

A photograph of three young children sitting at a wooden table in a classroom. They are looking towards the camera. The background shows a large window with a view of a green lawn and trees.

PreK and Kindergarten

Curriculum Overview

Social and Emotional Learning

The preKindergarten and kindergarten program respects and reflects the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs of young children. Its intent is to allow children the opportunity to grow and learn from experiences that are meaningful and relevant to them. Daily classroom routines, as well as a balance of structured and open-ended activities, are integrated throughout the day. Our day is designed to allow for periods of active hands-on learning, quiet independent learning, group gatherings and discussions, and one-on-one time with a teacher. The curriculum is designed to provide rich learning opportunities and challenges for all children, while respecting the individuality of each child's development. Each child works at the pace and level that best suits them.

Social and emotional learning is critical at this young age. Some of the competencies we will explore are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, problem solving, and responsible decision making. We will read books, engage in age-appropriate discussions, and role-play scenarios with the goal of developing these skills. Additionally, we select learning materials and provide experiences to help children see themselves reflected in the curriculum.



Social Studies

Our social studies curriculum addresses the big questions that preK and kindergarten children are attempting to understand. These questions include how people live and work together and what is necessary to support daily life in our local community and on a working farm. Our school year begins with focusing on each young member of our class. Our goal is to create a sense of community within our classroom. Together we develop rules, routines, and shared responsibility. Closely connected to this process is learning about ourselves as well as studying how each member of our class is connected to a unique family unit. We address how each of our families plays an integral part in making our local community thrive.



Once our classroom community is firmly established, we begin to explore our broader social studies theme of *Farm Life Within Our Community*, which guides us through the year as we contrast life in the family and classroom with life beyond our doors at various farms in our community. We think about where our food and clothing comes from, how farmers work to provide us with essential products, and how farms help the communities that they are in. Children have

the opportunity to gain first-hand experience through multiple visits to local farms including The Poughkeepsie Farm Project and Wilklow Farm. We will collaborate with the farmers at each of these farms to learn about many aspects of animal and vegetable farming. We will follow the cycle of vegetable gardens through the seasons, learn about the tools and techniques that farmers use, and look closely at how farmers interact with the land that they care for in a way that is respectful and mutually beneficial.

Our work at the farm places special emphasis on cooperative skills, environmental awareness, learning by doing, and extending each child's understanding of the natural



cycles inherent in farm life. This study captures the essence of what social studies is all about: the relationships among people and their interactions with the environment. Through this long-term investigation, children also learn to communicate clearly with words, to listen, to take turns, and to think about the needs and feelings of others. These are important steps in a child's growth in becoming part of a social community. Throughout the preK/kindergarten year, the children are immersed in the comparative exploration of the systems of family, school, farm, and local community, heightening their level of understanding by discovering the differences and similarities of each.

Language Arts

The goal for all students in language arts is to instill a love of reading, writing, and language. With that in mind, we concentrate on developing verbal expression and listening, letter sound correspondence, formation of letters, rhyming and phonics, and book knowledge. Our goal is to meet the needs of each individual child and help them develop these essential reading skills. Experiences of our pre-k and kindergarten students will vary based on their readiness.

The preK/kindergarten program consists of several key components: the integration of listening, speaking, reading and writing; the use of quality literature; the interaction and involvement of the children; and well-planned and purposeful instruction. Both informal and formal approaches are used to facilitate learning. The classroom walls are covered with print. Signs, charts, letters, words, and books are abundant. This enables children to find resources themselves and reinforce sight vocabulary while helping them develop literacy in meaningful ways. The children learn from each other as well as from the teachers. Opportunities abound for children to interact with other children of varying abilities and interests, allowing them to develop to their full potential. Teacher modeling facilitates learning. The children also learn to set their own goals which leads to growing independence. The language arts program is shaped according to the strengths and needs of the children.



Reading, in many forms, is an integral part of the literacy program. Instruction occurs in a variety of ways, including full-class shared reading of poems, charts, songs and big books, small group work focusing on specific skills, and individual work with a teacher. The children are read to daily, and opportunities for children to read their own stories to the class are available as the children are ready to do so. The children are introduced to many literary genres: fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and more.

