



Welcome to First Grade!

JULY 2021

First grade is a transcendent experience. Eager to come to school each morning, first graders are becoming “the big kids”. It is a year of many firsts: lockers to store their belongings and playing on the larger playgrounds are highlights for first graders! At recess some first graders will start to organize games such as basketball and soccer. Some will collect and build with natural materials and still others inhabit a universe where fantasy play and magical thinking are very real - it’s important first graders have opportunities for all kinds of play.

Structures introduced in Kindergarten – reading workshop and writing workshop - continue. Teachers work with whole groups, small groups and individuals to provide targeted instruction in reading, writing, phonics and spelling. As in all grades, assessment is frequent. First-grade homework expectations and routines are explained by the classroom teachers at Back-to-School Night.

Literacy work focuses on building independence and learning a great deal about print as both readers and writers. Strategies for decoding and building reading fluency are explicitly taught other reading units include realistic fiction, poetry, and informational text. Students are given a *Kids A to Z* account to practice at home. This account is kept throughout their time in Lower School and will be explained at Back-to-School Night.

First graders write in complete sentences, and they love incorporating the writing conventions. They learn about punctuation not only periods, question marks and exclamation points but also commas and ellipses as they study the works of other writers. They will try these out in their writing because first graders are wild for new tools and techniques! They write stories called “small moments”, informational books and pieces connected to social studies. *Words Their Way* provides the sequence for spelling rules and patterns, and handwriting follows the *Handwriting Without Tears* sequence.

The math scope and sequence is aligned with the Singapore Math Curriculum. More formal notation is introduced. First graders get a *Dreambox* account which is a tool for practicing skills and concepts at home. Math units of study in first grade include tools and routines; cardinal & ordinal numbers; addition and subtraction within 10; shapes and patterns; graphing and comparison; numbers and operations within 40; measurement of length, weight, and time; and numbers and operations within 100.

Social studies includes a study of houses and homes in which families are invited in to help students construct models of homes from around the world. For many students this experience is one of their most cherished Lower School memories.

Students visit the music room to learn the language of music, particularly beat, rhythm and melody. Budding musicians sing, move, improvise, listen and respond. They study instruments of the orchestra and are introduced to the lives and music of Bach, Handel, Haydn and Mozart.

In Health and Wellness students practice balance through gymnastics activities, learn skills and rules for sports such as soccer, basketball, floor hockey and base games, as well as tag games. They learn about good sportsmanship, safety rules and procedures, and how to problem-solve.

Students learn Spanish through animation, stories, puppets, plays, games and music. Numbers, colors, greetings, days of the week and months of the year are topics students learn and practice.



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First-grade scientists visit the science room where they investigate, observe and record information with drawings and age-appropriate writing. They learn to make evidence-based inferences and practice using the tools of science including but not limited to hand lenses and binoculars. Units of study including the life cycles of plants and the life cycles of animals such as birds, butterflies and mammals. They also study simple machines. They spend a great deal of time studying and learning from the outdoor classroom, which is just outside the Lower School science classroom and is a wonderful place for our students to become invested in the natural environment.

First graders visit Swartley Art Center for art. Here they learn about the elements of color, line and shape through drawing, painting, collage, sculpture and printmaking. Students work independently and collaboratively, and each child creates a collection of work to represent their understanding of the medium and concepts taught.

First graders have formal instruction in technology. They are introduced to flowcharts and simple coding using apps such as *Light-Bot*, *Kodable*, *Scratch Jr.*, and *Hopscotch*.

We see first grade as a time of robust energy and excitement. It is a time filled with learning new skills and solidifying many skills while “trying on” others. It is also a magical time in which students experience an explosion of learning while the beautiful sheen of childhood is still upon them.