

The Class 5 Child

The question that arises each year from the child that stands before us is “Who am I and what is my place in this world?” As children become older this question begins to be articulated more and it is through our curriculum we hope to help them on their path. We endeavour to stir the emotions and imaginations and to inspire; not too hard in Class 5 as this is an enormously rich year developed to mirror the state of being of the 10-11 year old- joyous and light, loving truth and beauty with the enormous capacity to wonder.

As a teacher it is of utmost importance to address the needs of the emerging qualities of the child, so they are strengthened and developed. Thus, in Class 5 we continue to include activities and rhythmical work to strengthen the will; imaginative presentation using stories; colour illustrations to nourish the feeling life of the child and investigative activities and written work to enliven the thinking process.

We take Myths, legends and history from the cultures of the year of Ancient Peoples. We map and identify the geography of these countries and that of our own. We expand upon fractions and decimals through the study of measurement and money. We introduce more formal Geometry which gives the children a true and meaningful inner understanding for the discovery of the wonders of geometry from its earliest evolution through to Egyptian times and through the study of botany, the children develop a greater consciousness of the interrelatedness of life and environment.

The material we teach is appropriate for children in their eleventh/twelfth year because they are in the process of formation themselves. Great changes begin to take place in the children this year – individualities emerge more strongly, one senses a gathering up of all the experiences of childhood, a completion of this stage of their lives and an inward preparation for a kind of spring into the next phase. Children of this age often enjoy looking back on their earlier years and re-visiting games and favourite places, they also begin to enjoy learning about their own heritage. They like to gain a sense of the ground from which they have sprung.

Children at this age are developing their own strengths and characters/talents, it is a point halfway between fantasy and the material world. Between the inner world (beauty) and the outer world (reasonable). We could say it is like drawing a breath before the heaviness of Class 6.

At this age children are leaving the security of the family and are venturing into the larger world- feeling more at home in a wider circle. They relate to the world with their feelings, which at times can be expressed in the extremes.

Eleven-year olds have increased abilities to do things and increased skills in physical co-ordination, intellectual understandings and interest in the world. Children have reached a balance between an active inner life and outer abilities. However, this does not always go smoothly. If the child does not gain self-confidence through skill development or social

interaction, if they do not always have a consistent adult to turn to they may assume negative attitudes or display gestures of "I don't care....I can't do it anyway."

How can we help? Again, we feed them with the great strivings and deeds of humans. Through Ancient Histories we progress as humanity did through the different consciousness of the epochs. In one year, we look at the rise and fall of most of the major civilizations that have shaped our culture. We began our journey with Ancient India – the land of the mythical, richness of colours and beauty. From the vast plains to the highest reaches of the Himalayas. We then move to the ancient lands of Persia. Here life is harder, the land less lush and evilness in the form of Ahriman is around us to tempt us to his ways. Life is harder and more physical – it is the 'cradle of civilizations'. Nomadic life became villages and towns and later great and beautiful cities. The land was tilled and animals first domesticated. Then we move to Egypt – the lovers of Earthly things- great building deeds, great exploration and conquering, great wealth and great human achievements. And finally, in term three we turn to the thinkers of Greece. The culmination of the human year with the beginning of democracy, forums, discussions and voting. The great philosophers of all time. We begin to discuss roles and responsibilities of the individual and the group as a whole. The teacher needs to be a role model not to simply lay the 'rules' down but to open discussion and to gently but 'wisely' guide.

Picture of the child

- Pivotal point between childhood and puberty
- Often a settled year before the turbulence of the onset of puberty
- There is a strong group dynamic although the individual ego is very much a fledgling
- The children are involved in their work with a new sense of self-assurance

Physical

- Increased balance and coordination
- Ease and grace of movement
- Growth in limbs
- Increased strength and endurance

Cognitive

- Thinking and reasoning becomes more active; though the pictorial aspect is still strong, the child is starting to think in concepts
- Questioning and criticising, but now starting to be combined with a more realistic and rational understanding of the world
- Concern with fairness deepens into greater use of conscience and sense of responsibility
- Greater memory and appreciation of time
- Identifying totally with their work, they spend time embellishing it; bringing it closer to perfection- they are often proud of their work.

Emotional

- Growing sense of self

- Growing confidence in their abilities
- Elementary notions of personal responsibility (owning your behaviour) and an ability for understanding 'right and wrong' in a reasoning spirit begins after the eleventh birthday

In Steiner schools we see this as a bench mark year with the evolution of the gift of thought and a quantum leap in the quality of work that the child can produce and their desire to achieve a perfection that was unthought-of previously.

For parents, expect quantum leaps in abilities in Class 5. Be deliberate, be lively, be encouraging, be challenging. Above all be there and celebrate that which is the heart of childhood.