

BRIDGE:

*A Homeschool Program for 6 year olds
preparing to enter First Grade*

Waldorf Curriculum

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UNIT DESIGN

Each unit in our Preschool curriculum is made up of eight components: Music & Movement, Art, Nature, Cooking, Play, Handwork, Helping, and Stories. The Bridge program carries this forward but begins to integrate it into a schedule more similar to the Main Lesson block approach.

DAILY SCHEDULE

Your six year old child will not need as much sleep as a Kindergartener but should still have periods of rest alternating with periods of activity. The morning school block should be 3 hours long; the afternoon block 2 hours. A schedule such as the following would be ideal.

Example:

7 am	wake up, morning verse, get dressed, breakfast
8 am	school
11 am	lunch
11:30 am	independent play
12:30 pm	school
2:30 pm	snack
3 pm	independent play
5:30 pm	prepare dinner, set the table
6 pm	dinner
7 pm	bedtime

Your morning block should consist of the following subjects:

- Music & Movement
- Art
- Nature
- Cooking
- Play

Your afternoon block should consist of the following subjects:

- Handwork
- Helping
- Stories

Remember that you may also have demands placed upon you by older or younger children and make sure that the schedule you develop as your daily routine is designed to accommodate the needs of the entire family. For instance, if you have two preschool aged-children, they will be able to participate in some portions of the Bridge program but not others. Arrange the more academic periods of your school day to fall during their naptimes to avoid conflicts.

PARENT PREPARATION

As with every year of homeschooling, the most important element in the program is **you**. Begin each school day with a period of meditation. Reflect upon yesterday's work, how it went, what you would like to do better. Journalling is an important part of teacher preparation so be sure to keep a notebook where you write down your thoughts at the end of each day. If you have any concerns about your child, spend some time before you go to sleep thinking about him or her. Try to bring a complete picture of your child to your mind, such that you can really see her. Then give the problem over to her guardian angel and fall asleep. Many times you will wake up refreshed and with some new ideas in mind to help you approach the problem.

Meditations for parents and teachers can be found in [A Journey Through Time in Verse and Rhyme](#), a collection edited by Heather Thomas.

INTRODUCING NEW SUBJECTS

Bridge can be a difficult time for homeschooling parents and children. Your child may be "chomping at the bit" to do some REAL school, to learn to read and do math. Family members may be pressuring you as well. Even well-meaning strangers may ask you (seemingly over and over again) if your child can read yet, and to tell you with pride at which age their children reached this important milestone. If you are beginning to get frustrated and to feel your resolve buckling under all this pressure, remember that you are the parent. You wouldn't let your child eat ice cream for every meal, even if other parents did. When you believe that something will be harmful to your child in the long run you say "no" firmly and consistently, no matter how much she may plead and insist that this is what she really wants.

We have written the Bridge program to help you with this period of time, and to help your child feel that she is not stuck doing baby work while everyone around her is having fun learning new things. New and exciting challenges are introduced which will stimulate her, although they are not ones which will push her unfolding consciousness to develop too fast. Consider the Bridge period to be one of watchfulness and waiting. You are carefully evaluating your child, waiting for signs that she is ready to begin First Grade. Your child is waiting eagerly for this too but, for the sake of domestic harmony, we will give you some ideas to keep her happy while she waits.

THE BRIDGE

Through Fairy Halls. My Book House series, volume 6. by Olive Beaupre Miller.

Olive Beaupre Miller wrote the My Book House series intending to gather together in each volume an assortment of tales from around the world eminently suited to children at each age. Volume 6 is for the six year old child. It is used as the basis of this curriculum. Although Miller was not aligning herself with any particular method of education at the time, her choices reflect what is considered suitable for this age group within the Waldorf method. Used copies of the book can easily be found on eBay.

We give lesson plan suggestions for the first ten literary excerpts in this book. For support in unit implementation or to request or share activity suggestions, please email the Group at waldorfcriculum@yahoo.com.

