

Fifth and Sixth Grade Curriculum Guide 2008-2009

5th and 6th Grade Humanities: The Ancient and Medieval World

Over a two year sequence, students in the fifth and sixth grade humanities program study the ancient and medieval history of Europe and the non-western world and read relevant literature, including historical novels, myths and legends, renditions of ancient and medieval texts, and texts that build on ancient themes, myths, and traditions. Students additionally read a selection of modern works designed to introduce literary concepts and develop analytic skills appropriate to the fifth and sixth grade reader. The course includes extensive reading, intensive writing instruction, and instruction in skills relevant to the study of both history and English, including vocabulary, grammar, spelling, study skills, and research strategies.

B Year: The focus of the B Year, including 2008-2009, is the classical and medieval history of Western Europe. Using the *Early Times* series and supporting literature, the class studies Ancient Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The class examines the social, political and economic structures and practices in each of these periods, as well as the cultural legacies and influences on the world we live in today. Guiding questions for the course include: Why did certain civilizations thrive or decline at given periods? How did geography and climate affect the civilizations? How did the people live? How did they govern? How did they interact with other civilizations? What did they believe in, and how were their daily lives affected by their beliefs? And finally, why do we study these civilizations? Why does it matter, and how can this study help us understand the world we live in? Students conduct research projects of their choice for each period studied, craft their own myth or legend, and design their own civilization in the spring. Supporting literature providing an expanded perspective into each civilization may include: *D'Aulaire's Greek Mythology*, *Black Ships Before Troy*, *The Hero and the Crown*, *The Thief*, *Catherine Called Birdie*, biographies of influential Renaissance figures, and selections of poetry, short stories, and adapted Shakespeare plays. Additional readings include modern literature that builds on ancient myths and legends.

A Year: The focus of the A year is non-western world history and cultures. Using the *Early Times* series, *World Explorer* textbook, and supporting literature, the class studies ancient and medieval civilizations in China, the Near East, South Asia, Africa and Latin America. The class examines the social, political, and economic structures and practices in each of these periods, as well as the cultural legacies and influences on the world we live in today. They also investigate the regional geography and cultural practices of each area. Guiding questions for the course include: Why did certain civilizations thrive or decline at given periods? How did geography and climate affect the civilizations? How did the people live? How did they govern? How did they interact with other civilizations? What did they believe in, and how were their daily lives affected by their beliefs? And finally, why do we study these civilizations? Why does it matter, and how can this study help us understand the world we live in? Students investigate through research and study places different from their own experience and draw connections to

help them understand the diversity that we see in the world today. Supporting literature providing an expanded perspective into each civilization may include: *The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen*, selections from *The Ramayana*, *A Year of No Rain*, *Jade and Iron*, as well as supplemental short literature and poetry. Additional readings will include modern young adult literature that will help students develop their reading and analytic abilities.

Reading: The humanities class is based on reading, writing and the improving listening and speaking skills. Students formulate perspectives on historical study and literature based on evidence, synthesis and understanding. Students investigate a range of genres and continue to work on summarizing, paraphrasing and identifying important information as they read every day in class and for homework. Students keep an independent reading journal with written correspondence with their teacher and give four “book talks” throughout the year. Independent reading allows students to develop reading preferences and enjoyment, explore different genres and increase responsibility in making meaning of a text outside of class discussions.

Writing: Students practice writing different forms, including personal narrative, profiles, journal, reader response, critical essays and poetry, in writing workshop. They also practice revision and editing skills and write in their journals daily. In addition, students develop clear and focused writing skills, including the use of evidence, introductions, transitions and conclusions. Research and immersion projects help students to gain skills such as questioning, focusing, outlining, finding supporting evidence, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Students continue to assess and revise their writing using the 6+1 writing traits introduced in the Lower School. The frequency of both reading and writing -every day in class and at home – increases fluency, confidence and achievement in both areas.

Listening & Speaking: Students engage in occasional debates based on focus questions related to shared themes from history and English classes. Students use new vocabulary and learn debating techniques, such as note-taking and counter-argumentation. In addition, students present one meaningful monologue relating historical perspectives and concepts to present day activities in their own lives.

