Eurthmy Overview for the Third Grade Child

**Third Grade Developmental Overview**

The Waldorf curriculum is built on what is called age-appropriate learning, while emphasizing the importance of having a live teacher bringing stories and experiences to the children in a way that will support their development. And of course, different things are expected of the children at each age in their development, in accordance with their physical, psychological and neurological development.

Naturally, the Waldorf curriculum recognizes the individual qualities of each child in this process, but also sees the over-arching arc of development that the child goes through as they comes to term with learning to become a person on the earth. Having worked with hundreds or even thousands of children over the years, I have seen how the Waldorf curriculum can generally support a vast spectrum of children, no matter whether they are intellectually gifted or challenged.

Sometime in the course of their third grade, the children generally will become nine years old. This was characterized by Rudolf Steiner—the founder of Waldorf education—as the time of the so-called “crossing of the Rubicon.” (The term “crossing the Rubicon” generally means “reaching a point of no return,” and refers to Julius Ceasar’s crossing of the Rubicon River in northern Italy in 49BC.)

Until this age, the children were rightly so closely knit to their parents and their environment that they were rightfully quite malleable in their behavior and learning. They still learned best through imitating the examples of the people in their surroundings, and the Waldorf school builds upon this by bringing them all their lessons—of reading, writing, arithmetic and history—embedded in stories of saints and heroes, of people they can worthily emulate.

In reaching their own so-called Rubicon crossing, the third graders experience how they have become separated from this innocent unity with their family, from selfless identification with their significant others. We can expect that after this point, they will no longer be as unquestioningly at one with their teachers, and this is something that we must learn to welcome and strive to understand how to work with it skillfully.

For many children, this Rubicon crossing will be experienced as a somewhat frightening experience, possibly accompanied by nightmares. It is not uncommon for children at this age to begin to harbor the secret doubt of whether their parents are really their own parents, or whether they had been mixed up with another child at the hospital, or perhaps in truth secretly adopted. One child I know told me “I feel as if I am standing in front of a great door, and I have to go through that door to become who I truly am!”

The Waldorf curriculum meets the third grader first with the stories of the Old Testament. They hear how “God created the heaven and the earth,” and how out of the unity of one creative being the dichotomy of heaven and earth, dark and light, day and night appeared. This corresponds to their own feeling that they have fallen out of oneness and now have to bear the pain of separating from their parents. Of course, we adults know that this pain will continue for the rest of their lives as they learn to individuate and finally to seek healing through building connections of mature love. But can we imagine how the young child feels when the awareness first arises of how those first tender bonds of connection are broken?

The curriculum then goes on to teach the stories of Noah and the arc, and how Noah had to take all of the animals with him as he crossed into new lands. When they hear “God’s promise to Noah,” and how the rainbow is a promise of eternal connection, the children sense that in fact all will be well in the end, even as they continue on to their journey of taking care of the animals and the ecosystems of the earth that we have been given to take care of.

The rest of the Waldorf school curriculum then meets the child with other subjects, including learning how to measure and build things. This includes real-life carpentry skills, as well as planting gardens and baking and cooking. Through these experiences, the so-called wandering child, cast out from paradise in a highly symbolic sense, finds his or her way into earthly civilization.

Up until this age, eurythmy classes were always done with the children standing in a circle. Children were still living in a kind of dream of being in one community. In the beginning of third grade, children begin to work with geometrical forms with their classmates, learning how to create shapes of circles and triangles and squares together. As the year progresses, they will begin to cut their circles and squares in half, bisecting them and experiencing the division of the unity into parts.

Finally, at around the midpoint of the year, when most of them have turned nine, they children are taught to turn forwards and face the blackboard as individuals. This reflects the turning point for them, at which point they will begin to feel what it means to rely on their own individual relationship to spatial orientation.

I generally bring this to the children by first having each of them stand in a star shape in their own body. I have them put their attention on their head, and then let an imaginary line of light travel to their right foot. As I say that, we take a small step to the right. From there, the line travels to the left arm, and we extend the left arm out to the side, holding it at heart-level. Then a line travels to the right arm (we hold the right arm out), then down to the left foot (and we take a step to the right), and finally back to the head. As we discover this wonderful symmetry, we allow ourselves to shine inwardly, with a glow of completion. Please notice how this simple exercises gives us so many challenges, as we must learn to cross multiple inner midlines, both vertical and horizontal.

The next step involves a large shift in consciousness, as we must learn to put this vertical star into the horizontal plane. I allow one willing volunteer to stand in the middle of the room and tell how they are to imagine that there was once a star in the sky (they themselves!) who looked down upon the earth and was so curious about what it saw that it fell to the earth, and was knocked out cold. When it came to its senses, if found five other friends who stood around it and reminded it that it was a star. These friends then gather around the child on the floor and place themselves at the star points, one-by-one reminding the fallen star of the rotation from head to foot to arm to arm to foot. Then, the star child stands up and places herself at the point of the head. Now she must walk from the head to the foot to the arm, to the other arm, the foot and back to the head, *all the time facing forward*. In this way, the child now learns to feel the multi-dimensionality of space and that they can walk in all directions without turning around, without using their eyes. This is a huge step in self-perception and self-mastery, and its accomplishment is part of the child’s process of crossing the Rubicon and beginning to pilot his or her own life. I recommend to each adult who watches reads this to try it for themselves, and see whether they can learn to move in space with equal ease in all directions. The ability to do so is one of the many great gifts of eurythmy!

Now is a great time to begin working more intensely with rod exercises with the children. The rod challenges will increase year by year, as the children develop skills and agility in their body and in how they move in space.

Beginning in the third grade, the eurythmyonline curriculum focuses on geometrical forms and rod exercises. The forms can be the beginning of simple choreographic exercises that the homeschool teacher can bring to children for their poetry and music. However, to learn these in a living way, we are offering live workshops to communities. Please contact me at [info@eurythmyonline.com](mailto:info@eurythmyonline.com) to set up a homeschool eurythmy workshop for your region!