

# Ridge and Valley Charter School



## Curriculum Framework

“And besides the very unborn nature of the future, we must also deal with the inadequacies of our present forms of consciousness. For even if the future were determined, its complexity would be beyond our capacity to articulate it. We will find our way only with a deep and prolonged process of groping – considering with care a great variety of interpretations, weighing evidence from a spectrum of perspectives, attending with great patience to the inchoate, barely discernible glimmers that visit us in our more contemplative moments. Out of this welter will slowly emerge our way to the star.”

(The Universe Story, Swimme & Berry)

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# Table of Contents

<b>Mission &amp; Vision.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction &amp; Premise.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Learning Culture.....</b>	<b>6-7</b>
<b>Yearly Integrating Lenses.....</b>	<b>8-15</b>
<b>Key Learning Experiences.....</b>	<b>16-20</b>
<b>Seasonally Based Trimesters.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Resources.....</b>	<b>22</b>



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## **Ridge and Valley Charter School Mission**

Education for a hopeful sustainable future

### **Ridge and Valley Charter School Experience**

Children are born with an immense potential. Their innate curiosity and fascination with the world around them is the fundamental basis of their human search for meaning, purpose, love, satisfaction and community.

Ridge and Valley Charter School is committed to developing this immense potential. By encouraging our children's relationships to home, family, school, town, region, nature, Earth and universe, all life becomes the context for their learning.

Our school will encourage children to wonder, to think, to discover and to question. They will be cherished and respected and learn to do the same with the world around them.

Ridge and Valley Charter School promotes

- Immersion in the natural world
- Hands-on, project-based learning
- Small instructional groups with individualized attention
- Problem-solving skills through real life experiences
- Healthy food, gardening and cooking
- Integrated arts
- Outdoor and adventure education
- Community involvement
- Values for sustainable living

A primary focus of Ridge and Valley Charter School is the exploration of the effects of human endeavor on our ecosystem. The natural world is the integrating context for our learning. All subject matter, including the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, is explored through this perspective.

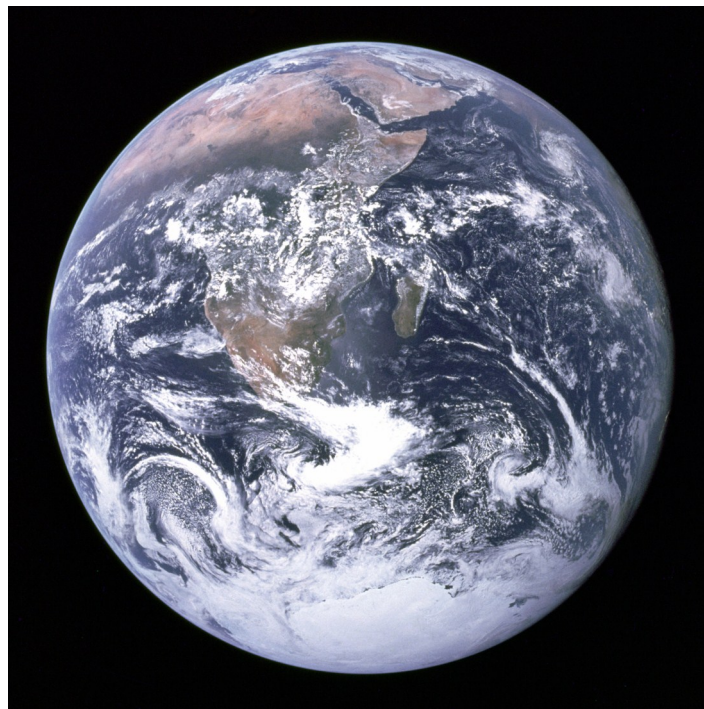
Ridge and Valley Charter School believes that it is possible to create a more ecologically sustainable future and that our children have a right to a planet of pure air, clean water, a vibrant natural world and a more just and equitable human community.

This vision is not only a right but a possibility. We believe it is the purpose of a democratic society to lay the foundation of such a future.

## Introduction & Premise

The mission of the Ridge and Valley Charter School is to educate for a hopeful sustainable future. We believe that in order for this to occur humans must experience a profound shift in their understanding of and relationship with the earth, universe and each other. Part of this shift has to do with what we study, but most of the shift has to do with changing the lens, angle or perspective from which we view the world and our stories of it. The current scientific, mechanistic and anthropocentric approach to understanding things has led to a disconnection from relationships and the corresponding wide-ranging impact of our choices. We seek to move into a more system-based, ecocentric view of the world in which learning and understanding occur within the larger, holistic context of the planet and universe.

