

Links between Crow's Path and Vermont State Standards (preK – 4)

1 Expression

1.15 Students use verbal and nonverbal skills to express themselves effectively

We close each day with story telling and reflection. Each child is offered the opportunity to share stories of the day with the group. Stories are gateways for diving deeper into their learning. If a child says that they saw a deer in the morning we can then ask if it was male or female and how might they know. Do they know what deer are doing this time of year? How did it walk and did they find tracks or sign? The next time the child sees a deer (or whatever else the subject of their story may have been) their sense of observation will be keener. By asking questions, the story teller also learns how to draw out the experience to be more visual and connective for their audience.

1.16 Students use a variety of forms, such as dance, music, theater, and visual arts, to create projects that are appropriate in terms of the following dimensions: skill development, reflection and critique, making connections, and approach to work

We are continually experimenting with a wide variety of natural materials as we create. Examples include clay pots, beads and ocarinas that we fire-hardened in a fire. We experimented by using different sources of sediment from the land (including some siltier sediments, others with a higher percentage of clay). Each child's creation takes its own life and because we return to these skills children are able to hone their craft and refine their capacity to express themselves as they become increasingly proficient with different media (other media include wood for carving, birch bark drawings, fairy houses, shelters, snow sculptures, etc.). Some of our children love dance, others music. We created a rubbish band last year out of antique sugar buckets we found.

2 Reasoning and Problem Solving Standards

2.1 Students ask a variety of questions.

Our approach to learning is inquiry based. Children are encouraged to seek their own answers rather than just look for answers from others. We connect a plant's use with the ecology of the area to foster a curiosity about the deeper "how" and "why" questions. For example, last year while sugaring we paid attention to the weather and how this connected with the flow of sap. We postulated on why we got better flow on warmer days and noticed the pattern that cold nights yielded better flows. Mentors push the children to ask questions and to think more than at the surface about why things are the way they are.

2.2 Students use reasoning strategies, knowledge, and common sense to solve complex problems related to all fields of knowledge

There are very few textbooks go into detail about many of the things we do at Crow's Path. If a child wants to build a debris shelter to sleep in at our overnight they must design and build this on their own. We can ask them questions to get them to think more critically about their solutions (like, which direction should the entrance face, should you look around for standing dead trees, which trees tend to attract lightning, which shelter you best from the wind). Because we test our solutions in a very real way, the learning is rich and refines and improves the process of solving complex problems in the future.

2.3 Students solve problems of increasing complexity

Because our projects continually build on one another and are interrelated we always approach problems with an increased complexity of understanding. While carving a

spoon we talk about creating edges in our chunk of wood to facilitate taking off wood. We talk about the same process while using a draw knife to flatten a log for building a bridge or using an axe to cut a log in half for a bench. Because we connect each of our activities we are increasingly aware of the shared complexity of problems. Not only does this improve our awareness of similarities between distant things, but also improves our awareness of patterns in complexity.

2.4 Students devise and test ways of improving the effectiveness of a system

We depend on the things we create to make us more comfortable (whether it's a spoon for eating, a long house for shelter from the wind, a fire structure to burn wood to keep us warm, or a wild edible salad to keep us sated). If we are unhappy with the results we improve on the system for next time (like learning to use a square knot rather than a granny knot to secure a lashing).

2.8 Students demonstrate a willingness to take risks in order to learn

Many of the activities at Crow's Path are new and unfamiliar to children (whether it's eating a wild edible, getting muddy with camouflage, observing a slug breathing, or being outside in the dark without a light). We strive to make our environment nurturing and safe so that children feel comfortable enough to take healthy risks. Our mentors work carefully to identify children's edges and work at the borders of these to push them just to that point of discomfort where learning takes place. On our overnight trips we have "Samurai Challenges" where the children have to accept the challenge before they know what it is. This establishes trust in the process and mentors and also encourages their sense of adventure and willingness to take a risk.

2.9 Students persevere in the face of challenges and obstacle

Mentors purposefully put the students in positions where they have to overcome challenges (like pretending to be lost or without a fire so that the students must take initiative to overcome the challenge). We also work with students to confront difficulty with humility and enthusiasm rather than pessimism and arrogance.

2.12 Students modify or change their original ideas and/or the ideas of others to generate innovative solutions.

By allowing children to take the lead on designing and creating, they are encouraged to engage in a wider range of creative solutions. We have several high school interns and UVM students helping out. By engaging the children in a diverse set of perspectives and skill levels, they are exposed to a wider array of possibility.s

2.14 Students design a product, project, or service to meet an identified need

Rock Point generously allows us to use their land. We engage in a number of projects to give back to the land and people that help us (we made apple sauce for the caretaker, build and maintain trails, repair bridges, plant trees, pick up trash, and educate others about the land to support Rock Point's mission).

3 Personal Development Standards

3.3 Students demonstrate respect for themselves and others

At the start of each semester we co-create a set of agreements for how we conduct ourselves and treat others. Our agreements this year are to care for ourselves, others, and the land. Each person is responsible for upholding these agreements and helping others uphold them as well.

