

Waldorf High School - Upper School

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When the youngsters finish the eighth grade they pass over the threshold into the high school. Here many of the same subjects are taught but in a completely different way. In the lower grades the teaching was through feelings, through dramatic stories, through imagery. Now, in the high school, the subjects are grasped through presentation, discussion, reflection and thinking, but the artistic is not forgotten. Teachers continue to deepen their artistic approach – to approach their lessons as an artist, to listen.

Rather than teachers relying on standard textbooks (although some may be used) they choose material that particularly relates to the students in the class. They describe biographies and events; create assignments that allow the student to explore the subjects in various mediums, and make evaluations based on the special nature of the ninth, tenth, eleventh, or twelfth graders. Instead of a class teacher to shepherd the class through the years, there is a communality of specialists who teach the students out of their expertise. One or two faculty members act as class advisors or sponsors over their four high school years.

The high school curriculum

The Waldorf high school curriculum is based on the understanding that each subject has a special place in the life of the student. For example, through science the adolescent learns to observe natural and mechanical processes. Through foreign languages the teenager learns to enter the thinking of another culture and to be able to communicate. In the study of mathematics the student experiences the wonder of form and pattern in number and nature. Through art the students develop inner sensitivity to living processes, through crafts they learn to bring an Aesthetic sense to the practical world. In music the students develop an individual sense of tone and have a social experience of sharing musical works.

The subjects become the stuff of the world through which is woven an integrated view of the universe. In Waldorf education each child is seen as gifted, worthy of the enrichment from all subjects in the curriculum. It

is only in the last two years of high school where some subjects will be electives.

The concept of the main lesson continues from the lower school into the high school, but the content and the form are different. After the main lesson time is over, the rest of the day includes a wide range of subjects such as mathematics, foreign language, English skills, literature, choir, orchestra, art and craft, eurhythmy and physical education. An attempt is made to work out the daily schedule so that the subjects that require the most alertness are placed in the morning.

The special nature of each high school year

The curriculum is related to each year of the high school and to the psychological development of the students. Just as children in the lower school experienced the recapitulation of cultures in their development, a similar parallel exists in the high school. There is a key experience related to each stage of adolescence.

Ninth Grade

Ninth graders have left the second seven-year phase behind, and as happens in most life phases, the first year of a new phase carries with it something of the old. Eighth graders have arrived in modern times; they have become contemporaries with others of their age. As they come into the ninth grade there is a strong feeling of the present. They want to be citizens of the modern world, but as of yet they do not have much understanding of it. They are fascinated with power and strength. The curriculum is woven around these themes. For example, both in physics and in history power and energy are addressed - in physics through mechanics and in history through the study of modern times following the American and French Revolutions.

At the same time ninth graders are focused on the physical body and physical world around them. They are trying to understand what things are all about. In the course History through Art the student learns the way art was expressed visually from the Ancient world through the seventeenth century. Art, science and religion were united in the ancient

world and this was reflected in the art of most ancient cultures, including Egypt.

Most Egyptian art was created from the gods and was not seen by the ordinary person. In Greek art we see the perfect balance of heaven and earth. The gods were portrayed as ideal men, their bodies based on the golden section, viewed as the temple of the gods. Gracefulness, movement, balance, harmony lived in Greek art.' Art of the Roman, Early Christian periods, and the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance are studied.

The students draw and paint, using the great masters as their teachers. Seeing and discussing the different standards of beauty over the ages helps ninth graders see that the present standard is not the only one. They learn that they are capable of producing beauty and they gain confidence in their drawing ability.

Rudolf Steiner felt very strongly that ninth graders should study history through art as a way of refining the crude emotions and distorted inner imagery they carry around with them. He said that such a study would go right down into their physical body and have a harmonizing effect.

In biology the ninth graders study the structure of the physical body, while in geography they study the physical body of the earth - the continents, the mountains, volcanoes, earthquakes and so on. They also study chemistry and foreign languages.

It is wonderful to see ninth graders working with wood, clay, drawing and calligraphy. Some nine graders are trying to make an impact on everything around them. They have trouble being quiet and concentrating, and for them the arts provide a challenge. They have to learn to respect the medium and to work with it, to give themselves up to the process. Other nine graders are still very hesitant, afraid to step out and make a mistake. For them the arts provide an opportunity to connect with the material. Instead of exposing themselves by talking, they can talk with their hands.

Tenth Grade

Tenth graders have come to the next step in maturity. Feeling fairly comfortable in themselves they become interested in process, in development, in metamorphosis. How do things happen, how do

governments form, how did the Word come into being? Whereas the ninth grader needed stability, the tenth grader responds to that which is in motion.

In geography they study the fluids, water currents and waterpower. In biology they study the fluids of the body, circulation, the endocrine system and reproduction. In chemistry they study organic processes of fermentation and distillation and so on. In physics the world of mechanics is studied.

The idea of finding out how things work is very important in the tenth-grade year, and Rudolf Steiner was especially keen that the teachers develop what he called the practical lessons which would include surveying, first aid, typing or shorthand, technical crafts such as weaving and drawing.

In history the tenth graders now go back to the ancient world and see how rivers and climate affected ancient settlements; they trace the evolution of societies from ancient India to the Hellenistic period in Greece.

The study of Greece is of particular importance. It was during the time of ancient Greece that philosophers became conscious of the act of thinking. When the myths of the gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines no longer satisfied the early philosophers' questions, they turned to the world of phenomena and questioned what was the primal "stuff" from which the universe was made. This formed the basis of modern science.

