



What is a Theme?

A Theme is a topic, and a journey, and an adventure in learning. A Theme ties together curiosity, learning in several subjects, substantial, challenging projects, and contributions to the community. It has the following parts:

- An invitation to explore, to wonder (an Immersion).
- Big ideas investigated through smaller, specific questions that require real learning to answer (Investigations).
- Projects that scale to each child's level, so that everyone can be proud of their best work (Products).
- An event sharing the work with the community (Celebration of Learning).
- And often - service learning contributions to the community.



Why does Helios teach through Themes?

Themes are especially appropriate for gifted students because:

- Themes motivate learning and draw students forward through *curiosity*
- Interdisciplinary learning naturally allows for more *complexity* - encourages students to make connections between areas of interest, background knowledge, and current study
- Broadly defined themes with authentic questions make it easier to *deepen* learning to match a student's background and interest
- Projects with multiple drafts and authentic audiences encourage students to do *high quality work*



What is fieldwork? Why does my child have so many days that are not “normal” school days?

Themes include many expert visits and fieldwork days.

Fieldwork is an experience off-campus that is part of the Theme curriculum. In contrast to “field trips” in other schools, fieldwork is an active, necessary learning experience where students gather information critical to their Theme.

In addition to fieldwork off campus, Themes also bring experts into the classroom. These individuals share their understanding of topics relevant to the Theme, and also serve as role models for students. Students are often very interested in the type of work that experts do, the training needed for it, and why the expert loves doing it.



How do Themes teach the skills needed as students move to the next grade?

Each project in a Theme offers a chance to apply academic skills and knowledge. Class time includes explicit lessons to teach these skills at each child's ready-to-learn level, so that students finish a Theme at a higher academic level than they began. Lessons are given when the skill or knowledge is needed for a project, which gives students a reason to learn what is being taught.

Common Core Language Arts standards, California Social Studies standards, and Next Generation Science Standards are incorporated into our curriculum design. Due to our two-year gradeband structure, the Theme topics, and our students' interests and abilities, standards may not always be addressed in the same grade they are assigned to in other schools.

EVERY DAY
IS A GOOD
DAY TO
LEARN.



What Themes will my child have?

Hummingbirds

Small and Powerful
Precious Water
Ready Set GO

Hawks and Falcons

Mission to Mars
Brave Hearts,
Clever Minds

Ravens and Jays

Carnival
Impact!

Condors and Ospreys

Making Waves
California Studies

Hérons

Living With Tension
Being Human

There are three Themes for the kindergarten year, and a set of four Themes for each two-year gradeband from grades 1-8.

The Themes for 2024-25 are shown on the left. These titles may change by the time your child reaches the next gradeband two years from now.

While the content taught in each semester will remain roughly the same, the title and unifying topic for each semester may change based on our experiences with the curriculum, changes in best practices, varying interests and expertise of the teachers, and current events.

Where can I learn about the Theme?



Fall 2024
Kindergarten - Hummingbirds

Small and Powerful

Small and Powerful is a four-month theme that will introduce students to the wonderful designs of relatively small organisms who have a great impact on our world. These critical creatures provide great service and support to countless life forms on the planet. Gardens provide numerous examples of our human reliance on these small beings, though we often have little knowledge of their roles. So get out your gardening shovels, your honey bees, and your



Investigate
Worms: Recycling Experts



FALL 2024
7TH/8TH GRADE - HERONS

LIVING WITH TENSION

Enduring Understandings

- Knowledge is vetted in governing systems.
- Flexibility leads to, and relieves tension.
- There are systems in place for conflicting needs/ideas allowing for information flow and skepticism.
- Collaboration and competition are both essential for change (knowledge, problem solving and policy)

Essential Questions

- How do we know what we think we know?
- How does flexibility impact tension?

Living With Tension is a four-month investigation into the inevitable tensions that exist in a nation holding democratic principles with many voices vying for power and a scientific community searching for facts with many different interpretations. In what ways are such tensions beneficial to the development of our nation and scientific community and where are we faltering?

Students should be prepared for a semester of deep thinking and provocation of big ideas in humanities and science.

In the same way that tension exists in our governance and scientific communities, tensions often exist within one's own person. The SEL component of this expedition will help guide

Key Areas of Study

Humanities

- U.S. History, History of the Ancient World
- Civics and Government

Language Arts

- Informative, Narrative, and Persuasive Writing
- Primary Source Analysis and Close Reading
- Research Skills
- Creating and Critiquing Arguments
- Presentation, Performance, and Public Speaking

Science

- Earth Science
- Nature of Science
- Developing a position
- Data Analysis and Interpretation

Each homeroom shares a brochure at the start of the Theme explaining the overall topic of the theme, the specific content students will learn, the different units, and essential calendar dates.

What might my student need from me to succeed in their Theme?

While Themes are designed as self-contained units that are completed mainly at school, you can ***extend the Theme at home*** by asking questions, reading, watching, taking trips, and otherwise making connections to the theme topics.

Some Themes call for students to ***learn about their families*** or other contacts through interviews, stories, or objects. These will be required homework even for our youngest students! We hope you enjoy this time together.

Most Themes have substantial ***projects*** to complete which might not be fully finished at school. Help your student set aside a time and place to work on these projects so that they are proud of what they have done at the end of the semester.



How will I know what my student has learned in their Theme?

At the end of the Theme, families are invited to the **Celebration of Learning** which showcases student learning and projects and often puts them to use - for instance, an interactive museum exhibit, a public art exhibition, or a ceremonial donation to a nonprofit organization. Students often take on the role of teacher or guide to lead their family through the topics they have learned about.

At these **CoL** events you will see evidence of your student's academic and personal growth over the semester. Unlike a traditional Open House event, the focus of the event is on active participation in the topic and not on examining work samples.



Where can I find more information?

For questions about this semester's Theme, refer to the brochure sent home by the teachers at the start of the semester. This brochure describes the semester's Theme in depth. It is your reference document explaining the content to be taught, questions to be answered, fieldwork and experts that are decided in advance, and ideas you can explore further at home.

For questions about Themes in general, including their philosophy, structure, and what is taught in each year of the Helios curriculum, send your questions to Linda Zadik:
linda.zadik@heliosschool.org.



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