

At first 5S can feel a little alien... but then it all begins to make sense!

What on earth are FABS, Web-nesdays, FSC's?



[And here is a little news link about what aliens might hear depending on their listening skills...](#)

What is it like to be in the shoes of **5S**? We have **5** themes.

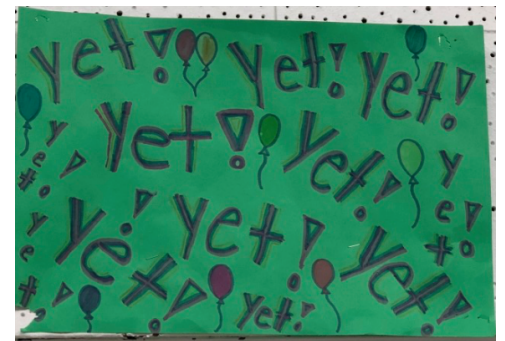
THEME 1: QUESTIONS LEAD THE WAY

In the articles, [The Art and Architecture of Powerful Questions: Link here](#) or the longer version-[The Art of Powerful questions](#) we learn that developing the right question is a better use of time than finding the right answer. In 5S we dig into questions because they can...



- deepen conversations
- focus our research
- Invite creativity and new ways of seeing the world
- inspire more thought provoking questions!

If we have a question, it means there is a good chance learning is about to happen. For this reason, we do **not** say, "I don't get it." We say, "I don't get it... **Yet!**"



Theme 2. LISTENING WITH CURIOSITY AND COMPASSION ARE KEYS TO A CLOSE COMMUNITY!



In an article called, [Willing To Be Disturbed](#), the author, Margaret Wheatley says: "We have the opportunity many times a day, everyday, to be the one who listens to others - curious rather than certain... In 5S we will look at who is talking, let people know our thoughts and questions and do our best to get in their shoes. They will listen to each other and to you while doing the FSC. They will learn the art of the interview."

Theme 3: WALKING IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES (Empathy) LEADS TO DEEPER KNOWLEDGE: But it's not easy. It takes work to find a place inside oneself that can relate. Everything we do and study in 5S will make more sense if we are willing to try on new shoes – even if the shoes belong to a silversmith, a crow, a table (Tabitha or Reggie) or a nemesis. There is always so much more to the story than what we first see. We will look at the stories people and objects can tell.

Theme 4: WHAT CAN BE COMMUNICATED WITHOUT WORDS?

In 5th grade, we study birds and we study animal behavior (humans too). We focus on how much we can learn from the intricate language that is communicated without words. 5th graders need to pay attention to the impact of body language and tones of voice. This can be read no matter what language you speak!

Theme 5: BE KIND TO YOURSELF; BE KIND TO OTHERS; BE KIND TO THE ENVIRONMENT: This is easy to say, but not so easy to do! This is especially true if we are tired, upset, hungry, worried, etc. We will try to *find solutions rather than lose our patience*. We will look out for each other and find places and spaces to take care of ourselves. We will listen to the voices in our heads and try to make them as positive and curious as possible rather than impatient or worried.

Why are these themes important?

In an NPR article called, *Want Change In Education? Look Beyond The Usual Suspects*, Anya Kamenetz said the following:

“Up to 70 percent of the tasks in most jobs are on track to be automated, leaving only the most creative, empathetic, technically fluent, collaborative work for humans... Students need to find motivation and meaning, and take a playful attitude that makes it safe to try and fail.

This sentence sums up what we are aiming for in 5S. We are not just gathering content and skills. We are listening, thinking, sharing, connecting and reaching for new understandings. AND our attitude must be playful. Studies have been done on the pivotal importance of PLAY. Also... [see Ken Robinson's IMPORTANT Ted Talk](#). So true, so funny and so important.

PERFECT TIMING: 5th graders are becoming more independent while at the same time better able to see their connection to and impact on the world. 5S students will be given more responsibility to take care of *their* environment: There will be more chances to shape projects to match their own interests. And just as 5th graders appreciate choice, they also benefit when expectations are clear and firm.

