

YOUR SIXTH 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 sixth 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.

Sixth Grade Development Overview

The sixth grade Waldorf school curriculum welcomes students into the last third of their “childhood.”

We remember how fifth graders were experiencing a unique phase of harmony, in body, soul and spirit. This was reflected in the beautiful language arts and history lessons in that grade that took the children on a journey from Ancient India (7000 BC) up until the age of Greece. The year culminated for the fifth graders in a celebration of the original Olympic games, in which the children practice their skills of physical strength, coordination and harmony. An atmosphere of archetypal innocence should reign in the fifth grade classroom, as yet untouched by the precociousness of adolescence.

By the time the modern child has reached sixth grade, he or she has most probably already begun to show the first signs of puberty. In the girls, breasts are beginning to swell and hips are beginning to widen. Boys’ voices have begun—or soon will begin—to deepen and “crack.” Whereas up until this point, a child’s movements tended to have a natural grace, at this age the growing bones increase significantly in mass, and the child begins to feel alienated from the body. Suddenly, feet feel as if they are far away from the “control center” of the head, and the child moves clumsily.

Importantly, these physical signs are almost sure to be accompanied by emotional changes. The natural openness of the child begins to give way to moodiness, which is generally covering up an underlying sense of confusion and heaviness.

In considering this passage away from innocence, William Wordsworth wrote,

“Heaven lies about us in our infancy,
Chains of the prison us begin to close around the growing boy.”

The Waldorf curriculum begins the year by introducing the children to Roman culture. Geographically and temporally quite close to ancient Greece, Rome evolved a more intellectual culture than their neighbors. Their art tended to be clumsier, but their laws and politics were all the more elegant. We can have the sense that the Roman culture specialized in learning how to *think* rationally and clearly.

Sixth grade Waldorf teachers often begin the year by inviting their class to creatively and collaboratively draft a code of behavior for their classroom. The code can be elegantly written and posted on the wall for the whole year, constantly inspiring and guiding the students to obey the agreed-upon rules and to aspire to create a just classroom society.

In the sciences, children also begin to come more “down to earth.” I have never met a sixth-grader who didn’t enjoy their block on mineralogy, learning to identify dozens beautiful rocks and crystals. They also study physics, learning how the physical world works. We can imagine how abstract this would have been for a 7 year old, but how it matches the evolving consciousness of the sixth grade perfectly!

In writing they work on understanding the laws of composition, understanding how to lay thoughts together so they develop a line of logic. In math, students work on fractions and decimals, including their practical applications in business math. They also work diligently on geometric drawing, practicing to merge precision and beauty in the creation of complex shapes.

In all of these endeavors, students are learning how to use the beautiful power of thinking to figure out how to navigate and increasingly complex world. The innocence of childhood is falling away from them, and they must now begin to be able to work with abstract thoughts. In the Waldorf curriculum, fortunately, these studies are always brought in a way that cultivate beauty and style as well as clarity and lawfulness, ever mindful of the urgent need to blend head-knowledge with heart-knowledge, and guide both into practical life skills.

Many schools are now celebrating the end of the sixth grade with the “Squire’s Challenge.” Over the course of many weeks, students consider different virtues they want to aspire to. They are guided to set challenges for themselves, doing deeds of service for others in their community. At the end of the challenge, students participate in a “knighting ceremony.” This may be conducted in festive costume, and preceded by a festive meal. Thereafter, each child is recognized by their “king” (typically, the class teacher), and in recognition of their accomplishments, “knighted” by their king (or queen). This rite of passage strengthens the young child in their aspiration to deal well with the tumultuous emotions they may be now feeling.

The eurythmy curriculum in sixth grade works much with very challenging concentration exercises, which demand that the children execute difficult coordination challenges, often with hands and feet doing opposite patterns. For instance, a pianist may play a piece of music with two voices, and the children must clap the upper voice with their hands and step the rhythm of the lower voice with their feet. There is also great emphasis on working with all kinds of rod exercises, which demand skill and agility in the body, and with geometric forms of all kinds. When students have become accustomed to moving the movements of language or of musical tones with their arms, they can now begin to do fairly complex pieces of poetry, building on the skills of doing contrasting things with arms and legs.

Homeschooling parents who do workshops with me will learn poems and music for their children that I am not able to teach through videos! You are encouraged to gather friends together for a workshop with me to learn poems and music you could do at this age. Contact me at info@eurythmyonline.com.

General Sixth Grade Movement Exercises

As my colleague Francine Adams writes in her book on eurythmy, “Whatever mood was present in the fifth grade is now greatly altered in the sixth and can be rightly compared to an erupting volcano.” At the age, the close relationship between the muscles and the blood-breath rhythm begins to change. The child now begins to be more closely knit into the body, right into the depths of the bones. Now the child appears to be clumsy, and the child is more self-conscious of now being graceful and harmonious. It feels as if the child is a stranger in the strange land of a growing body. And now, of course, the hormones are beginning to prepare the child for adulthood.

This is matched on a soul level by the child becoming more opinionated.

Now the child needs more exercises that both challenge both separately and together, the relationship of head and limbs. We work with concentration exercises in which, for instance, we must walk eight steps forward, then 7 forward and 1 back, 6 forward and 2 back, 5 forward and 3 back, etc. up to eight backwards. We then continue with 7 back and 1 forward, 6 back and 2 forward, 5 back and 3 forward, etc., up until we end with 8 forward. What fun it is to add to this the challenge of clapping on every “1,” and then perhaps also of jumping on “4.” You can make things up!

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

You will see that many of the exercises included here were also included in the fifth grade curriculum. If you have worked your way through that study with your child then you should be ready to add some poems to your exercises as you move them in space.

For this, I strongly recommend that you purchase Eurythmy for the Elementary Grades by Francine Adams (AWSNA press). Her book gives you ideas of what poems you can use for each grade, but you should use the techniques of moving in space that I have shown to you in these lessons!

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 imagine, 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 teaching, 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 Sixth 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.

Again, as I wrote above, *. If you have worked your way through that study with your child then you should be ready to add some poems to your exercises as you move them in space.*

For this, I strongly recommend that you purchase Eurythmy for the Elementary Grades by Francine Adams (AWSNA press). Her book gives you ideas of what poems you can use for each grade, but you should use the techniques of moving in space that I have shown to you in these lessons!

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.

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