FIRST GRADE HIGHLIGHTS

- Students become confident, independent readers and writers.
- Students strengthen their number sense and how to execute problem solving strategies.
- Students become more confident individuals, develop socially, and grow in empathy for others.
- Students are paired with a fifth grade buddy to build community.

READING

Reading is a developmental process where children use strategies that help them understand meaning of the written word. The first grade curriculum integrates the best aspects from a variety of programs to provide a well-balanced literacy program. Strategies include semantics, grammar and structure, phonics, illustrations, and patterns. First graders participate in a variety of activities to improve phonemic awareness, reading, comprehension, word attack skills, and appreciation for literature. They learn how to use story patterns and illustrations to predict or decode unknown words.

The first grade reading curriculum includes:

- **Independent Reading:** Students are involved in reading individually during the day. First graders read material that is developmentally appropriate and both child- and teacher-selected.

- **Shared Reading:** First graders experience stories, poems, chants, and choral readings as a group. The teacher reads and models daily speech, vocabulary, familiar phrases, expression, timing, word patterns, and the enjoyment of literature.

- **Guided Reading:** Students interact with the teacher to discuss decoding strategies, practice skills, respond, share, and make connections with their own experiences to a book at their unique instructional level. They may then participate with their group, or individually, in an activity involving writing, creating, or performing.

- **Reading Conference:** The teacher meets individually with the student to observe and evaluate his/her reading fluency, comprehension, and decoding strategies he/she uses.

- **Phonics:** First graders learn consonants, short and long vowels, blends, and digraphs as well as how to decode words. Phonics skills are learned in the context of reading, using games, hands-on manipulatives, and literature-based activities.
• **Sight Word Reading:** Another reading strategy is exposing students to a variety of sight words to build a quick visual memory. Sight words are words that do not follow phonics rules, cannot be sounded out easily, and occur frequently in primary texts. A large sight vocabulary improves reading speed and fluency. Sight words are posted on our class’s word wall, where students can reference difficult words.

**WRITING**

Children learn how to write by writing. Teachers provide frequent opportunities to write through interactive/group writing, journal writing, guided writing, and independent writing. By encouraging children to use invented spelling, students can write with less inhibition and see themselves as writers. The Six Traits Plus One model of writing is introduced to first grade students through reading quality literature and their own writings.

Teachers give special attention to the proper formation of letters and spacing in handwriting, as well as conventional punctuation. First graders practice correct handwriting in writing and spelling activities. In January, students begin a formal spelling program which allows them to begin to notice spelling patterns within words.

Students are able to grow as writers in first grade through both free writing and structured lessons. Daily, they choose what to write and illustrate in their journals. The emphasis is for students to experience the writing process at their level and encourage the continuum of writing development. The process includes prewriting, drafting, editing, and publishing.

**HANDWRITING**

First grade handwriting is taught in a developmentally-appropriate manner using the Handwriting Without Tears curriculum (www.hwtears.com). The goal of handwriting instruction is to make legible and fluent handwriting an easy and automatic task for all students. Using a multisensory approach, instruction is based on what children already know and how they learn best. Teacher modeling, guided practice, and consistent child-friendly language and habits facilitate and strengthen handwriting from year to year.

In first grade, students review the correct formation of all capital and small letters using age-appropriate manipulatives and songs, as well practicing using a student workbook. Legible and fluent handwriting in first grade is the primary goal.

**MATH**

Using the My Math curriculum, students discover that the world of numbers is more than just computation. Mathematical thinking is an unfolding process and develops individually with each child.

Through a hands-on, concrete approach, students develop their ability to:

- think visually
- make connections between ideas
- apply strategies to solve problems
- see patterns
- make estimates

First graders also learn basic mathematical facts, consistent with the Common Core standards, with an
emphasis on understanding and applying the following core concept/skill areas to real world situations.

Students learn about and practice skills such as:

- one and two-digit addition and subtraction
- place value
- graphs
- measurement and time
- two- and three-dimensional shapes

At the end of each lesson, students are given a word problem and complete a written explanation of their thinking.

SCIENCE

The science curriculum for first grade incorporates inquiry-based instruction with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), engaging students at the intersection of the disciplinary core ideas, science and engineering practices, and crosscutting concepts. FOSS kits, the core curriculum used in our science program, are designed to center around learning as a developmental progression, providing experiences that allow students to continually build on their initial notions and develop more complex scientific and engineering ideas.

Students experience the following units in first grade:

- **Earth Science** - Air and Weather
- **Physical Science** - Sound and Light
- **Life Science** - Plants and Animals

Each unit includes opportunities for students to use all four steps of the scientific method (observation, hypothesis, prediction, and experimentation/testing) through inquiry-based lessons. The Villa grounds are used often as an outdoor classroom to enhance various lessons and/or units.

In addition to the FOSS Program, other hands-on experiences, literature resources, and role-play are incorporated to enhance children’s understanding of scientific concepts.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Students are introduced to the Storypath curriculum in first grade. Storypath’s narrative structure helps students understand concepts that they often find difficult to comprehend in traditional social studies programs. The story structure and inquiry, guided by unit goals, provide the framework for students to make connections, integrate skills, and acquire complex content through problems they encounter.

In each unit, a “story” involves the creation of a real world setting, exploring that setting in depth, a crisis or problem, and creation of a solution. First graders begin to expand their understanding of the world and its people through these Storypath units: “Families and Their Neighborhoods” and “The Parade – Celebrating Cultural Diversity.”