Follow through the book in chronological order until you begin to sense that your child is nearly ready to begin First Grade. Then use The Seven-Year-Old Wonder Book to serve as the final transition into the world of formal schooling. Read this together and create your own Wonder Book, as an introduction to the Main Lesson Book your child will be creating in First Grade.

LOOKING BACK

While on a bridge, you can look in both directions – back at where you have come from and ahead to where you are going. In addition to reading the stories in Through Fairy Halls and completing the activities suggested, always bear in mind that your child is transitioning from the world of Kindergarten to the world of First Grade. Bridge is a blend of the two, so do not neglect favorite Kindergarten activities such as gardening, watercolor painting, eurythmy, singing, beeswax modelling, nature walks, and so on, even where not specifically indicated in this curriculum.

LOOKING FORWARD

Horseback Riding

We recommend having your child take up horseback riding as a part of the Bridge curriculum. Not only does this provide an exciting new challenge, but the development of balance is an important precursor to the First Grade curriculum, especially for Form Drawing. Taking care of a horse is also a new responsibility which your child will find stimulating and rewarding.

Swimming Lessons

Swimming is another excellent activity to begin at this age. Here, again, the goal is to provide your child with new yet developmentally appropriate challenges. The cross-lateral action of the breaststroke also sets in place a strong foundation for learning to read and write.

Stringed Instrument

We also recommend introducing your child to an instrument such as the dulcimer, harp, or pentatonic lyre. These instruments are easy for a child to play and do not require the more complex coordination of the recorder. Your child is old enough to be gentle with the strings and will see this instrument as a statement of your faith and confidence in him. He will correctly regard these new activities as a sign that the curriculum is becoming more challenging as he gets older – and will feel a sense of pride in mastering them, instead of pushing impatiently towards First Grade.

CONTENTS OF

The Fairy Halls

- ❖ The Sleeping Beauty
- ❖ The Assembling of the Fays
- ❖ Old Pipes and the Dryad
- ❖ A Midsummer Night's Dream
- ❖ A Musical Visit to Fairyland
- ❖ The Wizard of Oz
- ❖ Hie Away, Hie Away
- ❖ The Twelve Months
- ❖ Providence
- ❖ The Princess on the Glass Hill
- ❖ The Three Wishes
- ❖ A Boy's Song
- ❖ April
- ❖ The Squire's Bride
- ❖ How Yehl, the Hero, Freed the Beaming Maiden
- ❖ The Luck Boy of Toy Valley
- ❖ A Boy Who Made a Dream Come True
- ❖ The Strong Boy
- ❖ The Man Who Loved Hai Quai
- ❖ "It"
- ❖ The Mice
- ❖ The Lost Spear
- ❖ Jack the Giant-Killer
- ❖ The Duty That Was Not Paid
- ❖ The Wonderland of an Artist's Workshop
- ❖ The Wise Men of Gotham
- ❖ Little Shepherd's Song
- ❖ The Three Sillies
- ❖ The Merman
- ❖ Daniel in the Lion's Den
- ❖ The Fairyland of Science
- ❖ Fairy Forests
- ❖ Pigling and Her Proud Sister
- ❖ Snow
- ❖ Off We'll Go
- ❖ Willows in the Snow
- ❖ Snow Blossoms
- ❖ The Fisherman Who Caught the Sun
- ❖ A Tropical Morning at Sea
- ❖ Aruman, a Hero of Java
- ❖ The King's Cream
- ❖ The Moon-Maiden

LESSON PLANS

The Sleeping Beauty

Listen to the "Sleeping Beauty Waltz" by Tchaikovsky.

Try spinning flax. <http://www.handspinning.com/lollipops/spininst.htm>

See our Preschool Newsletter topic "Spinning and Sewing" for more on spinning and sewing with cotton, linen, silk and wool.

http://www.waldorfcriculum.com/Newsletter/06_29_2005.html

The Assembling of the Fays

Make flower fairies using Felt Wee Folk by Salley Mavor.

