



## **GRADE SIX, 2009 - 2010**

The sixth grade curriculum reinforces and strengthens basic language arts and mathematical skills. The incorporation of these skills is emphasized in creative thinking and problem solving. During this phase of their cognitive growth, students are able to take more responsibility for their own learning. An important goal for a sixth grade student is to develop strong study skills and habits of learning that will carry them through future academic endeavors.

Social expectations of sixth graders are to be respectful of their teachers, peers, other students, and visitors, and to be accepting of different learning styles and interests, thereby providing good role models as the oldest group in the main building.

**ENGLISH:** The sixth grade English curriculum focuses on expanding skills in reading, writing, and speaking. The classroom is a supportive place for the exploration of ideas and students have daily opportunities for both collaborative and independent work. Students participate in the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award program by reading at least five books from this year's selection and voting on their favorite titles.

Students read from a variety of genres, with a focus not just on what is said, but also how, and why. In the early fall, students read short stories by Roald Dahl and others, becoming familiar with the literary elements of plot, setting, characters, point of view, and theme. Students also read selections from memoirs, essays, and articles. Emphasis is on reading actively, observing, and questioning. Later literature selections include: *Witness*, *Counting on Grace*, *The Breadwinner*, and *Return to Sender*. Poetry is integrated into regular readings and assignments, with a special focus during National Poetry Month in April.

In-class writing exercises give students the chance to use the literary elements from the writer's perspective. Each student keeps a writing journal for in-class work. Assignments are varied, allowing students to examine and practice expository, descriptive, narrative, and persuasive writing. Students are encouraged to think broadly and stretch beyond their comfort zone in their writing. Students expand their spelling and grammar skills through revision of their own work, with additional material from *Rules of the Game* and *Painless Grammar*. Students gain new vocabulary from weekly lessons in *Painless Vocabulary* as well as vocabulary from the literature selections.

Speaking and listening skills are practiced on a daily basis, with all students participating in class discussions. With the expectation that all ideas are taken seriously, students are encouraged to share their thoughts with others in whole-class and small-group activities. In the spring, students complete independent research (I-Search) projects on topics of their choosing. In a combined social studies/English unit, each student researches a topic, writes an in-depth report (with multiple drafts), and makes an oral and visual presentation to an audience.

**MATH:** The sixth grade uses the University of Chicago School Mathematics Project *Everyday Mathematics* text. In the sixth grade program, students develop a broad background by learning concepts and skills in these six content strands: Number and Numeration; Operations and Computation; Data and Chance; Measurement and Reference Frames; Geometry; Patterns,

Functions, and Algebra. Proportional reasoning, the major mathematical theme for middle school math, will be addressed in the specific topics of fractions, decimals, percents, rates, ratios, and scale. Sound foundations in place value and number sense, as well as the basics of statistical analysis, are stressed. Students are encouraged to demonstrate their mathematical thinking through writing and sharing their work in small groups or on the board. Additionally, integrated curriculum incorporates the disciplines of art, social studies, science, and math. For example, a geometry unit in Islamic design is integrated with art and social studies in the spring.

**SCIENCE:** The focus of the sixth grade science program is the interrelationship and interdependence inherent in the functioning of systems in the natural world. We read selected chapters from *Dr. Art's Guide to Planet Earth* (Sussman) and Prentice Hall's *Ecology*, as well as a variety of other sources, including journals, library books, and the Internet, for current information on scientific topics. Individually, students develop the skills of observation, prediction, analysis, comparison, recording information, and research. Working cooperatively in small groups and as a whole class, students develop critical thinking, problem solving, and decision-making skills. During the middle of the year, the scientific method of investigation is used by students to develop an extended independent project. Some of the themes explored throughout the year are water, topography of the land, the chemistry of solutions, astronomy, nutrition, and healthy choices.

**SOCIAL STUDIES:** The sixth grade begins the year with a focus on Vermont history and geography. Students learn about waterways in the state, and they travel to the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum to explore the lake and understand its importance historically, in the present, and in the future. The primary text for this unit will be *1609: Quadricentennial Curriculum* from the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum. Students also will study local history in Windham County, using resources from historical societies. Later in the year sixth graders will learn about the state government and will travel to Montpelier to observe the legislature in session. In the spring the class will study the Middle East and the rise of Islam. In a combined social studies-English unit at the end of the year, students will do independent I-Search projects where they have the opportunity to research topics of their choice.

