

## OPTIONAL TOUR

### WELCOME TO THE 1/2 OPTIONAL CLASSROOM!

During your observation you might see students working independently at tables, reading in pairs, interacting in small cooperative groups, participating in class discussions and whole class direct instruction. This is typical of an optional classroom.

The curriculum of the Optional Program is the same as the Traditional Program. The way the curriculum is taught is the major difference.

I hope this narrative assists in forming a picture of our Optional class.

### Learning Environment

Our classroom is open, airy and spacious. Color and quality materials provide an aesthetic environment for learning. A friendly couch, carpet and loft space set the tone for a relaxed niche in our formal setting. Our library is growing and changing as better books are donated to our program. There is a large collection of games and learning aids accessible to the students after individual assignments are completed.

### Curriculum

Our curriculum encompasses that of the Anchorage School District with the addition of weekly classes in painting, knitting and special science topics. Recorder playing, songs and poetry supplement the school curriculum daily. There is a special emphasis on the natural sciences with a daily 'Nature Watch' each morning along with calendar notes. A weekly social skills class taught by a parent is an added favorite of the students.

## Language Arts

Emphasis is placed on language throughout each day. I use the more progressive Whole Language Approach throughout all my teaching. Theme work culminates with a written book by each student. Oral communication and listening skills are heartily encouraged through sharing of experiences, dramatic role play, storytelling and active discussion.

Reading approaches vary. I group my students in many different ways- ability being one of them. Phonics and sight word recognition form the core for decoding instruction. There are independent reading assignments for those capable of completing this level of work. I use the Houghtan-Mifflin Literature series and many, many books from the library and other additional sources. A continuing story is read aloud to the children four times a week and stories are told to the children in connection with theme and season. I encourage invented spelling for a child's own writing so their phonic skills may be utilized. Students also work on a sight word list for reading and spelling. Additional words are introduced through theme work. Younger students begin second quarter with a simple list of spelling words.

## Arithmetic

I utilize the "Math Their Way" program which is a "hands on" approach to learning number concepts. I also supplement these lessons with an additional workbook for skill reenforcement. Direct instruction also includes lessons which emphasize the 'picture forming' capacity of children's thinking. I utilize movement and music for counting. Mental math exercises are a daily part of the math lesson.

## Theme

Theme topics include social studies, science, health and literature topics. All theme work is experiential and includes "hands on" experiments, dramatic role play, field trips, artistic activities and a continuing book of experiences created throughout a theme unit. The 'flavor' of our week is always theme related.

## **Computer**

*There is a computer in the classroom which is utilized on an individual basis for the reinforcement of basic skills. A computer theme occurs twice through the year covering keyboarding, computer terms, computer art and basic word processing.*

## **Contracts**

*Students work on individual contracts twice a week and when they complete their class assignments. A visit to the Science Corner and an entry in their personal journal is always included on each weekly contract. The use of contracts in a first and second grade classroom is individually tailored to the capabilities of each student. A contract provides the child with a visual image of their task completion and an experience in organizing themselves and their work.*

## **Cooperative Learning**

*A combination class lends itself to daily opportunities for cooperative learning. Second graders take the general leadership role and shine in their responsibility. Theme work, art and drama projects and some math and reading time are organized to involve multi-level groups.*

## **Social Skills**

*Helping each other, sharing experiences, telling stories of their lives and solving social problems together as a class combine to afford each child experiences for life long skills- respect for each other, a cooperative spirit, decision making and conflict resolution.*

## **Student Responsibilities**

Students are viewed with a 'developmental' eye. Each child is expected to fulfill his/her responsibility to their school work. Each child is individually challenged and encouraged to bring forth their best efforts. A weekly student self-evaluation fosters a student's awareness of feelings about their week's activities.

Students in our class are active participants. They develop initiative and self reliance in this learning process. Parental support is paramount to the success of a student in the Optional classroom.

Thank you for your interest in the program!

Janice Mortko