



Lower School Course Descriptions

Jr. Cubs – Grade 5

The USJ Lower School offers a strong, developmental curriculum. USJ's unique program is educationally stimulating and exemplifies practices that are developmentally appropriate and responsive to the individual needs and talents of our students. Through team teaching, self-contained classes, and flexible grouping, students are taught language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. Students learn in a loving environment that encourages self-discipline, respect, participation, communication, and trial and error.

Enrichment programs include art, music, library, computer, foreign language, character education, physical education, and hands-on science lab. Spanish begins with the Jr. Cubs program. French is introduced in Second Grade and continues through Fifth Grade when students have one semester of French and one semester of Spanish. Opportunities for age-appropriate participation in the PAL League (sports) and the after-school art program further enhance the curriculum.

Jr. Cubs

Jr. Cubs, for children who are 2 years old by August 15, has a developmentally and age appropriate program that gives each child the important first step in his or her education. Teachers encourage a child's curiosity through hands-on experiences as well as addressing the developmental domains of play-- fine and gross motor skills, social/emotional skills, language, and cognitive skills.

USJ also offers a two-day-a-week program for Jr. Cubs. Children attending this program will have physical education enrichment on one day and music on the other day.

Cubs

Bruin Cubs, for children who are 3 years old by August 15, helps children acquire social competence and the skills they need to succeed as learners. Classrooms are center-based to promote interactive learning and encourage the child's construction of knowledge. We believe that early childhood education should encourage children's active exploration and creativity while integrating developmentally appropriate subject matter to include phonological awareness and number concepts. Monthly themes that promote social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth are presented with the child's interest in mind.

We acknowledge and accept the varied and different rates of development present in each child. Our classes strive for the optimum growth potential of the child, while providing a positive learning environment. Children learn to function as a classroom community, learning independence in a safe and nurturing setting. We believe child-directed and teacher-supported active learning is the key to a quality program for children this age.

USJ also offers a three-day-a-week program for Cubs. Children attending this program will have an enrichment class each day: physical education, library, and character education.

Jr. Kindergarten

Jr. Kindergarten, for students who are 4 and 5 years old, offers a program that helps the young student develop self-confidence, self-discipline, and social skills. These qualities encourage a sense of security and independence. Jr. Kindergarten classes use a variety of instructional tools for individual, small group, and whole group experiences. Individual instruction helps the students to practice and improve their skills as well as accommodate individual learning differences.

Pre-reading skills are taught through phonics, phonemic awareness, and print awareness. Jr. Kindergarten students also learn pre-writing skills as letters are introduced. They learn

how to ask and answer questions as they learn about familiar and unfamiliar topics through science and social studies units. The mathematics curriculum is designed to help our students develop number sense and computational fluency as they explore a range of strategies for problem solving through hands-on experiences. The classroom environment is tailored to meet each student's needs and stimulate a love of learning in all developmental areas. Pre-handwriting skills are introduced in small groups at this level.

Kindergarten

Kindergarten classes continue both group and individual instruction through active learning. Our balanced literacy curriculum provides for daily experiences in phonemic awareness, reading, and writing. This systematic and multi-level instruction smoothly integrates all aspects of print so that the children can make appropriate connections with language.

Our math program offers meaningful and in-depth mathematical thinking, which allows children to talk and work through problems with group instructions. Lessons involve hands-on use of manipulatives and higher order thinking. Handwriting instruction continues at this level working toward mastery. The science and social studies program continues the same child-centered, high-interest concepts through thematic learning units. These units are used as a foundation to integrate all areas of the curriculum. This type of learning allows fluidity of the child's day.

First Grade

Building sequentially on the Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten programs, First Grade applies the four language-process components – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – to form the First Grade language arts program. The program provides a variety of meaningful learning experiences that enhance skill development and an appreciation for literature. The assortment of literature incorporates shared reading, guided reading, and self-selected reading. A spelling component emphasizes word families and basic sight words. Manuscript handwriting is taught formally and is also reinforced through creative writing.

The mathematics curriculum features the development of an understanding of math concepts, logical problem-solving skills, and mathematics operations. Manipulatives and a hands-on approach provide concrete experiences.

Social studies and science units are integrated into the curriculum throughout the year.

Second Grade

The Second Grade language arts program integrates the basic elements of reading, phonics, spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and creative writing. Manuscript handwriting is practiced, and cursive is introduced mid-year.