Systems and routines are comforting and they help students organize their time.

With that in mind, 5S students will focus on the following:

- Getting to school early enough to get settled and ready. This means arriving at 7:50
- Reading and listening to directions. Underlining key parts. Noticing what matters.
- Planning time wisely so time is well spent on assignments in class and home
- Maintaining an organized backpack, desk and classroom
- Making sure to understand the assignment and having the materials necessary to complete what is required at home and school
- Learning study skills such as highlighting key text, taking notes, asking thought provoking questions, communicating ideas, coming back to ask more questions for clarity and taking movement breaks!

One hot button topic throughout the lives of students is... **Homework** (a.k.a. P.S. Work)

Homework should *help your child* do the following:

- Connect what we do within the classroom to the outside world and actually get outside!
- Reinforce what we have studied during the day
- Stimulate and strengthen your child's brain and body and creativity
- Give your child a better understanding of his or her own learning style and a chance to explain his or her own thinking

Homework should NOT be stressful, boring or a waste of time And for parents...

Homework should not be stressful (or boring for that matter)

It should...

- give you a sense of the kind of work we are doing
- give you an opportunity to exchange ideas about school. ** The FSC is a big part of that.
- help you have a better sense of your child's progress or needs
- help you set up systems that make homework positive rather than a burden

These skills will help a great deal as your child heads into the middle school and beyond

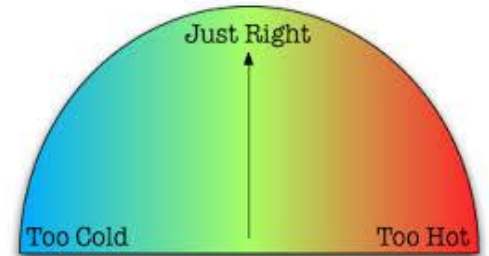
WORK HARD - NO STRESS - BALANCE

In room 302, we have a “Work hard, no worry, no stress” policy.



It's not easy. We must find the right balance. That is why we have the *Goldilocks Guide*.

In 5S, homework is called P.S. Work. (Post-School) work.. It should take around 45 minutes - plus 20-30



minutes of reading. There are usually four parts: reading, main, math, and skills. The main assignment should take around 20-30 minutes, the math should take 10-15 minutes, and the skills/exercise should take 5-10 minutes. If your child is consistently speeding through assignments, then the work is not challenging or thought provoking enough. If the work becomes painstaking and is taking more than one hour, then adjustments must be made.

It is important that your child becomes more aware of the questions or frustrations he or she has and can communicate them. Instead of worrying about not being able to complete the assignment, he or she should attempt to figure out *what is possible* and then write down the parts that are confusing. In other words, they should learn to figure out their own questions. Doing that might come as a relief, and it is an important skill unto itself. [We have codes for different types of questions.](#)

If your child forgets to do the assignment or leaves a book group book or journal behind, please **do not rush around trying to get it**. This causes stress and is counterproductive to our *finding solutions* policy. Your child should write a note explaining what happened and what might prevent this from happening in the future. It will also help us tweak an organizational system your child might need.

The only kind of stress we like is when people **stress the positive**. It's helpful to know when things are going well. If your child finds a particular kind of assignment clear, fun, or inspiring, it helps me to know about it. I can keep that information in mind for future projects. And, if you have memorable discussions or see progress happening at home, it helps us to know this too.

CURRICULUM:

Please note a curriculum overview for K-8 in Brookline [can be found here:](#)

Below is information specific to our Driscoll and our class.

