

ABOUT CORE KNOWLEDGE

At our school your child will be offered a very special curriculum called Core Knowledge. It is based on some of the ideas presented by E. D. Hirsch, Jr. in his well-known books, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* and *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*, and further developed by the Foundation he established in 1986.

As your child proceeds in school from month to month and year to year, he or she will be exposed to a broad range of historical, scientific, and cultural topics that will build on one another and prepare the student for later educational success. This exposure to a wide array of subject matter is intended not only to develop cultural literacy but also to build a strong vocabulary, now recognized, along with decoding skills, to be absolutely necessary for *true* reading comprehension. Cultural literacy, or familiarity with the traditions and knowledge commonly shared by educated citizens in a society, is sometimes acquired in informal ways as well as by formal study. Core Knowledge tries to develop cultural literacy in a way that is systematic but leaves lots of room for creativity. This curriculum eliminates some of the gaps and repetitions that frequently characterize a curriculum in which textbooks and programs are selected more or less at random.

We know that your cooperation with us and your support of your child's education is crucial. Research has proven it time and time again. Parental involvement can make the difference between success and failure in school.

KNOWLEDGE BUILDS ON KNOWLEDGE

We learn new knowledge by building on what we already know. Students in Core Knowledge schools know a lot because they are offered a coherent sequence of specific knowledge that builds year by year. For example, in sixth grade they should be ready to grasp the law of conservation of energy because they have been building the knowledge that prepares them for it, as shown in this selection from the physical science strand of the Core Knowledge Sequence:

Kindergarten

- * Magnetism, the idea of forces we cannot see
- * Classify materials according to whether they are attracted to a magnet

First Grade

- * Basic concept of atoms
- * Names and examples of the three states of matter
- * Examine water as an example of changing states of matter in a single substance
- * Properties of matter; measurement

Second Grade

- * Lodestones: naturally occurring magnets
- * Magnetic poles: north-seeking and south-seeking
- * Magnetic fields (strongest at the poles)
- * Law of attraction: unlike poles attract, like poles repel

Fourth Grade

- * Atoms: all matter is made up of particles too small to see
- * Concept of electrical charge: proton has positive charge; electron negative charge; neutron has no charge
- * Unlike charges attract; like charges repel
- * Properties of matter: mass, volume, and density
- * The elements: basic kinds of matter

Fifth Grade

- * Atoms are in constant motion; electrons move around the nucleus in paths called shells or energy levels
- * Atoms form molecules and compounds
- * The Periodic Table
- * Energy transfer: matter changes phase by adding or removing energy
- * Expansion and contraction

Sixth Grade

- * Kinetic and potential energy
- * Heat and temperature

WHAT IS CORE KNOWLEDGE

Solid: Many people say that knowledge is changing so fast that what students learn today will soon be outdated. While current events and technology are constantly changing, there is nevertheless a body of lasting knowledge that should form the core of a K-8 curriculum. Such solid knowledge includes, for example, the basic principles of constitutional government, important events of world history, essential elements of mathematics and of oral and written expression, the periodic table of the elements, widely acknowledged masterpieces of art and music, and stories and poems passed down from generation to generation.

Sequenced: Knowledge builds on knowledge. Children learn new knowledge by building on what they already know. Only a school system that clearly defines knowledge and skills required to participate in each successive grade can be excellent and fair for all students. For this reason, the Core Knowledge Sequence provides a clear outline of content to be learned grade by grade. This sequential building of knowledge helps ensure that children enter each new grade ready to learn and helps prevent the repetitions and gaps that characterize much of current schooling.

Specific: A typical state or district curriculum says, “Students will demonstrate knowledge of people, events, ideas, and movements that contributed to the development of the United States.” But which people and events? What ideas and movements? Core Knowledge clearly specifies important knowledge in language arts, history and geography, math, science, and the fine arts.

Shared: Literacy depends on shared knowledge. To be literate means, in part, to be familiar with a broad range of knowledge taken for granted by speakers and writers. For example, when sportscasters refer to an upset victory as “David knocking off Goliath,” or when reporters refer to a “threatened presidential veto,” they are assuming that their audience shares certain knowledge. One goal of Core Knowledge is to provide all children, regardless of background, with the shared knowledge they need to take part in our national literate culture.

