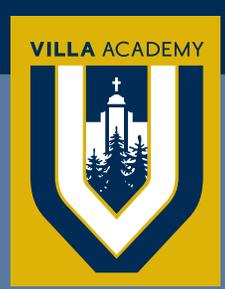


KINDERGARTEN



INTRODUCTION

Kindergarten is a time of tremendous growth and change for young children. At Villa Academy, we challenge and support each student in order to find the most optimal point of learning. From participating in yearlong community service projects at the Ronald McDonald House, to exploring science on our tree-filled grounds, to becoming leaders at our Grandparents' Day Mass, to creating farm animal reports with research and illustrations, our kindergarten students develop the skills and the love of learning they need to be successful on their academic journey.

At Villa Academy, kindergarten students employ critical thinking, creativity, caring, choice, and collaboration. We provide many opportunities for students to connect with our community, including our popular yearlong Kindergarten-8th Grade Buddy program. Our goal is simple: provide the support and instruction so that our kindergartners are prepared for the opportunities and challenges that await them in first grade and beyond.

LITERACY

(READING/ORAL LANGUAGE)

Reading is a developmental process where children use strategies to help them understand meaning and the written word. The kindergarten reading curriculum integrates the best aspects in early childhood reading instruction to provide a well-balanced literacy program. Students participate in a variety of activities to improve phonemic awareness, reading comprehension, word attack skills, and an appreciation for literature. Kindergarten classrooms are lively and rich with conversations, choice, and movement throughout the Literacy Block.

VILLA READING CURRICULUM

Independent Reading

Students read individually throughout the day, choosing developmentally-appropriate materials on their own or with teacher assistance.

Shared Reading

Students experience stories, poems, chants, and choral readings as a group. The teacher reads and models daily speech, vocabulary, familiar phrases, expression, timing, word patterns, and the enjoyment of literature.

Guided Reading

Students interact with the teacher through small group and individual instruction to discuss decoding strategies, practice skills, respond, share, and make connections with their own experiences to a book at their unique instructional level.

Oral Language and Phonemic Awareness

Daily oral language and phonemic awareness is encouraged and enhanced as our young scholars practice stretching out sounds, discussing literature, sharing their lives and experiences through class meetings, small groups, and developmental songs and games.

Phonics

Students learn consonants, short and long vowels, blends, and digraphs, as well as how to decode words. Phonics skills are learned in the context of reading, using games, hands-on manipulatives, and literature-based activities, often through Literacy Centers.

Sight Word Reading

Another reading strategy is exposing students to a variety of sight words to build a quick visual memory. Sight words are words that do not follow phonics rules, cannot be sounded out easily, and occur frequently in primary texts. A large sight vocabulary improves reading speed and fluency. The classroom Word Wall serves as a daily reminder and tool for students as they connect sight word reading with their daily writing practices.

WRITING

Children learn how to write by writing. Our young kindergarten scholars write daily through journals, stories, cards, science notebooks, and math journals. Integrating writing into all parts of the curriculum, fosters a love of writing and a deep connection between thought, oral language, and the written form. Thus, the kindergartners see writing as another form of communication.

Teachers provide frequent opportunities to write through interactive/group writing and modeling, guided writing, and independent writing. By encouraging students to use invented spelling or “guess and go,” students can write with less inhibition and see themselves as writers as early as the first day of school.

The book *Kid Writing- A Systematic Approach to Phonics, Journals, and Writer’s Workshop* serves as a guide as we look at each individual writer on the writing continuum. This allows us to gear instruction and mini-lessons towards each individual student. In the spring, kindergarten students begin the *Six Traits Plus One* model of writing by reading quality literature as well as what they have written throughout the year.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Kindergarten Social Studies begins with the students as they learn about themselves and their families. Children find connections between themselves and others, identifying similarities and differences in the *All About Me* unit. From there, children explore their relationship to the community—local and beyond—through the *Me and My Community* unit.

As students begin to understand their relationship to the community beyond Villa, world geography is explored through a unit about Flat Stanley’s travels. We also learn about holidays and cultural celebrations from around the world as well as fairy tales from different traditions as students begin to have a basic understanding of culture.

Students explore all of these topics in their very own weekly news magazine called “Let’s Find Out.” This connection to real world events introduces the concept of current events.

All Social Studies topics are integrated with literature, writing, music, visual arts, field trips, religion, and class meetings. No topic is taught in isolation in kindergarten.

