

YOUR SEVENTH AND EIGHTH 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.

Seventh and Eighth Grades Developmental Overview

The path of the elementary school curriculum of Waldorf education offers a magnificent journey from first through eight grade.* I am constantly amazed at the changes that children go through in this eight-year period. They arrive in school at 6 or 7 years old, wide-eyed and full of wonder. Often they have very little impulse control, barely know their right hands from their left, and have only just begun to develop social skills and self-awareness.

Looking back to first grade, we remember that the key educational principle is that from age 0-7, the child is just beginning to work on their physical body. We have allowed the very young child to postpone intellectual learning until the first “change of teeth” occurs at about age 7, indicating that the child has worked through all the systems of the physical body. That effort required the complete attention of the etheric, or life body, but by age 7, a portion of that etheric body can be set free from its pure organic tasks and can now work in a body-free state.

From age 7 onwards, the growing child must gradually develop the skills to be able to use these freed etheric forces to *make inner (mental) pictures, to reflect on things, and to remember them*. For this reason, it is so important that the young child does not have “pre-fabricated” mental media images filling their minds, but that they hear stories and lessons and make their own inner pictures. Only in this way will they grow the capacity for free and independent thinking as adults. The eight grades of the Waldorf curriculum grow these skills step by step, meeting the child at each age with new content that evolves as the children grow and become more “earthly.”

By seventh and eighth grade, the children become teenagers, 13 and 14 years old. They reach the end of this second 7-year cycle, and should now carry a healthy and lively interest in the world around them. They should be able to have basic skills in arithmetic and geometry, as well as in the sciences: biology, mineralogy, physics, chemistry and anatomy. They should have good language skills and be able to write logical compositions. They should have a good sense of their place in time and space, understanding history and geography as well as our present age. They should be able to do research projects on all manner of topics, and create projects with a fine sense of beauty and skill.

Of course, we experience that these teenagers are no longer the wide-eyed innocents who began the journey eight years ago. No longer do they blithely hold our hands as they walk down the street. In the process of arriving at this point of being able to think about things and reflect on them, they have begun to create their own inner world. They begin to feel the inklings of new feelings. For many of them, melancholy and moodiness set in. Others may hide feelings of loneliness and fear behind masks of nonchalance. They turn much more often to their peers for advice and discussion than to their parents. The impact of the media and social norms begin to play an enormous role in their lives.

All these qualities mark the beginning of the third 7-year cycle, which rule ages 14-21. In this cycle, during the years of high school and beyond, youth begin to develop a very highly differentiated emotional life. They are served in the high school curriculum by strong intellectual clarity and richly nuanced feelings. The seventh and eighth graders are poised between these two phases of childhood and youth. In eurythmy, as well as in their other arts, they can often accomplish beautiful work with coordinated movements and expressivity, but I can see that they are largely only able to *imitate* me, even as they can as yet only *imitate* the thought processes of their elders. They now have rich potential to develop in the next seven-year cycle, but they are only at the beginning of understanding themselves.

In my curriculum for seventh and eighth graders, I offer almost all of the basic walking exercises, the spatial forms and the rod exercises. Each of these exercises can be further developed by the home-school parent and the child, and used as part of the daily exercises. I recommend doing 5-15 minutes of concentrated eurythmy each day throughout the year, or, alternately, doing seven-week blocks of eurythmy and three to four times a year, and choosing other movement activities in the intervening periods. Once again, parent and child should be equally diligent in developing eurythmy skills. By this age, the parent and child can collaborate on the exercises as equals.

If at all possible, parents should attend eurythmy workshops, to learn how to bring the sound gestures to their children and to learn how to do poetry and music with simple forms. Please contact me if you are interested! *Please contact me through my website at info@eurythmyonline.com to arrange for live courses in your community to learn poetry and verses for your homeschooling project.*

*It seems that there might have been substantial grounds to make the Waldorf school curriculum only a seven-year journey, to suit the pattern of the seven-year life cycles. However, because already from the beginning the original Waldorf school had to adapt itself to the mandates of a state educational system that dictated that elementary schools should have eight grades, the basic Waldorf curriculum also is an eight-year journey.

General Seventh and Eighth Grade Movement Exercises

The seventh and eighth grade children rightly feels that they have left the world of childhood behind. Many will be chomping at the bit of adolescence, feeling the lure of the internet, the city, the life beyond their walls. They are, however, still youth, and still need to be held in the warm embrace of your guidance. Encourage their inquiries, but encourage them to strive for beauty and goodness!

Most—but not all-- children love sports at this age. It is a blessed thing for them to be able to run strongly and stretch their limbs!

Waldorf education offers a great gymnastics-type movement, known as “Spatial Gymnastics” or also “Bothmer Gym.” Both of these offer wonderful exercises for coordination, balance and skill.

And what of the martial arts? I admire them for the discipline they offer, and for the agility they train. To differentiate between the two, we can observe first of all that eurythmy is an art form, and develops creativity. Even at this age, eurythmy shines as a movement experience, in that it integrates not only skill but also feeling, and meaning through word and music. And, very importantly, eurythmy works out of the *heart chakra*, and leads the practitioner into a feeling of the space around them. The martial arts, on the other hand, work out of the lower chakra, the *hara*, which is a different kind of energetic field.

By this age, I open all of the eurythmy rod and movement exercises to you as parent. Now it is up to you and your child to discover when to do which movements, and how to make them fun and interesting.

If you have worked your way through the sequential grade curriculum with your child up to now, 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!)

However, by this age, you can invite your child to use more initiative in mastering the exercises with you. The adolescent will enjoy learning to master these with you, and possibly to do them better than you can. **Still, 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 are teaching 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 Seventh and Eighth Grade Eurythmy Exercises

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

These include all of the exercises for moving in space and all of the rod exercises.

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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