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St. Croix Preparatory Academy
Lower School Curriculum Overview

Classical Education – The Grammar Stage

St. Croix Preparatory Academy is based on a classical model of education. A classical model focuses on providing students with the lifelong educational tools to learn and think for themselves. The classical tradition is grounded in the time-tested methodology of learning called the "Trivium", which recognizes that critical learning skills must precede critical thinking skills. The Trivium methodology is organized into the following three stages corresponding to the general stages of a student's cognitive development:

The first phase of the Trivium is Grammar (grade level K – 4). Grammar emphasizes the facts and rules of each subject upon which later learning is built. This stage focuses on the accumulation of knowledge and the rules related to each particular subject. This mirrors the stage of development where children love to mimic, recite, chant, and memorize. The objective of this phase is to provide each student with a strong foundation of subject matter KNOWLEDGE.

According to E.D. Hirsch, author of Why Knowledge Matters (2016), knowledge is cyclical and systematic. Students need to be taught through direct instruction a coherent, specific content so that they may lead to meaningful thoughts, actions, and applications. By implementing a liberal arts curriculum through the Core Knowledge Sequence, the Lower School's purpose is to build the foundation to prepare them for the Logic and Rhetoric stages of the classical education experience.

Foundation of Curriculum - Core Knowledge Sequence

At SCPA in the Lower School, the Minnesota standards, in addition to the Core Knowledge Sequence, are the foundations of knowledge that are followed to support SCPA's Classical emphasis. Core Knowledge Sequence is a detailed outline of specific content and skills to be taught in language arts, history, geography, mathematics, science, and fine arts. As the core of SCPA's curriculum, it is intended to provide a coherent, content specific foundation of learning, while allowing flexibility to meet Minnesota standards.

The Sequence states the specific core of shared knowledge that all students should learn in U.S. Schools. It should be emphasized that Core Knowledge Sequence is not a list of facts to be memorized. It is a guide to coherent content from grade to grade, designed to encourage cumulative academic progress as children build their knowledge and skills from one year to the next.

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The Core Knowledge Sequence is distinguished by its specificity. While other standards provide general guidelines concerning what students should be able to do they typically offer little help to teachers in detailing specific content or skills. The Sequence provides a solid foundation on which to build instruction. Moreover, because the Sequence offers a coherent plan that builds year by year, it helps prevent the many repetitions and gaps in instruction that often result from vague curricular guidelines.

If you would like more information regarding Core Knowledge Sequence, please visit: www.coreknowledge.org or The Core Knowledge Series: ***What Your ___ Grader Needs to Know,*** by E.D. Hirsch, Jr. There is a book for each grade K-4.

Reading/Language Arts Instruction – RIGGS, Voyages in English & Growing Your Vocabulary – Greek and Latin Roots

Supporting the Core Knowledge Sequence, teachers will use the Riggs literacy program to teach reading, writing, and spelling. The Riggs method is a phonics-based program that began 120 years ago by Dr. Samuel T. Orton. The program teaches students the foundational sounds made by letters and groups of letters. As young students learn to read, they are able to sound out words by using the phonograms already instilled in them. They are able to compare the sounds with words they already know until they eventually speak the correct combination. As they do this, they can identify what is right and what is not. In doing so, students learn to become self-sufficient in reading alone. It offers practical support to teach the following language arts "strands" and various components of cognitive development:

- "Explicit" phonics with dictated initial letter formation
- Phonemic and graphemic awareness
- Correct spelling with the standardized 47 spelling rules of English
- Fluent oral and silent reading
- Oral and print comprehension
- Vocabulary
- Pronunciation and speech
- Creative and organizational composition
- Grammar, syntax, punctuation and capitalization
- Analytical and inferential thinking
- Auditory, visual, verbal, and motor cognitive development in:
    - Attention
    - Discrimination
    - Association
    - Memory

Additionally, students in second, third, and fourth grade will be learning grammar skills from the Voyages in English series. This system fully prepares students to become literate masters of the written and spoken word. The components of this program are the result of decades of research and practice by experts in the fields of grammar, writing, and communication. The result is better writers, readers, listeners, and speakers.

As students prepare to transition to the middle school and learn Latin, the fourth graders will be learning from the Growing Your Vocabulary series. Students need to develop the skills to improve their vocabulary, not only because state standards require it, but because nothing will make students better readers and communicators than having the ability to understand new words, similarities among roots, and from where words come.

