

MANHATTAN COUNTRY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

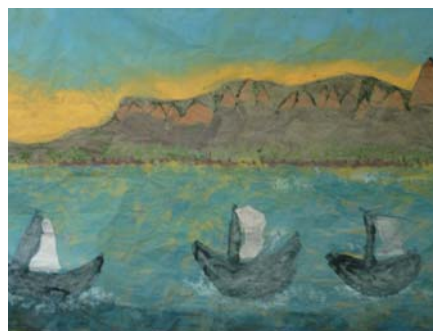
Social Studies



The core program of each class is Social Studies. It is this curriculum that perhaps best enables the school to apply a multicultural perspective and to foster social values. Social Studies start with children's questions. From the curiosity of the youngest to the boldness of the oldest, these questions can surprise the casual visitor, but they are the substance of an MCS education.

Social Studies are integrated into all areas of the classroom through block buildings, graphs, geography and mapping, creative writing, literature, dramatics, and art projects. Trips, oral histories, films, textbooks, news-papers, electronic media, and the Internet are all part of the rich mix of resources through which students learn about their world. Parents, grandparents, and invited guests who are witnesses to history tell their stories and answer children's questions.

Beginning with the 4-5s, topics expand both geographically and sequentially with the children's own expanding world. Diversity and the interaction of cultures become a strong, integrating force that reveals commonalities in the human condition. Young children learn about themselves and their classmates. They go on to explore the school community and city neighborhoods. Historical time is introduced in the context of the question, "What makes a family?" Three generations, beginning with students themselves, become the source of answers. Eventually the curriculum engages questions about New York City's past and present through studies of Native Peoples, their contacts with Europeans and other cultural groups, and the experiences of immigrant communities in New York City.



"What is history?" "Who decides?" are questions integral to the exploration of archaeology, Mesopotamia, and Egypt at the beginning of the Upper School. An emphasis on depth of understanding and MCS as a historical institution is perhaps best exemplified by a year-long study in sixth grade of the American Civil Rights Movement and other modern human rights movements. Finally, seventh and eighth graders delve more deeply into themes of American democracy from the colonial period to the present, including relationships between the United States and the rest of the world.

As students' knowledge expands, active participation in contemporary social justice movements is encouraged. They organize educational forums with speakers who represent multiple views, letter writing campaigns, and lobbying trips to advocate for policies that affect young people.

Language Arts

Children enter Manhattan Country School with all levels of literacy skills. Some are already readers; others develop their skills slowly. At MCS they are surrounded by the symbols of language and taught to recognize the many functional purposes language serves. Charts and signs record classroom activities; dictated stories become books. To encourage an appreciation of language as a vehicle for personal, social, and intellectual exchange, teachers make opportunities to read aloud and quietly, for pleasure and for information. Students enjoy discussing literature and writing.



Children learn to read in many ways and the program takes into account the learning styles of individual students. Formal reading is taught using a combination of methods (sight, phonetic, analytic, and whole language) with individuals and small groups. A love of literature and an ability to analyze it critically are achieved through exposure to a wide variety of genres and authors.



Teachers follow a systematic program of instruction in writing mechanics, vocabulary, spelling, and grammar. As students acquire these skills, they are encouraged to apply them to their own writing. Assignments cover a range of literary forms: expository prose, creative stories, letters, original plays and poetry. Use of print, electronic reference materials, the Internet, and other research skills are built into the program for older students. The teaching of reading

and writing in the upper grades is characterized by a critical exploration of text, voice, and perspective, as well as the historical context of race, gender, and social class.

Spanish

Spanish is part of the culture of the community, and the Spanish program balances language acquisition with cultural experiences. Daily schedules and classroom jobs are posted in Spanish and students use Spanish to communicate with bilingual staff. Posters, signs, and student compositions in Spanish are visible around the school. Once a year students gather in *tertulias* to share poems, songs and writing. The cultural content of the program teaches about the diversity of the contemporary Hispanic world. Links with the Latino community are strengthened by trips to neighborhoods and museum exhibits.



Thematic units introduce vocabulary and simple sentences to the youngest groups. Children learn to follow simple instructions in Spanish as stories, songs and games are integrated into classroom experiences. In the middle years, students use Spanish to enrich the social studies program, in dramatic adaptations of stories, and student-authored books. In the Upper School, students concentrate increasingly on basic literacy and conversational skills, as well as the fundamentals of grammar.

Eighth graders take the New York State Oral Proficiency Examination and generally place at the intermediate level in high school.

Mathematics

The math program develops skills at the same time as it challenges children to become independent mathematical thinkers. Four continuous content themes, recommended by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, are developed throughout the years. They are making sense of data, patterns and predictions, numbers and number sense, geometry and spatial sense. For students this translates into solid preparation for high school math, combining comprehension of mathematical concepts, knowledge of standard algorithms, and the ability to apply them.

A full-time math specialist works with teachers to build a program that follows a sequential curriculum with an appropriate amount of review. Teachers get to know their students as individual problem solvers in the context of whole group and individual instruction. They encourage conventional as well as creative problem-solving strategies.

Math is integrated daily with classroom life of the younger students. Patterns, charts, and games introduce mathematical concepts and symbols. Manipulative materials enable children to illustrate numerical relationships concretely and to solve and explain questions with understanding.