This holistic understanding of the impact of choices within any system, combined with immersion in the natural world, stirs a deep wonder, awe, respect and responsibility for our planet and universe. Our intention is for students to see themselves not as separate from the intricate tapestry of the universe and the world around them but rather as a thread in the greater whole. Utilizing experiential education practices whenever possible, we seek to cultivate in students the practical skills and knowledge necessary for becoming confident and articulate as well as self-regulating, self-disciplined and self-motivated individuals. Our intention is to support individual students within the context of the whole so that they can continually transform themselves on their life journeys into being rich, important and effective agents for and models of sustainable living and change.



## **Learning Culture**

As we work to make the shift from the traditional educational paradigm and our current human story, we choose to employ the following practices and programs:

### **Multi-Age Structure & Curriculum Loops**

Humans are complex, multi-faceted beings who, regardless of their age and at any given moment in time, can be in many different places on the developmental spectrum – socially, emotionally, physically, academically and spiritually. The organization of children in traditional school settings into groups based only on their physical age assumes two things: that children develop at the same rate, and that learning is a linear sequence of steps to be achieved within a prescribed timeframe to reach an externally defined ‘norm’. In reality, humans develop at different rates along a continuum even within different aspects of their lives. Choosing to create flexible, multi-age groupings, as we do at RVCS, facilitates learning in a more individualized, holistic manner. Taking time to nurture the individual and group relationships and dynamics within the class groups and school community allows for a more familial experience as well as a natural, enthusiastic unfolding of each person’s gifts.

Our children spend a large portion of their time in learning groups or teams, based broadly upon general, holistic understandings of child development, that span across multiple years of age: Stardust (4-7 year olds); Nova (6-9 year olds); Constellation (8-11 year olds); and Galaxy (10-14 year olds). Each team is comprised of a group of students and multiple adults called Guides (the term used to differentiate the role from one of direction to one of collaborative learning). Each team has the flexibility to not only create multiple, changing groupings from within the team, but also to arrange with other teams to allow for an even greater variety of ages and abilities. These arrangements celebrate diversity, create multiple opportunities for mentoring and being mentored, support various needs and interests and more closely mimic “real world” groups and experiences. Our choice to organize ourselves in this way directly supports our move towards a more systemic and holistic view of the world and the humans in it.

In order to support this type of arrangement our curriculum is organized into 2-3 year loops. Each loop has an overarching, integrating lens through which all content is experienced. All students within a team focus on the same lens within the same year and will have experienced all loops within a 2-3 year timeframe, although in a different order based upon when they enter the team.

### **Circle Practice**

The circle, or council, is an ancient form of meeting that has gathered human beings into respectful conversation for thousands of years. The governance model at Ridge and Valley Charter School is collaborative, circle-based, and utilizes modified consensus. Students, Guides, Trustees, and families use the circle form for meetings, discussions, and decision-making in small and large groups and in committees. The Trustees and staff credit the responsibility and relationships fostered by circle-based collaboration for the successful development and future evolution of the school. Children and adults seek to model the personal responsibility and mutual respect necessary to work in a circle of peers: to ask for what we need and to offer what we can, in support of the explicit shared intention of the group.

## **Learning Culture...**

### **Experiential, Project- & Place-Based, Interdisciplinary Learning:**

Experiential, project-based, place-based and interdisciplinary learning promote hands-on involvement in the local environment through multi-disciplinary, real world issues. This approach defines the teacher's role as a facilitator of learning, values the process of learning over the behavioral outcomes, and is based on the premise that learning is a continuous, integrated process, with experience at its foundation. Through direct contact with their local bioregion students develop an in-depth understanding of fundamental ecological principles. By working with others to solve real-world problems, they also develop complex critical thinking and collaborative skills that are at the heart of sustainable living.

### **Independent Study**

Our fundamental belief that all children are intrinsically motivated learners and ultimately capable of directing their own learning drives all elements of our program, especially our Independent Study. At least once a week all students are involved, in developmentally appropriate ways, in the process of identifying personal interests, setting goals, finding resources, planning and following through on projects, documenting their process, self-reflecting, and sharing outcomes. Students are encouraged to pursue their interests and passions as they learn to take responsibility for their choices and share their achievements.

### **Language Arts:**

The ability to articulate one's perceptions and understandings of the world, and to communicate effectively with others, is critical for the achievement of one's goals. Doing so in the context of real and practical applications of those skills allows the learner to see the difference that their efforts can make. By using a Reading and Writing Workshop model inspired by Columbia University's Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, as well as Nancie Atwell's work ([Lessons That Change Writers](#) and [The Reading Zone](#)) for our middle grades, we develop students' reading, writing and speaking skills within their own areas of interest. Instruction is embedded in content, topics and books chosen by the students and differentiated based on their abilities.

