

GERMANTOWN FRIENDS SCHOOL



Lower School Curriculum

GERMANTOWNFRIENDS.ORG

LOWER SCHOOL CURRICULUM

LANGUAGE ARTS

The goal of the Language Arts curriculum is to develop avid, knowledgeable, lifelong readers; strong writers; confident speakers; and careful listeners. From Kindergarten on, we use a wide range of language experiences to nurture critical and reflective thinking. Using a Readers' Workshop model, the students are given explicit instruction in reading skills, from decoding words to inferential comprehension strategies, as they engage with compelling literature throughout the school year. Beginning with our youngest learners, there are meaningful opportunities to enhance their written expression as well, through journal writing, Writers' Workshop, and research projects. Thoughtful instruction in spelling, vocabulary, mechanics, and handwriting are also key components of our program. Two reading specialists support all students as needed across the grades, through small group and individual sessions.

MATHEMATICS

Our mathematics instruction is designed to ensure that students develop a deep number sense and flexibility in their mathematical understanding. Children work together as a community of mathematicians, employing a variety of strategies and tools to model their thinking. We encourage them to look for patterns and mathematical relationships through investigations in the context of the real world, developing their own conjectures and testing these ideas, leading to generalizations that facilitate algebraic thinking.

Our students have occasion each day to demonstrate their knowledge of and comfort with mathematical vocabulary and principles that govern the numbers system. They learn a variety of algorithms and explore why they work.

Opportunities to use different strategies help students develop automaticity with basic facts—and underscore how facility with these facts contributes to their accuracy and efficiency as problems become more challenging.

Two mathematics curricula—Investigations in Number, Data, and Space and Contexts for Learning Mathematics—are used in grades K-5 as a foundation for developing these mathematical skills and capabilities, and we enhance the program with a variety of other resources. Our dedicated Lower School math coordinator works within the classroom and independently with small groups to provide support and enrichment.

SOCIAL STUDIES

The social studies program serves as the thematic center of the Lower School curriculum. Students develop a broad knowledge of and respect for history, geography, and populations across diverse cultures and communities.

Teachers design each thematic unit to provide entry points for students to learn from multiple perspectives. They study local and global communities, paying particular attention to social justice, history, culture, and customs.

There are many occasions to integrate social studies with language arts. Coordinating the music, art, science, Spanish, and woodshop programs enhances the subjects and provides rich interdisciplinary connections and thematic unity.

Examples of the social studies curriculum include:

- Second graders study the Lenape of the early 17th century and Colonial Pennsylvania life. They read and write historical fiction in language arts as part of the unit;





- Fourth graders explore Ancient Greece and its contributions to modern society, culminating in an integrated experience known as “Greek Day,” which involves the art, woodshop, and physical education departments;
- Fifth graders study the Middle Ages and the rise of Islam during that period. Their experience concludes with an interdisciplinary May Day celebration and performance in the spring.

SCIENCE

The Lower School science program is highly experiential, with hands-on activities in every period at all grade levels. We believe that children learn best through a combination of observation and experimentation. With a strong environmental focus, our program builds on children’s natural curiosity, covering a wide variety of topics, including physical science, Earth science, life science, and natural history.

We teach extended, in-depth units, favoring mastery and competence over broad coverage. Our goal is to lay a foundation for young learners to become scientifically literate in both their knowledge and skills. We make frequent use of the outdoors and take our students on regular field trips to see how the topics they are studying relate to the world around them. We want them to maintain their sense of wonder about their environment and their excitement about studying it, even as they are beginning a more formal investigation of science.

Studies also include explorations of space, electricity, and robotics, among other topics. Kindergartners have science with a specialist in half groups, and it is incorporated into their daily explorations as well. Students in first through fifth grades go to science as a class, and science teachers collaborate with classroom teachers to integrate and further extend the study of science.

SPANISH

In choosing this particular world language for integration in our program, we demonstrate a commitment to our local Philadelphia community, where Spanish is the second most common language spoken in the home. Early acquisition of a second language has been proven to increase awareness and deeper understanding of other cultures and flexibility in problem-solving, creative thinking, and analytic skills across the curriculum.

Beginning in Kindergarten, our expectation is that Spanish is the only language spoken during Spanish class by teachers and students. This encourages close observation and listening, pattern seeking, and problem-solving, as students work to develop their skills and understanding. Use of literature, songs, games, and images or objects to provide visual cues help to develop student comfort and confidence in this environment.

