

# **The Curriculum of The Chicken Coop School**

## **Our Curricular Approach**

The curriculum at the Chicken Coop School is instead focused on the mastery of skills that will enable children to learn more about whatever they want, whenever they want. This mastery is demonstrated in the projects that they complete throughout the year. The focus is on being aware of both *how* they are learning, as well as *what* they are learning. For example, when studying documents, the children may paraphrase parts of the actual document as a study of how to make sense of a difficult text. When faced with a difficult text in the future, students can use paraphrasing as one tool to understand it. We also practice social skills that enable a group to function positively, which will serve them in all types of personal, professional, and community interactions. These skills are as critical as more traditionally academic ones.

With this in mind, there are certain topics that simply must be studied in order to successfully function in a democracy, a society, or in a relationship. These ideas include:

- How to be actively kind
- How to be an active member of a democracy
- How to take in and communicate information
- How to influence and create change
- How to evaluate sources and information
- How to seek out and consider multiple perspectives

Students get to think about how democracy, society, and relationships work for them and their particular needs to bring them happiness and fulfillment.

## **How We Do It**

**Morning Meeting - a chance to connect and ground ourselves for the day**

**Play - indoor and outdoor games, as well as a playful spirit**

**Kudos - sharing compliments with a randomly selected classmate or teacher each week**

**Social Contract - group-generated guidelines for all our interactions and work here**

**Social Justice and Racial Equity conversations - incorporated in classes and community time to develop our understanding of race, racism, privilege, and oppression**

**Afternoon Jobs - sharing responsibility for taking care of our spaces**

**Reading Letters**

**Group Discussions**

**Independent Projects - a month-long project to dive into a personal interest**

## **Core Subjects**

### **Social Studies**

As the children study at the Coop for two years, the curriculum is on a two-year rotating

schedule. In one year, we study societal ideals (Utopia), and in the other year, we study societal realities (Reality).

## **Utopia**

This year is devoted to studying various historical visions of the perfect society and to each student articulating his or her vision of the perfect society.

The students study various forms of government, economic systems, concepts of the natural world, and a number of modern utopian experiments, all while creating their own utopian communities. The students create models of their utopias and written materials explaining their ideal worlds. For example, as they are working to understand the United States Declaration of Independence, they are penning their own declarations for their own society.

As the students form their worlds, we continue to introduce and explore new questions. For example, what role do children play in different societies? Which would they prefer in *their* utopia? Ideas of labor, material possessions, body adornment, food, religion, worldview, and art are all explored.

## **Reality**

During our Reality Year, we dive into an examination of the stories we tell as societies. Students explore the way many realities can exist in parallel throughout history. Whose stories are told? Whose are left out? We analyze events in history and today from global, local, and marginalized viewpoints. We challenge the origin stories of the United States by examining primary sources and reading “alternative” history texts like *The Indigenous People’s History of the United States* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by James W. Loewen. We dissect the Utopian narratives of government, justice, and society to unearth the lived experiences of real people.

We also explore our potential as change-makers in the world around us. Students learn about historic and modern-day activism around topics like suffrage, civil rights, and climate change, and then complete an advocacy project of their choice.

## **Writing**

At the Chicken Coop School, the children spend time every day working on writing that is important to them. We use the process approach to writing. This approach is not only about learning to express one’s own thoughts in writing; it is a thorough study of words and language - both spoken and written - and how they are used.

An understanding of language is essential for many reasons. With a competence in language, people have the ability to persuade others, and thereby impact their own political, social, and economic reality. When people have the words and the techniques to articulate their experiences, ideas, and understanding of the world, they are able to discuss them.

So the students write everyday. They gather ideas, revise their drafts, edit, and publish works that matter to them. While, as a class, they engage in studies of various genres, the children choose the topics that they will explore. This guarantees that they will always be writing about something that matters to them. Our studies help them portray their thoughts and experiences as accurately as possible. The children emerge with knowledge to convey their ideas well, as well as confidence to do so.

