



The Harley School

LOWER SCHOOL
CURRICULUM

2019–20

Lower School Curriculum

The Harley Lower School experience begins with a Nursery program for 3 and 4 year-olds that includes full time and part-time options. The Primary program includes a combined full-day Kindergarten and Grade 1.

The Lower School curriculum teaches math, reading, writing, and science through thematic, integrated, and hands-on lessons. Socio-emotional development is an integral part of learning in the Lower School. Understanding how to be a responsible individual in a community underlies all of our curricular experiences. Lower School students learn what it means to be a civic person through active participation in classroom community meetings, service projects, and tending the organic micro-farm. Throughout the Lower School, specialists in art, music, literature, world languages, physical education, sustainability education, and technology work with students to enrich and extend the academic program. All members of the Lower School community, including many parents, gather to share songs, stories, and projects at a weekly Assembly, an experience that fosters community, encourages risk-taking, and builds confidence.

Nursery (3- and 4-year olds)

Our Nursery program encourages 3- and 4-year olds to develop a love for learning. With a play-based philosophy and play as a vehicle for cognitive, social/emotional, and physical development, children are involved in a variety of daily activities, providing a balance between individual and group experiences. These activities include group projects, dramatic play, art, music, P.E., and outdoor play. We are committed to using nature as an outdoor classroom as much as possible. Students also participate in school assemblies and field studies. We emphasize the importance of language arts and provide a strong foundation for future language development through group discussions and storytelling.

Our experienced Nursery teachers are committed to working with you and your child. Our program is a full day and includes a rest after lunch. Parents have a choice of a three-day or a five-day plan. Our low student-faculty ratio allows teachers to give individual attention to each child in a small class setting. In addition to the regular class activities, a creative arts specialist incorporates dance, language arts, music, and creative dramatics into her daily sessions with the children. All Nursery students receive instruction in Spanish. Students also attend physical education classes that include swimming as part of the curriculum. Lunch is also served daily in the classroom. Our outdoor summer nursery program is an extension of the school year for students who attended three-year-old nursery during the traditional school year.

Primaries (Full Day Kindergarten and Grade 1)

Our Primary program offers a unique approach to educating five- and six-year olds. A two-teacher team works together providing individual, small group, and large group instruction to help meet each child's needs.

With an integrated approach that provides students with a context for learning, our curriculum focuses on the basic academic areas: reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. Beginning early in the year, Primary students are encouraged to think of themselves as authors. As phonic knowledge develops, they use invented spelling, along with drawing, to compose stories and record information independently. Children are able to select pieces of writing to be published as books for the classroom library. Through our literature-based program, we individualize reading materials and use methods best-suited to each child's learning style. In our math program, children work in small groups. We use manipulative materials to help children see relationships and interconnections, and to enable them to deal flexibly with math ideas and concepts. These concepts are reinforced through games and everyday problem-solving situations. Science and social studies are taught in a unit approach where topics such as undersea life and apples are explored. The approach to these topics incorporates the integration of all subject areas.

The Primary program provides experiences that foster independence and self-confidence. The day is structured to balance direct instruction with independent choice time with peers in various centers in the classroom. In addition to providing a strong academic foundation, we encourage children to have confidence in themselves as learners, to take risks and to learn from their mistakes, to respect others, and to show concern for their classmates and community.

Because we believe in educating the whole child, students attend special classes in art, technology, music, literature, physical education, and Spanish.

Sample Primary Schedule

- Settling in time, morning basket work
- Morning meeting
- Reading
- Writer's workshop
- P.E., Technology, or Spanish
- Art or Music
- Choice Time
- Lunch
- Math or Literature
- Unit Studies
- Playground
- Story

Grade 2

Grade 2 is designed to meet the developmental needs of children at this age. Most instruction is individual or in small groups after a large group introduction and exploration. Classrooms are organized with activity centers which include art, computer, math, science, games, and blocks.

Using the process approach to writing, students work to refine their skills in Writer's Workshop. They begin to revise and edit their rough drafts before their books are published. Students continue to use invented spelling, but a formal spelling program is added in Grade 2. We teach reading at different levels of challenge, depending on each child's capabilities. Students are involved in a manipulative-based math program and learn to reason, solve problems, and compute in a meaningful environment. The theme approach to science, health and social studies is continued at this level. Topics might include: birds, life cycles, stream life, other social cultures, and the post office. Field studies complement science and social studies units.