### **Mathematics:**

In order to support all students in acquiring mathematical knowledge, skill, and confidence to become active mathematics learners who can reason about and represent mathematical ideas and relationships, we use *Investigations Math* and *Connected Math Program 2*. These programs are inquiry-based and often problem-centered (utilizing a real-world problem as the context for the math topic). While including a focus on the basics, these programs also ask that children develop understanding, flexibility, fluency (both in articulation of ideas and in calculation) and the ability to reason mathematically — skills that are in high demand in today's high-tech and ever-changing world.

## Organization of Our Curriculum Framework:

To facilitate learning experiences that will provide students with the awareness and tools they need, we organize our curriculum framework within the following three layers: Yearly Integrating Lenses, Key Learning Experiences and Seasonally-based Trimesters. All content, including the NJ Core Curriculum Content Standards, is woven into this structure to create relevant, meaningful and tangible understandings that are integral to our students' success as leaders, now and in the future.

### Yearly Integrating Lenses

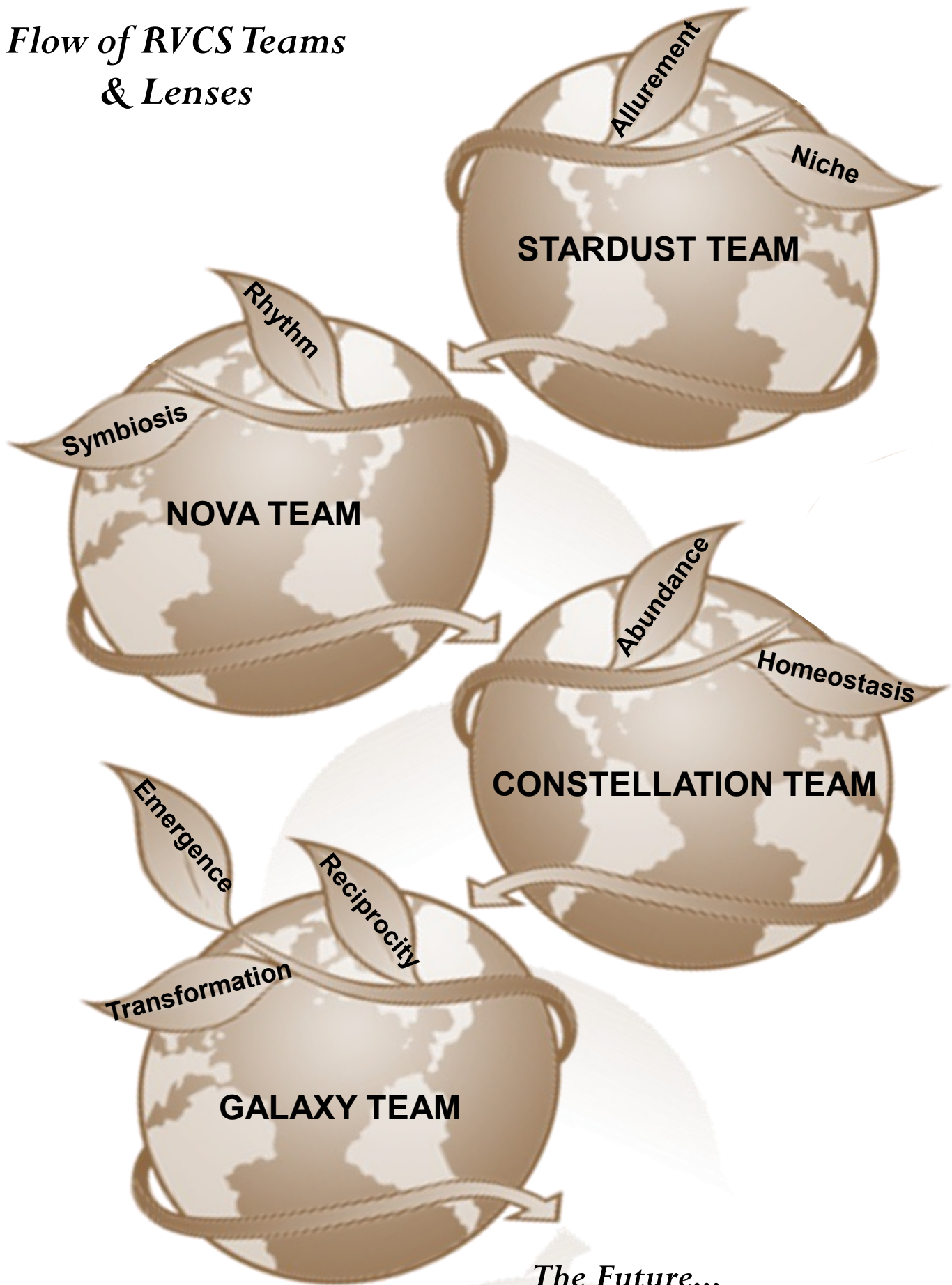
The interdisciplinary content, multi-age groupings and system thinking aspects of learning at RVCS lend themselves to experiences viewed through wide, yearlong lenses that loop over a period of 2-3 years. These integrating lenses, explained in more detail in the following pages, are intended to highlight the relationships among seemingly unrelated elements for a more holistic awareness of the larger, interrelated and interdependent systems that comprise the natural and human-made worlds. Each lens represents a biological process and/or relationship with the intention that, by studying all content areas and historical perspectives through this lens, students will come to see the correlations and analogies between the human and natural world experiences, therefore deepening their compassion for, understanding of, and connection to our planet and the entire Universe.

