



Sixth Grade: An Introduction

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Welcome to 6th Grade! We are explorers and leaders. We travel in the safety of groups while asserting our individuality and independence. We'll challenge you as we challenge ourselves. Come fly with us!

Your children my students, are now rising eleven and twelve year olds. What joyous times these are! Socially (the most important aspect of life to them), they are stuck like glue to their peers. We find that they value the views of their peers more than those of the adults in their lives. They tend to want to take on responsibilities that have been the domain of adults until now. They are socially conscious, being concerned about the environment and social justice.

During the sixth grade year at Friends School Haverford we encourage the best aspects of our students' social concern by providing numerous leadership opportunities. For example, these students will make up the student council, lead by Tr. Michael Zimmerman. We are also on call as helpers throughout the school, providing assistance with projects in younger classes, mediation of social issues with younger students, and set-up and striking of event venues. These students are given a voice in the planning of major academic projects throughout the year. Self and peer critiquing of academic work is also an integral aspect of our program; one that teaches cooperation and self-monitoring.

Cognitively you will find your child is thinking abstractly now. These young people enjoy exploring previously inaccessible ideas such as justice and ethics. They are happily challenged by brainteasers, and tend to possess a fascination with history, civics and current events. Through careful planning of the academic program we encourage and stretch their cognitive development. Cross-curricular units are the norm in 6th grade. Such explorations forward their growing abstract thinking abilities.

This is a year of tremendous growth. Come fly with us!

Sixth Grade Curriculum Overview

Language Arts

Sixth grade Language Arts centers on the Reading and Writing Workshop. This format allows students to grow both independently and with others as readers and writers. Specific reading and writing strategies and skills are taught in mini-lessons and students are given the opportunity to practice these in whole class and independent activities and assignments. One of the most important outcomes of the Reading and Writing workshops is thoughtful literacy. Students learn to slow down, notice, record, and finally talk about the thoughts they have as they read. They then carry these lines of thought through and between texts. In order to think with growing sophistication and complexity about texts, students learn how to talk and write thoughtfully about texts and then practice these skills in partnerships, small groups, literature circles, and in writing nightly response journal

entries. Students' writing becomes more formal in Writing Workshop where the writing process is emphasized. Students extend lines of thinking about texts by writing literary essays. Writing personal essays allow students to make connections with characters in the texts they read and reflect in writing on their own lives and the world in which they live. Research techniques and writing is emphasized throughout the year. Students write research papers on topics related to science and Costa Rica and format them using in-text citation, and according to the Modern Language Association (MLA format).

Mathematics

The sixth grade is dedicated to a problem-solving approach in the study of mathematics. Our primary goal is to assist students in extending the development of logical thought processes, as they begin to internalize skills necessary for higher mathematics. We also aim to develop in students an appreciation for the many facets of mathematics beyond basic computation and to empower them to find their own individual areas of strength. We believe this approach to the study of mathematics, with its strong emphasis on problem solving, encourages the continued development of important logic and reasoning skills. Above all else, we hope to build students' confidence in their own mathematical abilities and convey through experience and discovery that what they are learning is of real value outside the classroom, both now and in the years to come.

The 6th grade curricular mathematics program used at Friends School Haverford is the *Connected Mathematics* program developed by Michigan State University. As the year progresses, you can expect your child to review computation with whole numbers; to explore computation with and use of: decimals, fractions, percent and rational numbers; to work with two and three dimensional figures; to explore probability and pre-algebraic concepts. The goal of each unit is that students will be able to move from responses to specific situations onto the expression of general rules and mathematical truths.

Math classes meet formally for approximately five hours weekly. Concepts are also used and extended in science, technology, social studies, art and music classes. The teacher generally serves as facilitator, presenting ideas for consideration and discussion by the students, who then experiment with ways to test and extend their thinking. During any given week students will work independently, as well as in small, cooperative groups, and as a whole class. Students are required to maintain a math binder in which much of their computation is completed. Their observations and thought processes are recorded in their binder and in a math journal. Manipulatives are used extensively to build a foundation for new concepts, as well as to encourage exploration and discovery. A variety of educational games extend and reinforce math concepts.

Homework is assigned Monday through Thursday and occasionally over the weekend for reinforcement, practice and extension of skills and concepts. *First in Math*, while played regularly in technology class, should also be played at home at least once each week. This and other games, played on-line, provide an excellent way to solidify and reinforce basic skill sets, and encourages students to risk trying their hand at new concepts.

Vocabulary is an important part of the language of mathematics. Students will keep a running vocabulary list in their journal and will be tested regularly on their understanding of these important terms. Weekly quizzes and unit tests will provide concrete assessment of the students' progress.

Social Studies

Our sixth grade Social Studies program embraces the unique developmental aspects of children of this age, specifically their growing facility with abstract thinking skills and a common keen interest in history, current events, the environment, ethics, and social justice. We endeavor to provide a strong program that will enthuse our students and stretch their minds. We honor their desire for peer interaction and approval while guiding each student to value and grow his/her own unique strengths.