3.5 Students make informed, healthy choices that positively affect the health, safety, and well-being of themselves and others

Our agreements are a safety net to reinforce positive interactions with others. Our games are non-competitive and reinforce respect and care for others. We talk a lot about the hazards of spending a full day outside in the elements engaged in physical activity and help the children take responsibility for their health (e.g. staying hydrated, bringing warm clothes and extra dry clothes, learning how to deal with cold weather while camping, what to do in survival situations with an emphasis on prevention).

3.6 Students demonstrate competency in many and proficiency in a few of the skills and concepts needed for a lifetime of physical activity.

We play a wide variety of games involving running, hiding, jumping, throwing, etc. Many of our other activities (like shelter building) engage various muscle groups and encourage different physical skills. Play is an integral part of our learning process. Games forge associations between learning, fun, and physical activity.

3.9 Students make decisions that demonstrate understanding of natural and human communities, the ecological, economic, political, or social systems within them, and awareness of how their personal and collective actions affect the sustainability of these interrelated systems.

We ask a lot of the land that we use each Thursday. We take a conscious approach to how we engage with the land. While harvesting sugar maples and white ash for building a long house we selectively harvested plants to promote the health of the population of each species (we harvested trees that were unhealthy, physical damaged, or competing with a healthier tree of the same species). We spread the seeds of the plants we harvest and have protected other rare plants in our area by building tiny barriers to impede people from walking on them. Because we depend on many of the species that are our neighbors we learn to care for them.

3.10 Students perform effectively on teams that set and achieve goals, conduct investigations, solve problems, and create solutions (e.g., by using consensus-building and cooperation to work toward group decisions)

We have a horizontal learning structure. Because each person offers a unique suite of skills, perspectives, and experiences, a cooperative, consensus based approach ultimately leads to a richer more creative solution. In building our long house, children naturally gravitated to different tasks (e.g. tying rope, harvesting trees, limbing saplings, digging holes, laying out the floor plan, etc.). We engage in a wide variety of activities and games allowing each child to experience different roles and responsibilities. Each different task ultimately asks the group to cooperate, while offering a different set of circumstances to test out how to cooperate.

3.11 Students interact respectfully with others, including those with whom they have differences.

Again, because we have cooperatively created a set of agreements to uphold, we can easily turn to these to navigate any group difficulties that emerge.

3.14 Students demonstrate dependability, productivity, and initiative

Our program is weekly and each student attends roughly 90% of the days. Students work on both short-term projects (e.g. clay beads) and long-term projects (e.g. carving a 15-ft totem pole). Mentors provide ideas and materials for many of these but others are of the children's own design (e.g. clay ocarinas).

4 Civic/Social Responsibilities Standards

4.1 Students take an active role in their community.

Stewardship is fundamental to our time at Crow's Path. Our third agreement, to care for the land, manifests as bridge building, trail maintenance, planting mastig trees for wildlife habitat, creating art, teaching others, and making gifts for other people.

4.2 Students participate in democratic processes

Decisions that affect the group are most often decided democratically. We use a spin-off of instant run-off voting for siting new structures, tapping trees for sap, or harvesting trees for bow staves.

4.5 Students understand continuity and change

Our learning is seasonal and so our energy shifts from one week to the next as new occurrences are popping up on the land. We strive to ground our experiences in seeing time as a spiral, both linear and cyclical. Each season is continuous with the one before and different from the same season in the year before.

4.6 Students demonstrate understanding of the relationship between their local environment and community heritage and how each shapes their lives.

Because virtually all of the materials we use come from the land, our students have a personal and real connection between their local environment and how this shapes our lives. Our phenological approach cues us in to what is most alive on the land at different times of year and how this shapes the way we act (at least on Thursdays).

6 History and Social Science Standards

6.5 Students investigate both the traditional and the social histories of the people, places, and cultures under study, including those of indigenous peoples.

The Abenaki were unique in their understanding of this land. They understood the ecology of this area in a unique way that combined natural history with traditional skills. They knew where cattails grew, how they were used for fire, food, and shelter, and all about its life cycle. We look to the mythology, stories, and skills of the Abenaki and other indigenous cultures as we learn how to better inhabit our land. Each skill we explore is introduced in the context of where it comes from and how it was passed to us. We honor the lineage of great ideas and the cultures that hold them.

7 Science, Mathematics, and Technology Standard

7.13 Students understand the characteristics of organisms, see patterns of similarity and differences among living organisms, understand the role of evolution, and recognize the interdependence of all systems that support life

Because Crow's Path is home to so many beautiful animals (bald eagles, red foxes, white-tailed deer, short-tailed shrews, coyotes, red-tailed hawks, pileated woodpeckers and many more) we are constantly attuning our senses in to what they can teach us. We teach bird language, animal tracking, and play various games to reinforce an understanding of and respect for the life history of many animals.