The cyclical nature of the lenses ensures that all students will experience the most important content over the course of their time on the team. Students can begin with any of the lenses when they enter a new team, rotating through all of them before moving on to the next team. For instance, a student joining the Galaxy Team might begin with Emergence, move to Transformation, and end their time on the team with Reciprocity. The graphic on the following page shows the flow of the teams and their yearly integrating lenses.





## *Flow of RVCS Teams & Lenses*



## **Stardust Team Lenses:**

### **Allurement:**

Infants and very young children are born with an innate connection to all things. They do not perceive a distinct separation between themselves and their environment. They are sensual beings - exploring the world through all their senses. Their inherent bond with, and attraction to, all things dominates their early experiences. This same allurement permeates all of us and everything. It has led to the emergence of stars and planets, water, rocks, air and life itself. This basic binding energy is evident in the human emotions of friendship, compassion and love as well as in the chemical, gravitational and electromagnetic interactions among and between atoms, organisms, planets and galaxies. Children this age are still deeply connected to and immersed in allurement - the joy and intuitive fascination that exists everywhere in reality. They live in the moment, in their bodies, and are captivated by the world around them. By gently and thoughtfully guiding their dynamic attraction to and love of all energies and beings we can begin to help them gain fundamental understandings as well as draw intentional connections. During this year, children will explore the natural world and local foods as well as develop personal responsibility and individual/group relationships. We desire to cultivate their sense of wonder and awe and hope that they will maintain this open awareness into adulthood so they can always appreciate the magnificence of the universe and themselves.

### **Niche:**

What and where is one's place in the universe? What role do we play in the human, earth and star stories? What is our relationship with and responsibility to the natural world and all our neighbors? Niche is defined as the relational position of an individual and/or group within and to the whole. This lens considers the impact of and relationships between the whole and the parts, between the microcosm and macrocosm within any given system. Through this lens students will explore family, community, anatomical, ecological, solar, language and other systems. They will discover connections across systems such as how letters make words, sounds make music and language, organs make up their body, a wide variety of organisms make up an ecosystem, families make a community, stories and traditions make a culture and so on. By drawing awareness to the universal relationships and dynamics within the multitude of overlapping systems that are present in the cosmos, students will see themselves as an important strand in the larger unfolding web of the universe.

## **Nova Team Lenses:**

### **Rhythm:**

Listen to your heart beat. Listen to the sparrow's song. Attune yourself to the bee's hum, the approaching rainstorm, the crash of the ocean waves. Feel the changing sensations in your body in response to the subtle shift of the earth's seasons. Witness the bud, bloom, decline and decay of the flower or human. All of these are rhythms – examples of cycles and/or repeating patterns. Rhythms, be they auditory, biological, gravitational or cultural, to name a few, are fundamental to all beings. They shape us, limit us, provide reassurance and move us to dance. They remind us of the greater mystery of which we are a part. While looking through this lens students will explore the rhythms of the water, life, weather, seasonal, musical, physiological, rock and solar/lunar cycles. By observing and identifying different qualities and characteristics students will recognize, predict and be able to continue repeating patterns found in nature, art, music, movement, language, stories and so forth. What are the rhythms that you see, hear, feel, smell, taste and intuit?

### **Symbiosis:**

“In the very first instant when the primitive particles rushed forth, every one of them was connected to every other one in the entire universe. At no time in the future existence of the universe would they ever arrive at a point of disconnection... Nothing is itself without everything else.”

(The Universe Story, Swimme & Berry)

Humans, like every other particle of matter and form of energy, emerged from the creativity of the Universe. To say that we are in relationship with the Universe and Earth and all their manifestations would be an understatement. We are completely dependent upon them for our existence and survival. We are them and they are us. The current anthropocentric view eschews our reliance on and responsibility to the natural world, denying its importance for our continued existence, yet the interdependence of all living and non-living things is an undeniable reality. This lens focuses on this kinship and the agreements, principles and natural laws that are the foundation for these relationships. How do organisms (and how can humans) live in a mutually enhancing relationship within the systems of nature to sustainably nourish themselves, the earth and all its inhabitants? In exploring this concept students will study the organization of and interrelationships within biological, celestial, political and social systems. They will investigate food webs, organ systems, lunar phases, constellations, human culture and civics as examples of the analogous interconnectivity of all things.

