

## Student Characteristics

### Kindergarten (Ages 5-6)

Children begin to combine simple ideas into more complex relations. As a result, they need an environment rich in printed materials that stimulates the development of language and literacy skills. They also need a variety of direct experiences to develop cognitively, physically, emotionally, and socially. Be prepared to get down to their level and let them explore through play. Keep learning fun and interactive; they will pick up on what is important.

### 1st Grade (Ages 6-7)

These youngsters are active learners and demonstrate considerable verbal skills. They are interested in games and rules and develop concepts and problem-solving skills from these experiences. Hands-on activities and experimentation are important, so engage as many students as possible in each JA activity. These students have a hard time finishing what they start, so change your pace and move around the classroom to keep them interested and on track. Even when these kids sit, they do not stay still, for this is a class of movers and shakers.

### 2nd Grade (Ages 7-8)

As seasoned veterans of two years of schooling, they are increasingly able to reason, listen to others, and show social give-and-take. They can display flexibility, open-mindedness, and tolerance of unfamiliar ideas to a remarkable extent so they are very interested and engaged in each new JA session. Repetition is great fun--they will return day after day to the same session and only move on to the next one after the last is mastered. Start each JA visit with a few refresher questions about the last JA session you taught. These students' concentration lasts for 20 minutes at a time, change your pace every 10 minutes to keep them engaged.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade (Ages 8-9)

These children combine great curiosity with increased social interest and are a very active age group. They are able to learn about people who live elsewhere in the world, but their understanding of what they read is dependent upon relating ideas to their own experience. As you teach, use examples from their area of town and/or city so they can relate. These students need to inspect, to know, to organize, and to classify. They are focused on doing a good job with each JA activity.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Grade (Ages 9-10)

At this stage, students are somewhat self-conscious and prefer group activities. They also are beginning to understand abstractions as well as cause-and-effect relationships, but need real experiences in social settings. They are more absorbed and competitive, which gives them a strong need to improve on past accomplishments. This age is selective in their activities and they may spend more time focused on each JA activity than other grades. They accept failures and mistakes but are still prone to bursts of emotion and impatience. They have become distinct individuals and want everyone (including parents, teachers, and volunteers) to know it.

### 5<sup>th</sup> Grade (Ages 10-11)

These students may be experiencing bodily changes and rapid growth spurts, which cause periods of frustration and anger. They are interested in and enthusiastic about places and problems in the news and want to know what caused these problems, and where they occurred, so incorporate real time events when you are facilitating your JA sessions. They appear to grow before your eyes--mentally as well as physically. Honor and fair play are important this year and they show concern and sensitivity toward others. They may resent being told what to do, yet need constant reminders regarding routine responsibilities. This stems from their budding social conscience, so adults must be sensitive to treating everyone justly.

### **Middle School (Ages 11-14)**

Never underestimate this very active age group. They want to learn about almost everything, and they have the ability to think abstractly. These students can be brutally honest so be prepared for direct questions and do not come to class unprepared. They expect you to be “real” and like to be given real world examples that illustrate the JA sessions you are facilitating.

This age group may be accommodating, friendly, and pleasant with strangers. They stay enthusiastic for only short periods of time. They are prone to restlessness and daydreaming so change your pace *at least* every 10 to 15 minutes and avoid lecturing students. Students learn better with activities, class participation and open-ended questions. Let them respond with words and actions to involve as many students as possible in each JA activity. They respond positively to personal attention so remember to use their names; be complimentary of a job well done.

This age group is 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 need to feel cared about and respected by the adults in their lives and they no longer want to be considered a child. Developing comfortable and secure relationships with the students is a high priority.

### **High School (Ages 14-18)**

While the teacher can tell you a great deal about many of the students, it is important to develop your own relationship with them. Students this age are extremely intelligent so do not come to class unprepared and attempt to learn and teach your JA session at the same time. Students are more readily influenced by their friends than by adults or persons in authority. They may initially appear disinterested and slow to respond because of their desire not to appear foolish in front of their peers or you. Although peer conscious, it is very important to these students that they are respected by the adults in their lives so make sure that you praise the students as they participate in the various JA session activities. Remember to always use their names and to be enthusiastic, friendly, and honest with the students.

Tailor your presentation to meet the needs of your particular students and teachers. Students want to know about things that affect them personally. Direct their attention to subjects that interest them, not you. Use examples of things they will know about such as current events in the media to bring a real application to the classroom. Students are interested in “real” world knowledge so use your personal work and life experiences to enhance the JA sessions.