

YOUR FIFTH GRADE EURYTHMY EXERCISES

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Notes on the videos

In these lessons I am offering a few eurythmy exercises for you to do with your fifth grade students. Please begin by watching the Introduction to Eurythmy for Homeschooling Video, to orient yourself to the purpose and scope of this exciting opportunity.

Fifth Grade Development Overview

Fifth grade is called a time of balance, a time of grace. If a child has had the good fortune to develop in a healthy environment, surrounded by a healthy lifestyle and wholesome food, they will arrive in fifth grade with a beautiful open mind and graceful body. The muscles of the body are smooth, and movements are easy. The constitution of the 11-year-old can remind us of sculptures of Greek athletes, which were beautifully proportioned.

In the healthy 12 year old, the hormones of adolescence have not yet begun to assert their influences, and the child has an innocence of soul that they will soon leave behind. Of course, in our modern age many children begin puberty earlier than they used to, and fifth graders may already be drawn into trying to imitate the life of the teenagers that lie just before them. By not encouraging the temptations offered by the materialistic world too early, we can hope to preserve the forces of youth just a bit longer.

When I look at the curriculum of the fifth grade in the Waldorf school, I am struck by how much they are presented with in this one wonderful year.

When we examine the science curriculum of the Waldorf school, for instance, we can see how they progress from year to year into ever more material subjects. Thus, in fourth grade the students consider the animal, and in fifth they study the plants. Thereafter, they will explore the minerals and then the lawfulness of physics and chemistry.

Many fifth grade teachers choose Botany as their first class of the year. In their study of Botany, fifth graders are meeting the beauty of the so-called etheric laws, the dynamic forces of pure life and how they manifest in growing things. This is the year when the children experience the harmony of life in their own bodies, and the study of it in plants is matched by their own feeling in their bodies.

The children also learn to draw beautiful geometric forms at this age, practicing their hand at finding the harmonies in shapes and relationships.

Geography is also an important part of the fifth grade experience, and now covers a much larger scope. Children study whole land masses, and not only their own local environment.

The most beautiful gift to the fifth grader is the study of the major cultural epochs. This study traces the development of humanity as it emerges from the deep mythological past to the more recent historical past. Wherever possible, students also study the languages of the ancient people, gaining at least an impression of Sanskrit, Persian, Greek, and Latin.

They begin their year with the study of the Ancient Indian civilization. I like to encourage the children to imagine the world before cell phones, before computers, before televisions and telephones: before electric lights and lamps: before cars and roads. They imagine a world that is nearly paradisiacal, with beauty and simplicity everywhere. In that time, they many imagine that everyone wanted to give thanks daily to God, and they would bring their offerings to their altars every day. But the only gifts that a person had to offer to were gifts of nature. In this mood, we learn this ancient prayer to Krishna:

“He who offers to me a leaf, or a fruit or a flower,
or even a little water,
This I accept from the yearning soul,
Because with a pure heart it is offered in love.”

Through the stories of earliest India, the children glimpse backwards one more time at a memory of an ancient paradise.

Then they are taught about Ancient Persian legends, with a focus on the stories of the sun-god known as Ahura Mazdao and his high priest, Zarathustra. The ancient Persians no longer lived in child-like innocence, but set about conquering the dark earth-forces with might and power. They led the evolutionary step from the age of hunter-gatherers to agriculturalists.

The children might learn this poem:

“Carry the sun down to the earth!
You, o human being, are placed between heaven and earth.
Be a fighter of the light,
Love the earth.
Learn to transform the plants, the animals, and even your own self
Into a radiant, shining jewel.”

As the year progresses, the children will next study ancient Egypt and its contemporaries, the Chaldeans, Phoenicians, Babylonians and Hebrews. They will study the pyramids and the first beginnings of writing, astronomy and calculations. They will learn about the hieroglyphs inscribed on the temple walls, speaking of many deities, including Ra, the sun-god as the Egyptians called him.

The fifth grade culminates with the study of Greek culture. All remnants of Greek art give evidence of a period in history that celebrated beauty as a reflection of the divine world. And as we can learn much about a culture by studying how they experienced their gods, we get a glimpse into the life of the early Greeks by seeing how they felt their gods and goddesses were almost like humans, with thoughts and feelings, ambitions and jealousies, love and anger just as we know them to be. In a strangely comforting

twist of logic, the growing fifth grader must feel that they themselves are not so far away from the divine, if the gods themselves are so much like they are!

Just as we learned much about the Nordic cultures in fourth grade by experiencing how they used the element of *alliteration* in poetry to tell their history, so can we learn about the Greeks by studying their wise and natural use of *rhythm* in poetry to tell their tales. The homeschooling parent can really prepare for fifth grade by looking at the meaning of different poetic rhythmic styles and learning to identify and recite poems in different rhythms. Briefly: rhythms are distinguishable by the relationship of long and short syllables in a line. Longs have two “beats,” and shorts have one.

We can distinguish between *falling* and *rising* rhythms. The former begin with a long beat(s), followed by one (or more) short beats. They relate to the experience of energy falling from the heavens above down to earth, and are called Apollonian rhythms. The latter begin with a short beat(s), followed by one (or more) long beats. They relate to human endeavors to rise out of matter and connect with the divine. They are called Dionysian rhythms.

Additionally, there are *balanced* and *unbalanced* rhythms. Balanced rhythms include the rhythms with a total of four beats, which are the *rising rhythm* anapest (short-short-long), the *falling rhythm* dactyl (long-short-short) and the amphibrachus (short-long-short). Unbalanced rhythms include the rising iambic (short-long) and the *falling* trochee (long-short), among others.