Socrates was put on trial for corrupting the youth of Athens because he questioned traditions and sought to find the meaning of the true, the good and the beautiful. His student Plato introduced the analogy of the cave - the imagination of spiritual reality and earthly illusion. Finally, it was Plato's student, Aristotle, who opened the gates of modern thinking with his emphasis on categorizing knowledge and seeking the laws of nature, drama, politics and of thinking itself.

The tenth grader is experiencing many of the same changes. Out of the previous image-like thinking, pure concepts begin to be formed and grasped. Working with Greek ideas helps youngsters to bring form and order into their thinking as well as balance, movement and grace, that so imbued Greek sculpture and architecture. In literature they study the Word - in the epic, lyric and dramatic poetry of the Iliad or Odyssey, of Greek drama and of the Old Testament.

Many other subjects are included in the tenth-grade year, and of course each school has its own special courses. For example, many schools in the United States include American literature that is appropriate to each grade. For example, in my classes I introduced 19th century American authors such as Hawthorne, Emerson, Alcott, Thoreau, Fuller and Whitman, and English writers such as Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats and Shelley.

In the tenth grade we enjoyed their language, their imagery and their exciting lives. Two years later we looked at Emerson and Thoreau again, but in an analytical way as we traced the clarity and meaning of their thoughts.

Eleventh Grade

Most eleventh-graders have gone through or are going through a very important change - the sixteen/seventeen year change. The mysterious inward journey of the soul is mirrored in the curriculum through the question "Why?"

In the eleventh grade religious questions are addressed in the study of the Roman Empire, the birth of Christianity, the development of Judaism and Islam, the development of the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformation. Just as the Renaissance personalities questioned traditional authority and asked "Why?" so do the eleventh grade adolescents. It gives them satisfaction and insight to see that the questions they ask are the questions of their age. It is exciting to know that to challenge the accepted customs is valuable and necessary for the development of civilization.

Seventh graders respond strongly to the Renaissance because they are experiencing rebellion towards the physical authorities in their lives, but sixteen/seventeen-year-olds experience rebellion in their souls. For example, the doubt mirrored in the reformation is not doubt of whether the authorities have vested power - more a seventh grade concern - but existential doubts such as whether there exists the soul, the spirit, God and eternity.

The emotional or soul life of the adolescent is going through a profound development during this time, and one of the courses taught is History through Music. One major aspect of music through the ages has been an expression of the meeting between the soul and the divine. Listening to

music of the different historical periods and coming to appreciate and understand it helps the youngster develop an inner listening. Just as history through art in the ninth grade fed their craving for imaginative visual images, and history through poetry helped the tenth grader relate to language, history through music in the eleventh grade feeds their craving for tone.

In literature the study of Parsifal on its most apparent level mirrors the inner journey from foolish young knight to the Grail knight, from naïveté to mature wisdom. There is great wisdom embedded in this story. The study of Shakespeare reveals to the eleventh grader the insight into the modern condition in characters such as Hamlet. Shakespeare's genius opens doors to many soul questions.

The world of the heavens is studied in astronomy, and the sub-earthly power of electricity and magnetism is studied in physics.

The eleventh grade is a turning point in the adolescent's Waldorf experience. Out of the richness of the courses teenagers are placed in touch with their inner resources and higher selves.

Twelfth Grade

The theme of the twelfth grade is freedom. The main question asked is "Who?" "Who is behind this doctrine?" "Who is working through that personality?" "Who is really speaking?" Through these questions young people confront questions of destiny, of good and evil, of meaning.

Twelfth graders analyze and synthesize thoughts. They can look at an issue from many points of view, finding the common elements and the central issues. The Waldorf teachers bring example after example for the students to examine and think about.

Some examples from the literature studies are the great works of the nineteenth century Russians, Germans, and Americans. By reading Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* the student comes to understand how a Russian deals with the deep questions of life. In Melville's *Moby Dick* there is the struggle of the American soul with evil and in Goethe's *Faust* the German approach. In each of these studies an understanding of the particular culture is aroused, but more than that is the realization that the issues addressed are universal. The greatness of these writers is that

they have soared beyond their nationality and have given to humanity an artistic expression of questions facing human beings everywhere.

Twelfth graders grapple with the issues of their times. Before they leave school they step into the present. Their teachers examine with them the issues of the day, problems of economics, politics, social issues, nuclear chemistry, modern art, debates over evolution and so on.

The History through Art course of the twelfth grade is the study of architecture in which the students examine the expression of thought in physical form. What is the gesture of an Egyptian pyramid, a Gothic temple, an Art Deco bank, or of a high-tech office building?

Everything twelfth graders study is done by the young Ego penetrating the world - reflecting, shaping thoughts, discussing, sharing. In mathematics the young adults have passed into the abstract world of trigonometry and calculus, in English classes they work with précis and research, synthesizing viewpoints, and analyzing a theme. In their foreign language study they delve into literature, exploring singular themes to their English literature studies - the battle between good and evil and the nature of freedom.

The twelfth graders can reach way back in their education into the imaginative first-grade world of the fairy tale and bring the powerful shaping forces into creative writing. They experience the sweep of history through thousands of years and see patterns and threads working in human life from the kindergarten children they pass every day to their teachers who are quickly becoming contemporaries. They are able to understand the paradoxes of life without losing sight of the ideals. Their eyes are on a distant shore while they prepare to leave their school-home and bid their schoolmates and teachers good bye.

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