

## The Class 4 Child

This is an age of change. Through the younger classes the children were very much living in their imagination and learning out of imitation. Last year changes began to occur.

In Class 4 the children's egos are emerging more strongly; they begin to feel their own individuality and with it a plethora of emotions. This is a time when children actively seek more independence. Tempers and tears may occur (and not just from children!) and adults are often unsure how far to let their young Vikings go. Great care is needed at this point. It is now the age to give some reasons, as children of this age love to question and no longer is it enough to say "Because I said so..." Wise, consistent and realistic explanations should be given however, there needs to be firm authority to keep budding forces from bursting forth too soon and too far.

A question often asked is why do we choose Norse mythology to address the needs of our class four children?

The stories from this epoch have been chosen as those which reflect the inner development which the children are experiencing. The people among whom these stories originated were imbued with a sense of adventure and courage to face and overcome life's vicissitude through the power of their own actions. What we hope for with our own 9/10 year olds.

These dramatic stories of strength, determination and boldness contain deep truths and the children find in the characters an expression of their own vigorous personality. Unlike the immortal 'perfect' God of the Hebrews the Norse Gods contain many imperfections, the most important being mortality. They also portray many human traits; qualities that the children are just beginning to recognise in themselves and in people around them. The Norse Gods love and laugh; they are brave and curious; they are loyal and generous but also cunning, treacherous, greedy, mischievous, vain, ruthless and cruel. Children love playing 'tricks' on adults at this age and delight in Loki's (he is half god half giant) trickery however, there is a sudden awakening when Loki's tricks turn to treachery and cause devastating consequences. Powerful lessons to learn.

This is also a time when the children begin to perceive the mistakes and errors of judgement made by the authoritative figures surrounding them. It is therefore understandable that the children can relate with sympathy to the frequent mistakes made by the human-like Gods!

But as always there is hope. With the fall of heaven (Asgard) in the concluding story of - Twilight of the Gods, hope comes in the form of the humble human.

Another significant element of the Class 4 curriculum is embedded in our main lesson *Human and Animal*. It is one much loved and anticipated by all children and it is crucial in strengthening the children's understanding of what it is to be human. We begin by looking at ourselves and the wonder of our 'three-foldness'. Taking the human being as the focus for starting each lesson we compare ourselves with the other 'kingdoms', firstly the mineral, then plant and finally the animal kingdom. We notice specific and specialist development/characteristics in the animals we study

eg the eyesight of the eagle, the stomachs of the cow, and marvel at how we have used our limbs and in particular our hands, to live creatively upon the earth. With our special gift of thought we can feely decide how we use our hands. With them we can create, build, cultivate, construct and use them in service of all.

The Steiner curriculum is geared to guide, nourish, strengthen and address the changing needs of our children. By not filling the children up with dry and irrelevant facts and figures we hope to instil in them the notion that *life has quality and purpose not just quantity*.

**The Class 4 child: -**

- needs work, work and more work
- still needs strong rhythms and consistency
- thrives on responsibility
- needs obstacles to test their strength eg self-challenge of continual practise with violins/cellos and recorders
- needs a more independent way of working
- needs lots of physical activity both organised and not
- needs games that challenge- individual bravery
- needs stories that address social issues
- needs probably a lot more than this meagre list can give