Vocabulary, Spelling and Grammar: Grammar study is cumulative and includes regular grammar exercises, continued emphasis on editing in writing workshop, and weekly assignments in the *Let's Communicate* and *Editor-in-Chief*. Skills are taught, reinforced and reviewed so that students become accustomed to using them in their own writing. Mini-lessons introduce or review concepts as common grammar problems emerge from the class. Using the *Megawords* and *How to Spell* series, students learn basic spelling rules including syllable types and syllabication rules, long vowel spellings, common affixes and patterns for plurals and possessives. With twice-weekly review of spelling principles and spelling “demons,” weekly quizzes, individual practice at home and assistance in identifying strategies that best match their learning styles, students learn to spell in application. *Vocabulary from Classical Roots* teaches word origins, parts and

families to help students build vocabulary and understanding of words through recognition and reasoning skills. Students complete weekly lessons and quizzes. In addition, students keep word lists from their reading that are incorporated into cumulative vocabulary study.

5th and 6th Grade Mathematics

Fifth and sixth grade math students build on a foundation of basic mathematical operations to expand their understanding and prepare for the study of more advanced mathematics. While reviewing fundamentals of mathematics, fifth grade students study several new concepts such as the order of operations (in preparation for algebra), basic geometry, and advanced fraction and percentage operations. Sixth grade students engage in such topics as variables, ratio and proportion, speed/rate/distance operations, geometry, and challenging word problems that demand the application of problem-solving strategies. These topics form the main body of study for the year. By the end of sixth grade, students master the basics of converting fractions, decimals and percents and are prepared to tackle the abstractions of algebra.

Class is a balance of group collaborative work and individual skills development. Math classes typically begin with a group exercise, either a warm-up problem or a review of homework. Instruction in new concepts is given to both grade levels, while grade-specific instruction is given to small groups when appropriate. Students engage in discussions and activities designed to introduce new concepts or to review and reinforce previously learned material. Mathematical and logic games are employed throughout the course to keep class exciting and to keep minds limber.

The primary text for the course is *Primary Mathematics* by Singapore. Students build new skills by progressing through concrete, pictorial, and abstract approaches. This text promotes clear thinking, effective communication of mathematical ideas and adept problem solving, and helps develop the foundation pupils will need for more advanced mathematics. Students often work with classmates to share and solidify their understanding of given concepts.

Math is also integrated across the curriculum in order to build an appreciation for the usefulness of mathematical application in real-world situations. Students complete hands-on projects such as building models of structures from the ancient world and also study famous mathematicians and mathematical ideas, the prime number sieve, the Pythagorean theorem, and pi. Students use calculators and computer software to reinforce skills learned in the classroom and provide familiarity with technology. Most importantly, students deepen their mathematical thinking and problem solving throughout the course of the year as they grow to see math as a tool to help guide everyday inquiry.

5th and 6th Grade Science

Children are fascinated by the world and enjoy opportunities to explore it. Students can best acquire science concepts and skills by means of a fun, inquiry-based, hands-on approach that focuses on the process and techniques of discovery. Students satisfy their innate curiosity as they observe, question, and test basic scientific concepts. Throughout the fifth and sixth grade science curriculum, the scientific method is introduced and incorporated into a wide variety of topics, which are selected to develop the students' understanding of the natural world. Students learn to pose questions, make predictions, create hypotheses, collect data, conduct research, and present findings. At the heart of the curriculum are the open-ended types of questions that children ask as they explore the world around them, such as "What will happen?" and "How and *why* does that happen?"

Each year, students complete an in-depth study of topics in earth science, life science, and physical science. Over a two-year progression, students learn about forces, flight and rocketry, weather, planetary science, cells, human anatomy, marine science, and pollution. Throughout each unit, students employ the scientific skills of observing and comparing, classifying, measuring, inferring, formulating hypotheses, designing and testing investigations, collecting and interpreting data, and recognizing variables.

Skills: A fundamental goal of the curriculum is to develop awareness, scientific reasoning skills, and a commitment to learning in addition to increasing specific subject knowledge. Student progression in science results in informed decisions, responsible behavior, and constructive actions concerning the world in which they live. Students spend a significant amount of time discussing the ways in which scientists think, designing experiments, and collecting, recording, analyzing and learning from that data.