After the introduction of key vocabulary and phrases, our focus is on encouraging students to apply their language skills. This occurs through integration with other subject areas, such as math, science, art, and social studies, and through the exploration of cultures and traditions throughout the Hispanic/Latino world. Spanish instruction occurs in the classroom in all grades with teachers who are native speakers, and is reinforced through the use of vocabulary and key phrases in other classes as well.

COMPUTER SCIENCE

The Computer Science and Technology program teaches students to be creative problem-solvers, creators of digital content, innovative designers, global collaborators, and responsible digital citizens. Technology is integrated throughout the Lower School curriculum. Classrooms are equipped with SMART Boards, iPads, Macbooks, Chromebooks, and other resources that allow students to explore, collaborate, create, and present information using technology. The Lower School Computer Science and Technology teacher serves as a resource for teachers

and students, and shares innovative ideas for integrating technology into everyday classroom instruction in meaningful and intentional ways.

Students in grades 2-5 have a dedicated computer science class. They investigate how computer hardware works and are exposed to many software applications, with an emphasis on teaching a digital fluency that will allow them to independently and confidently master the new digital tools they encounter. Students learn computer programming skills, including problem-solving and computational thinking, and apply programming concepts to writing their own code. They work in teams to take on challenges using technology, and to design, test, redesign, and retest computer programs with patience and persistence.

The school uses Google's G Suite for Education apps to create content, such as documents, spreadsheets, digital drawings, and websites, and to organize digital information. Students also learn to think critically, behave appropriately, and participate responsibly in our digital world through lessons, discussions, and queries about digital citizenship and online safety. They practice communicating electronically in respectful and responsible ways that are an online extension of the school's community and Quaker values.

QUAKERISM

Germantown Friends School's Quaker identity fundamentally influences the Lower School program. The study of Quaker values guides young children of diverse religious backgrounds to learn to express themselves honestly, to listen well to others, to solve conflicts peacefully, and to be good members of the community. The faculty and staff in the Lower School establish warm relationships with the children in an environment that promotes mutual respect. The practice of weekly Meeting for Worship, a time when our entire Lower School comes together in silent reflection on issues and beliefs that are important to us, highlights the value we place on taking time out and thoughtfully considering our choices and responsibilities as community members.

The Lower School Quakerism Committee, comprised of dedicated Lower School faculty, has developed an informed curricular program, which guides students in developing ownership of the six Quaker values known as the "SPICES": Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship. Each year, the Lower School focuses on two of these testimonies to guide our work.

ART

Students in the Lower School art studio are given the opportunity to explore a variety of different mediums.

They are encouraged to experiment, engage, and create using paint, clay, collage, sculpture, and digital media in a structured and supportive environment. The studio work is closely tied to studies in the classroom as well, from prehistoric to contemporary art. Our students develop a series of sequentially taught skills throughout their Lower School art experience, including color mixing and theory, tempera painting, clay, claymation, paper collage, watercolor, monochromatic printing, and oil pastel. Students attend art class twice a cycle in half-classroom groups in grades Kindergarten-2, then participate in a one semester art intensive (paired with a Woodshop intensive in the other semester) in grades 3-5. Students in the upper grades are also invited to "art lunch" weekly to pursue their own creative endeavors.

HEALTH EDUCATION

Health education in Lower School is designed to familiarize students with basic anatomical and physiological systems relative to the total framework of a healthy body. This includes providing information on nutrition, healthy life habits, and sexuality. The classes provide age-appropriate opportunities to discuss information about growth and sexuality as it pertains to physical, emotional, and social development.

Health topics are integrated into the curriculum and activities in Kindergarten-grade 2, and we add specialized health instruction in grades 3-5.

LIBRARY

The library serves our student population in a variety of ways. Our collection consists of fiction and nonfiction titles that support and enhance the Lower School curriculum and stimulate interest in various topics. We hope to instill in our students a love of the written word and to create a generation of lifelong readers. At the end of the school year, students are given a list of suggested summer reading and are encouraged to participate in the Summer Reading Club, a program designed to promote recreational reading and book discussions during the summer break. All Lower School students visit the library once a cycle during the school year and are always welcome to exchange books when needed.

