

# Lower School

Curriculum Overview – Grades 1 and 2



## Lower School students expand their horizons and begin to see things from different perspectives.

All Lower School academic classes are taught in French or English, so students don't merely learn two languages – they learn *in* those two languages. This enables students to experience different ways of thinking and reasoning on a daily basis, enhancing their intellectual flexibility. It is a lifelong benefit that not many other elementary schools can match.

In first and second grades students spend the majority of their time building their French skills. English instruction makes up about a quarter of their time.

Lower School follows a curriculum that aligns with the official program of the French Ministry of Education. Additional topics are added based upon aspects related to United States education that further enhance the program and give the students an experience that is rich and unique.

## Reading and Language Arts

Though oral language in both French and English is still a strong focus of the learning in grades 1 and 2, emphasis now shifts to reading and writing skills. Following the French program, reading is not formally taught until grade 1. Kindergarten is reserved for reading readiness. Therefore it is grade 1 where students experience the joy of the world of reading. As they explore the sounds that make up each language students begin to read and write both fiction and non-fiction and works of poetry. As their skills grow so does their vocabulary. In second grade these skills are strengthened and students begin to read at a sustained level as they transition from learning to read to reading to learn.

English or French as a Second Language is provided in small groups to those not able to participate fully in the regular language arts activities. Throughout the year time spent in ESL/FSL will diminish as a student is better prepared to do all of the classroom activities.

## Mathematics

When we speak of literacy skills we also refer to building the foundation for understanding mathematics. The Lower School math program follows the mathematics guidelines from the French Ministry of Education as well as many of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The majority of topics in grades 1 and 2 are taught in French. The English program seeks primarily to build the vocabulary necessary to perform certain skills. Certain topics such as measurement using both the metric system and the U.S. standard system and money learning about both euros and dollars, are taught in both programs.

## **Bilingual Time, Science and Social Studies**

Three hours during the week are set aside for what we refer to as Bilingual Time. It is a time when the students benefit from being taught by both their French teacher and their English teacher. These lessons generally focus on science and social studies topics. This arrangement helps students to broaden their vocabulary on a wide range of topics in both languages. It also allows students with weaker skills in one or the other language to participate fully in all activities. And certainly the students benefit greatly from the teamwork demonstrated by their two core teachers.

## **Arts**

At ISB students study the arts to learn about the world around them and to understand their own historical and cultural heritage as well as those of others within their community. Participating in artistic expression plays a significant role in the development of the student's spirit.

Through the performing arts of music and theater students increase their self-confidence in their ability to express themselves in two languages. They also learn the skills associated with performing in front of an audience and of creating a group work.

Through singing, playing instruments, listening, movement and much more, students in grades 1 and 2 will broaden their appreciation for and understanding of the role of music in our lives. Through activities in theater class, students gain a stronger understanding of space and how to express themselves through movement. They have the opportunity to stimulate their imagination and explore their emotions.

Visual arts allow students to express themselves while exploring the use of color and learning about form, perspective, composition and texture. It is a time when students can give their verbal skills a rest as they unleash the creative side of themselves.

## **Physical Education**

The objectives of our Lower School Physical Education program are to help students develop their motor skills, access the cultural heritage related to various physical activities and acquire life-long skills related to knowing and respecting their bodies and keeping them healthy. In grades 1 and 2 this is done through playing team sports where they learn to work with their peers and to follow rules and through tasks of individual strength building such as activities that build motor skills. Students also learn how to express themselves creatively through movement, acrobatics, gymnastics, and dance.

## **Character Education**

Throughout the year students learn about the importance of different character traits. Through discussions and activities about such topics as empathy, respect, global mindedness, gratitude, and perseverance, students gain a better understanding about living and working together in a community. During monthly assemblies, students are introduced to the theme of the month and are able to share activities they have done in class related to the previous month's theme.

## **Student Support Services and Programs**

As part of the Lower School curriculum, students have various opportunities for support and enrichment. Our Individualized Learning Support team made up of two English speaking literacy specialists and two French speaking learning specialists, provides small group help to students outside of the classroom or within the classroom as needed. Additional support in grades one and two is provided by arranging schedules that allow the classroom teacher to work with students in half groups to provide small group instruction. English as a Second Language and French as a Second Language professionals as well as classroom assistants also help teachers to further differentiate instruction to meet all the students' needs.