

5th grade should not feel alien...



What's going on in there?



What is it like to be in the shoes of 5SH?

THERE ARE **5** YEARLONG THEMES

1. QUESTIONS LEAD THE WAY.

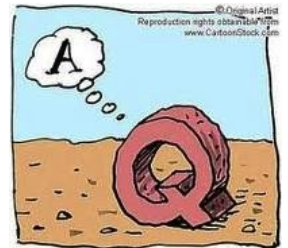
In 5SH, we do *not* say, "I don't get it. We say, "I do not get it... YET!"

As the writer Margaret Wheatley said in her article, *Willing to Be Disturbed*, (See link in our class webpage on readings.) "We weren't trained to admit we don't know. Most of us were taught to sound certain and confident, to state our opinion as if it were true. We haven't been rewarded for asking more questions rather than giving quick answers.

This is not the case in 5SH.

As was stated in another article called, *The Art and Architecture of Powerful Questions* by Eric Vogt (see link on our webpage), "Nobel laureats will often attribute their experience of successful scientific achievement to asking the right questions."

- Questions are a prerequisite to learning
- Questions are a window into creativity and insight,
- Questions motivate fresh thinking
- Questions challenge outdated assumptions
- Questions lead us to the future.



And questions will be in the future of 5SH
as we uncover the wondrous and perplexing world we live in.

2. COLLABORATION and COMMUNICATION ARE KEY!

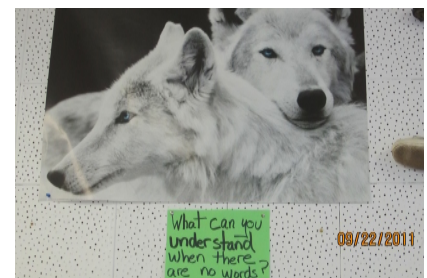
In the *Willing To Be Disturbed* article, Margaret Wheatley also said, "We have the opportunity many times a day, everyday, to be the one who listens to others - curious rather than certain... When we listen with less judgment, we always develop better relationships with each other. It's not differences that divide us. It's our judgments about each other that do that. Curiosity and good listening bring us back together.

3. IT TAKES MORE GRAY MATTER TO DEAL WITH GRAY MATTERS.

In other words, one must have flexible thinking to deal with situations that are not so black and white. The beauty of the world is bundled up between the layers of simplicity and complexity.

4. WHAT CAN BE COMMUNICATED WITHOUT WORDS?

In 5th grade we study birds and we study animal behavior (humans too), We will learn to recognize and learn from the intricate language that is communicated without words. 5th graders need to see how powerful body language is in animals and in their own behavior.



5. GETTING IN THE SHOES OF OTHERS (perspectives) LEADS TO LEAPS OF LEARNING AND DEEPER CONNECTIONS.

All the subjects we study will be more meaningful and will make more sense if we are willing to try on new shoes – even if the shoes belong to a table, a silversmith in 1775, a crow or a nemesis.

This year is about having more RESPONSIBILITY:

5th graders are pre-teens. They are becoming more independent while at the same time better able to see their connection to and impact upon the world. 5SH students will be given more responsibility to take care of *their* classroom, work, classmates and community. There will be more chances to shape research projects to match their own interests and learning styles. And just as 5th graders appreciate choice, they also benefit when expectations are clear and firm.



DAILY ROUTINES AND ORGANIZATION



Routines and organization are particularly comforting and important now. Even though students are older and can do more, they also have big changes happening (cognitively, physically, etc.) and these changes can be distracting. Thus in 5th grade students will...

- arrive to school early enough to get settled and ready.
- exercise to relax and strengthen muscles and circulate oxygen into the brain and blood. We will do cardio work, core work and yoga to help students get stronger, more balanced and have some stress relief.
- learn how to listen to and follow directions by looking at the speaker, taking notes, sitting up straight, and having self awareness of distractions.
- plan time wisely so time is well spent on assignments in class and home.
- maintain an organized binder, backpack, desk and classroom.
- learn study skills such as underlining or highlighting key text, two column notes, leaving tracks of thinking and how to communicate ideas so they can be heard and understood.
- be given strategies for dealing with problems or worries when they rise up.

