



Saint Thomas' Episcopal School Lower School Curriculum Kindergarten Through 5th Grade

Kindergarten

Kindergarten is a preparation for our Lower School program. Phonetically oriented reading instruction, mathematics, spelling, and manuscript, as well as instruction in Christian doctrine through a study of the Chapel service and Bible stories, form the core of the Kindergarten curriculum. The class features a daily worship service. The children work hard to learn the Prayer Service and after a few weeks are able to recite much of it from memory. They enjoy singing the hymns of praise and learn to be attentive, reverent, and enthusiastic in their response.

Phonics - the key to independence in reading – is employed to teach our children to read and spell. Included in this instruction is a study of all letters of the alphabet as well as certain blends, digraphs, and diphthongs.

The reading program is designed to give the students an early comprehension of the essence of reading; thus, after mastering a few key consonants and vowels, the children learn to blend those sounds and, then, to read and write simple words.

This process builds throughout the year until the child has learned the sounds of the letters as well as the sounds represented by the letter combinations – a solid foundation upon which to perfect skills of reading and writing. Reading materials throughout the year include word lists, various class readers, and home-reading material

suitable to each student's advancing reading skills.

Writing instruction naturally correlates with the spelling and phonics program. Visual, auditory, manual, and oral skills develop simultaneously for each sound. The teacher writes 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.

Eventually this and a variety of similar techniques lead to weekly spelling tests and the writing of short, simple sentences from dictation. Neatness and form are stressed, so that by the end of the Kindergarten year, the manuscript is well done.

Number work includes learning to count to one hundred by ones and tens and learning the relative positions of numbers. Addition and subtraction using numbers through nine, place value, using money, recognition of geometric shapes, and telling time round out our Kindergarten work.

Our full-day program allows ample time for activities that help to enrich the child's school experience. Among these activities are art, music, science, physical education, and Scottish dancing.

First Through Third Grades

Our curriculum has a twofold purpose. It seeks to provide a solid foundation in the skills of reading,

spelling, writing, arithmetic, and grammar; and it seeks to help the child toward the acquisition of a Christian worldview through systematic worship and a study of Christian doctrine. The program is so thoroughly integrated that each area of study reinforces the others. In addition to academic subjects, children are provided instruction in science, art, music, highland dancing, and physical education.

First through third grades continue to build elementary skills while exposing students to a wide range of subjects and disciplines that enhance the school experience. Beginning in first grade all students attend the daily Chapel service.

Phonics and Reading

Phonics training, begun in Kindergarten, continues throughout each of the Lower School years in phonics and spelling instruction. By the second semester of the first grade, most children can read any book or story suitable to their individual interests. Particular emphasis is placed on the comprehension of general reading material as well as scripture, and on the development of vocabulary.

Grammar

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

Although students in the first and second grades are instructed in grammatical topics, the formal study of English grammar begins in the third grade with a study of the parts of speech, usage, dictionary skills, syntax of the simple sentence, and related topics. The parsing of sentences and sentence

diagramming are important 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 students to produce, in precise form, a greater volume of work and allows for greater retention of content in note-taking.

Arithmetic

Instruction in arithmetic throughout the Lower School emphasizes computation and reasoning. Manipulatives are utilized to conceptualize the decimal numeration system. Particular attention is given to the structure and mechanics of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

All Saint Thomas' students must memorize all addition, subtraction, multiplication, and related division facts by the end of the second grade year. By the end of third grade, our students have become proficient in all four arithmetic functions using whole numbers.

Arithmetic instruction in the Lower School also includes the study of time, calendars, weights and measures, money, fractions, and descriptive geometry. Additionally, extensive experience in the solution of word problems provides ample opportunity for the development of mathematical concepts and reasoning.

Science

Science in Lower School is grounded in the framework of enjoying, exploring, and understanding God's world. Hands on activities are used to teach basic concepts in life, earth, and physical science.

The students learn about plants, animals, and their interdependence through the understanding of elementary

ecology. They are introduced to their planet, the sun, the moon, and the relationship among them. Physical science studies include introduction to the scientific method, measurement, and different ways to record data.

Students are also often given opportunities to explore STEM concepts through collaborative activities.

Sacred Studies

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of all truth and the foundation for our school. This belief is reiterated through daily attendance at the Chapel service by all students and faculty members. Students learn the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Morning Prayer Canticles, and the Ten Commandments, as well as many Bible verses.

Moral training is emphasized throughout the Lower School curriculum and is reinforced through the study of the Bible, Psalms, Aesop's Fables, and numerous other texts.