HANDWRITING

The goal of handwriting instruction is to make legible and fluent handwriting an easy and automatic task for all students. Kindergarten handwriting is taught in a developmentally-appropriate manner using the *Handwriting Without Tears* curriculum (www.hwtears.com). Using a multi-sensory approach, instruction is based on what children already know and how they learn best. Teacher modeling, guided practice, and consistent child-friendly language and habits facilitate and strengthen handwriting from year to year.

Students explore letters using age-appropriate manipulatives and songs; continue to practice proper grip using crayons, chalk, and small pencils; and master the formation of all capital and small letters. Our student workbooks reinforce proper letter formation (beginning with uppercase and extending to lowercase), spacing, and size.

MATH

The kindergarten *My Math* curriculum is built around the Common Core State Standards of Mathematics (CCSSM) and the Standards for Mathematical Practices. This curriculum challenges students to embrace math through meaningful real-world applications. The three components of rigor—conceptual understanding; procedural skill and fluency; and application—are woven with equal intensity throughout the program to meet CCSSM standards. Students steadily grow their math ability and confidence.

Students are provided with many opportunities to think about problems within the context of everyday experiences. The program uses Essential Questions to guide instruction which helps children make connections to their own lives.

Kindergartners learn important skills such as counting, place value; adding and subtracting; estimating; measuring; telling time; and recognizing and counting coins using many strategies including “Math Talks”, the SMARTboard, individual practice, small groups, one-on-one, games, and centers.

Lessons are developmentally appropriate and meet students at their level of readiness to encourage exploration; active thinking and questioning; cooperation; and hands-on learning. Our kindergartners absolutely love “doing math”!

SCIENCE

The kindergarten Science Program incorporates inquiry-based instruction with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), engaging children at the intersection of the disciplinary core ideas, science and engineering practices, and crosscutting concepts. FOSS kits, the core curriculum used in our Science program, are designed to center around learning as a developmental progression, providing experiences that allow students to continually build on their initial notions and develop more complex scientific and engineering ideas.

Students experience the following units:

- Life Science/Earth Science: Trees and Weather (Fall)
- Physical Science: Materials and Motion (Winter)
- Life Science: Animals Two by Two (Spring)

Each unit includes opportunities for students to use all four steps of the scientific method (observation, hypothesis, prediction, and experimentation/testing) through inquiry-based methods. Some methods of instruction include focus questions, whole class discussions, analyzing and interpreting data, writing in science notebooks, and centers. Each unit of study takes approximately six weeks to complete.

As we dive deeper into each Science unit, we use the Villa grounds as an outdoor classroom. For example, during our Trees and Weather unit we observe trees in and around Villa; collect leaves to sort and classify by attributes (e.g., shape, color); and even adopt and plant a tree that will serve as a reminder of the students' growth throughout their Villa career. The kindergartners have a spot in the school garden, too. We harvest, plant, and care for our garden throughout the year.

Two field trips enhance our science curriculum. In the fall, we visit the Washington Arboretum and in the spring we visit the Woodland Park Zoo. The Arboretum serves as another place our naturalists explore and compare trees and seasons through docent led games and role plays. Our visit to the zoo focuses on the animals on the farm as we explore and discover their needs and habitats. We also learn about fabric and the various materials that animals provide for us. This field trip serves as a springboard for a research project and oral presentation based on a farm animal of the child's interests.

RELIGION

Religion in Kindergarten is a part of every day! The focus of the Religion program at this level is respect for self, each other, and the environment. With this as an overall theme, learning about the Catholic faith, class meetings, social/emotional learning (Second Step curriculum), and community service (including buddies) are all part of kindergarten religion.

THE CATHOLIC FAITH

Students come to know Jesus as a loving friend and God as a loving Father. Students learn about God through basic prayers and Bible stories that are taught at an age-appropriate level. Students celebrate events and seasons of the liturgical year, including Advent and Lent, and learn about the mass. Students have a pamphlet-style text which comes home to families weekly.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

The Second Step program, taught in Preschool through Grade Five in Villa classrooms, focuses on four key areas in kindergarten:

- ♦ **Skills for Learning:** learning to listen, focus attention, following directions, self talk for staying on task, and being assertive
- ♦ **Empathy:** feeling, identifying anger, same or different, accidents
- ♦ **Emotion Management:** feeling our feelings, managing frustration, calming down strong feelings, handling waiting, managing anger and disappointment
- ♦ **Problem Solving:** solving problems, inviting to play, fair ways to play, having fun with friends, handling name calling and having things taken away

Kindergarten students learn and practice all of these skills through fun and interactive lessons, role plays, games, stories, video segments, and short daily reinforcements. Students also begin to develop self care skills, an emotion vocabulary, and problem solving strategies that can be utilized both in and out of school.