The mathematics curriculum features the development of an understanding of math concepts and logical problem-solving skills. Manipulatives and a hands-on approach provide concrete experiences.

The Second Grade science curriculum includes investigation of animal adaptations and classifications; trees, leaves, and fossils; and the sun, moon, and stars. Social studies units include studies of Native Americans, the early exploration and settlement of America, a foreign culture, and map skills.

Third Grade

The Third Grade language arts program uses literature and novel studies to integrate reading, writing, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. The vocabulary curriculum is based on Wordly Wise from Educators Publishing Service. Grammar studies feature sentence structure, sentence purpose, parts of speech, capitalization, and punctuation. Manuscript is reviewed, and students transition into writing in cursive on a daily basis.

The mathematics curriculum is sequential and continues to build on concepts and skills acquired in previous levels. Science units include life science, physical science, and earth science. The Third Grade social studies curriculum is project-based with a focus on learning about the different communities around the world.

Fourth Grade

The Fourth Grade language arts curriculum is made up of many components, including novel studies, oral reading, creative writing, basic grammar, and writing mechanics. Vocabulary building skills are enriched through the use of the Wordly Wise series.

Mathematics: The mathematics curriculum focuses on a knowledge of basic mathematical skills with individual needs met through the use of flexible grouping and manipulatives. Students change classes for math. This is the beginning of the transition from self-contained classes to a departmental structure.

Science is taught on a unit basis and is enhanced with hands-on science experiences in the science lab. The scientific method also is taught as a unit, culminating in student-produced science fair projects.

The social studies curriculum encompasses an in-depth study of the geography, culture, and economy of regions of the United States.

Fifth Grade

The Fifth Grade learning environment is responsive to students' needs. We strive to instill the principles of higher-level thinking skills, preparing each child for the transition into Middle School.

Mathematics: The mathematics curriculum includes whole numbers, decimals, place value, integers, equations, fractions, geometry, and percentage. This sequential mathematics program is designed to represent problem solving, communication, reasoning, connection, and the activities that relate math to the world around the students.

Language Arts: The language arts curriculum includes spelling, writing, reading, vocabulary, English, and Daily Oral Language. Grammar is developed not only through the selected text but also through Daily Oral Language. The skills taught include subjects, predicates, the eight parts of speech, diagramming sentences, capitalization, punctuation, and poetry.

Reading: The primary goal of our reading program is to foster an interest in and an enthusiasm for reading. We use an online interactive reading program that can be accessed by students at anytime. Students are motivated to practice reading by earning incentives that are built into the program. This program offers a variety of materials and activities that help build reading skills. These skills include problem solving, inferences, drawing conclusions, vocabulary skills, author's point of view, main idea, and words in context.

Science: The science curriculum places an emphasis on the human body and its main systems. Our science curriculum also covers graphing, statistics, probability, elapsed time, the customary measurement system, the metric system, and temperature.

History: Fifth Grade students study about the history of the United States from the early explorers in North America all the way through the settlements of the West in the late 1800s. Our study of the U.S. actually begins with the Vikings as Leif Ericson arrives at Newfoundland. We then go on to explore the landing of the Pilgrims, conflicts with the Indians, the reason for the Revolutionary War, the birth of the First Continental Congress, and the drafting of the U.S. Constitution. We talk extensively about the growth of cities and westward expansion and end our year with a chapter on the Civil War.

Enrichment Programs

Character Education

USJ is committed to character education in all grades. In the Lower School, character education is multi-faceted. The term "education" implies that character can be taught. Our task is to determine how to best provide instruction that will encourage children to understand and apply character traits to their lives. Character education is taught daily in the classroom through values, examples, and academics, as well as through the strong partnerships we share with our families to help prepare our students academically, socially, and emotionally.

Our guidance counselor teaches formal character education classes to all Lower School students. These lessons are representative of many good character traits, such as respect for yourself (honesty, integrity, responsibility, effort, and pride); respect for others (generosity, compassion, understanding, and loyalty); and characteristics that convey a positive outlook on life (fairness, open-mindedness, initiative, optimism, and sense of humor). It is our desire that these will help our students become not only scholars but also productive citizens.

