



Wee Learners(4 - 5 years): Kindergarten Academics: What to Expect

Perhaps no grade has changed as much as kindergarten over the past few decades. Most children now attend full-day kindergarten as opposed to the half-day programs and for many kids, kindergarten is not their first school experience. They are already pros after attending prekindergarten classes or participating in kindergarten readiness programs.

These shifts have affected what kindergartners learn, resulting in what educators call a "pushing down" of the curriculum. What students used to learn in 1st grade is now taught in kindergarten, in part because so many children already learned what used to be taught in kindergarten in preK.

Prereading Skills

Most kindergarten classrooms still make room for the staples that 5-year-olds love: manipulatives, blocks, finger paints, puppets, and of course loads of books. The idea is to encourage young children to continue to learn mostly through play but to expect them to tackle more complex academic skills in the process.

The amount of time students spend on traditional kindergarten activities or sitting at a desk completing worksheets varies by school and even by teacher. Often, the structure of the kindergarten day depends on the students—their kindergarten readiness when they arrived on the first day and what academic skills they already have.

Generally, kindergartners are expected to develop prereading skills during that year of school. Some will skip ahead and start reading by the end of the year. Children start with letter recognition and associating sounds with certain letters. Then they move on to guided reading—a method in which the teacher works with children in small groups—and recognition of familiar sight words.

These days, kindergartners are usually assessed year-round against a set of milestones rather than with a standardized test.

Math, Science, and Other Subjects

Most of the school day in kindergarten is focused on reading, but other subjects, including math, science, and social studies, are woven into the curriculum. Many kindergarten lessons are built around a theme, such as dinosaurs or butterflies. Such themed units give children a chance to learn about science while they build their reading skills. Science at this age is about exploration and observation. Children also learn through art and music.

Math is an easy subject to integrate at this age. Kindergartners love to count, and many will have conquered simple addition and subtraction of tangible objects by the time school lets out for summer.

Parents can help their kindergartners achieve at school by reading with them every day and encouraging them to observe the world around them. Providing children with a range of experiences and opportunities will help them develop their vocabularies and learn simple math.

Time for Fun, Learning

Children at this age have a great capacity for compassion. They enjoy books featuring characters—human or animal. It's important to give young children books that relate to their everyday world rather than abstract texts.

A typical kindergarten class might start the day with "calendar time," with children gathered in a circle to talk about aspects of daily life such as which day of the week it is, whether the weather is sunny or rainy, and how many students are present, and that's a math lesson.

A kindergarten student's day should be filled with singing, playing games, rhyming, and other fun activities. The lessons kindergartners learn through play will help build the strong foundation they'll need in years to come.

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