

## Nature School at Camp Albemarle Lower School

### Shape of the Day

Lower School encourages children to learn at their own pace. We value free play and the intersection of academics and social learning that can happen during that time. Some of our most important learning happens in unplanned moments, through the children's interest and discoveries. Our Shape of the Day makes room for this kind of emergent learning, while providing a rhythm to cover academic work that aligns with NC state standards.

We begin each day with choice time and free play where children can explore books, revisit previous activities, or continue work on a project, or investigate something new while their classmates arrive and get settled. This will happen mostly outdoors.

Next, students gather for a **Morning Meeting** where they:

- Greet each other
- Review class expectations and receive information from teachers
- Participate in a group game, yoga, devotional, or team-building
- Practice social-emotional and communication skills
- Have time to share about their lives and learning

#### Language Arts Time

All classes participate in small group Language Arts time after morning meeting. This includes phonics instruction, sight words, vocabulary development and reading practice. This coordinated time across our classes gives us the ability to provide for each child's reading level. If a Kindergarten child is advanced, they can join a 1<sup>st</sup> grade reading group and vice versa. Our older students will have independent reading time, reading instruction and interventions as needed, and our 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> grade students will have a Kindergarten buddy to read with during this time, a few days a week.

#### Morning Snack

Children enjoy a small, healthy snack brought from home with their teachers and peers, building community and enjoying conversation while they snack.

#### Math Workshop

Math instruction is given through guided lessons that gradually transition children to work and explore the concepts independently. We utilize Wild Math, which is a nature-based curriculum that aligns with state standards, as well as touching on various methods for practicing and solving math concepts. Our goal is that children understand a concept thoroughly, while recognizing that each child's brain works differently and they may prefer to utilize one of the techniques they learn, but not all. An example of this is how our 3<sup>rd</sup> graders learn and practice multiplication. We use Wild Math techniques, Waldorf hand-clapping to memorize time tables and skip count, Montessori multiplication boards, games like Super Genius multiplication, Monster Sock Factory, and Math For Love's Tiny Polka Dot, multiplication wrap ups, and regular worksheets with multiplication equations presented in their various forms. Some

of it may look familiar to what you experienced or to what a child in public school experiences and some of it may look very different. Our children can successfully complete a traditional assessment after their math instruction, even when the teaching method looks different.

### **Content-Based Studies**

Using the Core Knowledge curriculum as a framework, our classes will explore topics in science, social studies and language arts through stories and projects. These topics begin in Kindergarten and build upon each other through the grades as a student progresses, thus growing their knowledge as they grow. Assessment of learning is done through discussion, writing, retelling, performing, art and projects. If a topic truly captivates a class, they may extend the learning and choose to continue exploring the topic beyond the curriculum.

### **Independent Exploration and Lunch**

Children may play outside and pursue their interests within the boundaries laid out by the teacher. Lunch, brought from home, will generally happen outside, picnic style, but indoor space is available on days of inclement weather.

### **Project Time and Continued Independent Exploration**

After lunch, children will pursue various projects, traditional wilderness skills and handicrafts, and have time to explore across Nature School. They may pursue interests as a class, across classes, in small groups or individually and these interests may cross content areas. Teachers will act as guides and facilitators during this time, following the children's lead and providing books and materials to grow the learning. This is also a time when a teacher can provide additional help or instruction in a topic or a class can continue to pursue a topic that may have ignited their imagination in the morning.

### **Closing Circle**

Towards the end of each day, children will gather again in their class to share their reflections and questions about the day. This time often gives teachers an inkling of how to prepare for the next day and allows them to ask questions to further curiosity and learning. Following the meeting, children can enjoy free time with their classmates at play until parent pick up or our after-school program begins.

### **Spanish and Vespers**

In addition to the above, our students will have a Spanish teacher coming into their class twice a week for Spanish instruction. This will follow a regular time and schedule that will be worked out between the Spanish teacher and the classroom teachers.

As one group, the children will participate in weekly Vespers. This is a time to gather together to learn about God and the Bible. They will be led in stories and songs and celebrate together as a school.