MUSIC

Our comprehensive music curriculum helps students become skillful, enthusiastic music makers and appreciators. Folk songs, representing a variety of cultural traditions, rounds, hymns, spirituals, and contemporary children's music form the basic repertoire throughout the Lower School. Instrumental activities are introduced as appropriate throughout the grades, including 10 weeks of

small-group violin instruction in third grade and recorder instruction in fourth and fifth grades. Games involving song and movement lay the foundation for dance work. Kindergartners through fifth graders have scheduled music classes several times a week, but singing and performing are incorporated throughout the curriculum, from weekly Kindergarten sing-alongs to regular assemblies.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The goal of the Physical Education department is to provide developmentally appropriate activities that are inclusive, stimulating, and safe for all students in grades Kindergarten-12. Our emphasis is on leading students to discover and develop their individual movement skills and interests through participation in co-educational classes at each grade level. By providing opportunities to develop the social skills requisite for successful group work, competence in movement skills, and an appreciation for the diversity of movement activities, fitness, and skill levels, we hope that students will participate enthusiastically in class activities and beyond. Lower Schoolers attend PE classes at least three times a week, using our indoor and field facilities.

WOODSHOP

Lower School Woodshop begins in third grade and offers a highly interactive, hands-on experience with tools and materials. Students develop manual dexterity, confidence in problem-solving, and an understanding of how things fit together. A variety of techniques, such as carving and shaping, joinery, mechanical fastening, and applying finishes, are explored in the program to give each student a broad understanding of the scope of woodworking.

KINDERGARTEN

Kindergarten is first and foremost a social experience with an emphasis on nurturing and developing character, values, and a sense of community. We encourage both autonomous thinking and cooperation with others. Students come together in small and large groups and work collaboratively with teachers to create a safe and joyful classroom community. Each child's experience of success in Kindergarten builds self-esteem, which in turn enhances a love of learning.

Kindergarten is also an opportunity for intellectual challenge; at this age, our youngest students are learning how to learn, and academic expectations are matched appropriately to each child's development. We encourage independent critical thinking and problem-solving, and provide an integrated multidisciplinary curriculum that links together learning experiences of language arts, math, science, and social studies. Our students develop an



independence of spirit and a feeling of responsibility to themselves and to others; they become children who, able to think for themselves, are confident in what they learn and know.

FACULTY

Our faculty has a wealth of experience and expertise. They are dedicated professionals who continue to study the best practices in the realm of educating young children. A collective hallmark of our faculty is the strong relationships established with the students. Our teachers value and encourage strong partnerships with families and caregivers.

With regard to demonstrating continued study and professional development, members of the faculty belong to various committees. Each committee has a charge, or mission, that guides the work for the school year. Below are some examples of committees:

- Quakerism Committee
- Curriculum Committees
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee
- Admissions Committees
- Assembly Committee
- Campus Stewardship
- Safety and Security Committee

LOWER SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

There are a wide variety of extracurricular activities available to Lower School students, including private instrumental lessons and music ensembles; world language instruction; Early Risers; Animal Care; Lunch Art; and Math Club. Some of these activities occur in the morning, before school begins, some meet during lunch period, and some convene after school. Here are just a few examples of the programs that are offered:

ANIMAL CARE: HELP WITH OUR SCIENCE ROOM ANIMALS

This program provides students in the fifth grade with the opportunity to learn care and feeding skills for the animals in the science rooms. Students come from 8-8:30 a.m. during their appointed time, and care for a chosen animal, often with a partner, for three to four days at a time, then switch to another animal. All students are encouraged to sign up for this program; second turns are only granted once everyone who wishes to participate has had a chance.

EARLY RISERS: WAKE UP AND GET MOVING!

Early Risers is a voluntary intramural sports program that provides an opportunity for students in fourth and fifth grades to have fun while learning fundamental skills and playing in a cooperative team setting.

There are options for basketball, field hockey, and lacrosse.

Early Risers meets one morning per week (7:30-8 a.m.) in the Field House and Scattergood gyms for two five-week sessions: one in the late fall and the other before Spring Break. The program is led by members of the GFS coaching staff, with support from parent volunteers. There is a nominal fee to cover costs.

MAKING MUSIC: ORCHESTRA, CHORUS, AND WORLD PERCUSSION ENSEMBLES

These three ensembles provide students with the opportunity to extend their musical knowledge in a group setting alongside friends and classmates.

Orchestra is open to any Lower School student who has taken private lessons for at least one year. All acoustic instruments are welcome and encouraged; pianists will be taught to play orchestral percussion as well as piano.

Chorus and World Percussion are open to all fourth and fifth graders; no experience is required.

One-hour rehearsals occur once a week after school. Sessions run through the fall (October-December) and spring (April-June), with a break in the winter. All three ensembles perform twice a year, at the end of each term.





GFS

GERMANTOWN FRIENDS SCHOOL

Visit germantownfriends.org

215.951.2345 | 31 West Coulter Street, Philadelphia, PA 19144