



ST. MARY'S

An IB World School

PRESCHOOL

Jean Piaget, leading cognitive theorist, theorized that a child's mental models, or cognitive structures, are based on the child's activities; engagement makes meaning. Free, unstructured play is healthy and, in fact, essential for helping children reach important social, emotional and cognitive developmental milestones. Piaget's theory is based on the idea that the developing child builds cognitive structures known as mental maps, or schemas, for understanding and responding to physical experiences.

St. Mary's offers an inquiry based program allowing the students to reflect on their learning in order to develop their own understanding of the world. Through teacher directed activities and child initiated play experiences, the student adjusts their mental model to accommodate their new knowledge. Our focus is on creating inquiry based, engaging activities taught in a transdisciplinary curriculum which also involves an important element: play. "Play is the work of the child." – Jean Piaget

Through play, the child learns to negotiate the world around them. Their imagination and creativity flourishes as they role play and invent games and the rules that govern. Through a fine tuned balance of academics and play, St. Mary's students become life-long learners prepared to conquer the challenges that lie ahead of them.

JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM

Four & Five-Year-Old Classrooms

Language

In Jr. Kindergarten (JK), the St. Mary's program builds upon what was taught in Preschool. St. Mary's utilizes the Orton-Gillingham method to teach students the building blocks of reading. This model allows the teachers to teach not only the letters, the sounds, and how to write them, but also how to blend consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words. Learning how to blend three letter words is the beginning of reading instruction. In addition to Orton-Gillingham, St. Mary's utilizes Handwriting Without Tears as the method of instruction for proper letter formation and proper grip of the pencil. This program provides the students with a multitude of materials to begin the proper writing of the letters. On a daily basis, students are engaged in language activities that include teacher read stories from a variety of genre, rhyming, reading comprehension, dictation journals, and language manipulation. Through games, manipulatives, collaborative projects, and direct instruction, the students gain concrete knowledge of upper and lower case letter recognition.

Throughout the year and using a multitude of instructional practices, JK students will understand that listening is important in small and large groups, listen with increasing concentration, listen to a variety of genre, identify main events and relevant points in a story, follow multi-step directions and work collaboratively in a group. Students will learn to spell simple words, rhyme, blend sounds into words, make predictions about a story and understand the different elements within a story such as the characters, the conflict, and the resolution, identify the purpose of the author and the illustrator, and begin to tell their own stories both with and without picture cards.

Math

In JK, math is taught through a hands-on approach in which students are constructing meaning and concept, through increasing levels of abstraction. The teaching of math is taught in relevant and realistic contexts within the math areas of numeracy, algebra, data, measurement, geometry, and mathematical reasoning.

Students in JK will learn to compare and contrast sets of objects, begin to rote count and read whole numbers to 100, begin to write whole numbers to at least 20, begin to understand the concept of estimation, create describe and extend patterns, begin to understand the purpose of graphing data, begin to understand the concept of time through the use of the calendar and understand the sequence of the week and months in the year. Students will also begin to measure through standard and non-standard units of measurement and learn to identify and classify objects according attributes and explain why certain objects do not belong. Block play is essential in order to strengthen student's spatial awareness and achievement on spatial skills tests. Allowing students to build with blocks of different materials, sizes, and non-standard means reinforces their physical and spatial awareness skills.

Science

JK students are introduced to the concept of science through the study of the four strands of study provided by IB, the four strands are: living things, earth and space, materials and matter and forces and energy. JK students will develop their observational skills by using their senses to gather and record information, and they will use their observations to identify simple patterns, make prediction and discuss their ideas. They will begin to explore the way objects function and the basic cause and effect

relationship. Students will examine change over varying time periods and know that different variables and condition may affect change. Students will communicate their ideas using scientific vocabulary modeled throughout the year.

JK students will learn to identify the similarities and differences between themselves and other living things, begin to understand the life cycle of plants and animals, explore animal habitats and how plants and animals affect the environment around us and our responsibility towards maintaining their natural environment. Students will begin to observe how materials change over time and how some materials will cause that change. Building with ramps allows the children learn how to negotiate through the world of physics and gravity and begin to understand what makes things move. Science experiments exploring buoyancy, gravity, change, forces of nature, and living things are integrated into our curriculum throughout the year. The students learn to ask scientific questions, make a hypothesis, record their observations and discuss what happened. The culminating Science Faire in the Spring allows our students to showcase their scientific skills of how to form a hypothesis, conduct an experiment while observing what happens, and finally drawing and recording conclusions.

Social Studies

Students will gain an understanding of people and their lives focusing on themselves, their friends and families, and their immediate environment. They will gain an increasing awareness of themselves in relation to the various groups to which they belong. They will gain a sense of place and the reasons why particular places are important. They will also gain a sense of time, and recognize important events in their own life and how time and change affect people. There are three strands of social studies JK students will inquire into: history, geography and society. Within the three strands, JK students will begin to understand that events occur in an order, use and understand common words for the passing of time, know the days of the week and month, and discuss events in the past. Students will understand and identify what places are like and where they are in relation to where the student is and begin to understand that different places have different features. The students will begin to recognize what is fair, unfair, right, and wrong and begin to make diplomatic decisions. They will begin to recognize how their behavior affects others and the community around them.

The Arts

Art is an important component to our daily curriculum as it allows each child to develop in their imagination and creativity as well as provide an additional means to express their emotions. Each day, unstructured art is available to the students through the art/writing center in addition to a planned art activity. We focus on process driven art rather than product driven to allow all our students the ability to plan and create a piece of art they are engaged in and are proud of at the completion of their work. In JK, we begin to introduce the students to classic artists in history such as Van Gough, Kandinsky, and Cassatt. By learning about the artists, their medium of choice and common themes they produced, the students begin to recreate famous works while still adding their personal touch to their art.

