**Fourth Grade Developmental Overview**

To understand the Waldorf school curriculum for the fourth grade, it is important to reflect upon what the child went through in third grade. In my third grade curriculum overview, I described how the nine-year old child can be described as someone who is now aware of being cast out of paradise, even as Adam and Eve were, and sent out into the world, to learn to deal with earthly things and build culture upon the earth. This is the beginning of the great journey into life, into individuation and self-actualization.

The healthy fourth grader now begins to embark on this earth adventure with a sense of engagement, although we can often see that many children still feel overwhelmed and a bit scared at the prospect of what lies ahead.

The first main lesson block for fourth graders is often the so-called human and animal block. We can remember that first graders were told fairy tales in which animals were their friends and companions and gave them wise counsel. Second graders were taught about animals through folk tales and fables, and learned to appreciate how characteristic archetypes live in each of the various animals of the world, including cleverness, slyness, faithfulness and the like. I like to think of this in almost a Jungian sense, knowing that the child is being prepared to come to terms with the animals archetypes that we all carry in our own personal soul lives.

In third grade, Noah of course had to take the animals all with him on the arc as he prepared for the civilization that would exist after the great flood subsided. And so it is that the fourth graders then study the multiple relationships of humans and animals, in their first so-called science block. They learn the way that each animal has a genius of specificity in their capacities, making each uniquely suited to their own ecosystem. The human has none of these body-bound specificities. Precisely through being generalists in our body and our abilities, we are able to rise above our merely animal nature and understand the world through our mental activity. And although it takes us a whole lifetime to understand this miracle, the seeds for it are planted in the fourth grade curriculum.

Having landed on the earth, so to speak, fourth graders are now happy to learn local geography. They learn to map their own school campus, their home, their block, their neighborhood. They learn to know about how the native people lived in their ecosystem, and thereby come to honor the deep relationships we have had and must re-discover on a new level with our environment.

The eager fourth grader is also ready to get down to details and start figuring things out. Mathematics becomes fun for them with fractions, understanding how things that are broken down can still be reassembled into a whole (1/2 plus ¼ plus ¼ will return to 1).

They are able to start figuring out the fractional parts of speech as well. Now able to read and write with increasing ease, they are able to examine the building blocks of language through grammar, recognizing how verbs bring activity and nouns are like standing stones, whereas adjectives and adverbs describe and embellish the words they refer to and prepositions direct our attention to the relationships of the things in the story line. These can all be brought together in a fun kind of dramatic activity in movement, and in classroom eurythmy we practice running with verbs, standing in nouns, bowing with adjectives and using indicating directions with prepositions.

The great mythology of the fourth graders can be found in the stories of the Norse gods and goddesses. These tales tell of powerful deities whose lived in the kingdom of Asgard with Odin, the sun god. Through deeds of deceit and trickery, the gods were led to engage in the mighty battle Ragnarok. The stories culminate in the dramatic fall of the gods, but not before they are vouchsafed a glimpse into a future in which a new god of love and of light will arise. The gods challenge and struggle with each other throughout the story, but they must also learn to live together. Fourth graders can sense in this story their own struggle with the “old world” that they are born into, their discovery of their own power of deceit and trickery, the sad acknowledgment that these may lead to the end of “paradise,” and the unconscious assurance that in fact, a better world can arise in an unknown future time. As was seen in the Old Testament stories of the 3rd grade, these tales give the children courage and orientation as they leave the womb of childhood and embark on the long and uncertain journey of becoming conscious human beings on the earth.

The Norse myths were told in the great epic narrative called the Edda. If we research the style of this ancient poem, we see that the Norse used the element of *alliteration* to tell their tale. This means that throughout the entire poem, they repeated strong sounds again and again, as if driving their story into language. An example would be the first words of Ragnarok, which read “Behold, there Breaketh the Day of Doom. Darkness descendeth.” We experience here the repetition of the B and the D sounds. You as teacher should practice speaking these sounds with a controlled and powerful voice, and then let your children learn to do so. They may imagine themselves to be a bard standing in the midst of a great storm and needing the strength of their voice to combat the destructive forces around them. They are asked not to shout, but to speak with firm power. They then can learn to take one strong and very firm step with each alliterated sound (B, B, D, D, D, D), grounding themselves as firmly as they can against the wind that buffets them.

The fourth grade eurythmy curriculum continues the journey begun in fourth grade by focusing on moving ever more complex forms in space. Conscious and masterful concentration exercises and rod exercises, accompanied with challenges in stepping and speed control create the foundation for the young heroes to challenge and master their own bodies.

The eurythmyonline curriculum offers only a small step in fourth grade beyond what is offered in 3rd grade. However, you are once again invited to host a workshop in your area with Cynthia Hoven by contacting her at [info@eurythmyonline.com](mailto:info@eurythmyonline.com), requesting live lessons in the expanded curriculum you can teach your fourth graders.