Students attend classes in art, music, technology, literature, physical education, and Spanish. They also participate in a sleepover at the school at the end of the year. This is one highlight of their Second Grade experience.

Grade 2 Sample Schedule

- Morning meeting
- Art or Music
- Math
- Reading
- P.E.
- Lunch
- Science or Social Studies
- Writer's workshop
- Spanish or Technology
- Story or quiet reading
- Playground

Grade 3

In Grade 3, we help children develop responsible work habits, study skills, competence in academic areas, independence, a positive sense of self, and sensitivity to the needs and feelings of other people. Teachers continue to encourage students to think independently, as well as collaboratively in small groups, and help them express ideas in written form.

Grader 3 students learn to read for meaning, define details, discuss inferential questions, refine word attack skills, and develop vocabulary. Students read literature to form a foundation for developing class discussion, literary appreciation skills, and integrating curriculum subject areas. Various topics are presented in which the children choose books to read independently; the teachers also read aloud to the children, and students complete a variety of activities and assignments related to the topic in their literary circles. The children are immersed in poetry, fiction and nonfiction, biographies, tall tales, science, and history books. Grade 3 students continue to develop the craft of writing during Writer's Workshop. They learn about punctuation, grammar, and proofreading by using their own published stories which they share with family and friends. These audiences ensure that the children will value the importance of applying proper English usage to their own writing. The children are encouraged to use a variety of genre in their writing, especially those they have studied in their reading units. Grade 3 students also learn cursive writing.

Students develop critical and analytical skills while studying math, science and social studies. Math includes basic problem solving and computation, as well as an introduction to geometry, fractions, and unit conversions. A project-based learning approach is taken with integrated science and social studies topics. The students determine the scope and direction of learning, driven by essential questions. Some past units have been Harlic Garlic, Community, Energy and Diversity. Individual and group projects such as researching, writing reports, and learning to read and understand maps supplement classroom study.

As in other Lower School classes, third graders attend special classes in art, literature, technology, music, physical education, and French.

Grade 3 Sample Schedule

- Morning meeting
- French or Literature or Technology
- Math
- Reading/Writer's Workshop
- Recess
- Lunch
- P.E.
- Unit Studies (Science/Social Studies/Project-Based Learning)
- Art or Music

Grade 4

Grade 4 continues to provide the nurturing and creative environment of the Lower School and, at the same time, solidifies those skills necessary for successful academic achievement. Students learn to establish priorities, manage study time, and organize their work, and they are challenged to achieve to their potential. They are also working toward becoming self-motivated, responsible, independent learners. Students learn the importance of building a productive community.

The curriculum includes reading, Writer's Workshop, math, unit studies (science/social studies/project-based learning) spelling, and cursive handwriting. Teachers emphasize reading as a means of communication through the use of novels and other literary works. Students read books at their level centered around a broader theme, such as mystery, science fiction, and biography. Children write thoughtful responses about their readings in a journal, and assume different roles for discussion in their literary circles. Vocabulary development, comprehension, study and research skills, and literary appreciation are all included in the fourth grade program. Students refine cursive writing skills and develop a legible, individual style. In Writing Workshop, students write daily and rehearse, draft, revise, conference, edit, and share their own writing. Mini-lessons are used to introduce the structure and grammar of our language; the student's own writing provides the basis for practicing these skills.

In math, the basic number operations are reviewed and further refined. There is a heavier concentration on word problems, division, mental math, and related applications. In Grade 4, students gain a better understanding of the Scientific Method as they follow the process through the completion of individual and class investigations. A highlight of the program is working on their individual experiments to share with the Lower School students and community.

The project-based learning approach to unit studies continues in Grade 4. Students have explored and developed deep understandings about Native Americans, growth mindset, weather, and New York State. A respect for and celebration of diversity is fostered through all of these units

Gathering data about each of these topics provides experience in research and working on long-term assignments. Similar to other Lower School grades, Grade 4 students attend special classes in literature, art, technology, music, physical education, and French.

Grade 4 Sample Schedule

- Morning meeting
- French or Literature or Technology
- Math
- Reading/Writer’s Workshop
- Recess
- Lunch
- Unit Studies (Science/Social Studies/Project-Based Learning)
- P.E.
- Art or Music

Lower School Specials

In addition to their own intrinsic value, specials also serve to reinforce the curricular content in the classrooms.

