

Upper Elementary

Curriculum Guide


4th - 6th Grade



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Freedom within limits is a Montessori core concept. In Upper Elementary, students have the freedom to make choices, communicate, discover, work at their own pace, connect with others, move, and take the time to learn. It is expected that students be responsible for respecting themselves, others, and the classroom environment. Having limits and boundaries allows students to gain the understanding of a structure that is important for their development. Students learn to explore the environment and therefore discover their own interests along with the freedom to make mistakes. This balance of personal freedom and responsibility is seen everywhere in the classroom: assignments, partners, and movement. When students have that balance, they understand that freedom is what is best for themselves and others.

The Upper Elementary Classrooms

The Upper Elementary is located in the historic Morse-Peletiah Tavern. There are two sections of UE, and each one occupies a floor of the building, with one multi-grade student group on each floor. The Upper Elementary values floor work and has two large main areas for such work. There are also enough tables for all students in which to sit, either to work in small groups or independently. Additionally, there are areas for students to collaborate or to work silently. Given the size of the Upper Elementary classrooms, there are plenty of opportunities for active and sedentary work. Most lessons are given in small groups of the same grade, such as in the areas of math, geometry, grammar, and reading.

In Upper Elementary, students have many opportunities to grow and develop in their own ways. Students advocate for themselves the areas they want to learn, and the curriculum is designed to encourage them to collaborate, teach each other, and stimulate a love of learning. Giving students the opportunity to come to their own conclusions regarding their work with the materials, and to conduct their learning on their own terms, are important aspects of the classroom culture. The Upper Elementary classroom provides students with many opportunities for choice and finding their voice. Choices include input into what work is assigned, how many questions to complete, when the assignment is due, or who to work with. Choice also includes topics to study for in-depth research as well as materials to use when engaged in research projects. Students are then held accountable for the choices they make by writing their assignments on their work plans,



and meeting expected deadlines. Teachers are able to create follow-up lessons based on the readiness and interests of the students.

LITERACY IN UPPER ELEMENTARY

Upper Elementary students apply reading and writing skills across the curriculum and develop a deeper appreciation for their audience. They become more fluent readers, expressive and accomplished writers, and confident oral presenters in the process. Consequently, students gain an increased appreciation for the power of communication while gaining a greater understanding of the world around them.

Reading

Building on the accelerated reading growth that happens in Lower Elementary, Upper Elementary students continue to deepen and enrich their reading lives through literature study as well as research. Drawing on a range of resources, students engage in rich literary analysis and discussion in Upper Elementary. Through student-led literature circles as well as a shared inquiry approach using both fiction and nonfiction texts, our Upper Elementary students develop their ability to use reading comprehension strategies purposefully. They develop their own opinions and claims about a text, and learn to support ideas with textual evidence, and weigh evidence for divergent ideas. Through this work with literature, students learn to go beyond initial responses to think deeper about issues that arise in their reading. Throughout all of this, they also develop social and emotional intelligence through respectful dialogue and collaboration. Students engage in reading and literary analysis both in grade-level groupings, and in multi-age discussions. Some of the books that Upper Elementary students have read together in order to develop these skills include:

Fourth Grade:

- The Lemonade War - Jacqueline Davies
- Tale of Despereaux - Kate DiCamillo
- Turtle in Paradise - Jennifer L. Holm
- Who was Harriet Tubman? - Yona Zeldis McDonough
- Rules - Cynthia Lord



Fifth Grade:

- Fish in a Tree - Lynda Mullaly Hunt
- Birchbark House - Louise Erdrich
- Out of My Mind - Sharon M. Draper;
- A Long Walk to Water - Linda Sue Park
- Home of the Brave - Katherine Applegate

Sixth Grade:

- Hoot - Carl Hiaasen
- I am Malala - Malala Yousafzai
- Esperanza Rising - Pam Muñoz Ryan
- Night Diary - Veera Hiranandani
- The Giver - Lois Lowry

Writing

In Upper Elementary, students have many opportunities to develop as writers. Across the year, students will learn about and craft narrative, persuasive and informational texts. They will have the opportunity to develop a routine for writing that includes planning, revising, editing, and publishing in a variety of formats. The emphasis for Upper Elementary students is to build both stamina for writing longer and more in-depth pieces as well as the critical eye for crafting deeper, more meaningful works. Students learn to revise their writing through both teacher conferences and peer conferences, using rubrics that help them elevate the quality of their writing not only in terms of the grammar and conventions, but also in terms of the depth of their ideas. An intentional study of writing mechanics and grammar are woven into the work.

As students develop their writing voice, they tune into the concept that they are writing for an audience. The concept of audience comes to life when they have the opportunity to share their writing out loud. Upper Elementary students share their writings three times per year with the Riverbend community at the Authors' Breakfast.



