Dear Parents of the Third Grade,

A word about the coming year: We are about to embark upon a year, which will be dominated by the nine-year change. How will the Waldorf curriculum help your child move through this important developmental stage?

Have you noticed a concern with TEETH among third-graders and their parents? (If not, you will!) Now that the second dentition is well underway, the teeth are struggling to find a comfortable resting place in each particular mouth. The process can be a struggle, as witnessed by the strange and elaborate devices covering the faces of some 3rd and 4th grade students. However, it is not only the teeth that are changing, but the mind and soul as well. New capacities for thinking and judgment are emerging. The "unity of all things" experience of the younger child is giving way to an inner/outer dichotomy. "I am here, and the world is there," may bring self-consciousness, and a critical view of oneself and others. We may see a renewed interest in the child’s birth and toddler-hood. Strong opinions and stronger likes and dislikes are emerging. A new realistic view of the world is beginning to manifest. (Please refer to my notes on the nine-year change.)

Parents and teachers are challenged at this time to continue to meet the children with sensitivity and understanding. A bridge must be built between the outer and the newly felt inner world. Moodiness and the expression of strong feelings are usually best met with a patient, listening ear without attempting to analyze or moralize. The child needs to feel the steadiness of a trusted authority: one who won’t "hook in" to his or her own turbulent feelings.

The hands-on experience of the Waldorf third grade curriculum includes cooking, building, working with fibers, preparing the soil, planting, tending, and harvesting. Each has the purpose of connecting the child in a very concrete way to the material world. In a sense, the world is "demystified" with a growing knowledge of the "how-to's" of life. This knowledge is then augmented by the development of those archetypal skills that are most necessary for humanity's survival on the earth, those having to do with insuring food, clothing and shelter.

What is the primary story material or literature shared with the Third grade? The Old Testament or Hebrew Bible is something of a bridge between folk tale and recorded history. These stories recapitulate the inner mood of the child at this age. The theme is law, divine justice and the difficulty of living up to one’s higher self.
The story of Creation in the early weeks of the school year paints a powerful picture before the child’s consciousness of how the earth and its inhabitants came to be. In the story of “The Fall,” we see Adam and Eve cross a threshold into a new consciousness that requires they learn to consciously revere what was formerly loved unconsciously. The stories of Cain and Abel, Jabal, Jubal, Thubal-Cain, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob, Leah and Rachel, Joseph and his brothers, Moses, Joshua, Naomi and Ruth, David and Saul are very strong pictures of the inner struggles each individual will face in life. It is quite amazing how the children become involved in the struggles of the "children of Israel" and their attempts to follow God’s covenant. They are a little surprised by the frequency of wrongdoing on the part of grown-ups, but they instinctively know how difficult it is to be "perfect."

During the first weeks of school the children, as creators themselves, will paint the seven days of creation and learn the opening verses of Genesis in English (and hopefully in Hebrew). Later they will make their own Torah scroll, writing the first paragraph in Hebrew.

We will also look forward to a few daily outings to Apple Hill and Grist Mill State Park as the children begin to prepare for the Thanksgiving dinner they will host for their parents. Other field trips to Valhalla Farm, etc. will also be scheduled.

As their perception of the world becomes ever more objective, 3rd graders have a natural desire to quantify and measure. Measurement is introduced as an outgrowth of human activity and the parts of the body, i.e. cubit (arm and hand), fathom (both arms stretched out), uncia (thumb) and hand. Together we will measure the size of Noah’s ark (they’ll be quite surprised to find it would have stretched almost the entire length and breadth of the lower meadow!). In fact, in all of our practical work, we will continually come back to measurement; from cooking to building to digging to working with money to time telling to moving through the seasons of the garden. We will measure our classroom, our school, our own individual bedrooms and ourselves.

We will also begin our six-year journey of geography with our study of shelters and how the environment around them lent to their design. The children will build mini-shelters, visit different types of buildings, learn what it takes to build a house (from the site selection, architectural drawings, legal permits.... to moving in) and with parent help, (and perhaps help from some of my ex-students during Sacramento Waldorf’s High School work week!), we will construct a building project
of our own- perhaps a chicken coop for the school.

Over the course of the year we will review and extend arithmetic skills. We will continue to work with the 4 processes: "carrying" in addition, "borrowing" for subtraction, multiplication and division. The mastery of the 12 times tables by Christmas will be one of our goals. Special recognition will be given to each student as s/he masters a particular table. We will also be extending our knowledge of place value, and begin working with double-digit multiplication.

In our grammar work the simple parts of speech: "doing" (verbs), "naming"(nouns and pronouns) and "describing" (adjectives and adverbs) words will be introduced. Simple punctuation, paragraphing and capitalization will be practiced along with the different types of sentences. We will continue to work with phonics; long and short vowels, plurals and compound words, as well as begin to learn basic spelling rules. Vocabulary words will be drawn from the story content and reflected in the students' main lesson books. The students will begin to compose some of their own stories in their own words (after hearing and retelling the story). In this way, spelling correctly will gain further importance.

Reading will be a major focus of the year. As well as reading from our main lesson books and other texts, the class will have reading groups and /or individual reading time on a daily basis. Practice in choral reading, reading in pairs and individually, will emphasize proper intonation.

The "farming" block in spring will be punctuated by the class' first overnight field trip to Full Belly Farm for a three-day/two night camping trip. This experience will include milking a cow, making butter, watching the shearing of a sheep and then gathering the wool for future projects, harvesting crops, gathering flowers, and swimming in Cache Creek.

This year promises to be very busy and lots of fun. I will need lots of helping adult hands, so get ready! I look forward to the honor of teaching your children.

With warmest regards,

Janet Langley
Third Grade Class Teacher