CLASS MEETINGS

Creating a safe and emotionally-secure classroom encourages students to share their feelings and solve problems together. Daily/weekly class meetings enable such an environment to thrive. Whether celebrating each other or solving problems together, kindergarten students are empowered to make a difference in their classroom community and their school.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Kindergarten partners with Ronald McDonald House in four different service activities during the year. They all know what it is like to be sick, so they eagerly embrace the idea of helping a child “feel better” through art projects; decorations for holidays; a mitten and hat drive for families living there; and funds to purchase “wish list” items for the facility. Teachers give students opportunities to reflect on their service and help them understand that they are “the hand of Jesus” helping others. In addition, students build connections beyond the classroom by sharing experiences with their third grade “buddy class.”

SPECIALISTS

Kindergarten students participate in a varied schedule and see specialists in the following areas:

- ♦ **Library:** 35 minutes — once a week
- ♦ **Music:** 30 minutes — twice a week
- ♦ **Physical Education:** 30 minutes — twice a week, recess twice a day
- ♦ **Technology:** 45 minutes — once a week
- ♦ **Visual Arts:** 60 minutes — once a week (art is also integrated into all aspects of the kindergarten classroom)
- ♦ **World Languages:** 30 minutes — twice a week (one semester each of French and Spanish)

LIBRARY

The goal of our kindergarten Library program is to develop students who value learning and can apply the skills, strategies, and processes to be independent users of information. Students work as a group to learn to generate questions and locate resources that address their interests. They listen and respond to a variety of stories comparing author styles and genres, while building comprehension skills. They also learn to navigate the sections of the library, care for resources, and practice being responsible patrons.

MUSIC

To be “Tuneful, Artful, and Beatful” is the main objective in our kindergarten Music program. Students learn and explore what it means to use their voices correctly by singing Echo, Call and Response, Songtales, and Fingerplay/Action Songs. The children practice proper instrument care by playing on Orff and other non-pitched instruments. While studying Peter and the Wolf, the Kindergartners explore the different instruments in the symphony.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Kindergarten students are beginning a lifetime of movement. They are curious and eager to learn new skills. In kindergarten Physical Education, students develop gross motor skills, coordination, teamwork, following directions, and playing in a structured environment. PE doesn't just improve fitness, it also strengthens friendships, improves self-confidence, and reduces stress—all through fun, active play. The movement skills learned in kindergarten form the basis for future experiences and are used during a lifetime of physical activity.

TECHNOLOGY

Once each week, kindergarten students visit Villa's Computer Lab for forty-five minutes to build their computer literacy skills. We cover basic operations including turning a computer on and logging in, using the mouse to click on URLs and icons, adjusting the scroll bar, and drawing within various applications. Students learn how to use the dock and the icons that represent the application they are using. We also begin keyboarding practice, including how to position the right and left hands over the home row keys and understanding the function of the return, caps lock, and space bar keys. We work on gaining proficiency and speed in touch typing with the program *Keyboarding Without Tears*. Throughout the year, kindergartners are introduced to other software applications including *Pixie 3*, *Thinkin' Things*, *Mia Reading*, *Photobooth*, and *Tux Paint*.

VISUAL ARTS

The objective of the kindergarten Visual Arts program is to encourage artistic and aesthetic growth. Students participate in activities that teach observation; use of a variety of art media to express and communicate; application of the creative process to solve problems; understanding and use of art elements and concepts; and the appreciation and enjoyment of the artistic process. Art history and cultural arts are also an integral part of the Villa kindergarten Art Curriculum.

WORLD LANGUAGES

All kindergarten students at Villa Academy study both French and Spanish. They use the language to communicate and to express themselves. In a fun, active, and participatory environment, they learn through repetition, movement, songs, and games. Students respond with physical activity to increasingly complex teacher commands to develop oral comprehension and facilitate language acquisition and retention. The majority of class time is conducted in either French or Spanish.