As part of their Social Studies curriculum, first graders also:

- celebrate holidays and other special events from around the world
- learn about the history and people involved in those events
- read about and discuss current events
- begin to form a basic understanding of history
RELIGION
Religion in first grade is a part of every day! The focus of Villa’s religion program is for students to develop an understanding of and respect for self, each other, and the environment. With this as an overall theme, learning about the Catholic faith, class meetings, social/emotional learning (Second Step curriculum), and community service (including buddies) are all part of first grade religion.

THE CATHOLIC FAITH
First graders discover God the Father’s unique love for them, that Jesus is the Son of God who tells us about our Father, and that the Holy Spirit helps us to be holy. Topics include the creation story, the Trinity, Jesus’ life, special saints, the seven sacraments, liturgical seasons, introduction of traditional and student-centered prayer, and how we live out our faith every day. The first grade classes also have an opportunity to act as leaders during an Easter season mass for the school community.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING
The Second Step program, taught in preschool through fifth grade in Villa classrooms, focuses on four key areas in first grade:

- **Skills for Learning** - learning to listen, focusing attention, following directions, self-talk for staying on task, and being assertive.
- **Empathy** - identifying feelings, similarities and differences, changing feelings, accidents, and showing care and concern
- **Emotion Management** - identifying our own feelings, strong feelings, calming down anger, self-talk for calming down, and managing worry
- **Problem Solving** - solving problems, fair ways to play, inviting to join in, handling name-calling

Students learn and practice all of these skills through fun and interactive lessons, role plays, games, stories, video segments, and short daily reinforcements. First graders also begin to develop self care skills, an emotion vocabulary, and problem-solving strategies to use both in and out of school.

CLASS MEETINGS
Creating a safe, emotionally-secure classroom encourages students to share their feelings and solve problems together. Daily/weekly class meetings enable such an environment to thrive. Whether celebrating each other or solving problems together, first graders are empowered to make a difference in their classroom community and their school.

COMMUNITY SERVICE
Religion is also tied into first grade’s year-long, service-learning project. Each month, first graders visit with elderly residents at Northaven Assisted Living. Through the stories they read, pictures and cards they draw for the residents, conversations, and the treats they eat together, students learn about empathy, compassion, and respect. Students bring Jesus’ love and care to each resident! In first grade, students have the responsibility of leading an Easter prayer service for the school community.
SPECIALISTS

First grade students participate in a varied schedule and see specialists in the following areas:

- Visual Arts: 60 minutes — once a week
- Library: 40 minutes — once a week
- Music: 30 minutes — twice a week
- Physical Education: 30 minutes — twice a week
- Technology: 45 minutes — once a week
- World Language (Spanish): 30 minutes — twice a week

VISUAL ARTS

First grade students continue to build on their art knowledge and skills through further exploration of a variety of media such as: painting, drawing, printmaking, oils pastel, collage, and ceramics.

In addition, first graders:

- demonstrate thinking skills by using artistic processes
- communicate their ideas and feelings through the visual arts
- work to demonstrate understanding for balance, repetition, and pattern
- learn to recognize and create symmetrical balance and analyze pattern in the environment
- explore the notion that the Arts can shape and reflect culture and history when they learn to describe a specific style of art (i.e., painting fans using the ancient style of Japanese Sumi-e painting)
- practice safety habits using tools and materials appropriately
- learn to respect and support each other’s ideas and artwork

LIBRARY

The goal of our library program is to develop students who value learning and can apply the skills, strategies, and processes to be independent users of information.

First graders work as a group to learn:

- information literacy skills such as generating questions, locating resources, and interpreting and summarizing information
- how to respond to a variety of stories, comparing author styles, genres, and perspectives while building comprehension skills
- how to locate resources using the classification system, care for resources, and practice being responsible patrons

MUSIC

To be Tuneful, Artful, and Beatful is the main objective in first grade music classes. Students learn and explore what it means to use their voices correctly by singing Echo, Call and Response; Songtales; and Fingerplay/Action Songs. With these songs, students gain the ability to sing in tune with musicality.

Students also practice:

- rhythmic dictation
- study of composers
- proper instrument care by playing on Orff and a variety of pitched instruments
PHYSICAL EDUCATION
First graders continue to develop skills to build a solid foundation for health and exercise. They are excited about physical movement and actively participate in the many games we play in physical education, including wall climbing, skill development, and multiple tag games.

First grade PE continues to focus on:

• developing gross motor skills and coordination
• being a good teammate
• following directions
• playing in a structured environment

TECHNOLOGY
Once each week, first graders work in the Computer Lab for 45 minutes to build their computer literacy skills. Assigned projects in this class integrate with the students’ classroom curriculum throughout the school year.

We reinforce the skills they learned in kindergarten and introduce more complex operations, including:

• how to open an application and save the file with their name and grade
• quit the application when done
• logout of their computer
• web browser and bookmarked educational sites
• word processing to write, edit, and print using menu functions like font, size, and copy/paste

• Kidspiration, a visual mind mapping program, for organizing information in many creative ways
• gaining proficiency and speed in touch typing with Keyboarding Without Tears

Applications introduced and used in first grade include Pixie 3, Kidspiration, iMovie, and iPhoto.

WORLD LANGUAGE (SPANISH)
All first grade students at Villa Academy are immersed in Spanish. They use the language to communicate and express themselves. In a fun, active, and participatory environment, they are learning through repetition, movement, songs, and games.

First graders begin to read and write in their target language and respond with physical activity to increasingly complex teacher commands. The language program incorporates Total Physical Response (TPR) and storytelling methods. This develops oral comprehension and facilitates language acquisition and retention. The majority of class time is conducted in Spanish.