Plant a special fairy garden, using flowers that fairies especially like. The most important fairy plant of all is thyme. Shakespeare featured it in his play, "A Midsummer Night's Dream." In the play, Oberon, king of the fairies, refers to the fact that Titania, the fairy queen, sleeps in a bed of wild thyme growing on a bank. Foxgloves are also essential for fairy gardens. Fairies are extremely fond of foxgloves. According to legend, they sleep in the bell-shaped flowers, and wear them as gloves. Some say the common name, foxglove, was originally known as folk's glove (fairies are known as wee folks), which was later shortened to foxglove. Other common names for the plant include fairy fingers, fairy thimbles, and fairy cap.

Other plants for the fairy garden include saffron, rosemary, and roses of all sorts. As your garden grows, sit in it quietly for a few minutes each day and see if you can find signs of fairy activity.

Old Pipes and the Dryad

Take a walk around your property and stop and look at every tree. You may even find you have trees you never noticed before! Make sure you visit an oak tree and point it out to your child.

Building a relationship with dryads: <http://www.sacredspiral.com/books/dryads.pdf>

If you and your child have never done so before, plant a tree. Refer to the Preschool Newsletter Topic: "Who Plants a Tree" for more on tree identification, the life cycle of trees, and community giving. http://www.waldorfcriculum.com/Newsletter/09_14_2005.html

You can also read The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Take your child to see a performance of this play.

Read Ballet Shoes by Noel Streatfield.

Look at pictures of ballet dancers in Degas and the Dance; visit an art museum and look at some works by Degas if you can. Visit a ballet studio to watch a class.

A Musical Visit to Fairyland

Listen to some music by Felix Mendelssohn, especially "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

Take the stringed instrument (dulcimer, harp, or pentatonic lyre) and go sit with your child in your own fairy garden. Have your child compose a piece of music inspired by the fairies.

Visit a piano store or the home of a friend who has a piano. Let your child gently touch the keys.

The Wizard of Oz

In this excerpt the Woodman expresses the belief that one should never harm any animal, no matter how small. Use this as an opportunity to introduce your child to Buddhism. Share some other books with your child about the fundamental principles of Buddhism, such as Buddha by Demi and I Once Was a Monkey: Stories Buddha Told by Jeanne M. Lee.

Read the entirety of The Wizard of Oz.

For more on acting rightly, read The Three Questions by Jon. J. Muth. Participate in some community service or volunteer project with your child to reinforce the importance of helping others.

Hie Away, Hie Away

Take your child on a long nature walk through the woods. See if you can find the most hidden secluded preserved spot possible and sit there and enjoy it. Pack a picnic if you like.

Wander together "over bank and over brae". Visit a small stream and wander along its banks, observing plant and animal life. "Brae" means hill. Take your child to the top of a high hill and roll and tumble down it.

Gather and press fern leaves. Frame the result (it is helpful to write on the back the date, where you gathered the fern, and what type it is – remember, it's easier to identify a plant before pressing it then after).

Fern Votives:

<http://www.marthastewart.com/page.jhtml?type=content&id=tv8199&contentGroup=TV&site=living>

You can also use ferns to print beautiful designs on fabric:

<http://www.fortunecity.com/victorian/tollington/72/paint.htm>

The Twelve Months

Every month brings with it its own special gifts. Noticing the change of seasons with your child is important, but it can be hard to do when we import foods from all over the world. Do you eat strawberries all year round, simply purchasing a bag at the grocery store and keeping them in your freezer, or do you take your child strawberry picking during their brief but sweet season in May? Try only eating foods which are in season. This will serve to make both you and your child more thankful for each month as it comes.