## Reading

The students have 3 one-hour periods of Reader's Workshop each week. During this time, they analyze and discuss a book that they read together. They learn how to search for and understand symbolism, recognize the strategies that an author uses to engage a reader, and to read carefully to notice the subtleties of a text. They are also taught to take responsibility for a literary conversation, and are expected to come to class prepared for a discussion.

The recurring theme in the books is an effort to help the children to see the world from a different point of view.

Some of the texts we use are: *The Canning Season* by Polly Horvath, *Before the Ever After*, by Jacqueline Woodson, *The Benefits of Being an Octopus* by Ann Braden, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor, *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt, *What Lane?* by Torrey Maldonado, *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry and a variety of poetry and short stories.

In addition, students read independently on a regular basis.

## Math

The Chicken Coop follows the Connected Math 3 Curriculum of the University of Michigan. The children are taught the skills necessary to work with whatever problem they encounter. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the State of Massachusetts endorse this curriculum. It is a curriculum favored by many of the progressive and inquiry-based schools in the nation.

The students also use mathematical thinking to complete projects at the farm. For example, the students calculated the dimensions and angles to build a wooden Gaga pit.

### Math 7 Topics

- Study the properties of polygons
- Find patterns among exterior and interior angles of polygons
- Study rational numbers using a number line
- Analyze relationships between positive and negative numbers in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division operations
- Study the order of operations
- Analyze mathematical similarity, ratios and proportions

- Use percents, decimals, fractions and rates to express ratios and proportions
- Graph in four quadrants
- Represent and identify linear relationships in words, tables, graphs and symbols
- Write and solve linear equations in the form  $y = mx + b$
- Find the slope and y-intercept of a line from a graph, table or equation
- Investigate chance processes and analyze probability
- Compare volume and surface area of 3D objects

### **Math 8 Topics**

- Compare and interpret graphs, tables, and equations of linear and nonlinear relationships
- Devise ways to evaluate the success of self-designed bridges and boats
- Represent data using graphs, tables, word descriptions and algebraic expressions
- Investigate the nature of inverse variation in contexts
- Compare inverse variation with linear relationships
- Develop strategies for finding the distance between two points on a grid
- Compare and interpret graphs, tables and equations of linear, exponential and quadratic relationships
- Identify situations that can be modeled by quadratic functions
- Move between the factored and expanded forms of an equation using the distributive property
- Study relationships with multiple variables and to practice a range of symbolic forms of equations

## **Science**

The Science Curriculum is designed to introduce students to the scientific practices of observation, experimental design, and research, and to incorporate those practices into solving authentic challenges and answering genuine questions. We draw from the world around us: the farm's food that we can preserve, our hot classroom that we can cool down, the frozen pond that we skate on. The students have approximately 2 hours of Science each week, and their class includes lab work, experiments, and projects.

Some of the skills we focus on developing are: asking good questions, experimental design, research, data analysis, and presenting information.

## **Farm Life**

One of the most interesting aspects of the Chicken Coop School is that it is situated on a working organic farm, where both work and food are celebrated. In several formal ways, and in an infinite amount of informal ways, the farm impacts the curriculum. At least once each week, the students engage in a structured work project.

## **Additional Subjects**

### **Art**

The art course is structured as a basic survey course. The students study both the history of art and engage in the creation of art. They explore various mediums, including drawing with pencils, paints, and using other materials, such as fabric. Students have approximately an hour of art each week.

### **Physical Education**

The goal of P.E. at the Chicken Coop is to build movement into the week, and to help students build a lifelong love of physical activity. We do a variety of sports and games including Ultimate, soccer, and capture the flag. In the winter, we ice skate on a nearby pond. Students have approximately an hour of P.E. each week.

## **End of Semester Reports and Conferences**

The teachers prepare narrative reports at the end of each semester based on the skills listed below. The students write detailed reflections about their learning in each subject and present these and their portfolios twice a year in a family conference.

- Social Skills
- Reading and Interpreting
- Writing and Presenting
- Researching and Experimenting
- Mathematics
- Approach to Work