Sample Writing Projects

Biography Scrapbook - 4th Grade

Fourth graders immerse themselves in the genre of biographies. They start by studying a broad array of famous role models, learning both about the individuals and about the genre of a biography. This genre study allows students to learn that a biography tends to include certain elements such as a timeline of someone's life, major accomplishments, and the impact they have had on the world. Following a more global study of biographies, students choose their own topic for research. Fourth graders use a variety of sources to study including books, internet research, and other media resources. The putting together of a scrapbook about the person they have researched offers students an opportunity to hone their research and writing skills as well as creative expression for presenting their final product.

Autobiography - 5th Grade

Building on the skills developed in their fourth grade biography project, fifth graders have the opportunity to write an autobiography. They are at an age where they begin to search for identity, purpose, and meaning in their lives. People who write about themselves learn about themselves, and in this project, students discover answers to that age-old question "Who am I?" This project offers students a high-interest topic (themselves!) as the context for deepening their writing skills. Through this project, students are introduced to a variety of graphic organizers to support them in idea development as well as organization. Students create a beautiful scrapbook at the end of the project, which contains both stories and images from their lives.

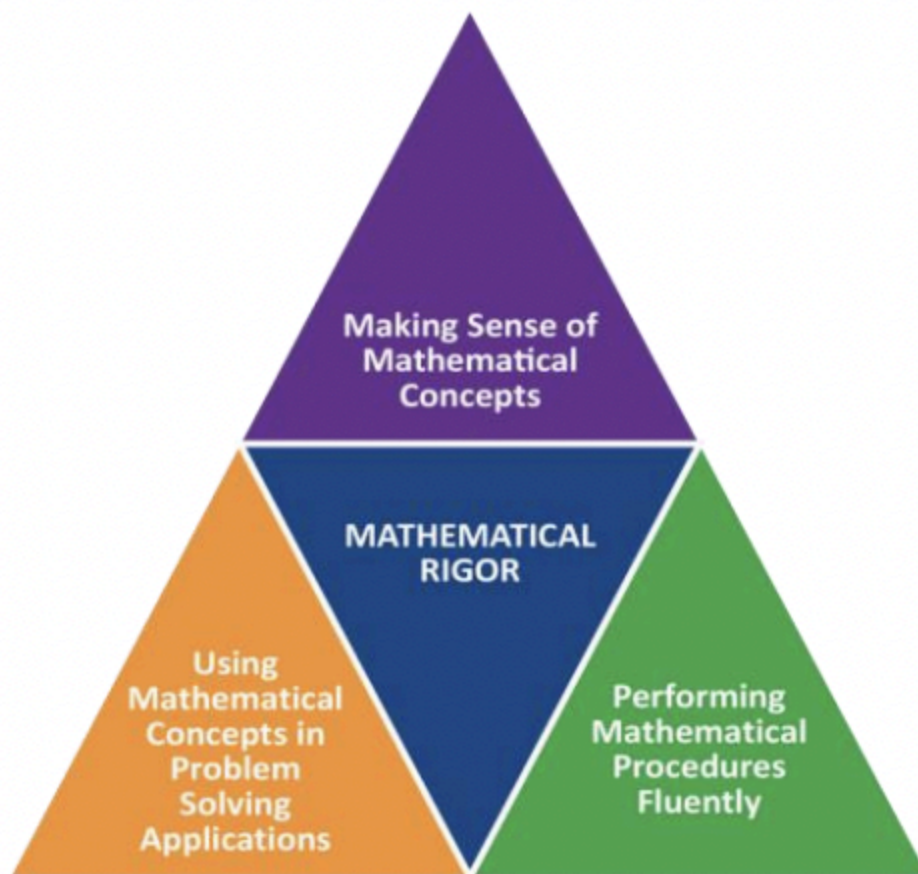
Social Justice Expert Project - 6th Grade


The Social Justice Expert Project is the capstone research and writing experience for students completing their sixth-grade year at Riverbend. This project provides students with an opportunity to extensively research a topic of their choosing. Early in the year, students commit to this project and persevere during the research, writing, revising, and editing phases. Throughout the year, as they deepen their learning about their chosen topic, they consider the social issues that surround their topic. They learn to consider multiple perspectives and use both

primary and secondary sources. Individual presentations are the culminating product of their year-long work.

In [this chart](#), you can see the progression from fourth grade through the sixth grade that aligns with the Common Core Standards. Because we teach students in the three year cycle, they may go beyond the grade level listed here, or they may spend more time in one grade level before progressing to the next. By the end of the three year cycle, we find that our students have had the opportunity to meet or exceed the sixth grade Language Arts expectations listed here.

MATHEMATICS





The goal of our rigorous math curriculum is for students to gain a deep understanding of mathematical concepts, be able to perform mathematical procedures fluently, and use the concepts and procedures effectively to solve problems. Mathematical concepts are explored using hands-on materials so students can integrate concrete experiences with abstract mathematical processes. As their reasoning skills develop, students apply their learning in new and different ways. Finally, reinforcement of concepts is incorporated regularly through independent practice in the classroom and for homework.

