

The Greensboro Montessori School Upper Elementary Division

The Upper Elementary Division ("Upper El") of the Greensboro Montessori School is comprised of 9-11 year old students. This is typically viewed as 4th and 5th grades in a traditional system.

Structure

The Upper El division consists primarily of four teachers: Cindy Bathgate, John Archambault, Jenn Phillips, and Eleanor Farlow. Walter Moore, Frank Brainard, Alicia Kay, and the music, art and physical education teachers also work with Upper El students, in subjects discussed more below. Students have opportunities to interact with all of these teachers. The four main Upper Elementary teachers meet regularly to discuss each student's needs and achievements and often include a student's former teachers when considering curriculum for a student.

Parents, students, and teachers meet at conferences after the first and second trimesters to discuss a student's progress. Other meetings are scheduled as needed by the parents or teachers.

Curriculum

The Upper Elementary curriculum is full and varied. Students choose from or are assigned a wide range of types of work. Students also interact with several different teachers, and develop organizational skills through their use of written planners and personal schedules.

Upper El includes a strong emphasis on integrating the different parts of the curriculum whenever possible. The novel study, writing and geography curricula are closely related to studies in history and sometimes science. Reading and writing skills also are reinforced in language groups, and conversely, concepts of grammar, sentence structure and the mechanics of the English language are emphasized not only in language groups, but also through the writing program. Weekly journal topics often reflect elements of our peace curriculum and community building, and our geometry studies are closely linked with math and often with art.

Language Arts

The four main components of the language arts curriculum are grammar, literacy skills, writing and reading.

Grammar

Students use a variety of grammar materials to learn sentence structure, sentence analysis, and the detailed functions of words. Grammar lessons are held twice a week (or more often if needed). Analyzing the components and structure of the English language are the main focus of these lessons.

Literacy Skills

The literacy skills curriculum combines spelling with punctuation, capitalization and the proper usage of words. Students receive direct instruction each week on a spelling rule and another concept involving use of the language. Students reinforce their understanding of the concept through activities and assignments, with a focus on editing their own work to apply what they are learning. Students have a spelling quiz each week on words that follow the

week's spelling rule. Once a spelling rule or language concept is covered, students must correct any errors in their subsequent written work that relate to that rule or concept.

Writing

The Upper El writing program is extensive and varied, and includes introduction to and practice in many different types of writing. One principal focus for students in both levels is research writing. Students learn techniques for researching and locating information from various sources, including interviews of primary sources. They are guided through note taking techniques, and receive instruction in how to organize the information that they find. Students also practice creating outlines, and learn how to express the information that they found in their own words. They receive instruction in paragraph structure and the structure of reports, as well as learning how to format a bibliography and how to edit their own and others' writing. The research writing program is designed to work in conjunction with students' studies in history and science. One special research project is the Family History Project, which challenges each 5th level student to explore and share the history of his/her family. This year we are planning to do that project in conjunction with the 5th levels' study of the late Middle Ages, when use of surnames became more consistent.

Students also receive instruction in creative writing, and have many opportunities to write stories, poetry and even plays. Students work with brainstorming techniques, figurative language, elaboration, and editing skills. They review their knowledge of language mechanics in their own writing and practice editing of others' work.

Students also have opportunities to write reflective journals each week, to work on letter writing form, and to write descriptive paragraphs and instructions.

Reading

Students are introduced to a wide variety of reading material in Upper El. Novel Study groups read books and materials relevant to the students' history curriculum to offer the students a wider understanding of the time period, culture or concepts they are studying. Students receive reading instruction and practice comprehension skills in these groups, and sometimes in their language groups as well.

Students also are required to read and write "reviews" (summary and opinion) of three books of different genres throughout the year. Students may choose to present these to the class as "book reports", and also may choose to read and review more than three books. Students read a wide variety of material in history, and engage in a number of types of exercises and activities related to their history studies.

Math and Geometry

The Upper El math and geometry programs continue from the Lower Elementary curriculum and progress based on the individual student's needs. Lessons are held in small groups of students working on the same material at the same pace or one-on-one as needed. Math and geometry materials are available in every classroom, and we have a variety of materials that focus on higher math, including beginning algebra, square and cube root, base systems, and powers of numbers. Upper El is the time when many students become ready for abstraction in math. In conjunction with the ongoing use of concrete materials, students also may begin to use textbooks for their math studies.

