



*Of all you learn here, remember this the best;
Don't hurt each other and clean up your mess.
Take a nap every day, wash before you eat;
Hold hands, stick together,
Look before you cross the street.
Remember the seed in the little paper cup,
First the root goes down and then the plant grows up!*

— *Kindergarten Wall*, refrain, Peck Lower School

AMERICAN FOLK SINGER-SONGWRITER

John McCutcheon released his song *Kindergarten Wall* on an album that, as noted in its description, is “for dancing and singing, for going to sleep and waking up, for remembering and imagining, for thinking about the future and the past.” In other words, *Kindergarten Wall* is part of a collection of songs about childhood life.

Peck’s kindergarten students have sung *Kindergarten Wall* during assemblies and Sings for the past few years. It’s a catchy tune (and one they perform with glee and gusto) that speaks to that unpretentious-yet-exhilarating life stage occupied by five- and six-year-old bodies and brains.

At this age, kids are learning to learn, to find routines, to follow norms, to clarify their voice. To be aware of their relation to others and their community. They’re learning what’s important, to themselves and to others. And the Peck kindergarten program is structured to meet them where they are, at every angle—academically, socially, emotionally, and developmentally.

“There are so many ways to describe a five- or six-year-old,” said Kindergarten Teacher Maribel Mohr. “They’re playful, joyful, energetic, happy. Inviting and inquisitive. Curiosity is a human condition, and you can see how much they’re constantly wanting to learn and grow and make connections.”

childhood | honored



Of all you learn here, remember this the best.

Distilling kindergarten to just the “ABCs” and “123s” does a disservice to the whole world of things to learn and experience at this grade. Peck’s kindergarten program is both academically rigorous and thoughtful in its approach to teaching young children how to learn.

Given that children hit a critical period in brain development from about age two to seven, Peck’s program capitalizes on the last few years of this growth. This is prime ground to nurture executive functioning skills, emotional intelligence, and a growth mindset. Kindergarten teachers Mohr and Kristin Young (who both hold advanced degrees and have decades of experience in early education) attend to *how* kids learn just as much as *what* they learn.

“There’s a certain freedom to them, and they don’t judge the thought in their head,” said Mohr. “They learn that mistakes are part of learning and to fail successfully.”

A willingness to take risks and the resilience to make mistakes and try again are crucial capacities for lifelong learning. Of all the things Peck kindergartners take away from their inaugural year, it’s remembering *‘I can try this, and try again!’* that propels them to even greater potential.

Don’t hurt each other, and clean up your mess.

Consideration of others and empathy are core to the Peck experience. From kindergarten through eighth grade, character education and academics intersect powerfully in the learning experience. This is a philosophy that speaks to not only how we relate to each other, but to the responsibilities of trying your hardest, contributing to your community, and respecting your space.

Kindergarten is also a prime year for forming friendships with peers, which plays a significant role in social-emotional development and community responsibility.

“However, before young children can begin to have relationships with others they need to develop an awareness of self—their behaviors and feelings, impact on others, and how to act within a space,” said Lower School Psychologist Ashley Tabor.

“This is the basis of any social-emotional learning. One of the critical things that Peck does so well is integrating kids into

routines that help them understand things like taking turns, sharing, and relating to others. Our students come from so many different communities and environments, that we’re starting a school year with a different baseline than, say, a public preschool that transitions into a kindergarten.”

Teaching young children how to reciprocate within a community requires more than just a caring, fun, and friendly environment. Peck’s kindergarten program relies on structured approaches and frameworks to meet these goals—such as the Responsive Classroom technique and curriculum targeted towards strengthening social-emotional skills.

“Kindergartners are constantly wanting to learn, not only academics, but socially learning right from wrong, simple skills such as sharing and caring, and that every decision they make has an effect. They learn that being kind to someone makes you feel good,” said Young.

Take a nap every day, wash before you eat.

Though Peck kindergartners don’t nap, they *do* enjoy the home-like feeling of their own space—and the agency, ownership, and stewardship that feeling cultivates. The standalone Deetjen Kindergarten building is one of the top things that distinguishes our program, with its homerooms and “Big Room,” Kindergarten Idea & Design Lab (known as the K.I.D. Lab!), and an outdoor learning space and playground.

“We create a real sense of community in the beginning,” said Young, “where we can be together in our own building. It’s intimate, and they feel like they can move in their own space.”

When it comes to lunchtime, kindergartners eat together in the Big Room, sometimes as homerooms and sometimes as the whole grade (as they do for *¡Vamos a Comer!* spanish-immersion lunches.) In a miniature version of Peck’s Family Dining program, they chat over their meals while sitting at round tables, helping each other clean up, and making connections that otherwise might be lost in the hubbub of a multiple-grade lunch space.

Throughout kindergarten, students increasingly become more independent and confident completing small tasks by themselves. From serving themselves lunch to washing their hands properly, they start taking charge of daily activities that make them more responsible.

**Hold hands,
stick together,
look before you
cross the street.**

Forging connections with the rest of the school isn't forgotten during the school year. Indeed, it's an important component to ensuring a smooth transition from kindergarten to first grade, as well as an overall experience through eighth grade.

The Class of 2023 have designated 'buddies' in the first and fourth grades, with whom they enjoy fun projects and field trips. With the fourth and eighth grade, they participate in Peck's Reach Across program.

They'll parade for Halloween and take walking field trips with their first-grade buddies (holding hands on the way!). Field trips and reading time is special with fourth-grade buddies, as is celebrating "Pajama Day" together in December.

During Reach Across activities, the K (as they are affectionately known) is grouped with fourth and eighth grade for fun projects fostering collaboration and communication.

"My FAVORITE part about having a buddy is playing with him!" said kindergartner Fitz Zeidler, of his fourth-grade buddy Arthur Soudah.

Connecting with adults on campus is intentional, too, as nearly every Peck

teacher or staff happily volunteers to be a surprise reader. The kindergarten also travels to learn from other teachers for classes like Art, Music, Library, and Science, Design, & Technology. While the K remains their home base, they develop comfort and confidence among the rest of Peck's buildings and entire school community.

Exposure to the emotions and perspectives of other people, from same-age to older, is part of building emotional resilience and independence.

Students build habits for sharing, taking turns, active listening, and communicating their ideas to others—all which lay the foundation for leadership qualities as they grow.

**First the root
goes down,
and then the
plant grows up!**

Peck's kindergarten program deeply roots young children in the habits of active learning. Teachers (both homeroom and other Peck specialists who teach kindergartners) feed curiosity, welcome questions, and nurture independent thinkers. Honoring this stage of development, where the world is full of new things and endless possibilities, is something that Peck teachers excel at, every day.

"We have an extremely nurturing community here," said Mohr, "with the flexibility to meet kids where they are. If they're not happy and content and ready to learn, they're not going to learn—so we stop and recognize moments that are emotional or where we make a mistake, and the more we do that, the more we can support each other."

"We build a strong foundation of trust and connection, which lets them learn deeply and enjoy it," continued Mohr. "I love that we can be responsive; when we want to know more about why something works the way it does, we can investigate that. When we need to acknowledge and celebrate each other, we do that and it builds a stronger community. And when we want to break out into song, we break out into song!"

