

FALL 1977 ISSUE

on

THE SIXTH GRADE

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REFLECTIONS ON SIXTH GRADE AND SIXTH GRADERS

Following are recollections of what I presented to the parents of my sixth grade class of 1976. It appears as more of an outline, since that is the form in which it was given, basically, and lack of time to write this up for the Newsletter makes this sketchier than it should be.

I began by characterizing the sixth grade as moving from the general to the specific: a moving out of the infinite cosmos, the "cosmic consciousness", or Jung's collective unconscious, to the world of mechanics, of the mineral, of the strictly codified law. I asked the parents to consider mankind before this time, when life itself depended on a keen attunement to both the sensible and the supersensible world... that world of the fairy tale, the fable, and the legend; the last remnant of the supersensible world which Jung would call a vestige of the "universal language." One cannot consider as coincidental the world-wide stories of creation and purge: the Old Testament flood, the Indian story of Manu and the flood, the Babylonian story of the flood, Aztec and Hopi legends of the time when the sun disappeared into the sea and the earth had to be created anew. Adam and Eve had to move out of Paradise; so, too, must the child.

This incarnation of consciousness is brought forward in the classroom by recapitulating, through the subject matter, mankind's development, much as one were to hold up to the child a mirror out of whose reflection comes an experience of all that has gone on in the past. This brings us to the point where we may ask: At what point are we now in this recapitulation with the sixth grade child?

Well, look at the children! How do they move, and how do they relate to one another? Gone for the most part is the beautiful, natural grace of the fifth grader. Just in terms of physical shape the children in the sixth grade are different: most are getting more angular; rounded childish faces are showing material influence already. The child can actually be seen moving into his body and bones. He is much more awkward - his feet and head often appear to belong to separate entities!

Lamentable as this loss of childishness may seem, these things have to happen if the child is to become an adult. The value here lies in the ability of the teacher to capitalize on these developments by teaching those subjects which are good reflectors of what is presently working in the child. In history, then, we move from the natural grace and political skill of the Athenians to the studied precision of the Romans - from the loosely organized demos to strictly codified law. Consider, as only one example out of many, the contrast between the Greeks' ability to ostracize Pericles, on the one hand, with the almost absolute power of the Roman emperor on the other.

In geometry we move from the natural grace of the freehand form design and figures to the strict adherence to line and point of the sixth grade geometrical drawing, where a one-millimeter error in placing the point of the compass is multiplied throughout the drawing and ultimately causes a gross inaccuracy.

In natural history we move from the languid, fluid movement of the plants and their seemingly more artistic formative forces to the strict geometrical, chemical, and mechanical laws which give rise to the mineral crystals. Though what is presented is governed by such strict laws, we cannot fail to present the material within both an artistic and imaginative context. We discovered how the granitic Sierra Nevadas arose from under an ancient sea, eroded away to fill an even deeper sea which once covered the valley where our school now lies. We conjectured about the cycle of birth, life, deterioration, and rebirth of the earth's rocks through our study of the igneous, sedimentary, and metamorphic processes, as well as the natural erosion forces of wind and weather.

In astronomy we learned first to see what goes on in the heavens in relationship with the earth; of how the stars rise in the tropics and how they rise in the cold, barren polar regions; of how these apparent movements of the planets and stars correspond with the plant, animal, and human life of each region. We already know many stories from the various mythologies of the origin of certain constellations. It occurred to me that perhaps the central tenet of true education (edu-care : to draw out) is that when we elicit something which already lives within the child we are not only making it possible for him to form concepts, but we are giving him something of substance which he may carry into the future to grow into.

- Mark Murray
Sacramento

The makeup of a healthy sixth grade is a work of art which arouses the wonder and admiration of the world. He possesses, for an all-too-fleeting moment, an unconscious identity of truth and beauty. He stands before life with the complete surety of the naive realist, absorbed by the sweet web of natural phenomena, untroubled by inner, nagging doubts, serene in instinctive faith, solid, like granite, the image for this marvelous age.

How rich is the curriculum for this moment! The dramatic biographies of the Romans are etched in sharp contours. Each is formed from a unique mold. Each emerges in a rich, chiselled personality, confronting life with a personal will, guided and prodded by tradition, duty, law, family ties, patriotism, ambition, and a sense of the historical mission unique to the ages of man. (I sometimes culminate the history with a class play on St. Paul.)

