Diversity & Equity: Lower School

The Waldorf School of Atlanta boasts a rich and diverse curriculum experience in the Lower School classes. Stories are DE-. Each and every single day our teachers pull upon the threads of the shared story that is humanity. Our stories provide context, add perspective, and offer clarity around feelings that are only beginning to arise in the young child’s thought life. Without a rich and diverse story we cannot imagine what it might be like to walk in the shoes of another, to speak in another tongue, to see things with different eyes. The stories brought in grades 1-5 provide just that: a glimpse into the other and ultimately, into ourselves.

In the First Grade many of the characters brought in stories are about or revolve around people of color and also many have a female hero. Native Americans and Indigenous Peoples are represented throughout each and every single block this year. And we highlight implicitly socioeconomic differences through heartwarming and honest human beings, from portraits of farmers to emperors, tradespeople to kings and queens. These fairy tales have a deep resonance with the children and the picture that is provided creates a wonderfully diverse picture of the world we all share.

In the Second Grade, we share stories of Good, Kind, and Strong and Saintly people. The saintly stories include biographies from the Middle East of Saint George and Nicholas, females such as Saint Brigit and Clare. These tales also included pictures of everyday people, like Nelson Mandela, who rose to tremendous heights in faraway lands, as well as those more close to home, like Dr. Martin Luther Kind and Rosa Parks, who resonate with us still. The fables that balance out these tales of goodness come from diverse backgrounds as well, like the Indian Jataka Tales, Rudyard Kipling's Just So Stories or even Joel Chandler Harris' Brer Rabbit stories, which will even be revisited during their 8th grade's study of slavery and social justice, just a few years down the road. We also make sure to bring a number of diverse festivals into the classroom, including Soyal (a Hopi celebration), Kwaanza, Hannukah and stories for Chinese New Year.

In the Third Grade we bring one of the greatest stories ever told in the Old Testament, a story that binds together the Jewish, Christian and Islamic faiths together in an ancient and wondrous tale. These daily stories allow certain ideas and thoughts to rise to the surface, ideas that tie directly into the lives of the children and their families in the class. In one example, after singing and teaching, "Go Down Moses", we thought it important to bring a picture of the Negro spiritual and its history to his children. Reaching further into the here and now, we shared a story of Kumani’s Goat - a story from Uganda in which Kumani receives a goat from a humanitarian organization and the income from selling the goat’s milk is enough to send the girl to school.

In the Fourth Grade, our curriculum focuses on the rich history of the Norse gods of Scandinavia and Northern Europe. We balance these far-fetched tales with stories of the local history and Geography of Georgia and the Southeast. These lessons bring the history of Georgia to life with thoughtful depictions of the American Indian people already here, such as
the Creek and Cherokee Nations. Ancient creation stories of the Native Nations and visits to the Ocmulgee and Kolomoki burial mounds are important experiences for the children to glimpse the wonder of such great civilizations.

In the Fifth Grade, the students learn the diverse picture of the ancient civilizations of India, Mesopotamia, Persia, Babylon, Egypt, China and Greece. In each of these vastly different cultures and civilizations, the children sing traditional songs, recite ancient verses, and hear epic stories, the oldest known to humanity. The Fifth grade also brings a fuller picture of the history of the United States with the study of North American Geography. This study focuses on the American experience, but cannot exclude our all-important neighbors in Canada and Mexico. Additionally, the study highlights the vast American Indian Nations living here through the transition from 13 colonies to the 50 states we now know.

- Joshua Gartland