History

The history curriculum follows human progress beginning with the Montessori Timeline of Early Humans. Fourth level students begin with the earliest bipeds and explore how humans changed based on archaeological findings. Fourth level students also study ancient civilizations such as those of Mesopotamia and South America, as well as those of Egypt, China and Greece. Fourth level students also study the history of North Carolina. Fifth level students begin the year with Ancient Rome and follow Europe through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The Age of Exploration leads them to the New World, where they study Colonial America and the Revolutionary War. The students have numerous opportunities to experience the history they are studying through activities such as cuneiform writing, Greek Olympics, making of Roman mosaics, "monk time" and hosting a Medieval or Renaissance faire.

Fourth and fifth level students end the year with the opportunity to participate in a field trip relevant to their history curriculum.

Science

In Upper Elementary, the science curriculum focuses on the study of the biosphere. During our two-year cycle, fourth and fifth level students study together. One year, students focus on four of the five Kingdoms of Life including the kingdoms Monera, Protista, Fungi, and Animalia. In addition to classifying a wide variety of organisms, the students are introduced to microscope use as they study one-celled organisms and cells from more complex creatures. The other year, students study botany (Kingdom Plantae), as well as chemistry, geology, and meteorology. During the botany year, students examine plant cell structure under the microscope.

We also emphasize environmental science each year in Upper Elementary. As we work to integrate geography and science, we will look closely at several aspects of our ecological address, including the local topography, soil, river basins, biodiversity, climate, and energy. Several of our field trips this year will relate to the study of the local environment. In addition, students spend time each week working in our permaculture garden and learning the processes and care of our immediate environment. This activity is combined with the students' Spanish studies.

Each year, Upper El students have the opportunity to apply their growing knowledge of the scientific process by conducting experiments for a science project, and then presenting their results. They may enter their project in the GMS Science Fair.

Spanish and Gardening

Upper El students go to Spanish class three times per week: twice in the Spanish classroom and once in the garden. Their Spanish teacher is Walter Moore. Spanish integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. In the process of second language acquisition, knowledge of the societies and cultures that accompany Spanish is considered to be essential. The courses will promote the understanding and appreciation of Hispano-Iberian cultures. Instruction will center on the development of conversational skills, and grammar structures and vocabulary will be emphasized to enable proficiency in thematic topics. Every effort will be made to create an immersive learning environment. Students will be strongly encouraged to speak Spanish in the classroom and in the garden.

The schedule of activities in the Upper Elementary garden focuses mainly on plant care and general garden maintenance, as well as tasting and observing natural systems. There also will be kitchen days built into the schedule, where dishes will be made from garden produce and other foods that are in season.

Social and emotional skills will be built upon throughout the course of the gardening program, with an emphasis on group work and collaboration. Furthermore, gardening will be conducted in Spanish whenever possible, allowing the students ample opportunity to improve their conversational skills as well as to gain a greater appreciation for the application of bilingual abilities in the real world.

Students also will develop a more cohesive awareness of natural cycles as they occur in the garden. The development of discrete observational skills (i.e. direction of prevailing winds, subtle and not-so-subtle seasonal changes, the position of the sun and the moon in the sky) will play a fundamental role.

Geography

Students have a geography class each week. The curriculum is closely tied to the students' studies in history and science, and may include examining the physical and political geography of the eras and civilizations being studied. 5th levels have geography with Frank Brainard and John Archambault. Likewise, Frank Brainard and Jenn Phillips work with the 4th levels, while Eleanor Farlow also works with the 4th levels in learning about environmental issues that relate to physical geography.

Computer Skills

The students have a computer class with Alicia Kay, during which they practice keyboarding skills and using the Internet for research purposes, and also may learn to use programs such as Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. They also begin to learn additional skills needed to begin building an electronic portfolio of their work.

Art, Music and Physical Education

Upper El students go to each of three "specials" classes once a week. They have music with Jonathan Henderson, physical education with Morgan Kratovil, and art with Elizabeth Ramsey. Whenever possible, the curriculum in these classes is related to the students' studies.

Peace Curriculum

As justice and fairness are fundamental concerns of the Upper El child, the peace curriculum builds on the foundations established in the Lower Elementary division. We stress conflict resolution, grace, and courtesy throughout the year.

Atmosphere

Upper El is a peaceful but highly dynamic learning environment. Students are allowed to progress at a pace suitable for them, but also are challenged to extend themselves and take academic risks in order to expand their skills. By doing so they grow in self-confidence. Students move regularly among the rooms comprising Upper Elementary, and also undertake responsibilities elsewhere on campus, including picking up attendance sheets each day and delivering pizza. The individual interests of students are encouraged, shared and celebrated, and opportunities for developing skills in problem solving, leadership, and conflict resolution are plentiful.