

## Junior Unit Curriculum

### Language Arts

#### Reading

In Junior Unit, fourth and fifth grade students actively engage in reading to learn as opposed to learning to read, while continuing to enhance their reading lives by choosing “just-right” books for pleasure. They read with increased stamina, focus and engagement, using independent reading time effectively. They develop deep, personal engagement with books and extend the variety of genres and media they read in an appropriate manner.

Across the disciplines, junior unit students use a variety of media to collect information, compare and contrast points of view, and understand complex historical, scientific, and mathematical concepts. Texts chosen to support the fourth and fifth grade thematic curriculum not only enhance an understanding of cultures studied and their history, but allow for students’ continued growth as readers of nonfiction. Students use foundational reading skills to enhance the study of word origins, and apply word knowledge and comprehension strategies such as summarizing, questioning, and connecting, to the reading of anthologies, non-fiction texts, fiction, and primary and secondary source materials in support of their thematic explorations. Readers become increasingly skilled in distinguishing between explicit meaning and inference, in building content-specific vocabulary, and in connecting learning across the disciplines.

#### Writing

In fourth and fifth grades, students become increasingly adept at writing to communicate their ideas across content areas with precision and organization. Writing assignments are integrated with projects across the curriculum. Students respond to literature, report scientific observations and support claims with evidence, craft effective and powerful personal narratives, and develop short and extended works of nonfiction. Strategies for efficient note-taking support learning in science and theme. Students edit their own writing and the writing of their peers for clarity, structure, and mechanics. Weekly spelling and vocabulary instruction supports students’ ability to express themselves precisely and vividly, and students build keyboarding skills to foster efficient written communication. They maintain a writer’s notebook to encourage thoughtful reflection and regular writing.

#### Speaking and Listening

In fourth and fifth grades students are expected to be engaged citizens in the classroom learning community and employ active listening skills and thoughtful, civil discourse in classroom discussion, group work, and individual conversations. Students are encouraged to build on, support, or respectfully disagree with others’ ideas, to express their own ideas clearly, and to use examples and evidence to support opinions. Students prepare for discussions by reading, writing, or talking with others and pose and respond to questions that contribute to the discussion and reference others’ ideas. Using verbal and nonverbal signals to demonstrate attention, comprehension, and synthesis of ideas in group discussions is encouraged.

## **Math**

With strong foundational mathematics skills, fourth and fifth graders are ready for the challenges of multiplicative reasoning, division, fractions, and decimals. Through number talks and mathematical investigations, students practice mental calculations, write equations, solve story problems, play math games, and use a variety of math

tools and manipulatives. Junior Unit students continue to practice persevering through challenges, making sense of multi-step problems, and using prior knowledge to interpret new kinds of problems.

Fourth graders focus on developing fluency with multi-digit multiplication and they develop, discuss, and use efficient, accurate, and generalizable procedures to find quotients involving multi-digit dividends. They might show their learning by asking a question that can be solved using multi-digit multiplication and then make a book page that explains how to solve it using the standard algorithm and at least one other strategy. Fifth graders expand their understanding of place value and begin solidifying notions of fraction equivalence and comparison, as they practice fundamentals of adding and subtracting fractions, extending these ideas to include multiplication of fractions by whole numbers. Students also develop an understanding of decimal notation, representing simple fractions as decimals and vice versa. They practice converting measurements, develop additional representations of data, and develop more sophisticated understandings of geometric properties like angle measure and symmetry.

Fifth grade students continue to develop fluency in adding and subtracting fractions and develop a basic understanding of multiplying and dividing fractions. Confident in most other whole-number operations and place value, students can explain cogently not just how various arithmetic procedures work, but also why they work. Fifth graders continue to develop fluency in working with decimals using a variety of models and strategies and they become more sophisticated with interpretation and representation of data. They are developing precision in their communication, calculations, and measurements. Fifth graders use estimation to determine whether an answer is reasonable and check their work for accuracy.

## **Science**

Science in our 4th and 5th grade classrooms follow the two year rotation that closely relates to our thematic and cultural studies. In their studies of ancient civilizations, Junior Unit students are immersed in questions of science both here and now and long ago and far away. From orienteering and planetary science, experimenting with fast plants and their life cycles, to creating devices using the principles of simple machines, students experience the evolution and growth of scientific understanding, and how theories are challenged by time and new information.

## **Spanish**

Fourth and fifth graders broaden their vocabulary and comprehension through listening, reading, writing, and conversation. Grammatical concepts are learned and practiced more formally. Oral skills are developed through conversations, interviews, skits, and games. Cultural explorations include movement and dance activities, singing, cooking, and the development of multimedia projects. Students in Junior Unit are able to communicate their thoughts and feelings in increasingly sophisticated ways using a variety of complex sentence structures.



## Physical Education

In the junior unit, students continue to develop social and emotional skills and personal responsibility while also building an understanding of functional athletic movement patterns. Through drills, fitness, and game play, students continue to master strategies, effort, teamwork, leadership, and communication skills. They also learn about themselves and teammates and are on their way to becoming lifelong learners of physical movement.

## Music

Integrating with their year-long theme, Junior Unit students become familiar with the role of music in the cultures of ancient Greece and China. They strengthen their basic musicianship skills through singing, improvisation, movement, and participation in small instrumental ensembles. Students solidify their comprehension of treble and bass clef notes, basic music symbols, and solfeggio. They continue to expand their hands-on experiences with keyboards and soprano recorders. Students also have numerous opportunities to create original music in small ensemble settings. We support students as they build listening skills during individual and group performances. Line dancing, Appalachian dancing, other types of stepping and dancing give the students opportunities to experience creative movement as a group. Pentatonic compositions and modal improvisations are done in conjunction with classroom thematic studies.

## Art

The fourth and fifth grade curriculum consists of longer-term projects that emphasize basic design elements, craftsmanship, and originality. Classroom themes influence and inform the projects pursued in the art room. As students delve into their study of ancient Chinese and Greek civilizations, a project in paper manipulation and the construction of faux Greek columns reinforces the classroom work. At times, projects are inspired by local exhibitions throughout the city.