



Saint Thomas' Episcopal School

Lower School Curriculum

Kindergarten - 5th Grade

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

Classical education is a long-standing tradition in education that emphasizes seeking all that is true, good, and beautiful. Typically the trivium, grammar, logic, and rhetoric, are seen as the core of classical education. In our lower school, students participate in grammar, reading, vocabulary, spelling, and Sacred Studies coursework to complete the grammar stage. Our middle school embraces the logic stage, in which students begin to analyze and form arguments. This leads to the upper school rhetoric stage, in which students become skilled orators. Outside of the trivium, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy are considered the mathematical arts to form the quadrivium.

The lower school is a place of learning 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 clearly 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 their own personal growth.

Kindergarten

Kindergarten serves as the firm foundation for our lower school program. Phonetically oriented reading instruction, literature, mathematics, and Biblical studies form the core of the kindergarten curriculum. This programming is complemented by seamlessly integrating social studies, grammar and composition, and science into class activities.

Sacred Studies

Our daily worship service forms the core of kindergarten Sacred Studies. Students learn the Chapel service and after a few weeks are able to recite much of it from memory. The service includes singing hymns of praise and a focus on being attentive, reverent, and enthusiastic in Chapel responses. Chapel service includes the reading and discussion of major Bible stories, as well as a time to offer petitions for others. This Biblical study

introduces students to our Sacred Studies programming in lower school and offers ample opportunity for memory work and recitation of prayers, verses, and poems.

Phonics

A firm grasp of phonics is key to independence in reading. Traditional methodology is employed to teach students 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 phonics program is designed to give the students an understanding of the essence of reading. After mastering a few key consonants and vowel sounds, kindergartners learn to blend those sounds and then to read and write simple words. This process builds throughout the year until the student has learned the sounds of all of the letters, as well as the sounds represented by letter combinations. This serves as 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.

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 both orally and in writing as the year progresses. Students are coached in identifying the basic parts of a story, including beginning, middle, and end, as well as 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, as well as profile holidays and their significance.

Penmanship and Spelling

Writing instruction naturally correlates 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 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 crafted and spaced appropriately.

Grammar and Composition

Students gain a basic understanding of the role of nouns and verbs, as well as the components of a simple sentence. The children learn to identify different types of sentences, specifically to discern between a question and statement. Ultimately, the goal is for students to craft original simple sentences that feature capitalization, express a complete thought, and employ proper punctuation. This 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 skill 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, learning 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 by partitioning shapes to understand that fractions are parts of a whole. Identifying, generating, and explaining patterns, use of money, telling time, measuring, and basic data analysis through charts rounds out our mathematics work.

Science

Students participate in science laboratory classes each week. These classes focus on the development of 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 work stations 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, work stations and center time, art, music, library, and Spanish. Each day students engage in two movement blocks: recess and either 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 skills and concepts for literacy, grammar and composition, history, science, and mathematics, while exposing students to the Christian worldview through worship and Biblical studies. In addition to academic subjects, children are provided instruction in 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 wider range of subjects and disciplines to broaden the school experience in preparation for fourth and fifth grades.

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 of Chapel service by 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.

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

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

Phonics and Spelling

Phonics training, begun in kindergarten, continues in first through third grades through formal 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. 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 on a weekly basis.

Literature

Students are exposed to great books and stories of notable women and men in history through picture book, poetry, and novel studies. 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 both orally and in writing. Students are coached in identifying plot, setting, and characters, as well as literary elements, 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, as well as through comprehension assessments and reading projects.

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

Grammar and Composition

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 kindergarten and first grade are instructed in grammatical topics, the formal study of English grammar begins in the second 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. Cursive writing is used throughout the lower school years.

Mathematics

Our lower school math program is designed to build conceptual understanding, application of math skills to build relevance and 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 are confident in making sense of problems and persevere in solving them. Additionally, we promote 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 system. Particular attention is given to the structure and mechanics of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division and the relationships between them. 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 become proficient in all four arithmetic functions using whole numbers.

Mathematics instruction in the lower school also includes the study of time and calendars; measurement, including 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 are used to teach basic concepts in life, earth, and physical science.

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 relationships among them. Physical science studies include introduction to the scientific method, measurement, and different ways to record data.

Students are also often given extensive opportunities to explore STEM concepts through collaborative activities and work stations. Students use a variety of lab tools to observe specimens and design their own experiments with teacher guidance.

History

In early grades, students focus on social studies topics. The goal of these studies is for students to gain an awareness of their world and to understand how they can participate in their world and make healthy, informed decisions. Our curriculum encourages active inquiry while introducing civics, economics, geography, and history concepts. Students develop critical thinking, problem solving, and communicating skills for engaged civic life.

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

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.

Geography is an important component of these studies. Second graders gain familiarity with many types of maps. 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 school work.

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 and Phonics

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.

Each spelling lesson contains a phonics focus in which a phonics rule is either reviewed or introduced. The lesson cycle is five days consisting of the introduction of the phonics rule and words, guided student work including word coding, use of spelling words in context, and ultimately student assessment through a spelling and dictation test.

Reading and Vocabulary

The study of literature in the fourth and fifth grades helps to 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 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 and Composition

The formal study of grammar, begun in the second 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.