Be consistent about saying a blessing with your child at the beginning of each meal. One traditional Waldorf blessing is:

*Earth who gives to us this food,
Sun who make it ripe and good,
Dear Earth, dear Sun, by you we live,
All our thanks to you we give.*

If you don't already, support local farmers by shopping at farmers markets and roadside stands. Ask your grocery store to identify which produce has been purchased locally. A farm subscription is an invaluable way for children to discover more about the relationship between farms and our food. For more on community supported agriculture, visit <http://www.localharvest.org/csa/>

Start a small vegetable garden with your child. There are many books available about gardening in small spaces. Organic gardening is best, so learn about pest control methods in advance.

Providence

Your child is ready to learn a longer morning verse than the one used in Kindergarten; this poem is perfect. Recite it together each morning from now on.

Find additional suggestions about using verses, blessings, and prayer each day in the Preschool Newsletter topic "Giving Thanks".

http://www.waldorfcriculum.com/Newsletter/11_23_2005.html

The Princess on the Glass Hill

This would make an excellent puppet play. Make a series of puppets using the directions in [Toymaking with Children](#). You'll need four male puppets: the three sons, each with different colored robes, and the King with his crown; and one female puppet to be the Princess. Make a figure to act as the knight out of pipe cleaners covered with aluminum foil. You will also need three horses, each a different color and size (again, directions and patterns for making horses can be found in [Toymaking with Children](#)) and three small gold balls. For sets you will need a wooden building to be the barn and the house, a green silk to be the meadow, and a white silk laid over a large basin or pot to be the glass hill.

Read the story with your child on the first day, then make the puppets together. Set up the stage on a long table, with the puppeteer standing behind. Cover the table with a cloth which hangs down sufficiently that unused puppets and set pieces can be hidden from the audience.

For the first scene, place the barn with its back to the audience, and the silk for the meadow alongside. For the second scene, turn the barn around to act as the interior of the house and place the glass hill at the other end of the table.

Reenact the story as a puppet play, using these suggestions:

Begin to tell the story as the narrator, bringing the puppet of the first son up to the stage when he is introduced. Have him look over the meadow, then go "into" the barn but really behind the table. Shake the barn building vehemently during the earthquake. Then have the son reappear out of the barn door, walk over to the meadow to take a look at it, and hastily rush away to tell his father what happened. Repeat this for the second son. When it comes time for Boots have him reappear after the third earthquake and walk from the front door of the barn around the side into the meadow and discover the horse. Let him ride the horse away to hide it, then return home (there is no set for the home, here the narrator fills in the missing scene). Have Boots discover the other two horses and hide them in the same way.

For the second scene, place the Princess at the top of the glass hill. Then let the King come forth and stand at the base of the hill and loudly proclaim that anyone who wishes may try to ride up it. If he succeeds, he will win the hand of the princess. (The narrator then explains that many knights tried but could not succeed). Out of nowhere the first horse appears with the knight on his back, rides part way up the hill then turns around and leaves. If you hold the horse in one hand, you can use the other hand to throw a small golden apple from the princess down the hill. Then, holding the two sons in one hand and Boots in the other, have the family gather in the house. The two sons can come from one side of the house and wander in together as if they had just come from the glass hill and Boots can come in from the other side of the house as if he had been doing something else. Repeat this for the second and third days, using a different horse each time.

Have the King appear at the base of the glass hill and call every man in his kingdom before him one at a time. When Boots appears he throws the gold balls at the King's feet and wins the hand of the Princess, who comes down the hill to embrace him.

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How long does Bridge last?

As long as it needs to!

There is nothing worse you can do for your child's development and future health than to hurry the stages of unfolding.

How do I know when my child is ready for First Grade?

Refer to "Signs of First Grade Readiness: Physical Development" and "Signs of First Grade Readiness: Skill Development" on pages 7 and 8.

We also recommend the Audio CD lecture "Readiness for First Grade" by Daena Ross, available through www.waldorfinthehome.com.

What other resources are there for the Bridge period?