We introduce Biblical history in first through third grades through a study of selected Bible stories. Both the Old and New Testaments are profiled.

History

In third grade, formal History studies begin by profiling significant men and women, who formed and shaped our great nation. Additionally, the study of geography begins in third grade. All third grade students learn the regions of the United States, the location of the 50 states, and their capitals.

Fourth and Fifth Grades

In the fourth and fifth grades, we continue to build on the foundation laid 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 schoolwork.

Students learn to organize their material and thoughts using note-taking and graphic organizers as they begin to 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

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

Reading and Vocabulary

The study of literature in the fourth and fifth grades helps to improve the art of reading. Through the study of poetry, we introduce imagery as a tool of writing. Required outside reading in a variety of English and American classics sharpens reading skills. 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 to words in literature. We emphasize the determination of meaning from contextual clues. The goal is to perfect articulation and to interpret words within paragraphs.

Grammar

The formal study of grammar, begun in the third grade, expands through

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

Composition

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 on conciseness, organization, and originality.

Mathematics

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 arithmetic reasoning and logical thinking.

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

Additional topics include the metric system, perimeter, area, factoring, primes, multiples, ratio, proportion, and percentages.

History/Sacred Studies

Our history program instills in students an understanding of the heritage of Western Civilization and the Christian principles that have formed Western social and political institutions. History classes proceed in a mostly chronological order but are arranged so that the more demanding and complex materials are considered in the later grades.

The study of America from the Revolution to the Civil War, as well as a unit on Texas History comprises fourth grade coursework. Fifth grade reviews the Civil War and continues to profile the nation's development to modern times.

Reading and making maps and the political and physical geography embedded in our history lessons augments 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 Testament, reinforcing the stories and values introduced in earlier grades.

Science

In fourth grade, the students continue their study of 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 pulls together 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, continues with life science, earth science, astronomy, and physical science.

Fine Arts, Foreign Language, and Athletics

Art

Art in the Lower School is a time of exploration and development of skills. The structured teaching encourages the children to develop their imaginations and talents as well as an awareness and appreciation of design in their environment.

Music

The music program teaches children to sing and appreciate beautiful music. Frequently they perform in Chapel. At Christmas, the students give a concert of complex and inspiring pieces. An added benefit is that learning and singing the chapel texts helps to reinforce the reading program.

Junior String Ensemble

JSE provides an opportunity to violin, viola, and cello students who have sufficient note-reading skills and solid technique 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 as well as develop ensemble skills including playing different parts, balancing melody and harmony, and matching bowing technique and style. Our Ensemble performs during some Chapel services, at Christmas and spring concerts, and in community service performances throughout the year.

Fourth-Sixth Grade Choir

Fourth through sixth grade students may participate in the choir by audition, and work to develop intonation, a pleasing sound, and correct diction. Regular part-singing, canons, anthems, and folk songs make up some of the repertoire as well as singing in several languages by performing works in Latin, German, Spanish, French, Italian, and English.

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

Private Lessons

Private music lessons in piano, voice, organ, violin, viola, cello, flute, and classical guitar are offered.

Scottish Arts

Pipe Band

Beginning in fourth grade, students involved 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 are also available.

Highland Dance

Instruction in Scottish dancing 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, to develop a sense of rhythm and to offer for their enjoyment a disciplined and moral dance form.

Spanish

Lower School Spanish exposes students to foreign language to develop their ear, introduce vocabulary, begin conversation and social skills, and study other cultures' customs and traditions. Students will also study examples of Mexican culture in Houston to appreciate the cultural diversity found within our own city. Building on their understanding of English grammar, fourth and fifth graders begin Spanish grammar.

Oral Presentation

This class focuses on verbal and body language communication. With dramatizations, skits, debates, and storytelling, this class emphasizes oral communication and helps mold the students into articulate and creative young thinkers.

The class supports the mission of the school with learning and communication, concentrating on words (both written and spoken) rather than with images (video and television). By offering this in fourth and fifth grades, we give our future Middle School students the tools to communicate effectively within a social environment that is comprised of their peers and adults.

Physical Education and Athletics

Our Lower School students attend at least two movement periods each day: PE or dance on alternating days and an unstructured recess period.

Our PE classes focus on teaching students about physical fitness. These classes teach games and exercises students can play and do to keep fit. Students also learn the fundamentals of sports, personal health, and playing as a team.

School staff and faculty offer after school soccer, dance, fencing, and lacrosse for various ages throughout the year.

Library

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. We believe it is important to guide our students to properly use resources available to them at any library or online, so the skills taught are meant to prepare them for life outside of STE.