

Community Building

The foundation for all learning at the Village School is a strong sense of community. The children view themselves as integral members of their classroom and the larger Village School community. Students learn the important skills of learning with and caring for others and building responsible independence. Academic learning is enhanced when the children feel both safe to contribute their own original ideas and are open to hearing the ideas of others. Community building activities are present throughout the day, from morning meetings to group book talks to cooperative games. As part of community building, we are also working on ways to instill a growth mindset within our class. We are aiming to have a ‘can-do’ attitude and the students are learning about why this is important for their brain development.

Thematic Studies

Our theme this year is *Ancient Egypt*. We are starting the year with a study of archaeology in order to understand how we learn about ancient civilizations. The children will “live” as archaeologists and through a combination of readings, videos and projects learn about how they piece together the stories of long ago. After that we’ll study the land of Egypt with a focus on the Nile River in order to understand why the Egyptians could thrive in a desert environment. We’ll then immerse ourselves in the culture of the ancient Egyptians, with a focus on topics that include: social order, mythology, pharaohs, pyramids, the mummification process, trades, and hieroglyphics. We’ll read articles that help deepen our understanding of these topics, do a research project around a topic that piques their interest and have hands-on projects. Field trips in science will support theme, as will trips to museums such as the Fitchburg Art Museum.

Reading

During Reader’s Workshop children immerse themselves in a wide variety of books. Children are exposed to many different genres, from non-fiction to chapter books to poetry. The units of study will help students build skills to think deeply about the books they read. Children are given independent books from the classroom library. These books help them practice and develop skills, and offer the right challenge to extend their learning. We’ll also have group readers this year where we’ll read and discuss a common novel, which will offer rich discussions, time to reflect and write about their thinking. We’ll explore themes in the novel, character motivation, symbolism, and more. This will help them to deepen their thinking when reading their independent books. Children will be assigned reading and writing homework for the class reader and when assigned, this supersedes reading their independent books. To enhance continuity between home and school, children carry their books home each day and should spend at least 20 minutes each evening reading independently. Throughout the year, children are read stories aloud, some of which connect to theme. Some of the books they will hear are: *Mystery of the Egyptian Scroll*, *The Golden Goblet* and *Cat in the Mirror*.

Word Study

Word Study is a time for students to practice building English language skills. Dictionary skills, vocabulary building and learning parts of speech are the cornerstones of word study. A component of word study is spelling. During spelling students learn spelling rules, words that break rules and other words. They also learn the conventional spelling for their best choice spelling words. Word work helps students to increase their sight word list and serves as a bridge between best choice spelling and conventional spelling.

Writing Workshop

Writer’s workshop is a time for students to think about their own stories and to communicate with others through writing and drawing. While becoming more skilled with the technical aspects of writing, children are also learning to find their own voices, craft writing pieces, explore different types of writing and to think carefully about language. Because it is important for students to let their writing flow and get their words on paper, they are encouraged to use their “best choice” spelling. Teaching students a variety of strategies to spell unknown words empowers them to record their stories onto paper. Some units of study for this year are: Poetry, Personal Narrative and Report Writing.

Journal

Through journaling, children learn to record, value and reflect upon their own experiences. They are also creating seeds that may grow into later writing. Journal is a time for students to think about what is important to them and to get it down with drawings and/or words. We also use the journal as a place to collect the poems of the week. The children paste in the poem and write and draw about it. What they write about varies and helps them to work on close reading of poems.

Math

The *Investigations* math curriculum offers students opportunities to have multiple experiences with mathematical concepts through games and other hands-on activities. The students construct their own understanding and have a true sense of ownership of mathematical strategies and ideas. Children are encouraged to use multiple strategies to solve problems and engage with peers to stretch their thinking. The mathematical strands of number sense, geometry, data, and measurement are woven through the year. *Investigations* is aligned with the mathematical common core state standards. A letter explaining the mathematics will be sent home at the beginning of each unit. Students will receive homework that reinforces math concepts explored in the classroom.

Spanish

Spanish is taught through movement, stories, games and songs, and is based on the TPR (Total Physical Response) system. 3rd – 4th grade students will practice basic greetings and phrases, learn to respond to common classroom instructions, and work together to act out short stories in Spanish.

Art

Besides the art integrated throughout the curriculum on a daily basis, the class has a full session with the art teacher, Leia, on Thursday mornings. The goals of the art program are to have fun, have children feel successful with the art they are creating, enrich the class theme for the year, and develop their art making skills through the practice of techniques and exploration of art materials. Ancient Egyptian art invites us to learn about the civilization and culture, as well as the purpose of art making during that time. Students will explore the art history of Ancient Egypt through hands on art projects such as low relief sculpture, painting, and works in clay.

Music

This year 3rd- 4th grade students will sing a variety of new and traditional theme-related music. Challenges will include singing in rounds or parts, using rhythm instruments while singing, and learning to clap rhythms written on the board. Students will also continue to study the recorder, with some songs overlapping between singing and recorder class to help students learn to play by ear. Recorder students should practice for at least 5 minutes a day at home.

Science

This year, we are making an interpretive nature trail, as part of our trail system. This is a year-long project. We will select several stations, decide upon content as a group and make waterproof signs for display at specific locations. This fall, to align with the Theme, we are focusing on rivers and water to help us understand the role of the Nile River in ancient Egypt. We will do water experiments; we will perform a stream study and take a riverboat ride with a naturalist at Northfield Mountain. We will do experiments surrounding simple machines and building (pyramids) as well as take on some engineering challenges over the winter. In the spring we will turn our attention to soils, soil fertility and plant growth.