None that we know of. Waldorf Curriculum appears to have the only curriculum for your six year old child written solely for the purpose of helping homeschooling families with this difficult time. We have also coined the term "Bridge" to describe this transitional period.

EVALUATING YOUR CHILD

You may not feel completely at ease evaluating your child in terms of First Grade readiness. If, after reading the "Signs of First Grade Readiness: Physical Development" and "Signs of First Grade Readiness: Skill Development" on pages 7 and 8, you are still uncertain whether your child is ready for First Grade work consider conferring with a consultant.

Some consultants are listed below. Also, contact your local Waldorf school to see if they can offer assistance with assessing your child.

David Darcy	ddarcytx2000@yahoo.com
Barbara Dewey	www.waldorfwithoutwalls.com
Kathe Forrest	www.mothertomotherhs.com
Melisa Neilson	lacmama@yahoo.com
Donna Simmons	www.christopherushomeschool.org/
Rhoda McGrane	www.waldorfcurriculum.com

SIGNS OF FIRST GRADE READINESS: PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

There are more signs of First Grade readiness than just losing your first tooth! (If that were the case then my daughter, who knocked out one of her front baby teeth by falling against a bookcase at the age of three years and one month, would be extremely precocious indeed!)

Waldorf teachers look for a variety of symptoms of physical development to determine whether a child is ready for First Grade:

- ❖ the change of teeth
- ❖ ratio of head to body
- ❖ visible joints
- ❖ an observable arch in the foot
- ❖ individualized facial features
- ❖ S-curve in spine
- ❖ consistent heartbeat of 60 beats/minute
- ❖ respiration once every four heartbeats

The change of teeth:

In Steiner's time, this traditionally happened around age 7; however, it seems to be occurring earlier in modern children, so this is not necessarily as good a guide as it used to be. Look for your child to have at least seven of the eight physical characteristics described above for deciding he is ready for First Grade.

Ratio of head to body:

Your child's limbs begin to lengthen and his head becomes smaller in relation to the rest of the body. An infant has a ratio of 1:4 between head and body. In a First Grade child this ratio is 1:6. As a sign of this change, the child becomes able to reach his arm over his head and completely cover his ear with his hand.

Visible joints:

Check to see if your child has visible knuckles and kneecaps instead of dimples.

Individualized facial features:

Your child should have an enlarged and clearly defined chin and nose and a loss of fat on his cheeks.

SIGNS OF FIRST GRADE READINESS: SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Consider whether your child can do the following things before entering him in a Waldorf First Grade program:

- ❖ walk forward on a balance beam, maintaining balance
- ❖ catch and throw a large ball
- ❖ climb stairs, alternating feet with each step
- ❖ tie knots and bows
- ❖ zip and button clothing
- ❖ hop, on either foot
- ❖ hop, with both feet together
- ❖ skip
- ❖ habitually walk by swinging opposite arm when stepping out with one foot
- ❖ shake hands by offering hand with thumb outstretched
- ❖ sew
- ❖ finger knit
- ❖ play finger games
- ❖ have established dominance (left-handed or right-handed)
- ❖ have a conscious goal in drawing or painting a picture

When in doubt, do your child a favor and wait.

A COMPLETE BOOKLIST

A Journey Through Time in Verse and Rhyme. edited by Heather Thomas.

Through Fairy Halls. My Book House series, volume 6. by Olive Beaupre Miller.

The Seven-Year-Old Wonder Book. by Isabel Wyatt.

Felt Wee Folk. by Salley Mavor.

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. by C.S. Lewis.

Ballet Shoes. by Noel Streatfield.

Degas and the Dance. by Susan Goldman Rubin.

Buddha. by Demi.

I Once Was a Monkey: Stories Buddha Told. by Jeanne M. Lee.

The Wizard of Oz. by L. Frank Baum.

The Three Questions. by Jon J. Muth.

Toymaking with Children. by Freya Jaffke.