Cross-curricular connections: Students explore the relevant histories of scientific understanding, influential scientists of the period, technological advances, and invention as they explore different cultures in their humanities courses. Students build Greek columns and test their strength to weight ratios as they examine classical Greek architecture. While studying the medieval period, students build and test different versions of catapults and trebuchets while examining the concepts of force and motion. Experiential learning trips also act to reinforce the lessons learned in the science classroom.

5th and 6th Grade Spanish

As this age group transitions towards more abstract thinking, the approach to language acquisition also changes. Students formalize existing skills and learn more advanced concepts, including language structure and individual components of grammar. They also explore cultural influences in greater depth. Students use the Kagan *Spanish: Cooperative Learning and Multiple Intelligence Activities* book and worksheets to develop vocabulary while Total Physical Response, skits, games and other activities connect the spoken language to actions. Students focus on culture through creating interactive projects that focus on specific countries and cultural festivities.

The curriculum provides a foundation in the 5 C's of the National Standards for foreign language instruction:

- Communication in the target language
- Connections with other disciplines
- Comparisons that develop insight into the nature of language and culture
- Cultural experiences
- Communities – students learn how to communicate in a multilingual community

5th and 6th Grade Visual Art

Art is a process that requires the combination of learned skills and the ability for creative thought to express a given concept. The more one hones one's technical skills, the more effective one is in conveying emotion through artwork. The means by which the creative mind is utilized and problem-solving processes are developed allow for deeper and more meaningful communication through the visual arts.

Visual art is a vital element in the development of the academic and creative mind at the middle school level. The artistic process is focused upon in a greater capacity than the creation of finished products. Students will participate in discussion based around the cultural relevance and impact of art in history to the present day. Discussion will also facilitate the formulation of personal preference and opinion in relation to appreciation and historical study, as well as allowing for development of the "art dialect." The basic elements and principles of design provide the foundation for building confidence in the processes and skill sets in art production of various two and three-dimensional materials.

The first units will be based around drawing skills as the foundation for all visual expression. Students will participate in life drawing lessons as well as more creative, open-ended uses of the various drawing media. Painting is the second major unit, allowing students opportunities to develop color theory, mixing and application techniques, and compositional decision-making. Students are then directed into several three-dimensional sculpture projects dealing with ceramic hand-building, wheel throwing, and plaster-based materials. Other media explored include printmaking, fabric dyeing, and the commercial arts. Sketchbook homework assignments will be used as technical skill practice, idea generation, and preparation for class projects. Students will compile work in personal portfolios and participate in several peer and formal critique processes. By the end of this course, students will have experience in several technical aspects of two and three-dimensional work enabling realistic representation and creative expression. Continuing to create interest and excitement around the visual arts is a major focus of the middle school program.

5th and 6th Grade Music

The fifth and sixth grade students take advantage of the Rock and Roll Academy studio space where they have full access to guitars, drums, basses, keyboards and vocals. Employing a "learn by doing" approach, the students quickly gain competence on a

variety of instruments and, most importantly, play together in a group. This essentially allows the band to become the teacher, as the students intuitively understand when the music sounds right or wrong. Observing, performing and sharing knowledge with one another creates a supportive and vibrant learning environment. Students develop a rudimentary understanding of the cultural and historical perspective of American music and learn to play in various styles. Performance opportunities bring focus and excitement to student work. Developing listening skills, confidence and the ability to enjoy making and performing music are primary goals for this group.

5th and 6th Physical Education

The goal of the fifth and sixth grade physical education program is to provide students with physically enhancing and rewarding experiences outdoors that contribute to a lifetime of healthy and active endeavors. Students focus on building general fitness and coordination to improve athleticism. Sound work ethic and sportsmanship is expected. Fifth and sixth graders play sports such as soccer, ultimate frisbee, dodgeball, and track with a shift in emphasis to the physical training aspects of becoming successful athletes. Students use the skills and concepts of heart rate monitoring, student-led yoga and stretching, breathing, warm-up and cool-down, and endurance to encourage the synthesis of mind and body. Students train for winter sports through agility and strength exercises. Classes take place on the Lawson Hill field throughout the school year and in classrooms when weather dictates. Like all disciplines at the Telluride Mountain School, students are expected to uphold the core values of responsibility, respect, integrity, and love of learning.

