

Kindergartners at The Grammar School Learning French



French teacher, Johanna Gardner, with Kindergartners

November 25, 2008 (Putney) – “Tetes, epaules, genoux et pieds, genoux et pieds. Tetes, epaules, genoux et pied, genoux et pieds.” Sung to the popular early childhood song “head, shoulders, knees and toes”, kindergartners at The Grammar School in Putney, Vermont, are learning the parts of the body, as well as other important things, in French!

One of the goals of The Grammar School founders was to teach students a foreign language. Since the school was founded almost 50 years ago, the thought was to teach students the language of its closest foreign neighbors – Canadians. Hence the tradition of French study began and continues today. Unlike other schools, where foreign language study is often optional and usually offered beginning at the middle school level, the French language is introduced and taught from kindergarten all the way through 8th grade.

Body vocabulary (arms, legs, head, hand, foot, etc..) greetings such as hello (bonjour), goodbye (au revoir), have a nice weekend (bon weekend) and have a good day (bon journee), colors, numbers one through ten and a few classroom directives such as sit (assieds-toi), stand (leves-toi) and get your folder (cherche ton cahier) are a few of the things the kindergartners have been practicing in the month of November. In addition, they are working on an alphabet book and a book about themselves.

French is taught by Johanna Gardner. Johanna has taught at World Learning, Kroka Expeditions and Greenfield High School. She grew up in Newfane, Vermont, but has lived in Norway, France, and California. Her love of French began at Leland and Gray Union High School and flourished into a career. She loves teaching at TGS and had this to say about the ability of the young mind to learn a new language and the importance of capitalizing on this window of opportunity: “The young mind is so quick to respond to a new language. To utilize this highly flexible period in children’s development by offering a second language is the job of a strong educational institution. Our kindergartners show no hesitation when spoken to in French; they understand instinctively from the context of the situation what is asked of them. It is truly amazing to see how much they learn in just a month!”

The Grammar School was founded in 1960 by a small group of Putney, Vermont families with the understanding that a child’s elementary school years provide the foundation for all future learning. Originally sited in a small barn, the school opened with 23 local students taught by three teachers. Today, over 125 Grammar School students hail from over 20 towns in three states. Our campus encompasses three classroom buildings and 60 acres of forests and fields.

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The Grammar School is accredited by the State of Vermont and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. The Grammar School is a member of the National Association of Independent Schools, the Independent Schools Association of Northern New England, the Vermont Independent School Association, The Vermont School Boards Association, the Vermont Principals Association, and the Educational Records Bureau.