**ART:** The sixth grade curriculum builds upon the student's knowledge of the elements and principles of design. Students will be encouraged to identify important elements of painting such as line and texture, and be able to articulate how they are used in a composition to express an artist's idea. Sketchbooks are introduced mid-year and become the homework component of the art curriculum. These give students a chance to practice drawing in their home environment and to make sketches of ideas for projects that they would like to explore further. Two-point perspective is practiced and students are encouraged to discuss work in terms of positive and negative space, scale, gesture, and proportion. Projects that have been undertaken have been Shepard Fairey-inspired stencils, animal optical illusion drawings, costume design for Mardi Gras, and Sol Lewitt-inspired sculptures. In the spring, an integrated unit on Islamic art combines the study of art with math.

**FRENCH:** In the sixth grade we will use the text Fluo. Students will recognize similarities with books used in previous grades, as this textbook intrigues learners with comic strips and culturally rich chapters. An accompanying CD provides a sound track of native French speakers with authentic accents for auditory and oral exercises, and a workbook provides written exercises. The series, designed specifically for young learners of French, is structured in units that incorporate songs, games, and reading and writing built around a body of vocabulary. Topics include French families and names, back to school, school objects, food in France, animals, sports and the body, and traveling in France. Additionally, the new language series Qtalk, which employs pictures as a mechanism to promote oral proficiency, will be used to get students speaking more in class. There will be regular homework assignments. Class meets three times a week for 45 minutes in the French room.

**MUSIC AND TECHNOLOGY:** The music program is an integral part of the TGS curriculum with all students in K-8 having three music classes per week. The primary goals are: developing an appreciation for music; singing on-pitch; reading music and playing an instrument; dancing cooperatively; taking direction and performing on stage. Basic computer skills and an introduction to music technology are also important components of the program. Students work in groups, individually, and with several faculty members throughout the year in different learning situations.

**TECHNOLOGY:** Students are formally introduced to keyboarding through the UltraKey program. For the first half of the year they work daily to develop their touch-typing. Each child will learn folder, file, and disk management. Further uses of technology are explored and learned within the context of each subject. For instance, this will include research via the Internet and CD-ROM, spreadsheets, PowerPoint, and scientific calculators.

**STUDY SKILLS:** Organizational study skills are presented and emphasized during the sixth grade year. Students are expected to keep an updated notebook with sections for each subject and an assignment book. As the year progresses the students are required to plan for longer projects and extended assignments. They can expect homework in all their subjects with, on average, one hour of homework each day. In addition, they are encouraged to free read regularly.

**SOCIAL CURRICULUM:** The social curriculum at TGS is designed to complement the academic curriculum and help maintain a healthy social and learning environment. This includes a series of "Community Life" classes at all grade levels that complements and reinforces the classroom-based social curricular activities and goals. We define a healthy school community as a place where people have a sense of belonging, where adults and students extend and receive respect in their relationships with each other. We foster the creation of a place where people feel both a sense of support and personal challenge to help them learn and grow as human beings.

**LIBRARY:** The sixth grade will evaluate literary materials by text, illustration, and information through their participation in the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award program. They will use the library to choose materials from a variety of sources to support their I-Search and Journey North Mystery Class programs as well as reading for pleasure.

**PHYSICAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT:** Physical skills development in grade six is a program designed to give a child a chance to develop physically through play, games, skill tasks, and movement activities. Activities are planned to stress various underlying themes of the program: strength, endurance, flexibility, coordination, game skills, sportsmanship, and social interaction. The daily program varies in size and structure of the groups. Fall activities include soccer, running, Presidential Fitness Program, and adventure learning. There is an extended weekly walk in the fall and spring as long as the good weather holds out. We explore different locales and habitats close to home. In winter, students focus on cross-country skiing at school, and may choose to join the downhill skiing or snowboarding instruction program one afternoon each week. Skating is offered from November to March at a local skating rink. Spring activities include softball, basketball, and Frisbee, as well as other coordination and skill games. The program is varied to meet the needs of and allow interaction between age groups.