Homework (a.k.a. P.S. Work)

Homework should *help your child*. It should do the following:



- connect what we do within the classroom to the outside world
- reinforce what we have studied during the day
- stimulate and strengthen your child's brain
- give your child a better understanding of his or her own learning style and a chance to explain his or her own thinking.
- It should not be stressful. It should not be boring.

And for parents,..

- homework should not be stressful (or boring for that matter) for you either. It should give you a sense of the kind of work we are doing.
- It should give you an opportunity to talk about school.
- It should help you have a better sense of your child's progress or needs.
- And, it should help you set up systems that make homework a positive time in your house rather than a battle. These skills will help a great deal as your child heads into the middle school and beyond.

Goldilocks Guide To What Is Too Much And What Is Too Little Homework?



In 5SH we have a “Work hard, but no stress” policy. To do that, we must find the right balance. That is why we have the Goldilocks Guide To Homework. Homework (a.k.a. P.S. Work) should take around 1 hour plus 20-30 minutes of reading. There are usually three parts: Main, math and skills/other. The main assignment should take around 20-30 minutes, the math should take 15-20 minutes and the skills/other should take 10-15 minutes. If your child is consistently speeding through assignments, then the work is not challenging enough. If the work becomes pain staking and is consistently taking more than one hour, then adjustments must be made.

The *only* way we can solve problems that happen after school is if we know where the confusion occurred. It is very important that your child become more aware of the questions or frustrations he or she has and can articulate them. Instead of worrying about not being able to complete the whole assignment, he or she should attempt to figure out what is possible and then write down parts that were confusing. Doing that might come as a relief, and it is an important skill unto itself.

If your child forgets the homework or leaves a book-group book or journal behind, please do not rush around trying to get it. This causes stress and is counterproductive to our no stress policy. Your child should figure out how to go back and get it or write a note explaining (in detail) why the homework didn't get done and what he or she plans to do to get it done.

The only kind of stress we like is when people stress the positive. It's helpful to know when things are going well. If your child finds a particular kind of assignment clear, fun, or inspiring we should know. We can keep that information in mind for future projects. And, if you have memorable discussions or see progress happening at home, it helps us to know this too.

5th Grade Curriculum Areas



Social Studies

In 5SH, we are focusing on the following essential ideas:

In order to understand our government and how it emerged, we must pay attention to the tension between *individual rights and the common good*. *This tension is something we can see throughout our country's history and within the walls of our classroom.*

We will begin the year by looking at our three branches of government how it connects to the laws in our classroom. 5SH students are our legislative branch, Ms. Homer and I are the executive branch and our principal and vice principal, Ms. Cook and Mr. Youkilis, are our supreme court.

We will then begin to look at how and why our country became a country.

Life in the English Colonies

- Why do people migrate?
- How does where we live affect who we are?
- Who was a citizen, who wasn't, and why was that?

American Revolution and War for Independence

- When is appropriate to challenge authority?
- What is worth fighting for? What are the human costs of war?

Writing the Constitution

- Why do we need government?
- How do we balance the Common Good with individual liberty?
- How can leadership be prevented from becoming too powerful?

New Nation

- Why do we have political parties?
- Why did the United States expand its territory?
- How did America democratize and who was included or excluded?

The plot of history often has its setting along rivers. Note: That is why we have a river table. For a good part of the year, our river table will become the Charles River, where a great deal of history has taken place.

Science

Our science units are:

- Recycling and Environmental Protection
- Birds and Animal Behavior
- Light & Optics,
- Sound
- Astronomy/Moon (short unit)
- Introduction to Adolescence

Note-taking, expository writing, conducting experiments, and research techniques are all woven into our science units. Again, field trips and guest speakers will be part of our curriculum. The art of questioning will be key as we delve into each of the science topics we'll explore.