Reading/Language Arts Instruction – Imagine It! & STEP

Learning to read well by the end of third grade is a primary goal for every Lower School student. Imagine It! Reading and Language Arts Curriculum is utilized to teach the five key areas of Reading. Students begin instruction in these key areas in Kindergarten so they understand not just how to read and write, but the meaning and purpose of what they are learning.
Five Key Areas of Reading:

- Phonemic Awareness
- Systematic, Explicit Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension

Elementary students at St. Croix Preparatory Academy are assessed in their reading skills utilizing the Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP) assessment. STEP was created by the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute and evaluates key elements of literacy development for students from kindergarten through third grade, including: phonemic awareness, letter/word knowledge, reading accuracy and use of reading strategies, fluency and reading rate, literal and inferential comprehension.

Mathematics – Saxon

The Lower School utilizes Saxon Math for its math curriculum. It is one of the two main math curriculums primarily utilized by classical and college preparatory charter schools (the other is Singapore math). In addition, the approach taken by Saxon fits very well with how St. Croix Prep defines classical education and the trivium. Saxon's instructional methods coincide with the grammar stage.

To develop foundational understanding of math through daily reinforcement, practice, and application of basic skills and concepts, students build conceptual understanding, computational fluency, and problem-solving skills and strategies. This foundation supports a steady progression through higher levels of mathematics, and is in-line with the Core Knowledge Sequence. To ensure retention of mathematical concepts, instruction, practice, and assessment are distributed throughout the year, more time is devoted to reinforcing and building depth of understanding for long-term mastery. Students demonstrate measurable, sustained improvements.

Kindergarten teachers use the foundational kindergarten and first grade Saxon textbooks. Each year thereafter, students learn from the next year's curriculum. The classes in first through fourth grade complete an entire textbook as the students are leveled based on speed of math ability, comprehension, and application.

Science – Core Knowledge Sequence - National Geographic & Interactive Science

Science is the active study of the natural and human-made world, including processes, structures, designs, and systems. Science students use their senses and tools to observe, record and analyze data about the world and make conclusions based on evidence. Scientifically literate students can understand basic science concepts, use skills for doing scientific investigations, solve technical problems for today's world.

In Core Knowledge Science, students are introduced early to topics in earth science, life science and physical science and then revisit many of these topics in greater depth in later grades. Topics include living things and their environments, the human body, cycles in nature, ecology, geology, meteorology, magnetism, simple machines, light and optics, sound, matter, electricity, and concepts in chemistry and physics. Each grade level also specifies basic biographical study of individuals who have made important contributions in science.

At SCPA, kindergarten and first grade students will learn using the National Geographic curriculum. In second, third, and fourth grades, students will be using the Pearson Interactive Science curriculum. Since the Next Gen Science Standards do not include the human body, as does the Core Knowledge Sequence, teachers will be supplementing the curriculum with materials related to the expectations listed in ***What Your ___ Grader Needs to Know*** by E.D. Hirsch, Jr.

Visual Arts & Music – Core Knowledge Sequence

SCPA and The Core Knowledge Foundation sees the arts not as a peripheral part of the curriculum, but as an essential part of the knowledge all children should learn in the early grades.

Early instruction in the arts should be noncompetitive, and provide many opportunities to sing, dance, listen to music, play act, read and write poetry, draw, paint, and make objects. Equally important, children should be exposed to fine paintings, great music, and other inspiring examples of art. As children progress in their knowledge and competencies, they can begin to learn more about the methods and terminology of the different arts, and become familiar with an ever-wider range of great artists and acknowledged masterworks.

Through attaining a basic knowledge of the arts, children are not only better prepared to understand and appreciate works of art, but also to communicate their ideas, feelings, and judgments to others. A good understanding of the arts grows out of at least three modes

of knowledge—creative (i.e., directly making artworks), historical, and analytical. Early study of the arts should embrace all three modes with special emphasis on creativity and active participation.

The arts guidelines in the Core Knowledge Sequence are organized into two main sections: Visual Arts and Music. While the Sequence does not present other arts such as dance or drama as separate disciplines, we acknowledge their importance and have incorporated them in other disciplines (for example, dance is in Music; drama in Language Arts).

Physical Education – MN Guidelines & Core Knowledge Sequence

The State of Minnesota and SCPA have adopted the National Health Education Standards as the basis of the curriculum in the physical education classes. The goal of physical education is to develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity. To pursue a lifetime of healthful physical activity, a physically literate individual:

- Has learned the skills necessary to participate in a variety of physical activities;
- Knows the implications and the benefits of involvement in various types of physical activities;
- Participates regularly in physical activity;
- Is physically fit;
- Values physical activity and its contributions to a healthful lifestyle.

Additionally, the physical education program in the Lower School ensures that the Core Knowledge Sequence addresses the health/science/human body components of the curriculum appropriate at each grade level.