## **Constellation Team Lenses:**

### **Homeostasis:**

Why does a snake sun itself on a rock? Why do we like certain foods? Because it feels 'good' or 'right'? What does that mean? Organisms are complex systems living within larger complex systems in which they are continuously seeking a 'feel good' state of equilibrium. Internal and external factors indicate what items are needed to perpetuate this state by filling the organism's needs – be they physical, emotional or cultural, innate or learned. Homeostasis, or this state of equilibrium, is the dynamic regulation of the components of a system, in response to change, in an effort to maintain a constant, stable condition. The snake sunning itself on a rock, the pancreas' release of insulin to regulate blood glucose, the geological discharge of pressure through plate tectonics and earthquakes, the impact of the carrying capacity of an ecosystem on the populations of predators and prey, a cell's intake of nutrients and release of waste, the environmental effects of and responses to climate change, the political and cultural changes caused by a shift in leadership, as well as the 'rising up' of a group with a focus on change (biological, political, cultural, etc.) and the resulting return to balance are all examples of the dynamic nature of homeostasis.

Change is inevitable and often uncomfortable. Most change occurs on a biological and/or physiological level requiring no cognitive thought or intention but rather relying on the wisdom of the living system for resolution. Other changes result from instinctive and/or conscious choices made by an organism within a given circumstance. Either way, the fundamental tendency of homeostatic regulation exists on all levels of systems and guides their unfolding as they seek to achieve internal and external stability. Through this lens, students will explore the cycles of conflict, change/growth/choice and resolution/homeostasis within different systems by examining things such as the following: the complex interactions within and between the systems of the human body; the impact of natural laws and principles as they apply to motion, force and energy transformation; the geological and geographical evolution of their bioregion (Big Bang to current day) and its corresponding effects on, and opportunities created for, local populations (including humans); and the dynamic equilibrium evident within the unfolding of the universe, the earth, bioregional ecosystems and individual organisms.

## **Abundance:**

Abundance vs. scarcity, needs vs. wants, wealth vs. poverty, haves vs. have-nots. This lens examines the potential for shifting the current human paradigm from scarcity and limits, which creates economic, political, environmental and social conditions in which some have and many go without, to the perspective of abundance, biodiversity and quality of life. By recognizing the sheer profusion and inherent significance of the energy, matter, complexity and diversity present in the universe, humans can make the choices necessary to live a fulfilled life in harmony with the natural world. Through this lens, students will study the composition, physical characteristics and changing dynamic of matter and energy, the interactions and implications of Earth's dynamic systems (geosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, and biosphere), and the economic, environmental, political, social and cultural stories that are the basis for human's understanding and experience of abundance and/or scarcity. They will be encouraged to take on projects that work for change, celebrate the abundance of the universe and promote social, environmental and economic justice.



## **Galaxy Team Lenses:**

### **Transformation:**

“Many of the inventions of the natural world arose out of beings meeting the constraints of the universe with creative responses.”

(The Universe Story, Swimme & Berry)

As humans grow and develop they become more aware of their power to transform – themselves, their environment, their relationships, their community, country and the world. The realization that even small shifts in behavior and choices can have larger, systemic consequences results in individuals who know that they can make a difference on both a personal and a global scale. Understanding the proliferation of transformations that has occurred from the beginning of the universe up to this point and whose sequence created all that is today, as well as those occurring on both micro and macro levels at any given moment, the limitations and opportunities caused by such, and that the students themselves are only one instance of such change, gives students the perspective necessary for responsible, respectful decision-making.

This lens explores this continual, ever-changing unfolding of the universe, earth and human through the study of chemical reactions; the concepts of biodiversity, genetics, adaptation, evolution and extinction; the immense influence of the invention of writing; the appearance of color from light, the characteristics and transformation of energy in its many forms; the use, and evolution, of mapmaking as a way to represent and perceive the earth and the subsequent effects on human migration, exploration, trade and ‘usage’ of the earth; as well as the systemic view of human and planetary history during the period of classical human civilizations (3500 BCE to 1500CE).

### **Reciprocity:**

Interdependence. Give and take. Justice. Ethics. Morality. All of these ideas are integral to reciprocal relationships, whether they are between beings of the same or of different species. A social phenomenon that allows for the existence of systems and organizations, reciprocity refers to the interrelationships, commitment and energetic dynamics between the members of any system, be they ecological, political, solar, physiological, cultural, etc.