The Upper School math program becomes more textbook-oriented yet maintains connections between math and meaning through an experiential orientation. In preparation for high school, sequential math and geometry programs are taught in seventh grade followed by an introductory algebra program in eighth. Math electives offer extra help and challenges, including the use of graphing calculators.

Science



The science program emphasizes cultivating young children's natural curiosity and their sense of what it means to be a "scientist." Lower School science concentrates on the natural world, particularly Central Park as a nature laboratory, and promotes understanding of biodiversity and the relationships between humans and the earth.

Classrooms contain accessible science tables, reference materials, and living creatures that provide experiences observing life cycles and processes of change. The three

youngest classrooms also have block areas, containing batteries, pulleys, and other equipment used for experimentation with physical science.

For older students, science remains an inquiry-based program in earth science, physics, chemistry, and human biology. It is increasingly taught in a laboratory setting, supplemented by trips to museum exhibits and the MCS Farm. Concepts are introduced through observation, data collection, experimentation, and ultimately the recording of findings through the use of charts, graphs and written reports.

One of our goals is for students to develop a dynamic view of science as a succession of changing theories. Another is to promote students' awareness of ethical dilemmas in science and to empower them to act on the basis of scientific understanding.



Computers

Computers are in all classrooms except those of the youngest groups. Students use computers for writing, Internet research, student presentations, and to archive their work. They go regularly to the computer lab to practice skills and to work on projects developed jointly by classroom teachers and the computer teacher. Older students learn desktop publishing, graphic design, and website design. Seminars eventually enable them to produce a newspaper, follow the progress of scientific and historical research projects, and have e-pals. Computer stations are also located in the library, a design center in the shop, and specialists' classrooms.

The Arts

Manhattan Country School derives strong expression of its values through the arts. Classrooms and common areas exhibit children's paintings, drawings, shop and ceramic projects, and textiles woven at the Farm. Arts offerings are required of students through sixth grade; thereafter, electives offer broader choices.

Music

Choral singing is integral to assemblies held at Thanksgiving, to celebrate winter festivals of light (Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, Three Kings' Day, and the Solstice), the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the end of the school year. The selections represent a variety of cultures and musical styles. Folk, classical, jazz and contemporary songs are programmed alongside freedom songs that embody the school's history and spirit.

The music curriculum supports children's natural love of music. In the 4-5s through 7-8s, class time is given equally to singing and movement. Children progress from unison singing to rounds and three-part harmony. Rhythm instruments develop skills in improvising and accompaniment. The 8-9s and 9-10s study the recorder and join the chorus. The chorus classes for Upper School students, assemblies, and concerts are conducted by a choral director with the assistance of a professional accompanist. Music appreciation is a required course for seventh and eighth graders.

Visual Arts



Students are exposed to a rich art curriculum that combines drawing, painting, clay, collage, printmaking, fabric arts, and other craft-related experiences. An art specialist, based in the art room, combines a structured approach with the encouragement of free expression. Art instruction, however, is not confined to the art room; collaborations involving the art teacher in classroom projects are routine. Backdrops for plays, watercolors depicting trips to the Farm or the Conservatory Garden, and sculptures evocative of cultural and current events are widely displayed.

Shop

Woodworking instruction prepares students to be competent in the basic measurement and design skills of carpentry. They gain experience in the practical use of hand and power tools, work with wood and Plexiglas, and use paper and pencil and computer design programs. Once competent in basic techniques, children may choose to develop their own constructions or work from models. A yearly exhibit of projects-in-progress is a much anticipated event.

Drama

Drama is integrated with daily classroom life. Dramatic play is a favorite choice among young children, while older students enjoy dramatic presentations as a method of sharing knowledge gained through other curriculum. The eighth grade graduation play represents the students' parting gift to the MCS community.



Library



All children have weekly classes in library and are welcome to visit before and after school. The library program excites students about literature, authors, illustrators, the writing process, and the evolution of stories into published books. Library classes include quiet reading, library and research skills, creative projects and games, storytelling, dramatics, and writing.

A circulating collection of more than 6,000 volumes is fully automated. The collection supports the school's multiculturalism and social activism as well as the diversity of interests and needs of the students and teachers. Research is enhanced by the books, print and electronic periodicals, and information from the Internet.

The library is a place where reading becomes both an informative and a joyful experience. Students learn to critique books and recommend favorite books and authors to one another. Even four- and five-year-olds discuss what drew them to a book, what they liked or disliked about it, and why.

Professional authors and illustrators are invited several times each year. Parents and the extended community participate in birthday book donations, Storytelling Night, a Book Fair, and other events. Fifth graders work closely with the Librarian and a public school class to designate an annual "Living the Dream" Book Award to the author and illustrator of a children's book that extends the vision of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Movement and Physical Education

Young children go to the meadow and playground in Central Park for daily outdoor recreation. Other opportunities for physical activity are integrated into movement and music classes each week.

Older students continue to use Central Park but also have physical education classes at a nearby gym. Seventh and eighth grade students meet a physical education requirement by choosing electives in softball, soccer, track, basketball, tennis, and African dance. The physical education or gym program emphasizes physical fitness and develops motor, social, and cognitive skills using drills, exercises, sports, and games. The program is co-educational and stresses individual skill development as well as teamwork and sportsmanship.



Manhattan Country School participates in interscholastic competition through the American International Private School League.