Waldorf Connection Presents...
The Ultimate Guide to Teaching

Letters & Form Drawing

For

First Grade

by Anne Cleveland

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B. INTRODUCTION

A little bit about me: I am a Musician, Dancer, Waldorf Teacher, Simplicity Parenting Coach & Educational Consultant, and I’ve been playing music, teaching, & tutoring for 30 years and for 16 of those years I’ve devoted my efforts to Waldorf Education. After teaching for many years I decided to get my Masters in Waldorf education. For my thesis I took a critical look at what children truly need to thrive in the world and how Waldorf education meets those needs. I came away from the project even more devoted to the principles of the education and helping others implement those principles. I have a deep passion for helping you as parents understand more clearly how children learn so you can feel empowered to create soul nourishing environments for your child that are in line with your values and principles, which will help your child thrive now and into their future.

For more information on my services go to www.lifebalanceforparents.com/session and sign up for a FREE 30-minute strategy session to help you get a head start on your planning.

C. WHY WAIT TO TEACH ACADEMICS

Why does Waldorf recommend taking longer than other schools to bring reading and writing to the children?

How reading & writing is presented in Waldorf schools mirrors the development of civilization. Language is brought in much the same way that human beings learned to read and write throughout history. The children begin their literary journey in Kindergarten with the rich story curriculum. In the first grade what Waldorf strives to do is to introduce written language in a manner that is suited to the way a child naturally learns and takes in the world.

There are three distinctive 7-year cycles that can be identified when speaking about child development. The first seven years are mostly centered on the development of the physical body, the second seven years, from 7-14, are centered around the development of the feeling life. It is not until the years between 14 and 21 when the focus of development shifts to intellectual and abstract thought. And finally, from 21-28, there is a focus on the development of the ego and the sense of the other.

So the idea of “the sooner the better doesn’t always apply, especially when it comes to the development of soul forces, because although a child can learn academics at an early age, the focus on intellectual and abstract thought takes away from the primary focus of developing the physical body from 0-7 and the development of the feeling life during the elementary years. Obviously, it’s not that there isn’t any intellectual activity going on in the early grades, but the academic subjects, during the years form 7-14 are primarily brought through the arts, story telling, images and the feeling life. This way a child can engage more deeply with the material and remember more because the learning is brought in a way that is easier to digest and ignites the enthusiasm.

How do you know if your child is ready for first grade?

One of the clearest indicators that a child is ready for the learning in first grade is when a child begins to lose their milk teeth. The loss of teeth signifies that there is a shift from the focus on the physical development to the development of the etheric body of life body, which around the age of 6 or 7 becomes freed up for the academic work that begins in the first grade.

There is a whole set of indicators known as First Grade Readiness, which shows that the etheric body has begun to separate from the physical and is freed up for more academic pursuits. What kindergarten teachers look for is a change in a child’s drawings, overall coordination and social interactions. Each child develops at their own pace, so as a homeschool parent you have the freedom to customize your curriculum to the needs of your child. In a Waldorf school, it is common for a child to have two years of kindergarten to ensure that they are ready for first grade. First grade readiness deserves a whole book in itself, but suffice it to say that the change of teeth, along with the development of basic coordination such as the ability to throw and catch or sing a song while skipping rope are just some of the indicators that the etheric has lifted from the physical body is ready for the rigors of first grade learning.

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D. THE LETTERS

What is the difference between form drawing & writing letters, they seem so similar?
The difference between form drawing and writing is that form drawing is the representation of a movement come rest and is brought forth from within. Letters, on the other hand are an abstract and symbolic representation of a sound or grouping of sounds. Form drawing supports writing in that a child has the opportunity to practice different combinations of straight and curved lines. Learning the letters is the process of bringing sounds into written form. Writing is also something that is not part of child nature, so it is important to provide the material in a way that supports the natural childlike and imaginative aspects of a first grader.

What’s the best way to introduce the alphabet to a child?
Because the letters are inherently abstract, the best way to introduce them is through stories and images. Of course children learn the letters by copying, and often children learns a few letters before first grade. But even if they have learned the whole alphabet, they will be thoroughly engaged through the stories and drawings, which bring these abstract symbols we call letters alive. So instead of just learning the abstract symbols, to which they have very little inner connection, the stories and images help a child to bridge the physical world with the world of symbols that have come to represent language.

Can you give me an example of how I would present a letter to a first grader?

The Story: Choose a fairy tale, nature story, animal story, poem, verse or song as the central them of your lesson or presentation.

The Drawing: Draw a picture of a scene with block crayons that includes the mountain, which can go on the wall after you tell the story.

Practice: Practice your letters with the correct stroke order and make a final copy that will go on the wall next to the story after they’ve created their own page.