Foreign Language

The elementary Foreign Language program is designed to give younger minds an introductory step in foreign language acquisition. The primary goal is to foster interest and enthusiasm for foreign language learning by expanding in sequential order the vocabulary and its application in base communication, as well as to acquire an understanding and appreciation of other cultures.

Each grade level introduces new thematic units and activities to apply learned concepts. Spanish begins with Jr. Cubs (2 year olds). French is introduced in the Second Grade and continues through Fifth Grade. Students have one semester of French and one semester of Spanish.

Depending on age level, students are challenged with the five basic skills necessary for foreign language study: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and culture. Due to the dual nature of foreign language study at USJ, the objectives for each grade of foreign language learning in the elementary school will remain constant and only the target language will change.

Library

USJ's Lower School Library contains more than 20,000 books and audiovisual materials. Jr. Kindergarten through Fifth Grade classes have a weekly, 30-minute library class to help foster reading, gain an appreciation of what a library has to offer, and get new reading materials. Each year the Lower School Library hosts three Scholastic book fairs, Read Across America, author visits, and Summer Library, which gives students and parents the opportunity to check out books and enjoy presentations by authors, naturalists, scientists, and others over the summer.

Music

Lower School Music incorporates a variety of teaching methods with a focus on beginning music theory and the performing arts. All of our students, including our youngest in Cubs and Jr. Cubs, are exposed to different genres and elements of music. They are taught music concepts (steady beat, rhythm, high/low, loud/soft, short/long, etc.) through the use of musical instruments, creative movement, dancing, and singing. Students begin performing grade-level musicals each year at the Jr. Kindergarten level and continue through Fifth Grade.

Performing an annual musical offers several advantages for each student. The youngest students develop a love of singing, movement, and pretending, which all come naturally to children at this age. Upper elementary students continue that love of singing and movement, while also developing their music-reading skills. Students also develop public speaking skills, learn theatrical terms and stage locations, learn the importance of each part in making the whole production come together, learn a different way of understanding children's literature, and, most importantly, self-confidence and self-esteem.

Beginning music theory (use of staff, notes, and rests) is also introduced, starting at the Kindergarten level, and continuing throughout the student's Lower School music experience.

Physical Education

Jr. Cubs through Fifth Grade physical education classes combine teaching developmentally-appropriate movement forms, fine and gross motor skills, games, and sports with the social skills that are imperative in this setting. A comprehensive curriculum is used to ensure the students in this age group not only learn skills, games, and sports but also begin to understand the importance of lifelong health and fitness goals and how an active lifestyle plays a part in that. This program helps children enjoy physical activity while building confidence as they interact with others safely and

become more competent in their movement abilities. It is our goal to lay the foundation for students to begin to actively pursue lifelong physical activities that meet their needs and the needs of their families.

Technology

Students in Kindergarten through Fifth Grade come to the Computer Lab once a week. They use computers to format and create documents in Microsoft Word, create spreadsheets in Microsoft Excel, and use the Internet safely for learning and research. Internet safety is an important part of the curriculum, and students learn to protect their privacy, research correctly, and play online safely. Students in Third Grade through Fifth Grade learn to produce presentations using Microsoft PowerPoint to share information related to curriculum they are studying. These learners also use Type to Learn 3 to develop their keyboarding skills. We participate annually in Code.org's programming week with all students learning about basic computer programming through apps and online games.

Visual Arts

Opportunities in the Visual Arts at USJ range from two-dimensional drawing, painting, and collage, to three-dimensional sculpture in clay and paper, with a variety of craft projects. An understanding and appreciation of the arts manifests itself in the artwork created and is displayed throughout the school. Spirited discussions about artists and their styles and lives stimulate the creative process and are evident in student production. Cross-curriculum activities engage students and contribute to the whole school atmosphere. After-school art classes are offered for students with a continued interest in the Visual Arts.

Elementary Science Lab

The Elementary Science Lab, for First Grade through Fifth Grade students, provides a unique atmosphere of exciting science lessons with a more hands-on approach to learning. The students are involved in activities that both complement the traditional classroom curriculum as well as expose them to scientific insights that are present in the world around them. The lessons are designed to foster cooperation in a team setting as well as challenging the creativity and interests of the individual.

Children learn better when more of the senses are engaged in the process, and the lab seeks to build on that understanding with manipulatives that supplement the concepts being discussed. This approach to learning reinforces information gathering through discovery.