Children have many opportunities to develop writing skills. They are introduced to letters, sounds and letter formation through playful, multi-sensory activities which reinforce letter recognition and sound associations. Efficient ways of forming letters are introduced and the students incorporate these methods into their writing as they are ready to do so. In addition, each child will have frequent opportunities to “write” (draw, write, or dictate), both during a dedicated time of our day called Writer’s Workshop, and throughout the day if they choose. Children also write their own books, individually and collectively. Titles and topics emerge spontaneously or evolve from the curriculum. For instance, the children might create their own version of *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* by Eric Carle or an alphabet book of their own. During the course of the year, children move from dictating their thoughts to “developmental spelling” (word building from a knowledge of letter sounds; for example “dog” may be written as “dg”), working toward an eventual ability to use standard spelling. Moving through this progression is an essential component of gaining literacy and each child moves through it at his or her own pace.

Mathematics

Math, like language arts, is integrated throughout our preK/kindergarten curriculum. Our physical environment and daily routines are basic to the mathematics curriculum. Counting, calculating, sequencing, and finding patterns are all included in the day’s activities. Early morning routines provide practice in recognizing quantities and discovering relationships between the numbers that are gleaned from our daily attendance and calendar. In our block center, unit blocks are purposely arranged to accentuate the mathematical relationships between the blocks and to provide the



children with a built-in classification system.

Whether in small or large group lessons, children are given daily opportunities to bring mathematics to life as they make connections with math topics and with other content areas. Games and projects help children develop problem-solving skills. They are encouraged to explain their mathematical thinking in words and to begin to use writing to explore different ways of solving the same problem. All students use both concrete and symbolic materials to support mathematical investigations (e.g. Cuisenaire rods, blocks, counters, unifix cubes, geo-blocks, number lines, 100 charts, graphs, and charts). Throughout the year we investigate patterns, geometry and spatial reasoning, number sense, computation, measurement, categories, estimation, equivalency, and recording and analyzing data. Every topic of study is adjusted to meet the specific needs of each child. While we meet daily to discuss certain math topics as a group, each child receives differentiation and individualized instruction through small group or one-on-one work with a teacher.

Our visits to local farms weave beautifully into math work. We count, predict, measure, and chart a variety of experiences. Throughout our curriculum we frequently use a variety of graphing techniques to help us organize information we collect. The children compare and plot data on topics such as hair and eye color, number of pets, what they've brought for lunch, or their favorite ice cream flavors.

Science

Children are naturally curious about the world around them. How do machines work? Where do insects go in the winter? What do farm animals eat? What sorts of things float in our water table? Our science curriculum builds on this natural interest and provides tools for the children to begin to make sense of the world around them, including observation, prediction, experimentation, classification, and recording data.

Our hands-on program is supplemented by outdoor discoveries such as the insects, rocks, bark, and leaves found by the children. Close attention is paid to weather



patterns. As the year progresses, comparisons are made between monthly and seasonal weather conditions.

Trips to the farm lead to further scientific thinking and activity. We observe the effects of changing weather upon the land and animals. What is the cycle of the seasons and what changes do we notice at the farm? We also compare natural habitats to domestic habitats. What animals and insects live nearby? Will we find the same insects and birds in our schoolyard that reside at the farm? We pay special attention to problem solving on the farm, and how this relates to life cycles and seasons. How do farmers deal with pests in a way that respects the land and its natural inhabitants? How do farmers cope with weather events like frosts and floods?



We actively take steps to preserve our environment and instill in the children a respect for the natural world. In the spring we create our own garden bed and tend the garden through each step of the process: preparing the soil, planting the seeds, watering, weeding, and finally enjoying the bounty of our work.

In the midst of the wonder and exploration, we record our questions, our predictions, our experiments and finally our conclusions with each project, thus enabling each child to understand the sequence of thinking that can lead to the power of discovery.

Play and Choice Time

Children learn through play. It is rich in creativity, trial and error experiences, and social negotiations. Sometimes their dramatic play reflects elements of the curriculum: farm workers, animals at the farm, and workers in the city. More often, children become mothers, fathers, babies, pets, and fantasy characters as they



continue to make sense of their world. Indoors and outdoors, dramatic and physical play are a vital part of each day.