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.

Mathematics

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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, 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. 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 serves to prepare students for middle school history.

Lessons encourage active citizenship using biographies to celebrate the contributions of many. Students read about the diverse people who made history and reflect on

important citizenship qualities, such as respect, determination, patriotism, respect for the rights of others, honesty, and courage, among others.

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.

Focus is placed on U.S. History, specifically the formation and development of our nation. The study of the United States from its beginnings 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. Students continue to participate in daily Chapel and the memorization of Bible verses.

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 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

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 goal of the lower school art program is to provide students with the skills necessary to use these elements and principles to make art in a creative way.

All classes meet in a studio art setting, where students are able to use a variety of media in order to create their own unique interpretations of each assignment. Assignments are all designed for students to be successful, while working at their own level. All assignments have enough restrictions to promote creativity, while leaving ample space for individual expression. Finished art is displayed in various areas around the school, giving students the chance to see and evaluate not only their own work, but other student's work as well.

The artwork of master artists, contemporary artists, and children's book illustrators is used as inspiration for many of the projects. This provides the dual benefit of art history education with studio art experience, allowing students to create their own "masterpieces." Art from a variety of cultures is also introduced to enhance the projects and promote the understanding of cultural differences.

Music Offerings

Those studying any of the instruments offered at Saint Thomas', whether it be 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 practicing, and *excellence* through their performance in public concerts and participation in competitions – to mention two of our school's core values.

Music

In lower school, a foundation is laid 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 exposures.

Throughout the year, students in first through fifth grades learn to sing psalms and hymns for the daily Chapel service. The hymns provide a good 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.

During the first semester, all students in kindergarten through fifth grade prepare music to perform at evening Christmas concerts. These concerts, a continuous and beloved feature of the cultural, social, and spiritual life of the school, are anticipated each year by families and friends, not to mention by the student-performers themselves.

After the Christmas concerts, second through third grades begin the study of music theory. Building upon their work in kindergarten and first grade, the students learn more complex rhythmic patterns and sing songs with greater tonal challenges. Games are utilized to help solidify music concepts. Classes for fourth and fifth grades include written

theory beginning with basic 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 both flats and sharps. Students learn to sing both part music and in canon. Sight singing skills are developed through the use of American folk songs, children's songs, as well as simple sight reading exercises.

Third - Fifth Grade Choir

Third through fifth 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 the 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.

Strings

Lower School Strings provides an opportunity to learn violin or cello. Students learn 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. The ensemble performs during some Chapel services, at Christmas and spring concerts, and in community service performances throughout the year.

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

Private music lessons in piano, voice, violin, cello, bagpipes, drums, and guitar are offered after school.

Language Offerings

Spanish (Kindergarten - Third 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 both language development and cultural understanding aimed at helping students become fluent and be able to communicate meaningfully in the target language and culture. Their approach to language learning is holistic, and some of the 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 common 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 families and traditions of different countries in which the target language is spoken, and they will be engaged to consider different cultural perspectives while incorporating the five C's 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, as well as 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 is different from the culture and traditions of the countries speaking the target language they are learning.

Latin (Fourth - Fifth Grade)

We believe Latin is important for many reasons. The major language of the Western world for more than two thousand years, it is the parent language of French, Spanish, and Italian, among others, and is a cousin to Greek, Sanskrit, and the Germanic languages. Thus, a good understanding of Latin facilitates learning both the Romance and the Germanic languages. English itself is overwhelmingly indebted to Latin, and students who take Latin tend to perform better on standardized testing.

It is far easier for a student to learn English vocabulary when the student can analyze the basic Latin roots and infer the definition rather than memorize meanings in a vacuum. Latin is also an invaluable aid in teaching English grammar because basic grammatical concepts become clearer in a student's mind when presented in the logical structure of the Latin language. The ability logically to deduce sense from statement (i.e., comprehension) is greatly increased. Also, Latin terms are common in many professions including law and medicine.

In preparation for middle school, our fourth and fifth grade students begin their Latin studies. The primary goal of the coursework is to build a foundation in grammar and vocabulary to equip students to excel in future Latin and Romance language studies. Additional goals include the development of cultural literacy through the study of Ancient Roman mythology and culture and Latin sacred music, art, and prayers. Finally, the class nurtures a sense of wonder and gratitude for the ancient world and the world around us.

Oral Presentation (Fourth - Fifth Grade)

In this course, students learn stage, acting, and speech techniques, which translate not only into the arts, but also into 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 performance of scene work, creating stories and characters, speech writing, and presentation. Diction, projection, posture, and poise are also addressed. The goal of coursework is to develop communication skills for creative and articulate expression.

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.

Movement/Fitness Offerings

Physical Education

Physical education classes seek to promote student physical fitness. Students learn the fundamentals of sports, personal health, and strategies for playing as a team. Games and exercises that promote physical fitness are introduced. Students are expected to develop competency in motor skills and movement patterns, demonstrate 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.

Athletic Extracurricular Offerings - Basketball, Fencing, Lacrosse (Boys), Soccer, Tennis, Volleyball (5), Swimming (5), Track and Cross Country (5), Competitive Highland Dance

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 dance form.