

THE THREE-DAY RHYTHM

As we have described in [Waldorf 101](#) there are many rhythms to Waldorf education that the teacher/parent must be aware of. We have already discussed the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out. We have also discussed the rhythm of balancing the head, heart and hands. A sample day balancing the head-heart and hands might look like this:

Morning (Head): Intellectual Work and Main Lesson

Middle of the Day (Heart): Form Drawing, Languages, Music, Plays

Later Part of the Day (Hands): Cooking, Free Play, Gardening, Crafts, Nature Walks.

You can rearrange these if you want. I usually like to start the day with “hands”.

There are two additional cycles we would like to discuss. These also involve a cycle of “three” like the head-heart and hands cycle. The first is the three-part cycle of the Main Lesson. The second is the three-day cycle.

Three Parts of the Main Lesson

The main lesson for a student in first through eighth grade is usually two hours but it can be less or more depending on the student. This may seem like a long time for a grade school student but it is actually divided into three parts. Dividing it is very important to the lesson because each of these parts addresses a different part of the student and often a different temperament as well. If you follow the 3-part process you will find that your student feels more balanced in their learning process. You will also find that no matter what temperament your student is, that they will be able to connect with the lesson on some level. This is why, although we divide the lessons into three parts I do not designate a certain amount of time for each part. Some teachers do. In a private or public school situation where things need to be more structured and regular to fit within the school day and embrace multiple children the suggested time is 40 minutes per part of the block. However, I like to let the student’s temperament and needs decide, ultimately, how much time we will spend on each part. In our classroom it also depends on the day. Some days the child(ren) will be able to do two hours. Other days I can clearly see that two hours is not going to work. In such cases I may decide to get out of the classroom and focus on the block in other ways – even if they are subtle. For example, if we are doing math and the process is not “working” that day we can still take a nature walk, bake something or paint something and focus on the same number – just in a different way. We could even take a field trip and along the way I could ask the child(ren) to look for that number. You can see why adapting lessons and timing is so important when you read about the three parts below:

Part One This should be the “rhythmic” part of the lesson (the heart) where the student should participate in some kind of movement. Counting, memorizing math tables, walking while learning, repeating things, singing, speech exercises, poetry and other such tasks are rhythmic.

Part Two This should be the “thinking” part of the lesson (the head) where new material is presented to the student. This is usually when the teacher writes or draws on the board or tells a story. This part of the lesson has the intellectual content of the lesson.

Part Three This part is the “doing” part of the lesson (the hands) where the student should be actively working on what they have learned.

Three Day Cycle On the first day the teacher should introduce the hands-on experience with the lesson. In math or science blocks this usually means drawing, using manipulatives, acting out math/science stories or actions, finding math/science concepts around the room or outside, building math/science concepts with blocks, or other hands-on experience related to the concept. In language or history blocks this usually means telling a story in a creative way or visiting a historical place and introducing the student(s) to the main idea of the language or history lesson. In the case of form drawing this usually means simply drawing the shape on the board and talking about how it is formed, acting out the shape, creating the shape in nature, or creating the shape in sand.

On the second day the teacher should discuss the lesson again with the student(s). In math this usually means introducing the lesson in a more formal way such as discussing the ‘how’ or ‘why’ of the lesson of the day before, or writing some of the math concepts on the board in a more formal way instead of just experiencing them or drawing them. At this point the student may go from drawing a divided square to writing out the fractions or from drawing “plus” to actually doing some addition problems. In language or history this means the teacher will discuss the lesson or story of the day before and involve the student in the story more by having them act out the story, do an assignment, or take part in a discussion. In the case of form drawing the student will often practice the form on the board or their own chalkboard.

On the third day the teacher will introduce the lesson in its final form and will have the student record the final result in the Main Lesson Book, or record it as a final project of some sort such as a play, a beeswax sculpture, clay sculpture or watercolor painting. This third day usually results in a Main Lesson Book page or other project so when we mention “have the student(s) put this in their Main Lesson Book” in your lesson blocks keep in mind that this will often happen on the third day and the stories, descriptions, concepts and smaller assignments that come before that are the days that lead up to it.

This three-day rhythm means that a student is introduced to something on the first day, is allowed to sleep and absorb this introduction, returns the second day to a familiar concept and is allowed to get closer to it, is allowed to sleep once again with the feeling that this concept is now a “friend”, and by the third day becomes part of the concept itself by creating a final page or project.