Throughout the day, the children are encouraged to make choices. During independent work times children select activities that will engage them. They may choose from quiet solitary activities such as reading, drawing, and writing, or from more active work like group games. These choices address each child's level of ability, interest, and learning style. In addition, when given choices, children gain a sense of control over their lives and become aware of our respect and

trust in their choices. Activities offered at our scheduled choice times include playing board games, building with, playing with sand or water at the texture table, reading and writing, working on art projects, and exploring math through a variety of manipulatives.

Art

The Lower School Visual Arts program is designed to offer students experiences in exploring, evaluating, analyzing, and creating art. Critical to the program is the notion that the arts provide students with opportunities to communicate about, respond to, and experience the world around them. The curriculum draws on the philosophy of Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB), a nationally-recognized choice-based art education approach to teaching art. TAB regards students as artists and offers them real choices for responding to their own ideas and interests through the making of art. This concept supports multiple modes of learning and teaching for the diverse needs of students. The visual art experiences students encounter will broaden their cultural awareness, develop their critical thinking skills, self-expression, and art appreciation.



Lower school artists will learn the eight principles and practice the Studio Habits of Mind: Develop Craft, Envision, Engage and Persist, Observe, Stretch and Explore, Understand Arts Community, Express and Reflect, as they engage in creating in the fundamental visual art forms of: painting, drawing, ceramics, sculpture. In a choice-based art studio, students will be developing a personal plan to guide their art making. The building blocks of color, shape, form, value, texture, and space allow students to expand their ability to create art and effectively communicate through it. Students will also create partnerships in collaboration with homeroom learning; these collaborations will guide students in developing their understanding of how art permeates the world in which they live. In addition, learning in the Art Studio adapts to the needs and interests of the students. Artists are also exposed to various contemporary, historical, and multicultural artists' work to see how these artists used the fundamentals of creative expression.

This year, in collaboration with the classroom teachers' implementation of our Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum (SEL), lower school artists will be focusing on the same skill development in our studio.

Music

Our overall aim is to have children develop a lifelong capacity for the enjoyment of music and the ability to expand that capacity independently as they grow. We begin with connecting music with their everyday experiences emotionally, mentally, and physically. Rhythm, melody, timbre, and text are explored through movement, song, and video footage of performances. More complex materials are used as the students grow and mature. Notation, improvisation, sight singing, ear training, composition, listening, and music history are all a part of becoming musically literate. Older students experience part singing in a chorus. Self confidence grows as students develop competence. Cross-curricular topics are carried into the music classroom on a consistent basis. We integrate dance, drama and visual arts whenever feasible. Artists visit the school to inspire the students and demonstrate real life applications of musical skills. At selected times throughout the year, performances are a culmination of all of the skills the children have developed, giving them the experience of the joy of sharing music with others.



Movement Education

The curriculum is designed to give students the opportunity to discover and improve their physical abilities, to expose them to the sheer joy of being active, and to help them learn sportsmanship and cooperative team play. Students are introduced to a variety of sports through games and activities. It is our goal to provide experiences and activities that help students make informed choices in order to maintain an active, healthy level of fitness.

Movement awareness activities help to develop fundamental movement skills. These skills are integrated into all aspects of sport, games, dance, as well as movements through everyday life. These themes are further divided into sub-themes which provide a wide variety of movement experiences and are sequentially arranged. Beginning with basic locomotor movements, activities progress to manipulation of equipment and from individual tasks to partner and group activities. Sub-themes include: exploring personal and general space; identifying boundaries, directions, pathways, and patterns; using equipment; exploring large muscle group movement, right/left and cross lateral movement; exploring body shapes; balance, creative movement, rhythm, and dance; and elements of health and fitness. We also have a very cool climbing wall!

The Movement program further seeks to help students to understand social and emotional dynamics in an active environment, through class discussions, and activities designed to teach kindness, respect, and tolerance. Along with lower school classroom teachers, we help students develop the competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.