Through this lens students will study the interactions and relationships of atoms, molecules, elements, matter and energy; the global human story from 1500 CE to current day (Rise of Nations), specifically in terms of political and cultural systems; the mutually supporting cycle of respiration and photosynthesis; the individual characteristics of, and interrelationships between, the members of our solar system as well as the Milky Way’s place within the universe and its story; the transformational impact of certain scientific discoveries and theories on human’s story, understanding and treatment of the earth; the give and take of economic systems.



## **Emergence:**

How is it that a single cell can become a complex human being? How does a bee colony function as a community? What is the process by which new words are created and become part of a language? Each of these examples demonstrates emergence – the self-organization that takes place as a result of a multiplicity of relatively simple, sometime seemingly unrelated, interactions which leads in turn to the creation of complex adaptive systems. Within any emergent system the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. By exploring the components of multicellular organisms, the geological and weather processes that act to shape the earth and tell its story, the parallels between the birth and evolution of the universe and the birth and evolution of humans (2.6 million years ago until 3000BCE (through the Neolithic period)), and the self-organizing properties of different human systems such as the Internet, stock market and grassroots organizations, as well as those of biological and geographical systems, students will understand the complexity inherent in and continually arising from emergent systems. This exploration is intended to cultivate not only a sense of wonder and awe for the intrinsic intelligence of the universe, but also a deep understanding of the impact of humans on the earth and a corollary sense of responsibility for one's choices.



## Key Learning Experiences

In addition to focused study in the fundamental skills of reading, writing and math, we have chosen to organize our instruction into interdisciplinary Key Learning Experiences, instead of separate content areas. Our intention is to articulate a curriculum that will cultivate Earth Literacy and sustainable living practices through practical applications of knowledge and skills within hands-on experiences in a larger, systems-thinking context.



Our four Key Learning Experiences (KLEs) – Relating: Energetics & Community; Exploring: Elements & Expeditions; Designing: Beauty & Function; and Nourishing: Sustenance & Fulfillment – offer students opportunities to develop critical knowledge, skills and problem-solving capabilities within practical, empowering, real-world experiences. Although the focus of the content changes each year as defined by the integrating lens, the Key Learning Experiences remain constant as the means for exploring all content, K-8.



## Relating: Energetics & Community

The Relating: Energetics & Community Key Learning Experience focuses on the dynamic interplay between time, space, matter and energy that results in light, sound, movement, expression, communication (both verbal and non-verbal) and group/community dynamics and systems. Through this KLE, using the natural laws and principles of the universe as the guiding force, students will explore interdisciplinary concepts during their time at RVCS including many of the following:

- ~the energy that was created and released at the birth of our universe is constantly recycled within the system of the universe;
- ~all organisms are constantly sensing, and in communication with, their internal/external environments and each other via non-verbal and verbal means;
- ~all forms of communication can express feelings and thoughts, cause responses in others and cause physiological/psychological changes;
- ~all organisms react to the communications they receive with immediate impulse responses as well as learned responses;
- ~non-verbal communication includes heat, light, chemicals, images, smells, sound, movement/gestures, etc.;
- ~verbal communication includes written symbols/words, sounds and spoken language. How this is expressed varies by species and/or culture;
- ~some organisms use storytelling to create meaning and/or a context, and to share information and experiences;
- ~organisms communicate for individual and/or community protection, reproduction and survival;
- ~different organisms systematize their communities in a variety of ways based on needs, environment and other factors;
- ~organism communities rely on certain systemic roles, assumptions and structures (and the proper communication of them) for homeostasis and self-perpetuation;
- ~a failure of an element within a community system can cause the adaptation and/or collapse of that community.

Student will explore these understandings through a variety of experiences and different species' perspectives such as: how sound evolved into music and language; verbal and non-verbal communication within and across species and its impact on group dynamics; the evolution of language – written and spoken; Greek and Latin language roots; the study of communities (microbe, plant, animal, human); the study of human governmental systems (historical place, similarities/differences, reasons for success/failure, etc.); tracking; yoga; dance; and eurythmy.

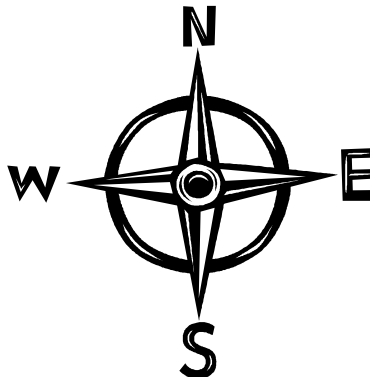


## Exploring: Elements & Expeditions

The Exploring: Elements & Expeditions Key Learning Experience focuses on reconnection with, and immersion in, the natural world in a way that is fun and exciting as well as safe and respectful. This KLE teaches environmental awareness, responsibility and ethics as well as skills for living in an outdoor environment comfortably, safely and with little or no impact. Through this KLE students will learn:

- ~that the Earth and its biosphere form a complex interacting system capable of maintaining homeostasis;
- ~astronomy - the origin, evolution and structure of the universe;
- ~the landscape, geology, geography and forces that inform and affect the many different bioregions of the earth;
- ~how to anticipate, be prepared for and respond to changes in the weather;
- ~basic first aid and safety;
- ~how to identify and avoid environmental hazards such as those found within the physical landscape, animals, insects, poisonous plants and those resulting from inadequate preparation/protection;
- ~Leave No Trace skills and minimum-impact camping;
- ~knot tying;
- ~excursion and expedition preparation and planning (i.e. gear, menu, transportation, route, budget);
- ~expedition food preparation and storage;
- ~map and compass reading (orienteering);
- ~shelter building;
- ~safe fire making and tending;
- ~the importance and availability of, as well as the human impact on, safe drinking water;
- ~how to find and/or filter safe (potable) water;
- ~tool making;
- ~a deeper awareness of place;
- ~tracking skills.

As a means of exploring these concepts students will engage in many experiences including short-term and extended low/no-impact hiking, camping and expeditions; quiet, individual immersion in, and observations of, nature including the night sky; nap making and orienteering; teambuilding and personal challenge experiences; and culminating experiences such as Earth Olympics and multi-day expeditions.



## Designing: Beauty & Function

The Designing: Beauty & Function Key Learning Experience focuses on the impulse for creative expression that arises through the design and construction of functional and/or beautiful (and ideally sustainable!) tools, art, structures, organisms and systems. In the course of exploring this impulse students will understand that:

- ~all organisms express creativity;
- ~the creative impulse expressed through design can lead to successful and/or unsuccessful adaptations resulting in the perpetuation or extinction of a device, culture/ecosystem or species;
- ~the essence and totality of all things – matter, rocks, plants, water, animals, soil, clouds, humans - embody creative design;
- ~many different species make and use functional and often beautiful tools, art, structures and systems;
- ~designs, especially non-human designs, are often made of local natural and/or manmade materials;
- ~design reflects the time, place and culture of its creation;
- ~a long-standing, embedded design can be perceived as ‘reality’ until a creative impulse manifests and offers other possibilities;
- ~some designs are intended to be purely functional, some purely beautiful, while others unite function and beauty;
- ~design is informed by the natural laws and principles of the universe and limited by the extent of the designer’s understanding of them;
- ~designs can intentionally or unintentionally tell a story;
- ~the most sustainable, and some may say aesthetically pleasing, designs often mimic those found in nature;
- ~the design process and/or product often evokes a wide range of responses such as wonder and awe, despair, joy or anger.

Student will explore these concepts through the examination of the things around them – from common objects to the design of the very systems in which they live – always with an eye to sustainability. They will explore the intention behind a design and whether or not that intention was achieved. They will take part in a variety of experiences such as: designing simple tools from common objects; learning the safe use and care of tools; identifying the resourcefulness and lack of waste demonstrated by local creatures in their design process; carving & whittling; finger knitting; weaving, papermaking; sewing; knitting; woodworking; felting; spinning; throwing pottery; using natural dyeing techniques; applying the principles of permaculture; applying sustainable design and construction methods (Jr. Solar Sprints, cradle to cradle, strawbale, etc.); painting; collage work; printmaking; observing and drawing as meditation (seeing vs. looking); gesture drawings; and storytelling through design.



## Nourishing: Sustenance & Fulfillment

The Nourishing: Sustenance & Fulfillment Key Learning Experience focuses on our relationship with ourselves, our community, our ecosystem and our planet for the nourishment of all our many dimensions. This KLE explores the primal relationship between life and food, the critical connection between caring for the earth and caring for ourselves, as well as the notions of happiness, fulfillment and quality of life. As a result of this KLE students will understand:

- ~the earth's position in the universe and annual rhythm which results in seasons, weather, and the composition and complexity of bioregional ecosystems and food webs ;
- ~the ecological benefits of organic practices on all organisms;
- ~the principles of diversity, supply, demand, abundance, scarcity and carrying capacity;
- ~the essentials and chemistry of nutritional needs (food as fuel) and as demonstrated through such things as cooking and composting;
- ~the impact of 'place' on dietary adaptations and culture;
- ~the history and practices of foraging, hunting and gathering, agriculture and animal domestication;
- ~the far-reaching nutritional, economic, community and planetary effects of distance vs. local foods;
- ~the technologizing of food through the use of pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, genetically modified organisms and the factory model;
- ~the politics of food;
- ~the fundamentals of growing, harvesting and preserving one's own food;
- ~the essences of happiness, fulfillment and quality of life are defined by individuals and manifested through personal choices.