The Presentation: Tell the story or introduce your verse or poem on the first day, which includes a detailed and colorful description of the mountain that they will be drawing later on.

The Review: The next day, ask what they remember about the story and piece it together. It’s not important that they tell it back in chronological order, but that they pull up what they remember and then you can fill in the missing pieces together.

The Drawing: Once the review is done and you’ve talked about the mountain in great detail it’s time for the drawing. On that same day demonstrate on a large piece of paper how you want them to draw the picture giving step-by-step instructions so they can follow right along with you. Give them block crayons for the drawing and in the demonstration emphasize how to use the different sides of the blocks to make the different parts of the picture, thus steering them gently away from drawing outlines and filling them in. As you draw you can demonstrate how to create color masses that grow from the inside out to create the forms in the picture.
The Letters: On the third day, after they’ve drawn the mountain and the accompanying scene, have a few sentences from the story prepared and practice saying say the word mountain emphasizing the “mm” sound. Show them, on another paper how the two peaks of the mountain can be made into a symbol of the sound “mm.” A common format to use for the letter page is to put a large capital “M” in the middle and then to place two smaller capital “M’s” on either side.

Practicing the Letters: After they’ve learned the letter, the next step is to have them practice writing a series of capital “M’s” across the page. Have them create guides above and below with space for a letter in between with the small side of the block crayon to to keep them writing straight across the page. They can usually fit two to three rows on a typical main lesson page, so you want the letters to be fairly large at first. Don’t forget to begin with your demonstration and then let them copy what you’ve done.

How do you I decide which letters to teach first and how do I proceed throughout the year?
Essentially, there isn’t any one right way so you have the creativity to decide when and how you bring the letters, but in the beginning I recommend that you focus on bringing most of the letters one at a time, each with a story rich in images. Then as you become more comfortable with the process you can bring a few letters together that are related in shape and create a story that includes them together. In terms of planning, keep in mind that during the year there is usually time for three language blocks. Before the year begins map out your plan so that you can bring all the capitals and lowercase letters by the end of the year. The whole alphabet is contained in the etheric or life body of the child.

A few guidelines for the introducing the letters
Teach the capitals first and then bring in their little brothers or sisters afterwards. The consonants are more connected to the physical and etheric body and thus tend to be more formative and sculptural, where as the vowels are musical and more related to the astral body. Each of the consonants evokes a different element in nature.

- **Earth** – B,K,G,D, N,P,T,M
- **Water** – L
- **Air** – R

Lower Case: After you’ve taught all of the capital letters and are bringing in the lower case letters, you don’t have to find a whole new story for each one. You can use a simple image or review the story from the older sibling as a way to introduce the lower case of each capital letter.
What do I do if they get frustrated?
You know your child best, and as you teach them you learn when they need a little nudge and when it’s time to take a break. Use your intuition and as you work with you child in this way you will come to know what works best for him or her. The important thing is not to force the issue into a power struggle, as I’m sure you know they always win! Sometimes the resistance is because there is a learning challenge, sometimes they are just tired, and sometimes they just need a little help.

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D. FORM DRAWING

What is Form Drawing?
Form Drawing is essentially movement come to rest in the form of straight lines and curves. Many of the forms can be found in folk traditions all over the world. It is taught in Waldorf schools throughout the world to classes 1-5, and is usually the first lesson taught on the first day of first grade. What is so special about form drawing is that it is a dynamic, with an emphasis on the process rather than the final product. The results are about whole-body movements that are momentarily captured on paper based on an inner experience or perception. Instead of trying to reproduce and object seen in the outer world, it stimulates an inner feeling for special orientation.

What is the difference between regular drawing and form drawing?
The difference between regular drawing and form drawing is that a regular drawing is a two-dimensional representation of a three dimensional outer experience. The essence of form drawing is movement, which is expressed in the form of a simple, unembellished line. Form drawing is about creating a continuous line experience and regular drawing is more about shading and creating shapes that represent outer reality, so traditionally in form drawing the background is left blank, without decoration so as not to detract from the vitality of the line.

How did form drawing begin?
It was created by Rudolf Steiner and introduced in the first Waldorf School in 1919. At the time it was a completely new subject that he created for the school and it continues to be a unique subject taught in Waldorf.

What are the benefits of form drawing for a child?
 • It develops the will forces, focus, concentration and self-control
 • Gives them a sense of self-movement and balance
 • It is an excellent preparation for the writing or numbers and letters as geometry
 • Running forms help to bring harmonious breathing
 • It Trains both the fine motor and gross motor skills
 • It helps to balance the soul forces—
  Angular forms are associated to thinking and have an awakening tendency, which increase alertness, concentration and focus.
  Color affects the feeling life of the child
  Rounded forms call on the unconscious forces of the will and have a relaxing affect.
  Forms that combine both straight lines and curves have a balancing effect.

