**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.