As a means of exploring these concepts students will engage in many activities such as: gardening; cooking; seasonal and weather-related observations; visits to and work at local farms; research and debate about current food issues; investigation and self-reflection on being happy; and the effects of food choices on one's energy, health, attitude and well-being. They will follow the seasons as they plan, prepare, till, sow and maintain the garden as well as when they gather, prepare, preserve and consume its harvest. Our hope is that by experiencing the skills and self-reflection necessary for holistically nourishing the earth and themselves students will become aware of the choices they can make for deep personal meaning and contentment.

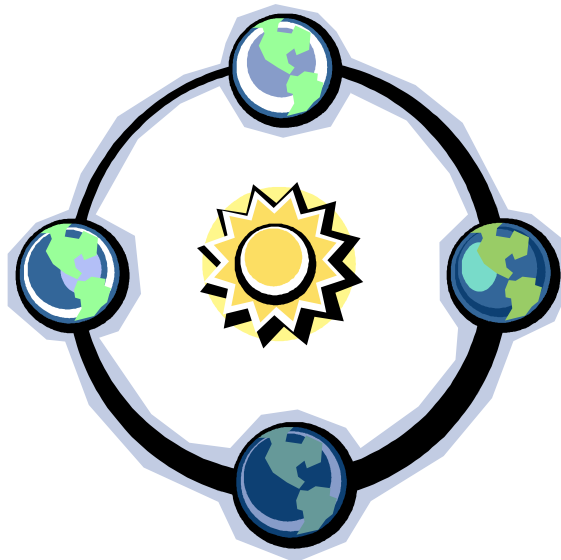


## Seasonally Based Trimesters

In an effort to support our innate awareness of and connection to the natural rhythms of the earth and ultimately encourage sustainable human behaviors we have divided our school year into 3 trimesters, which correspond with the 3 seasons of the year during which school occurs – fall, winter and spring. The educational experiences offered during these times draw inspiration from the seasonal elements and seek to further the learner’s sense of connection. The seasonal focus offers many opportunities for discovering and studying the positional and cyclical impact of our planet’s placement in and movement through the universe. It offers a first-hand experience of our local bioregion, a comparison point for other bioregions around the world and an exploration of how humans and other organisms have adapted, and continue to adapt, to their environment.

In the fall of the school year students might be harvesting from the garden, planting cover crops, studying the angle of the earth and its location relative to the sun as they celebrate the Autumnal Equinox and/or exploring the reasons for the vibrant fall colors coming forth on the deciduous trees. Winter might bring the growing of food in a coldframe, storing and preserving the fall harvest, seed saving, an in-depth observation of the night sky over an extended period of time and/or a greater ability to sketch and understand the geology of the area. In the spring, students will most likely be preparing and planting, designing solar cars, participating in extended expeditions and/or reflecting on their own growth over the year. And, of course, students are involved in nourishing the earth and themselves throughout the year, inside and outside of school, through practices such as composting, recycling, Leave No Trace and producing and eating locally grown organic foods.

Each season brings with it not only new opportunities, but also a deeper connection to the earth’s rhythms. By understanding the opportunities and limitations created by the rhythms of a place, we can learn to live in harmony within it to the mutual benefit of ourselves and all elements of the universe.



## Resources

### Circle:

Peer Spirit: <http://www.peerspirit.com/index.html>

*The Circle Way, A Leader in Every Chair* by Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea

*Calling the Circle* by Christina Baldwin

### Language Arts:

Teachers College Reading and Writing Workshop: [http://](http://readingandwritingproject.com/about/overview.html)

[readingandwritingproject.com/about/overview.html](http://readingandwritingproject.com/about/overview.html)

*The Reading Zone: How to Help Kids Become Skilled, Passionate, Habitual, Critical Readers* by Nancie Atwell

*Lessons That Change Writers* by Nancie Atwell

### Mathematics:

Investigations Math: <http://investigations.terc.edu/families/>

Connected Math Program 2: <http://connectedmath.msu.edu/parents/welcome.shtml>

**For More Information on our Mission, as well as Project- & Place-Based, Experiential, and Integrated Learning, check out the following:**

*The Journey of the Universe* (film and book), by Brian Swimme & Mary Evelyn Tucker

Center for Ecoliteracy: <http://www.ecoliteracy.org/teach>

Buck Institute for Education: <http://www.bie.org/>

*Place-Based Education* by David Sobel

*Into the Field: A Guide to Locally Focused Teaching* by Leslie, Tallmadge and Wessels







Aerial view– RVCS  
Photo by Will McNulty, Alum

“The historical mission of our times is to reinvent the human ~  
at the species level, with critical reflection, within the  
community of life~systems, in a time~developmental context...”  
~ Thomas Berry, from *The Great Work*