

Literacy Curriculum Overview

Introduction: Literacy

The earliest forms of writing evolved as a way of keeping records and accounts in several areas of the world, approximately 5000 years ago. Once writing began to be used to record complex ideas from religion, mythology, magic, science and history, it also began to be a way that people could record their collective and personal thoughts and feelings, and so literature was born. The transition from orality (including all forms of performative expression including speech, story-telling, song, sacred dance) to literacy, in which thoughts are conveyed using symbols that have a degree of permanency, changed the way people related to the world. With literacy human beings became capable of greater individual awareness, but also of abstraction and logic. If orality gives people access to the world they are embedded in through participation, literacy gives us the gift of reflection, analysis, categorizing and a sense for history (which categorizes events into a sequence). Literacy in the narrow sense of reading and writing is also the basis for other vital literacies, media literacy, science literacy, emotional literacy, which all share the basic aspects of articulating and understanding complexity.

Literacy always accompanies or perhaps serves orality. In Steiner Waldorf education great emphasis is placed on good, clear, expressive, sensitive and powerful speaking from kindergarten to the upper school. Poetry, drama, story-telling, rhetoric and conversation are cultivated hand in hand with literacy. For young children, making the transition from living in a world of living oral language to adding the dimension of literacy, where abstract symbols to represent reality, is a hugely complex process required powerful energy and focus, and the coordination of our hands and eyes and thinking. Waldorf education therefore, similarly to most countries around the world, introduces explicit literacy instruction at the age of 6 when the children enter Class 1. This enables children to develop high levels of orality, language familiarity, phonological awareness and fine motor coordination as a foundation on which to begin more formal learning. In order to make the transition to using abstract symbols easier for many children, the introduction of writing and reading is facilitated by artistic methods and movement using the whole body.

As Michael Rose (2007) points out, literacy is neither innate nor simply acquired; it is a highly complex cultural technology. Teaching writing and reading is therefore also a complex process that benefits from clarity, consistency, thoroughness and time. Equally important is the way that children feel about the process of learning to read and write. Research shows that reading enjoyment and positive emotions linked to learning are crucial indicators of long term success. Steiner Waldorf education wants children to enjoy writing and reading and be motivated to do it, so they can express themselves, develop literacy skills and access the imaginative worlds and information this makes possible. Right from the start children are encouraged to use the literacy skills they are acquiring in simple reading and writing tasks so that proficiency can develop. Waldorf children become avid readers with extensive interests and enthusiastic writers, capable of a wide range of writing styles, from narrative, poetry, formal and informal writing, scientific writing and ultimately, critical and academic writing.

Literacy: Purpose of Study

Literacy is central to full participation in academic, economic and civil society. Good literacy skills (knowledgeable action with purpose) show themselves in pupils' ability to speak and write fluently so that they can communicate their thoughts, opinions, ideas and emotions to others. Reading is an essential pre-requisite for building and using knowledge and is essential for accessing information through media of all kinds, supporting intellectual, emotional, cultural, social and spiritual development. Literature is particularly significant in reflecting traditional and critical values. Oral and embodied communication are equally important in formal and informal settings and professional life.

Literacy: Aims

The overarching aim for Literacy in the Waldorf curriculum is to promote high standards of language and literacy by equipping pupils with a strong command of the spoken and written language, and to develop their love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment. The Waldorf curriculum for English aims to ensure that all pupils:

- read easily, fluently and with good understanding
- develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information
- acquire a wide vocabulary, an understanding of grammar and knowledge of linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language
- appreciate our rich and varied literary heritage
- write clearly, accurately and coherently, adapting their language and style in and for a range of contexts, purposes and audiences
- use discussion in order to learn; they should be able to elaborate and explain clearly their understanding and ideas
- are competent in the arts of speaking and listening, presenting their ideas coherently in a range of ways
- express themselves in original and creative ways
- navigate a range of media, and can form judgements about the content of what they encounter

Long Term Curriculum Intent

Language and communication

- Using vocabulary and syntax effectively
- Using oral and textual structures effectively (e.g. gesture and body language, conversation, narrative, poetry, oration, song, blogs, argument, debate, essay, letter, articles, stories, plays and drama, images, film etc)
- Understanding and using oral and textual features (e.g. communicative intention, rhetorical, poetic and literary devices and their effects, style, standard forms, language of image and film etc)
- Mastery of the power of language to influence others: (e.g. code switching, persuasion and argument, creation of emotional response, performance of drama etc)
- Ability to create mutual understanding and/or transmission of information (e.g. clarity, fluency (reading, writing, speaking, listening and understanding))

Health and well-being

- Reading, writing, listening, watching and performing for pleasure; responding emotionally to literature, orature, drama.
- Ability to consciously use and interpret body language, gesture, facial expression etc

Senses

- Having a sense of and feeling for language
- Being able to translate sensory experience into language (e.g. description of an experience, or mental recreation of an experience from description)

Imagination and play

- Ability to create vivid mental imagery from literature, orature or drama
- Using imagination, recollection and recreation of experience and emotion as a basis for creating literature, orature or drama.

Empathy

- Imagining how the people written about, spoken about or presented (including e.g. characters and historical figures) think and feel, and imagining the relationships between them and their differing perspectives
- Imagining the author and their intentions, experiences and perspectives
- Being aware of and sensitive towards an audience
- Recognising and responding to individual and cultural voices

Aesthetics

- Appreciating language used artistically, beautifully and powerfully
- Using language to create something artistic, beautiful or powerful

Inquiry

- Being curious about the history and etymology of words and language, and the historical context of literature, orature or drama.
- Making sense, making meaning, interpreting, inferring
- Noting, exploring and understanding personal, philosophical and emotional responses to literature, orature and drama
- Researching using information through text and oral communication

Democratic participation and society

- Understanding the power of language and text in shaping and influencing political views
- Understanding how language and text can be used to manipulate people's political thinking

Lifelong learning

- Enjoy engaging with literature, orature and drama as a part of personal and community culture
- Using literacy of all types (including digital) to extend personal knowledge and skills

Future thinking

- Communicating with people from different backgrounds and social positions
- Using language to explore and express different ways of thinking
- Constructing biographical narratives

Holistic thinking / Spirituality

- Appreciating the role of language in spiritual experience
- Using language as a powerful way of connecting with others on many levels
- Using and creating literature, orature and drama in the flow of chronology and geography, connecting people across time and space
- Understanding the role of literature in holding a mirror up to the world

Judgement

- Literary analysis and criticism. Interrogating purpose, and how purpose is realised through the relationship of form and content.
- Developing and shaping complex arguments, eloquently articulating a stance