Language Arts

Reading

Many of the strategies we use come from the research done by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis. Their book *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding* is a book you also might enjoy

Reading strategies we use in the 5th grade:

- Monitoring Comprehension – Following ones inner conversation and leaving tracks of thinking
- Making Connections
- Asking Questions
- Inferring
- Visualizing:
- Determining Importance:
 - This one is key for most 5th graders. As you know, sometimes everything seems important in the text, and sometimes none of it seems important. Figuring out what is and isn't important is a difficult, but important skill.
- Summarizing and Synthesizing: Note, you will probably notice that they are being asked to summarize main ideas more often now.



Writing

“I need to write to find out what I’m thinking.” Larry Gelbart, a successful comedy writer (*Tootsie, M.A.S.H.*) was asked why he continued to write even though he had achieved fame and money. He said, **“I need to write to find out what I’m thinking.”** That quote is true for many of us.

Learning to write well is one of the most difficult and fulfilling parts of school. It is not easy to take the myriad of ideas, revelations, feelings and questions your children have and get them down onto a piece of paper. On top of that they need to learn to organize their thinking, and then make sure grammar, punctuation, capitalization and neatness have been considered. It is no wonder that so many students resist it. On the other hand, once they get started and the ideas start to flow, writing can be one of the most satisfying parts of our day. Not everything we write in the 5th grade will have to be revised, but at all times there will be something the class is working on that will take more than one draft. There will be a wide variety of writing projects we will partake in this year.

1. **Scribbler's Notebook:** We will use a Scribbler's notebook to write what's on our minds. These ideas might flow from journal prompts, topics the class brainstorms, or stories, poems, observations and inventions that come popping into your child's head.
2. **Writing Workshop** will be a more formal sequence of steps. Often students will share their pieces (drafts along the way) with their peers to get feedback and hear how their words sound.
3. **Expository Research Writing:** Current research shows that the bulk of information adults need to read and write is non-fiction. With that in mind, we will focus on the steps needed for this type of structured writing.
4. **Poetry** - we will read and write poetry all year – poetry is an excellent tool for enforcing a critical skill - and I quote, 'Omit Needless Words.' taken from the book 'Elements of Style' by Strunk and White.
5. **Cursive/Calligraphy/Handwriting:** If you ask many students if they like to write, they often think you mean do they have good *handwriting*. Some students who don't like to print, enjoy cursive. We will review how to do cursive and ask students to write some assignments in cursive. We don't have enough time in the day to spend hours on penmanship, but we believe that writing so your words can be easily read, and so the task is not laborious is important.
6. **Computers:** We will increase our knowledge, speed and accuracy on the computer. Students are invited to do many assignments on a computer.
7. **Grammar:** 5th graders will continue to learn rules of grammar and punctuation. For example, many 5th graders are ready to learn more about commas.
8. **Spelling and Vocabulary Development**
Brookline is continuing with the program called, 'Words Their Way'. The spelling/vocabulary program will be tailored to your child's skills and areas of strength. We will also focus on expanding everyone's vocabulary.



MATH

Brookline's math program in 5th grade is THINK MATH. We will work so that each student becomes an efficient mathematician who is confident in his or her own abilities. Students will further develop their ability to make logical choices while choosing a strategy for problem solving, and we will focus on how to communicate reasoning in a clear and specific format.

We will also focus on:

- Test-taking strategies - it does relieve stress and improve outcomes.
- Math writing and reflection; articulation of math thinking
- Memorization of math facts
- Extensions in math

Urban Improv and Farm School:

Urban Improv is a 4-week program that usually takes place in the winter/spring. By participating in an innovative, interactive curriculum, students develop skills for problem solving, cooperation, and leadership. Urban Improv uses structured theater improvisation to teach violence prevention, conflict resolution, decision-making, and impulse control.

Farm School: In June, we will head to the Farm School for 3 days and 2 nights. The Farm School is in Athol, MA, (Yes, Athol is its name). In any case farm school is a place where students can work the land and take home the cultural history, vital experience and personal identity that farms nurture.

8:30 That's it. You will be dismissed if...

- you think it's time to leave or you might fall over
- you are feeling a bit odd being at school this late at night