our librarian hosts each class once a week for a story or lesson and an opportunity to check out books. Lessons range from book care rules for our youngest Saints to understanding the Dewey Decimal system and online card catalogs to encouraging a love for great books and understanding online resources. It is essential to guide our students to properly use resources available at any library or online so the skills taught are meant to prepare them for life outside of STE.

### **Oral Presentation (Fourth - Fifth Grade)**

In this course, students learn stage, acting, and speech techniques, which translate into the arts and the real world as they pertain to employment, college interviews, and social circumstances. Games and improvisation encourage spontaneity and confidence. Exercises and projects promote team building and ensemble work. Projects include performing scene work, creating stories and characters, speech writing, and presentation. Diction, projection, posture, and poise are also addressed. The coursework aims to develop communication skills for creative and articulate expression.

## **Music Offerings**

Those studying any of the instruments offered at Saint Thomas', whether in choir, string orchestra, pipes and drums, piano, organ, or guitar, find fulfillment in cultivating their God-given talents. Not only that, but they develop *discipline* through their required daily practice and *excellence* through their performance in public concerts and participation in competitions – two of our school's core values.

### **Music (Kindergarten - Fifth Grade)**

The lower school lays a foundation for all succeeding grades' music study. Each lower school music class progressively learns basic music concepts such as beat, rhythm, tone, dynamics, melodic direction, and phrasing. Students have opportunities to sing in different languages to encourage multicultural exposure.

Throughout the year, students in first through fifth grades learn to sing psalms and hymns for the daily Chapel service. The hymns provide a suitable means of musical education and expression. Here, one finds music from all periods of Western culture: medieval, renaissance, baroque, classical, romantic, and modern. Melody,

rhythm, and harmony are studied. Utilizing the very best in sacred poetry, chosen according to the season of the liturgical year, the hymns take the students chronologically through the life of Jesus. In addition to the daily Chapel service, special Chapel programs are prepared each year.

All kindergarten through fifth-grade students prepare music for evening Christmas concerts during the first semester. These concerts, a continuous and beloved feature of the school's cultural, social, and spiritual life, are anticipated each year by families and friends, not to mention by the student performers.

After the Christmas concerts, the second through third grades begin studying music theory. Building upon their kindergarten and first-grade work, the students learn more complex rhythmic patterns and sing songs with more significant tonal challenges. Games are utilized to help solidify music concepts. Classes for fourth and fifth grades include written theory, beginning with fundamentals of music. Moving progressively, the students learn note and rest values, treble and bass clefs, music that moves by step and skip, dynamics, intervals, and key signatures in flats and sharps. Students learn to sing both part music and in canon. Sight-singing skills are developed through American folk songs, children's songs, and simple sight-reading exercises. Students also have the opportunity to learn to play various Orff instruments and recorders to perform their skills and talents for audiences.

### **Choristers (Third - Fifth Grade)**

Third through fifth-grade students may participate in the choir by auditioning and working to develop intonation, a pleasing sound, and correct diction. Regular part-singing, canons, anthems, and folk songs make up some of the repertoire. The choir also sings in several languages by performing works in Latin, German, Spanish, French, Italian, and English.

The choir enhances and leads the student body in singing through the performance of descants and anthems in regular Chapel services throughout the year and special services such as Nine Lessons and Carols, All Saints Day, and Ascension Day. Our choir also performs at Christmas and spring concerts and community service performances yearly.

### **Strings (Kindergarten - Fifth Grade)**

Lower School Strings provides an opportunity to learn violin or cello. Students learn note-reading skills and solid techniques on their respective instruments. The course

of instruction is designed to introduce students to orchestral literature and technique.

Students learn to follow conducting patterns and play independent musical lines. They also develop ensemble skills, including playing different parts, balancing melody and harmony, and matching bowing techniques and styles. The ensemble performs during some Chapel services, at Christmas and spring concerts, and in community service performances throughout the year.

### **Scottish Arts - Pipe Band (Fourth - Fifth Grade)**

Beginning in fourth grade, students in the band program will receive first-class instruction on the Great Highland bagpipe or Scottish snare, tenor, or bass drum. Participation in any of the A, B, or C Bands requires students to compete in pipe band competitions and perform at select school functions. A Band students earn the chance to perform in Glasgow, Scotland, to compete in the World Pipe Band Championship.

### **Private Lessons**

After school, private music lessons are offered on piano, violin, cello, bagpipes, drums, and guitar.

## **Language Offerings**

### **Spanish (Kindergarten - Fifth Grade)**

Lower School Spanish is provided through a partnership with Language Kids World. Their curriculum utilizes the most advanced methodologies of early foreign language acquisition, guiding children through an authentic learning experience designed for language development and cultural understanding. This aims to help students become fluent and communicate meaningfully in the target language and culture. Their approach to language learning is holistic, and some methods used include the Naturalistic Approach, Total Physical Response, and TPRS (TPR Storytelling).

Aside from the core vocabulary and sentence structures (which include words of everyday use, descriptive adjectives, expressions of like and dislike, verbs, and commonly used nouns), students will learn vocabulary and sentence structures related to different thematic units, and words and structures for describing the

culture and traditions of other countries. Students will also learn vocabulary for describing pastimes and self-descriptive adjectives.

Through fun, student-centered, and interactive activities, music, and games, students will learn about the families and traditions of different countries in which the target language is spoken. They will be engaged in considering different cultural perspectives while incorporating the five Cs of the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages.

Students will learn to ask questions and provide responses on topics such as self, family, and community. They will also understand and describe some cultural aspects and traditions of some Spanish-speaking countries, such as greetings, celebrations, food, and civics.

Students will be encouraged to think about their own culture and how it differs from the culture and traditions of the countries speaking the target language they are learning.

## **Movement/Fitness Offerings**

### **Physical Education**

Physical education classes seek to promote student physical fitness. Students learn the fundamentals of sports, personal health, and team playing strategies. Games and exercises that promote physical fitness are introduced. Students are expected to develop competency in motor skills and movement patterns, demonstrate an understanding of movement concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics, and exhibit responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others. Ultimately, students learn to value physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and social interaction.

### **Highland Dance**

Scottish dancing instruction with our world-class instructors not only provides excellent physical exercise but also helps develop precision, movement, and coordination of body and mind. This program provides a unique way for students to promote personal grace and precise muscle control, develop a sense of rhythm, and enjoy a disciplined dance form.