Art and Mindfulness

The art and mindfulness specialist helps children explore the intersection of mindfulness, art, and creativity. Mindfulness, or the practice of focused awareness, continues to gain popularity as a tool for an array of mind and body benefits, from stress-reduction to improved concentration to boosted creativity and innovation. Art theory, observation, and practice mesh perfectly with mindfulness techniques as expression naturally manifests in more visible and concrete ways. Children engage with various media to explore their creative expression, learning basic tools and techniques as they move from exploration to increased refinement. Children also learn mindful breathing techniques to calm the mind and increase focus, and accessible yoga movements to renew and invigorate the body for appropriate engagement. Knowledge of process serves to facilitate the natural unfolding of creativity.

Creative Arts

Nursery students attend Creative Arts every day for 30 minutes. They learn to sing, move, dance, improvise, and play instruments creatively. Students enjoy a variety of group activities designed to tap into their imaginations and give them different modes of expression.

Literature

The literature specialist works with children to develop their literary and thinking skills, and their capacity to enjoy and learn from the world of books. In the context of the literature program, children learn about their literary heritage, the themes, patterns, and language of literature, and the connections among diverse literary selections.

They engage in narrative analysis, readers theater, author studies, and connect through global read-alouds. The literature specialist also works with classroom teachers and other specialists to use literature across the curriculum.

Music

Students experience a wide variety of musical activities including singing, instrument play, body percussion, story telling, improvisation, creative movement and traditional folk dance. Music class curriculum is mainly based on the Orff-Schulwerk and Kolday methodology. The music room is well-supplied with a variety of age-appropriate instruments. Instrumental activities and games range from Samba-style instrument play using conga drums and smaller percussion instruments- to a full Orff ensemble using glockenspiels, xylophones, metalophones and bass bars. Students can recognize simple rhythm and melodic patterns from very early on. Beginning in Third Grade, students read and compose using the treble clef, which is a natural progression of musical literacy as it flows from their rich early childhood musical experiences. Their ability to read at sight, improvise, compose, and creatively express themselves continues to develop through Lower School.

Physical Education

The P.E. teachers help our students develop a healthy and energized approach to activity and athleticism. From developing basic coordination and skills to actual scrimmages in specific sports, the students are challenged to build overall fitness, effort, and sportsmanship. Three and four-year old students learn about coordinating movement as they practice running, walking, skipping, galloping, rolling, stretching, and curling. Kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 2 students develop concepts of discovery and problem solving. They learn to dodge, balance, turn, stop, and start. Grades 3 and 4 students develop more advanced skills and learn rules and strategies for familiar sports. Classes meet once a week for 3-year olds, twice a week for 4-year olds, kindergartners, and first graders; three times a week for second graders; and four times a week for third and fourth graders, and include three units of instructional swimming.

Student Support Program

Two Student Support Program learning specialists provide evaluation, consultation and individual instruction for children who need additional help in reading, writing, math, or organization. The SSP teachers meet regularly with the classroom teachers to develop strategies for students who need focused support for remediation or extension. The SSP program in the Lower School also provides academic challenge to students beyond the differentiation that is already in the classroom. Individual support services are available on a fee basis.

Technology

Students learn to appropriately use technology as a tool for learning and communicating. In the Primaries, children learn about the computer, its parts, uses, and its care.

They learn to share their reading, writing, math, and artistic skills through a variety of programs. Group and individual projects give them familiarity with many digital tools. Grade 2 students learn to keyboard and explore more complicated programs and procedures, while also learning about their digital footprint. By Grade 3, students are using technology to research, connect, and communicate their ideas with a broader audience, learning about media literacy throughout. Grade 4 students further develop their use of technology through coding, keyboarding, game design, and 3-D printing. Design thinking is fostered through collaborative projects that reinforce the broader curricular units of study, and explore non-digital forms of technology.

World Languages

It is important for our students to learn another language to better understand English and appreciate other cultures. Students study Spanish in 3-year old nursery through Grade 2 and French in Grades 3 and 4. The content of these sessions is designed to develop an appreciation for the culture and language through art, music and games, as well as a growing facility with vocabulary and conversational exchanges in the target language.