You will find the following incorporated into every unit of study:

- Research skills including: locating information, separating useful information from insignificant, note-taking techniques, collecting and citing information
- . Report writing techniques including: organization, presentation, and MLA formatting requirements
- Alternate methods of presentation
- Speaking and listening mastery
- Extension of study skills including: planning, organization, memory techniques, studying for and taking tests.

This year it's all about the stories

Unit 1: Sharing Our Stories

As our students look beyond Friends School Haverford, we ask them to reflect on who they truly are. What are their passions? What are their talents? What are their hopes and dreams? How do they hope to grow? These questions are addressed through the journaling process and interviews with adults and peers. They consider how to let others know just who they are. At the same time, they explore ways in which they can glean the stories of others. This is done through the interview process, as well as Internet research. In collaboration with Tr. Karen, they practice responding to essay prompts. The skills practiced in this unit will be useful throughout this year and their lives. They will use these skills as they explore other Social Studies units.

Unit 2: US Government (just in time for mid-term elections)

We will learn about how our government is set up and operates. Then we will turn our attention to the legislative process. We will focus on how a bill becomes a law, and the students will participate in a mock senate debate.

Unit 3: Mapping the World

In order to put historical stories into perspective we need to know something about the world in which we live. We will spend a month learning about the history of mapping, mapping language, and locating major regions of the world.

Unit 4: The Silk Road

This will be an integrated unit with Vanessa Mendes and Amy Kiely sharing art and music aspects of this important historical period. Karen Teel will also join in our collaboration as students read the historical novel, *Between the Dragon and the Eagle*.

Unit 5: Costa Rica/Peru: A Cultural Comparison

In collaboration with Mary Ayers we will look at the similarities and differences in the historical stories, arts, governments and economies of these two southern neighbors. Our trip to Costa Rica will occur in the midst of our exploration, allowing a truly hands-on experience. The culmination of our unit of study will be the sharing of our experiences with our schoolmates.

Unit 6: Stories from the Age of Exploration

Each student will read a biography of an explorer. They will complete further research and create a story to tell. The culmination of this unit will be a story-telling event on June 1.

June 1, 2011

On this date all Intermediate Students will participate in the first annual Intermediate School Learning Fair. For 6th graders this will include demonstrations of projects created throughout the year in the various disciplines, and a story-telling event.

Science

The sixth grade year begins with an integrated science and math unit on genetics. Using Gregor Mendel's discoveries as background, students use probability to explore how traits are passed from generation to generation. In order to be more aware of their own learning style, grade 6 science classes start the year by exploring the 8 multiple intelligences and creating 100% intelligent graph of themselves. We then explore their perceptions of who is a scientist and what they do. Per the National Science Standards, it is important that students have an understanding of the history of science, and that people develop science. In an integrated project with Language Art, Technology and Library, students pick scientists, and then research their life and work using the Internet, books and encyclopedias. Students create a research paper using MLA formatting, then summarize their research papers, write and deliver a monologue in the character of their scientists. Students make web pages in technology class to house their research papers and videotape their monologues.

Art

Sixth graders are expected to work with significant independence through process oriented, hands-on activities that challenge their creativity and problem solving skills on a higher conceptual level. Another major focus is on community, teamwork, and communication.

Music

Sixth graders continue honing their skills to assure musical independence. A review of previously learned basic musical concepts through more challenging material, using the concepts but demanding higher-level skills best describes the overall musical training in sixth grade. Opportunities to solve problems and create in small groups and through the various means of performance the Orff-Schulwerk* approach provides are especially valuable at this level. We explore mixed meter, modal scales, more complex chord changes, and the 12-bar blues through movement, composition, improvisation, singing and performance. Material relating to social studies themes, and to other cultures, is also incorporated. Sixth graders have two 40-minute music classes each week in the music room.

Chorus Overview

One component of the Friends School Haverford music curriculum that involves all fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students is the Friends School Haverford Chorus. Students rehearse once a week for 40 minutes. In addition to being a way to practice and apply musical skills that have been learned in their general music experiences, the chorus also provides practical experience in being and serving a community.

Musically, the chorus curriculum mainly addresses singing skills such as proper posture and breathing, unison singing, and harmony singing. Vocal placement and vocal health are also addressed. Students use percussion, Orff instruments, and other instruments, whenever possible, to accompany and take ownership of their performances. Movement opportunities are also present in the form of choreography, body percussion, and improvised movement. Each major performance will include songs in a variety of styles, tempos, meters, tonalities, and languages.

The chorus performs as an ensemble selected times throughout the year. Choral-type activities continue right through the end of the year with a song being performed during graduation.

Physical Education

The program emphasizes team sports that students may choose to play in coming years. Skill development and rule interpretation, good sportsmanship and full game participation are stressed. An after school program is offered one-two afternoons a week throughout the school year. 5th and 6th graders are leaders in the school community by serving as safeties. Safeties help younger children out of cars and walk them to their classrooms in the morning.

Revised 09/2010