

# Kindergarten

## Overview for Parents

**Teacher:** Liz O'Leary

### Content Goal

Our goals in Kindergarten are to provide your children with an engaging, stimulating, and safe environment in which they feel accepted and motivated to do and be their best.

The backbone of our program is the Core Knowledge Sequence. This is not a curriculum but rather a listing of essential knowledge that is organized in a sequential format. Foundational to Core Knowledge is the Kindergarten Language Arts program. The program consists of two "strands" of instruction. The first strand, the Skills Strand, strives to teach students the mechanics of reading and writing using a phonics approach. As part of this strand, students will learn how to hear sounds in words and write "pictures of sounds," also known as letters. The second strand, Listening & Learning, strives to build students' vocabulary and background knowledge through oral language experiences. Core Knowledge is presented through the sharing of rich, content based texts which are organized by theme. As part of this strand, students will listen to stories and nonfiction selections read aloud and actively participate in discussions. These stories include high level vocabulary to help students to gain strong listening and speaking skills. Students complete vocabulary and content rich activities in literature, history, science, and geography. Students with such skills are well prepared for the transition to written language. (Information taken from the Core Knowledge Foundation: Kindergarten Language Arts program.)

While many of these lessons are presented orally, hands-on learning is equally as important. Literacy is a huge part of the Kindergarten program. We play many games and sing songs to help develop phonemic awareness (awareness that words are made of sounds). Additionally, later in the year we use two systematic phonics programs (Explode the Code and Words Their Way) to supplement the Core Knowledge Language Arts Skills program. To support our early readers, we utilize the reading series, Primary Phonics. Handwriting is taught using the D'Nealian handwriting program. The children learn to form upper and lower case letters and practice a proper pencil grip. The children then practice these skills in their daily writing. Mathematics lessons are presented every day through Math In Focus using many concrete manipulatives, games, and opportunities to realize that math is a part of everyday life. The Math In Focus program enables students to develop problem solving strategies and strive toward mastery of the basic unit skills and mathematical concepts presented in Kindergarten.

For character education we use the Core Virtues program. Core Virtues was created by our founding Head at Crossroads, Mary Beth Klee. Every month we introduce a new virtue such as respect, loyalty, and gratitude. We bring these virtues to life through oral reading of high quality literature, through various projects, and through modeling. Rather than being two separate programs, our academic and character education programs blend and support one another.

### Expectations for Students

Kindergarten is where "real school" begins. We help our students to develop habits of the mind and heart and an orientation toward learning that will last a lifetime. This is the year when children learn to be students and classmates. The children practice good manners. They are expected to show respect for others, respect for their school environment, and as well, give each task their best effort. We expect and want kindergarteners to enjoy school. This is their preview for the years to come, and we want it to be a positive and happy experience. To this end we use the Responsive Classroom approach to learning. Through fun, clear, and engaging methods, students learn how to become responsible, respectful, and joyful students. Often these methods involve singing!

### Homework Requirements

We ask that you spend time reading every day with your child. There is a magical essence to reading aloud. Not only does this practice help your child to develop important language skills, but as well, your child will learn to visualize the text; this is key to good reading comprehension. As you snuggle up to bond over a good book, your child is also increasing his or her attention span. We recommend reading together for ten or more minutes per day. In the spring students will bring home decodable kindergarten reading booklets in order to build fluency and confidence in their emerging reading abilities.

### Contacting the Teacher

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