

# Why we knit in 1<sup>st</sup> grade

## Why Do We Teach Knitting?

Why do we teach handwork in Waldorf schools you may ask? Our fingertips contain billions of nerve endings. If we do not use our hands and stimulate our sense of touch, many of these nerve endings can become weak, leaving our hands essentially finger blind. Modern brain research confirms that mobility and dexterity in the fine motor muscles of the hand builds and strengthens neural pathways in the brain, thereby strengthening the physical foundation of thinking.

## Helping Children Learn to Read, Spell, and Write

As children knit and sew, they are continually crossing the midline, building connections between the left and right side of the brain. Stitch by stitch and row by row, children are increasing eye-hand coordination, tracking eye movement left to right, increasing capacity for concentration and focus. The ability to observe the effects of their work, staying organized with their materials, and problem solving on their own, are continually being applied right down to their fingertips. Knitting also supports rhythm and develops fine motor skills. These neural connections are important precursors to reading, writing, logical thinking, and problem solving. Modern brain research shows that learning to knit is actually proven to help children learn to read.

## Helping Strengthen Math Skills

Following a knitting pattern requires children to use all four math processes: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Over the years as the handwork projects become more advanced, so do the math skills. Drafting sewing patterns or weighing out wool and calculating shrinkage rates require students to use geometry, fractions, measurement, and algebra.



## **Developing Logical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills**

Handwork also develops problem-solving skills. Children learn that a straight line of yarn can be woven or knitted together to create an infinite number of forms. Learning to catch a dropped stitch and weave it back in or untangle a knot teaches the ability to slow down, look deeply, analyze, and solve a problem. Pattern recognition and visualizing what will come next in the pattern lay a firm foundation for logical thinking.

## **A Sense of Beauty and Worth**

Further than brain development, the handwork curriculum develops the senses of touch, beauty, color, and design. In this modern day our children too easily become passive consumers who, as Oscar Wilde once said, "know the price of everything and the value of nothing". Through the Waldorf handwork curriculum children develop a deep understanding and appreciation for natural fibers, toys, and clothing. They experience every step of the process from shearing the sheep, to carding, washing, spinning, dyeing, weaving, knitting, and sewing.

Handwork in the early years also builds confidence. It imbues a sense of well-being to be able to create something that is both useful and beautiful. Children learn that with their hands they are able to transform natural materials into something new. While in the early years it may be to create a toy, a hat, or a bag, later in life it translates into an important survival skill for meeting the needs of the individual, the family and the community, as the young adult feels empowered to create what is necessary and useful. Handwork gives your child the power to believe in themselves, to be able to say, "yes, I can do that", even if they have never done it before. Your child will know, with confidence, that if they want to, they can learn to do and make anything. That is an understanding they will carry with them for a lifetime.

