

Student Characteristics K-12

Elementary Students

Students in grades K through 5 are very enthusiastic! They will be excited that you are there and eager to hear about what they will be doing during your visit. With all that energy, it will be important to know and follow the classroom rules and procedures.

Kindergarten - 4, 5, 6 year olds

- ▲ Students need things to play with and manipulate. They are attention getters and crave praise. They get frustrated with serious talk and serious people so they need learning to be fun. They get along great with either gender.

First Grade - 5, 6, 7 year olds

- ▲ Students do not stay still even when sitting. They have a hard time finishing what they start. Many children are competitive, tend to be self-centered, want to be first, and most want all the attention. They need time to interact and play.

Second Grade - 6, 7, 8 year olds

- ▲ Students have distinct personalities and need encouragement about accepting their differences. They can only concentrate on subjects in class for about 20 minutes at a time. They find repetition great fun.

Third Grade - 7, 8, 9 year olds

- ▲ Students tend to be very talkative and have much to say to just about any person. They need to know, to organize, and to classify. They need values woven into everything from current events to fiction.

Fourth Grade - 8, 9, 10 year olds

- ▲ Students want everyone, including teachers and parents, to know they have become more distinct individuals. They become more absorbed and competitive, which gives them a strong need to improve on past accomplishments. They emphasize a division between boys and girls.

Fifth Grade - 9, 10, 11 year olds

- ▲ Students become interested and enthusiastic about places and problems in the news. They find school more demanding. They value honor and fair play, which stems from their budding social conscience. Boys begin to discover girls and girls begin to discover boys.

Middle School Students

Never underestimate this age group. They want to learn almost everything, and they are developing the ability to think abstractly. More important, they need to feel cared about and respected by the adults in their lives. Consequently, no matter what textbooks, materials, or guides are used, teachers are the focus. They believe in and want approval from the teacher. Developing comfortable and secure relationships with the students is a high priority.

Sixth Grade - 11 year olds

- ▲ They are in a period of transition between childhood and adolescence. As a result, they tend to be sociable and need opportunities to express feelings and opinions. They have an increased ability to de-center and see the world from various perspectives. Students prefer new tasks and experiences to reflection or revision of previous work.

Seventh Grade - 12 year olds

- ▲ Students often take a tentative approach to difficult intellectual tasks, as they are not willing to take big risks. They like to challenge authority and give one-word answers to adult questions. They worry about schoolwork. They can and will see both sides of an argument and have a high interest in current events, politics, social justice as well as pop culture.

Eighth Grade - 13 year olds

- ▲ Students want to be treated like adults, but do not expect adult behavior consistently. Asking the students to help develop the rules for your sessions can increase their involvement and positively influence their behavior. They are very aware of problems in the larger world and are interested in technology, and how things work.

Middle school students are often dealing with adult issues. Remember that despite their age and maturity levels, their feelings and beliefs are very important to them. Always treat them with the respect you expect them to show you.

They have a desire to be seen as competent and to be recognized for what they do well. They value order, consistency, and fair play. Make sure you are always clear and consistent when discussing and enforcing rules.

Conformity with peers is critical and it may seem they are “too cool to care”. If, however, you are consistent, friendly and caring, they will become more open and animated. The attention span of a middle school student is about 8-10 minutes.

High School Students

Grades 9 through 12 - 15 to 18 year olds

Teenagers within this age group can vary greatly in terms of maturity and development. They are on their way to adulthood, but aren't there yet. Being a volunteer in the classroom, you will have the opportunity to build a connection with the students over the course of your JA lessons.

- ▲ Abstract thinking becomes more common with older teenagers. They'll gravitate more to the "gray" areas between the "black-and-white" issues of their early years.
- ▲ At this age students expand their logic and reasoning abilities, although many still struggle to match their thinking abilities with their actions. Thus, many kids will talk intelligently but then have trouble with planning.
- ▲ Their thinking now considers the future. They can think and have thoughtful discussions about war, college, the economy, and their visions of what would make the world better.
- ▲ Being more intellectually advanced than a child or younger teens, adults can have more back-and-forth conversations with them. They're better able to understand other people's points of views, and they're more open to other perspectives and ideas.
- ▲ Most teenagers have trouble waking up in the morning. Part of this is because they stay up later. But part of it is biological. Older teenagers tend to shortchange sleep, keep this in mind if you are teaching a first period class.
- ▲ Older teenagers are less influenced by peer pressure but are heavily influenced by their friends. They're more likely to seek out experts when they want to know or do something.