What is the recommended form drawing curriculum for the first grade?
1. Straight lines
   a. Upside down T
   b. Cross over – lines of equal length
   c. Large Capital I
   d. Series of straight lines that rise and fall
   e. Series of straight lines that alternate in length
   f. Diagonal lines that don’t meet
2. Curves  
   a. Circles and Half Circles

3. Spirals

4. Changing curved forms into a straight lined form and vice versa.

5. Simple geometric closed forms—circle, square, rectangle etc.

6. Forms that go through a metamorphosis

7. Running forms
9. **Symmetry forms**- right around the age of 6 they begin to distinguish the difference between left and right. By first grade, most children have chosen a dominant hand. Form drawing provides simple *completion exercises* that can be in first grade. You draw one half of the drawing and the child fills in the mirror opposite on the other side so that it feels complete.

*Left/right symmetry*, also known as *mirroring*, is reflected in the body, which is the reflection of an inner experience.

What materials do I need for a form drawing class?
- Block crayons, stick crayons and later on thick colored pencils
- Form drawing main lesson book or single sheets of paper to be put together later on
- A nice quiet space with a cleared flat surface to write upon
- A chair sized to your child so the feet are flat on the ground and the arm is comfortable for writing.

What is the best way to present form drawing to a first grader?

**Moving the form:** To present the form it’s important to begin with a whole body experience. Figure out how you want them to *move* the form, keeping in mind that you want to start with large full body movements and then progress onto smaller movements that will eventually come to rest on the paper.

*For example…*
- Walk the form outside on the ground or inside across the floor
- Trace the form with just the feet
- Move the form in the air with the whole arm
- Move the form in the air with just the elbow
- Move the form in the air with just the hand
- Move the form in the air with just the pointer finger
- Move the form in the air with a pencil or crayon held in the hand
- Move the form 1 inch above the paper
- Finally… it’s time to bring the crayon or pencil to paper to create the form
- Your child may sit or stand to draw the forms. Standing gives the child more consciousness of what they are doing and a bird’s eye view. Experiment and observe the difference.

**The Importance of a Continuous Line:** It is recommended that with the running forms and other forms that don’t have a natural break that the child continues forward with the form without back tracking or trying to fix things. Find an imaginative way to remind them so that if they do pick up their pencil you have a positive way to encourage them try without lifting the pencil or crayon from the page.

**Paper Placement:** As you practice, make sure the paper is centered in front of you so that you remember to center the paper for your child on the table or desk—many children like to move the paper to one side or another—don’t worry about forcing the issue, but from the beginning teach them by example and through images where the paper should go. If they insist on moving the paper to one side, it may be an indication of a strong *mid-line*. The best way is to gently move the paper without making a lot of fuss, but I wouldn’t force the issue if there is a lot of resistance.
Evaluating their work and helping your child improve the forms

If in the beginning your child is has some difficulty with the form, remember that form drawing is like dancing on paper, let them enjoy the experience and notice and keep in mind what you want to emphasize for the next lesson as you observe what they do with the process. It’s important that you don’t tell them that they are doing it wrong. It’s best to notice what the tendency is and then to encourage them with images to try something the next time you have a session. Remember that just the act of creating a form is therapeutic, so your job as the teacher is to simply observe what they do and how they move the form, more as a diagnostic tool—so that then you can gently guide them in good direction for the next lesson.

You can have them begin with practice paper, and then you can decide when it’s time to put their final version in their book or paper or when to move on to a new form.

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F. RESOURCES
a. Form Drawing for Beginners by Donna Simmons
b. Form Drawing for Grades 1-4 by Ernst Schubert and Laura Embry-Stine
c. Teaching Children Handwriting by Audrey McAllen
d. Practical Advice for Teachers by Rudolf Steiner
e. For further information on left and right brain reading: Dr. Susan Johnson has many articles on her website on this very topic. If you have more questions about this topic, I recommend you check out her website: www.youandyourchildshealth.org

G. A FEW STORY TELLING TIPS
a. Be expressive, but let the story speak for itself
b. Vary the tempo, intonation, and timing as a way to create drama.
c. Have the pictures in mind as you are telling it.
d. Describe things from the perspective of all the senses.
e. Try not to give them the conclusion: describe and let them come to the conclusion
f. Speak clearly and slowly; it will help the children to settle
g. Move deliberately and be conscious that they will imitate pretty much everything you do
h. Make notes about how you might bring your story back later in the year or in another grade
i. Memorize the story as best as you can: you make more of a connection when you do
j. Notice the difference in the quality of the listening between reading and telling the story.
k. Try out different ways of getting the story in your body
l. While you are learning the story imagine different things you could do with the story: Letters, Words, Sentences, Poetry, Drawings, Paintings, Form Drawing & Crafts

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