In these two charts ([4th/5th](#) and [6th](#)), you can see the progression from fourth grade through sixth grade that aligns with the Common Core Standards. Because we teach students in the three year cycle, they may go beyond the grade level listed here, or they may spend more time in one grade level before progressing to the next. By the end of the three year cycle, we find that our students have had the opportunity to meet or exceed the sixth grade expectations listed here.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Over the course of their three years in Upper Elementary, students will have many opportunities to learn outside the classroom. Some key highlights include:

Hulbert Outdoor Center

Each spring the Upper Elementary students spend three days together in nature at the Hulbert Outdoor Center in Vermont. The excitement for the annual trip to Vermont begins in October when the Upper Elementary students host a car wash at the Fall Festival. They begin the year raising funds for their trip, and as the year unfolds, they continue making plans. When they journey to Vermont in late April, students stay in cabins, eat family style meals, and experience the thrill of living among the trees. The outdoor center provides the opportunity for personal as well as community challenge. Each year, our students leave this experience with a sense of pride, accomplishment, and deep connection with one another.



Montessori Model United Nations - 6th Grade

Montessori Model United Nations (MMUN) is a simulation of the United Nations General Assembly and its respective committees. The MMUN program follows the work of Dr. Montessori who supported the League of Nations and, later, the United Nations (UN) as a forum for world peace. She recognized that hope lies in the education of children and understood that they develop moral ethics by working on real-life issues.

At MMUN, student “delegates” become ambassadors of UN member states to debate current issues with other Montessori delegates from around the country and the world. During the conference, delegates give speeches, write draft resolutions, discuss solutions, find consensus, and learn the rules of procedure, with the goal of working cooperatively to solve problems that affect countries from every part of the world. MMUN differs from other Model UN simulations because students come up with resolutions based on collaboration and negotiation rather than debate.

HISTORY & SCIENCE (CULTURAL STUDIES)

The objective of the Montessori cultural curriculum is to expose students to an understanding of the inter-relatedness of life on our planet and the wonders of the universe. In Upper Elementary, we strive to meet this purpose by integrating learning in history and science while, at the same time, giving students opportunities to share their understanding with the community. The cultural curriculum is organized in a revolving three-year cycle.

History

The aim of our history studies is for students to recognize commonalities from our human heritage and apply lessons learned from the past to the present. Over the course of three years students explore early human cultures, compare ancient civilizations, and investigate American history. Through these explorations, students develop inquiry skills and familiarity with different types of resources that allow them to follow their academic interests.



History Outcomes

- Understands history both vertically and horizontally based on the Fundamental Needs of Humans
- Organizes information on given dates and creates timelines
- Applies research skills including the use of the Internet and print sources • Understands cause and effect of human action
- Has studied the Timelines of Humans
- Has studied ancient world civilizations
- Applies map skills to the investigation of ancient civilizations
- Has studied early American history: pre-Colonial through the Constitution • Has been introduced to the structure of the U.S. system of government
- Understands the purpose and activities of the United Nations
- Participates in Montessori Model United Nations including discussions on global issues, writing and proposing resolutions, learning how UN actions are funded

Science

Science is considered part of the Cultural curriculum in Upper Elementary. The curriculum follows the three-year cycle of the UE and the rotation includes botany, physics/chemistry, and simple machines.

Science Outcomes

- Applies scientific method
- Uses scientific language accurately
- Uses scientific tools and materials successfully
- Applies math skills to scientific investigations
- Interprets different types of graphs and data
- Formulates and interprets information
- Explains topics of study effectively
- Applies knowledge to experiments and projects

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- Understands the cycles of life
 - Explores introductory concepts of Life Science, Physical Science, Earth Science

PRACTICAL LIFE/SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Upper Elementary is a warm, supportive community where students continue to develop self-discipline, intrinsic motivation, and a greater sense of collaboration. At this level, students are intellectually ready to think abstractly and to understand increasingly complex ideas. Grace & Courtesy serve as a backdrop for all activity in the UE community. Respect for self, others, and the environment is discussed in daily morning meetings.

An essential goal is to motivate students to meet their personal best. Students pursue areas of interest and are always working at the edge of their intellectual ability by taking on challenging academic tasks and asking the types of questions that encourage them to broaden their knowledge.

As they experience greater independence and responsibility, students practice and acquire organizational skills. Using work plans, they also frequently meet with their teachers to discuss academic goals, review assignments, and prioritize tasks.

Social Skills

- Contributes to classroom community
- Practices grace and courtesy
- Respects self and others
- Uses conflict resolution skills effectively
- Demonstrates self control
- Displays empathy
- Accepts responsibility for one's own behavior



Learning Habits and Self-Regulation

- Uses class time effectively
- Puts forth persistent, visible effort
- Works independently
- Demonstrates organizational skills
- Plans for daily and weekly work
- Applies basic research skills
- Employs note-taking strategies
- Respects materials and others' personal property
- Works cooperatively and respectfully
- Participates in lessons
- Demonstrates initiative for learning
- Takes pride in work