Our science units are:

- Ecosystems - Environmental Protection- KEEP Club
- Birds and Animal Behavior
- Energy: Light, Optics, Sound & Sources of Energy
- Astronomy/Moon/shadows
- Introduction to Adolescence



Note-taking, expository writing, conducting experiments, and research techniques are all woven into our science units. Field trips and guest speakers (we hope) will be part of our curriculum. [The art of questioning](#) will be key as we delve into each of the science topics we'll explore. It's not an accident that many Nobel prize winners talk about the importance of questions and play.

Social Studies:

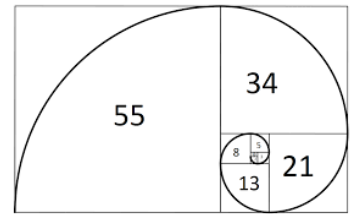
In order to understand our government and how it emerged, we must pay attention to the tension between *individual rights and the common good*. This tension is something we can see throughout our country's history and within the walls of our classroom. We will look at our three branches of government and how they connect to the laws in our classroom. 5S students are our legislative branch, I am the executive branch and our principal and vice principals are our supreme court.

The setting in U.S. history often takes place along rivers. That is why we have a river table in our room. The river table becomes a model for a fictional Massachusetts colonial village along the Charles River. **We hope to continue this in the new school!** We will also be using a new Brookline curriculum called Investigating History. I will share more about this curriculum as we launch it.

Math:

Our goals are to:

- observe patterns and relationships between numbers
- learn, efficient, accurate and logical ways to solve problems
- apply what we focus on in school to our lives outside of school
- experience how practice does help comprehension
- learn test-taking strategies - it does relieve stress and improve outcomes.
- improve communication and various methods for explaining our thinking through writing, speaking, graphs, equations, etc.
- We will use the Brookline Curriculum and use other resources that deepen numerical reasoning and understanding.



We will work so 5S students are comfortable not knowing but instead *exploring* and *communicating* new ideas and questions.

- What did you wonder?
- What did you notice?
- Now what do you wonder?

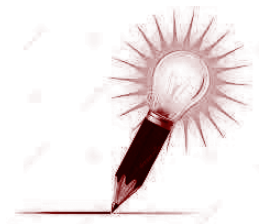
Language Arts:

Reading:

The expectation is that everyone in 5S will be reading every day. Students are expected to read at least 20-30 minutes every day. Yes, every day. We will have read aloud, book clubs, silent reading and paired reading. It is like Green Eggs and Ham... they will read in the rain, and on a train and in a house and with a mouse, etc. They will read to climb into books and they will read as authors.

Writing

“I need to write to find out what I’m thinking.” Larry Gelbart, a successful comedy writer (*Tootsie*, *M.A.S.H.*) was asked why he continued to write even though he had achieved fame and money. He said, **“I need to write to find out what I’m thinking.”**



That quote is true for many of us. Learning to write well is one of the most difficult and fulfilling parts of school. It is not easy to take a myriad of ideas, revelations,

feelings and questions and get them onto a piece of paper. On top of that, writers need to organize their thinking, and then make sure grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and neatness have been considered. It is no wonder so many students resist it. On the other hand, once ideas start to flow, writing can be one of the most satisfying parts of a day (or a life).

Not everything we write in the 5th grade will have to be revised, but *at all times* there will be something the class is working on that will take more than one draft. There will be a wide variety of writing projects. Students will be expected to write poetry, stories, essays, instructions, reviews, lists, and letters. They will write by hand and on the computer. The bulk of all writing is rewriting. It is rarely easy but so gratifying when words shine.

What do all these subjects have in common? No matter whether we are working together in school or considering the world outside, 5S will be following the words of Mary Oliver in her poem. "Sometimes". She has three simple yet meaningful directions.

"Pay Attention, Be Astonished, Tell About It."

5S will make this a priority all year in all aspects of our work.

That's it for now. I hope this packet and other forms of communication like the FSC, webpage, emails and listening conferences help you feel connected and included in our class. I also hope you know that your input, questions and connections are appreciated. Time moves quickly so we want to create space for what matters most.

Sincerely,

Francesca Stark

September, 2023