Literature in the sixth grade might include appropriate lines from Shakespeare, Virgil, Macaulay's Lays (Horatius at the Bridge), Coleridge's The Ancient Mariner, with much memorizing through repetition, which is at a peak capacity for most.

The highlights of the year include the study of optics, where each child is eventually given his own prism and the rich phenomena are carefully sorted out. Working with several mirrors is exciting, as the geometry of light can reproduce the children's earlier geometrical drawings.

The right introduction to algebraic techniques has an appealing practical application in business and measurements of all kind.

Sorting out the apparent daily and annual motion of the stars from various earth positions is rewarding in deepening the earth-space orientation which the age demands.

Lastly, a culmination of the whole year might be the mineralogy block, coming to terms with the unique character and properties of various minerals and their rock associations. The warm sympathy coupled with objective understanding a sixth grader can naturally generate for this "ground of the world" can scarcely be equalled anywhere else in a life's span.

- Noah Williams, III
Highland Hall

SUMMARY OF A SIXTH GRADE YEAR

All blocks are 3 weeks long

Subjects: English	3 blocks
Math	3 blocks
includes percentages, business math, introductory algebra	
Science	2 blocks
optics, acoustics, heat, light, and magnetism	
Geography	2 blocks
Africa and Europe; ties to mineralogy and astronomy	
History	2 blocks
Roman and medieval	

The daily schedule and a short assembly program which came out of our study of optics may be found elsewhere in this issue.

- Ed Hill
Kimberton Farms

POSSIBLE SIXTH GRADE SCHEDULE

Main Lessons:	Geometric Drawing	1 3-week block
	Roman History & Rise of Christianity	3 3-week blocks
	Optics	1 3-week block
	Business English	1 3-week block
	Introd. to Algebra	2 3-week blocks
	Astronomy	1 3-week block
	Geography - South America and Canada	1 4-week block
	Mineralogy	1 4-week block
	Review	1 week

Daily Subjects (40-45 minute periods):

Math Skills	2 periods/week
Reading skills	1 period/week
Eurythmy	2 periods/week
Woodcarving	1 period/week
Crafts (sewing)	1 period/week
German	2 periods/week
Spanish	2 periods/week
Latin	2 periods/week
Painting	1 period/week
Music	2 periods/week
Gardening	1 period/week

- Ross Jennings
Pine Hill

CRAFTS IN SIXTH GRADE

Moccasins were our first project for the year. We used a standard pattern put out by Tandy Leather Company (Ideas for Leather Projects, #2). The moccasins were cut from suede and sewed with waxed thread and leather lacing.

Following this project, some students still had to complete last year's work. Only after this could stuffed animals be constructed. All were encouraged to design their own patterns, but those who needed further assistance browsed through patterns for ideas to make their own, or chose a ready-made pattern.

The following books were used for reference:

The Big Book of Soft Toys, Mab Tyler (McGraw Hill - OP)

The Huggables - How to Make Stuffed Animals, Weaver (Lorenz Press)

Soft Toy Making, Chappell (Drake Pub., NY)

The Pooh Craft Book, Friedrichsen (E.P. Dutton, NY)

- Beverly Sonner
Sacramento

SIXTH GRADE SPANISH

In teaching languages in the sixth grade, I start each lesson by having the children recite a poem. After this, while the class is still standing, we conjugate several verbs - the most common irregular verbs and some regular ones as well. After they sit down I ask some quick questions using these verbs. Each child gets a chance to answer a question and use the verb in a complete sentence.

A play about the Spanish conquest in South America can fit right into their main lesson geography work. One year I had a sixth grade do Cervantes' Numancia in Spanish, a play about the Roman conquest of Spain.

Short stories can also be useful. Because it is bilingual and I do not want the children to see the English translation, I type and copy stories for them from Angel Flores' First Spanish Reader. It is a good collection of short works which are typically Spanish and which the children find interesting to read and answer questions on.

- Marta Harris
Sacramento

BOOK REVIEWS - Roman History

Two very useful source books on ancient Rome are Swords, Spears, and Sandals by Richard Susskind, and The City by David Macaulay. The first book is a simple but thorough background on the Roman Army with a focus on the life of Caligates, or 'Boots'. This book served as a useful focus for helping the students to experience the Roman Empire from the perspective of the common soldier who was its bulwark. One assignment that the children seemed to enjoy was to write a letter back home to Rome from the standpoint of a soldier stationed in an outpost in Gaul.