Dramatic play is another essential art form in the preschool classroom. Through dramatic play, children are provided the opportunity to role play. Through role play, children take on roles of family members, peers, teachers, and learn to make sense of the world through their experience. Language confidence and acquisition is an important component to dramatic play as they interact with their peers in a variety of roles and settings. In order to continue in dramatic play development, the theme of our dramatic play changes throughout the year, often supporting our current unit of inquiry.

Music

Music allows the child to learn concepts such as rhythm, melody, and pace in a fun and interactive way. Music is incorporated throughout the day with the availability of musical instruments, such as rhythm sticks, drums, and shakers, in the classroom as well as singing together as a group in circle time. Music is also a means to teach concepts such as numeracy and literacy and is integrated into our core curriculum.

Gross Motor Skills and the Outside Curriculum

Through an abundance of materials provided for outside play such as bikes, climbing structure, balls, and organized games, our students are strengthening their large muscles, core strength, and balance. In addition to the daily materials provided, St. Mary's provides additional outside activities to ensure each child is engaged during recess. These activities might include easel painting, gardening, or dramatic play.

Fine Motor Skills

Fine motor skills are the small muscles needed to learn how to write. Through the use of clay, cutting practice on a variety of materials, using tweezers, art, and lacing activities, our students are strengthening those necessary muscles daily. Once a student has demonstrated strong fine motor skills, we will begin to teach proper pencil grip leading to writing success.

IB Units of Inquiry

Through the use of a transdisciplinary IB programme, Jr. Kindergarten students are learning about the world around them and where they fit within that world. There are four units of inquiry taught in the year and are transdisciplinary in nature in that they encompass all areas of learning and developmental growth. The units of inquiry for Jr. Kindergarten are:

- **Peace Be With You:** The central idea is “when we express ourselves in a positive way and conflict is managed, peace is created. This unit is the first unit taught in the year and sets the tone from the first day of school. The students inquire into conflict resolution, what peace means, and how our choices contribute to a peaceful environment. Throughout this unit, the students become very good communicators and conflict is minimal as they begin to collaborate and work together to solve problems.
- **Energize Me:** this unit of inquiry is all about healthy choices and being a healthy person. The central idea of “healthy choices energize me” leads the students to inquire into nutrition, the importance of exercise, and how healthy choices affect how they feel. There is a lot of gross motor development within this unit as the students learn to build their own obstacle courses and teach others how to navigate them, begin to climb the rock wall and do yoga.
- **I'm A Scientist:** The central idea is “through observation and investigation, we learn about how our world works.” The students are deeply engaged in a rich science and math curriculum throughout this unit as they inquire into the world around us through investigation of forces and energy, materials and matter, and living things. Students learn to formulate a hypothesis, record their observations, and verbalize a conclusion with all their science experiments. The students

also engage in a Science Faire as the culminating summative assessment for this unit of inquiry. The Science Faire allows the students to showcase their “scientist” skills and abilities by teaching others about their science experiments.

- **Buzz on Bugs:** This is a student favorite as it’s all about insects. The central idea is “we need to understand and respect insects and how they help our environment”. The students inquire into the life cycles of insects, insects in their natural habitat, how insects affect us, and how we can respect insects.

PRESCHOOL TECHNOLOGY

All Preschool classrooms are equipped with video cameras, picture cameras, and light tables. Light tables provide the opportunity to explore science and light through engaging hands on activities. A variety of materials are placed on the light table such as x-rays and glass encased insects and small animals. Students are introduced to technology and curriculum content through interactive media to aide in learning and retention. Video and picture cameras allow teachers to capture students engaging in activities throughout the day. This equipment provides the means to create digital and video reflections for both students and parents. Videos capture the true essence of student learning at this young age, including dramatic play, social interaction with peers, creative interpretation, and making cognitive connections using ramps.

The Jr. Kindergarten program features three computers in each classroom and a Smart Table, used as an interactive computer for students in small groups. Learning games are designed and developed based on the current IB Unit of Inquiry. The Smart Table offers another method of visual and hands on instruction, encouraging students to actively participate in their own learning. The Smart Table and learning games reinforce concepts that are being taught in the curriculum and create a fun, social and interactive learning center in the classroom.

WEEK OF THE YOUNG CHILD

St. Mary's is proud to be both an IB World School with a Preschool that is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC is both an accrediting agency and advocate for young children. Part of being an NAEYC accredited school is being able to participate in Week of the Young Child (WOYC). NAEYC describes WOYC as:

“The Week of the Young Child is an annual celebration sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the world's largest early childhood education association, with nearly 90,000 members and a network of over 300 local, state, and regional Affiliates. The purpose of the Week of the Young Child is to focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families and to recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs.

NAEYC first established the Week of the Young Child in 1971, recognizing that the early childhood years (birth through age 8) lay the foundation for children's success in school and later life. The Week of the Young Child is a time to plan how we--as citizens of a community, of a state, and of a nation--will better meet the needs of all young children and their families.”

During WOYC, St. Mary's Preschool designates each day within the week-long celebration with a specific learning theme. Our goal is to showcase how much young children learn through play. Past themes have been: buildings and architecture, language and literacy, the arts, and through the senses. Within these themes the students are “playing” yet learning so much. Through buildings and architecture, the students are learning math concepts, spatial awareness, and how to building with materials other than blocks. This week long celebration takes place every April and is a favorite of our teaching faculty.