After learning to recite these rhythms, the teacher can lead the children in recitation. The most satisfying rhythm to speak is the hexameter, which gives health and balance to the speaker through its structure. The great epic poetry the *Odyssey* was composed of thousands of hexameter phrases.

At the end of fifth grade, most Waldorf children around the world come together to celebrate the annual Pentathlon, a day-long festivity of cooperatively competitive Greek athletic contests, in which the children compete not only for athletic prowess but also for excellence in beauty, grace and style.

The eurythmy curriculum for fifth grade involves learning poems from all the epochs studied, as well as developing ever more complex geometric forms, beautiful music and finer rod exercises. The botany block can be accompanied by moving the lawful patterns of contraction and expansion, often with poetry such as the following:

“For the dark earth	that cradles the seed,
For the rain	that brings forth the green leaves,
For the stars	that give form to the flowers
For the warm sun	that ripens the fruit
For all this goodness and beauty,	
Father in Heaven	we
Thank Thee.”	

The online curriculum expands its offerings by teaching the eurythmy waterfall and a few more forms that can be used as the basis for choreographing geometrical forms. Once again, you are encouraged to contact me through my website to arrange for live courses in your community to learn poetry and verses for your fifth grade curriculum. Contact me at info@eurythmyonline.com.

General Fifth Grade Movement Exercises

It is sometimes said that fifth grade, the age of the 12-year old, is the “golden age of childhood,” Physiologically the body had reached the stage in which the head the limbs and the rhythmic systems are in a special state of harmony. The breath-pulse rhythm have now reached the 1:4 relationship of the adult

body. The child will often have a natural athleticism. The fifth grade child is now able to work dynamically with rhythmical patterns in movement, poetry and music (as did the Greeks long ago, whom they are studying). Music and poetry should play an important role in this year. The year also finds its culmination in the Greek Pentathlon, in which the children compete with each other in a community setting to develop not only athletic prowess, but also Beauty, Grace and Style.

In eurythmy, we continue to build on the skills of being able to move freely in space.

If your child has not reached certain movement benchmarks, which lay the foundation for being able to stand tall, sit quietly, and move freely in all directions, they are probably having difficulties with the senses of movement and self-perception. These are very often the foundation for a host of other troubles, including what are called ADD, ADHD, and also problems with reading, writing, mental image, and math skills. If you are concerned about these things, I strongly encourage you to consult the website of developmental pediatrician Dr. Susan Johnson, at youandyourchildshealth.org.

How do I learn the exercises?

It is very important that you begin by learning the exercises yourself. Consider it your own path of eurythmy, your own journey for self-development! (After all, as a homeschooling parent, you get to work on your own skills as well as on your child's!)

Then, once you are confident that you can model the exercises, turn off the video, and teach the child out of your own experience. **It is important not to let the child watch the videos!**

And remember: don't let the child speak while moving. And remember: don't let the child speak while moving. **You** should speak, and the child should pour all of their "consciousness", their etheric presence, into their movements.

We are thereby truly encouraging mindful movements.

How do I teach my child?

When you practice with your child, stand in front of him or her, about 3 feet away. Speak gently, expect participation, and work with a light touch. Be sure that you do the exercises correctly, but don't correct the child. A standard guideline in eurythmy is that you should only correct 1 in 9 mistakes. Don't hesitate to repeat each exercise up to 7 times, but never pedantically.

Don't expect your child to be able to master everything at once. Build skills sequentially, starting with the easier exercises in the first weeks of eurythmy. Practice each one about 20 times (that number is flexible), with good will and fun. Add verses or poems if you can, to make the movements more engaging.

Once an exercise can be done smoothly, only do it about seven times, and then move on to the next exercise. Encourage engagement, but avoid boredom!

How long should we do eurythmy?

This exercise sequence takes about 10-15 minutes to accomplish. As with all of my grade sequences, you can do it every week, all year long, or you can alternate it with other opening series. In that case, I would recommend doing it for 7 weeks in the autumn, 7 weeks in the winter, and 3-7 weeks in the spring. If the child had an opportunity to work with a trained eurythmy teacher, they would have lessons all year long, and learn a multitude of musical and poetic pieces, building on the spatial skills you are learning here.

The Fifth Grade Eurythmy Exercises

Your curriculum package includes videos and pdfs for each of the exercises described above.

I suggest you learn them in the sequence in which I have listed them.

It also include videos and pdfs describing the reason behind learning to move in space fluidly (“How to move in etheric space”) and how we use rod exercises (“About Copper Rods”), as well as General Guidelines for how to do eurythmy at home.

To close your session:

At the end of every eurythmy experience, stand very quietly for 15-30 seconds or longer. I always say “no wiggling, no jiggling, no squiggling, no giggling,” in a firm but friendly voice.

The child should now be standing straight, tall, and centered.

It is not unusual for a child at this age to struggle a bit with the structured nature of the eurythmy exercises. They will respond well to you, however, if you are also learning the exercises and doing them with engagement and good will. Be earnest, but playful! Help the child *want* to do it.

What is essential?

To be a eurythmy teacher, we have to learn to pay attention to what is essential. The *learning process itself* is more important than immediate success. It is fine to make mistakes in the beginning, as the child learns to coordinate the unruly limbs, and to move smoothly with beauty, grace and style. Confidently, firmly but gently repeat the exercises often enough (perhaps 20 times when learning, and then 7 times once learned), until the child has “mastered” them and can do them well.

Remember, we are *building etheric strength through repetition!* Practicing the integrative movements of eurythmy is analogous to playing a piano: one has to repeat things often enough until the body can do them skillfully. Thereafter, the soul can build upon the foundations to *feel* and *bring self-perception* to them.

Cynthia Hoven

Eurythmyonline.com

info@eurythmyonline.com