



Washington Waldorf School



FOSTERING PASSIONATE, LIFELONG READERS

READING AT WWS

What age is truly the right age to learn to read? It depends on the individual.

We introduce reading in a developmentally appropriate way, when students are more comfortable with the written word and fully ready to engage.

We begin Implicit Literacy work in our Early Childhood programs, using a large oral vocabulary, rhyming phonemes and attentiveness to sound. Other physical capacities needed to read and write including eye tracking, left/right brain crossovers, midline inhibition, and proper pencil grip are supported in our play-based Kindergartens.

Explicit Literacy instruction begins in the first grade by teaching consonants and vowel names and sounds through an artistic approach of drawing, painting, movement, and speech. This process engages the children with great interest, and by the end of first grade, children are writing and reading sentences and short texts.

Instruction includes word families, phonological and phonemic awareness, concept imagery, and reading and writing high frequency sight words. Students typically begin formal, smaller peer reading groups during second grade.

This approach to teaching literacy has been proven to build a solid base for advanced comprehension and vocabulary skills in later years.

WHAT, HOW & WHY?

See a detailed breakdown of our approach to literacy on the other side of this page. 

“ *I have seen what a difference the more intimate, lower-stress environment of WWS has had on my children - they are more confident, curious, outgoing, and excited to learn new things.*

-Kate S. Early Childhood & Lower School Parent

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WILL MY EARLY READER BE BORED?

Because we don't think that learning to read is a race, we don't expect kids to develop their reading skills on the same timeline. Our early age classrooms are filled with a range of reading levels. We do not discourage reading if a child is ready for it.

Our lessons are flexible for the range in the class and we arrange reading groups to support each child wherever they are on their reading journey.

THE WALDORF APPROACH TO LITERACY

In our early childhood and early grades classrooms, we build literacy from the ground up — through movement, music, handwork, and play. Developing fine motor control, gross motor confidence, auditory memory, visual tracking — each of these experiences is purposefully preparing the child for the moment when letters and words come alive on the page. Reading, in the Waldorf view, is not a skill to be drilled but a capacity to be grown, so that the ability to read emerges with confidence and joy.

What?

How?

Why?

ORAL LANGUAGE & LISTENING COMPREHENSION

- storytelling without visuals
- puppet shows
- learning and reciting verses from memory

- build vocabulary
- follow narrative sequence
- comprehend meaning beyond decoding words on a page

AUDITORY DISCRIMINATION & PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

- daily songs, verses, tongue twisters, and clapping rhythms
- call-and-response games
- learning poetry by ear

- distinguish similar sounds
- segment words into syllables
- connect spoken sounds to written letters (phonics foundation)

VISUAL TRACKING & PERCEPTUAL SKILLS

- sewing, weaving, knitting
- painting and form drawing
- eurythmy movement sequences

- track lines of text left-to-right
- distinguish letter shapes
- maintain place on a page

GRAPHOMOTOR SKILLS (HANDWRITING)

- cutting food for snacks
- drawing with crayons
- sewing
- modeling with beeswax

- hold a pencil
- form letters
- understand spatial organization (left-to-right)

BILATERAL COORDINATION & CROSSING THE MIDLINE

- bean bag games
- cross-crawl movements
- jump rope
- clapping games that cross the body's center line

- coordinate both hands (holding a book while turning pages)
- support the neurological integration that underlies smooth left-to-right reading

ATTENTION & WORKING MEMORY

- seasonal verses repeated over weeks
- multi-step movement games
- learning long poems gradually

- hold a sentence in mind while decoding
- retain what was read at the start of a paragraph by the end of it