THE CORE KNOWLEDGE SEQUENCE

The Core Knowledge Sequence is a detailed outline of specific content to be taught in language arts, history and geography, math, science, and the fine arts. As the basis of at least 50% of a school’s curriculum, it can provide a solid, coherent foundation for learning, while allowing flexibility to meet local needs. The following sample-one subject for each grade-will give you an idea of the specific content requirements of the curriculum. Parents interested in more detail might obtain the Sequence, ask to see the year-long plan, or consult the Core Knowledge website. Teachers are free to teach the subject matter as creatively as they like, but the content is specified and builds from year to year.

Kindergarten: *History*-overview of the seven continents, Native American peoples, early exploration, presidents

First: *World History*-early civilization; *Ancient Egypt*-the Nile River, pharaohs, mummies, and hieroglyphics

Second: *American History*-U.S. Constitution; Civil Rights: women’s roles (Susan B. Anthony, Eleanor Roosevelt, et al); equality: (Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, et al); Geography of Americas

Third: *Math*-fractions to one-tenth, numerator and denominator, mixed numbers, introduction to geometrical concepts

Fourth: *Science*-Human body: circulatory and respiratory systems; *Chemistry*-atoms, matter, elements, solutions

Fifth: *American History and Geography*-westward exploration and expansion, Daniel Boone, the Louisiana Purchase, Lewis and Clark, land and water routes, major rivers, American Indian resistance

Sixth: *Art History*-periods and schools (Classical, Renaissance, Rococo, Romantic, et al.)

Seventh: *Music*-classical music, romantics, and nationalists (Brahms, Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner, et al.); blues and jazz

Eighth: *Language Arts*-novels and stories; *Writing the research essay*-organizing with an outline, quoting materials from secondary sources, summarizing and paraphrasing, acknowledging sources and avoiding plagiarism, a bibliography

WHO DECIDED WHAT'S IN THE SEQUENCE?

The Core Knowledge Sequence is the result of research into the content and structure of the highest-performing elementary school systems around the world, as well as extensive consensus-building among diverse groups and interests, including parents, teachers, scientists, professional curriculum organizations, and experts from the Core Knowledge Foundation's advisory board on multi-cultural traditions. Provisional versions of the *Sequence* were reviewed and revised by panels of teachers, and in 1990 a national conference was convened at which twenty-four working groups hammered out a draft sequence. This draft was fine-tuned during a year of implementation piloting at Three Oaks Elementary in Ft. Myers, Florida. As more elementary and middle schools adopt Core Knowledge, the Foundation seeks their suggestions based on experience in order to update the *Sequence*.

“In a democracy such as ours, access to a rigorous, coherent, and common curriculum is every child’s civil right”.

Barbara Garvin-Kester, Ph..D., President, the Core Knowledge Foundation

THE CORE KNOWLEDGE NETWORK

Our school is part of a growing network of schools across the country-public, charter, and private-that use the Core Knowledge curriculum and are finding great success as measured both by standardized tests and by the students' enjoyment of learning.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR CHILD IN SCHOOL

Know the Cored Knowledge topics being studied in the classroom and discuss them with your child. You can request a copy of the year-long plan and read books related to the Core Knowledge topics together with your child. Reading aloud will increase your child's vocabulary and their background knowledge.

Provide enrichment opportunities to reinforce the curriculum-trips to libraries, museums, music venues, and children's theaters.

Provide your child's teacher with feedback about circumstances that might affect the classroom learning experience.

Keep a scrapbook of schoolwork and student achievements. Let your child know how important his or her school life is to you.

RESOURCES FOR UNDERSTANDING THE CORE KNOWLEDGE CURRICULUM

The Core Knowledge Grader Series: *What Your Kindergartner-Eighth Grader Needs to Know*.

The Core Knowledge Sequence: Content Guidelines for Grades K-8. A comprehensive topic guide to the curriculum.

Books to Build On: A Grade-by-Grade for Parents and Teachers. An annotated list of books that compliment the Core Knowledge curriculum. Several hundred additions to this list are presented on the web site.

On www.coreknowledge.org you can:

- * read articles about the curriculum
- * order resource materials
- * subscribe to the Foundation's e-newsletter