

AL CANTO DEL CUCÚ
Sponsored by the Italian American Committee on
Education (IACE)

Educational Goals/Program
2005- 2006 Academic Year

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Class for 1 to 2 ½ Year-Old Bilingual Children

Teacher: Francesca Mignosa

Similarly to the other classes in our program, this group meets once a week. Given the age of this very young group, the class is designed to include the participation of an Italian-speaking parent/caretaker who would almost function as a “liaison” between the child and the teacher, in this way maximizing learning opportunities. Not only parents repeat with the teacher all songs/words and games that are included in the class but they also contribute to the children’s perception of a “safe and nurturing” environment, which is fundamental for any kinds of activities targeted to this age group. Moreover, parent participation increases the likelihood that songs and games learned during the class would be rehearsed at home and become part of the child’s daily environment. According to parental reports, it is not unusual that children who are too shy to repeat songs and words in the classroom would be able to do that without any problem in a more familiar environment such as their homes.

Our primary goal is to create a nurturing environment in which children from bilingual families (Italian-English) would be exposed to the Italian language outside of their homes. This would help them perceive Italian as a “fun” language and start to feel “pressured” by their little peers to repeat words in Italian despite the fact they live in an English-speaking country/environment. Several studies have shown that there is a window of opportunity for acquisition of a second language starting from very early in the life of a child and definitely after six months of age. Children who acquire a second language at this age not only will be more proficient in the overall knowledge and pronunciation of the second language but will also have better reading skills in both languages. Our class is formed by children who have at least one parent who speaks Italian as a first or second language.

This one hour-workshop features traditional and modern children songs (e.g. Al Canto del Cucu’, La Bella Lavenderina, Stella Stellina, Per Fare un Tavolo, Ninna Nanna del Chicco di Caffè’, Sono L’Ippopotamo, etc.) as well as games (e.g. Girotondo, Salta

Salterello su 10 piedini di carta colorata per imparare i numeri, etc.), and books (e.g. ABC, Le Mie Prime Parole) in Italian. Parents participate by singing and guiding their own child through the activities. Given the short attention span of this age group, children are kept interested through the use of visual and noise-making aids (e.g. musical instruments that each child would “play” during some of the songs; paper stars in various colors dropping from the sky for Stella Stellina, so that everyone can repeat the names of the colors; a little bear to hug and greet, which would also show the different parts of his body, so the children can learn their names, etc.) as well as, more occasionally, puppet shows. The class’ mascot is Topo Gigio, the Italian television character that greets the children with a song that would make them repeat their names. We also use of the “parachute” as a didactic instrument to bring the children together around a colorful object to sing, seat under it, fly it and follow other instructions in Italian.



Class for 2 ½ to 4 Year-Old Bilingual Children **Teacher: Alessia Dalsant**

Weekly classes that are a “step-up” in comparison to our program for 1 to 2 ½ years-old. Parent participation is still required at this level but is more discreet, since more emphasis is placed on having the children interact more directly with the teacher.

Our primary educational goal for this class is to have the children start speaking in Italian and to gain independence and confidence in doing so. Language competence for the little students in this class varies from “as fluent in Italian as in English” to “a few words” in Italian. Regardless of their specific language ability, children are encouraged to become increasingly independent in interacting with each other and with the teacher in Italian.

In addition to some of the didactic tools used for the previous level, craft activities and storytelling are the two primary methods used for this class. Through craft activities, children learn the names of shapes, colors, and objects as well as discuss with each other their preferences for specific situations, food or games. In addition to the ABC books, storytelling relies on the use of more advanced books (e.g. Milo, Pandi e la Palla, etc.) that the teacher will read to the children while asking questions on how they relate to the situation described in the book to make the overall experience more interactive. Additional activities include the alphabet puzzle (a large floor puzzle that children would complete to learn the Italian alphabet), Girotondo, hopscotch and singing (e.g. Al Canto del Cucu’, Una Casetta in Canadá, Gli Indiani, etc.). In this class we also use the “parachute” as a didactic instrument to bring the children together around a colorful object to sing, seat under it, fly it, prepare “popcorn” made of bouncing balls, spin around, etc., and follow instructions in Italian. The two “mascots” of this class are Topo Gigio and a “rabbit in a hat” that in turn sing the introductory song and allow the children to introduce themselves.



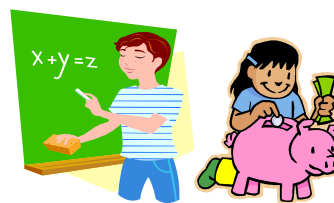
Class for 4 to 6 Year-Old Bilingual Children

Teacher: Alessia Dalsant

Weekly classes that focus on learning the alphabet and the connection between sounds, letters, and words. For this age group, parental attendance is not required since the emphasis is on encouraging independence and self-confidence in interacting with other children as well as the teacher while speaking Italian.

For each letter of the alphabet a series of words, games, images, and related craft activities would be used to teach children to speak Italian while “playing.” For example for the letter “A” children will: Look at objects that start with “a” and be asked to say their names; participate in a “flag” game in which a flag in “arancio (orange)” would be the winner’s flag; draw a picture of the “arcobaleno (rainbow)” ; etc. The different parts/ names of the human body will also be used as a theme when appropriate. For example for the letter “M”, children will draw a profile of their hands; use finger painting to “stamp” their hand on paper; learn a song that would feature a hand as the “town’s square” (C’era una lepre nella piazza --- N.B. The teacher will act as the hand is actually a square). By the end of the class, children would have completed the whole alphabet as well as the names of the parts of the human body.

In addition to the above approach, children will be engaged in other age appropriate songs (e.g. La Bella Lavenderina, Samba, Questo É L’Occhio Bello, etc.) and games (e.g. Gioco Dei Quattro Cantoni, Conte, etc.). In each class, the teacher will also read an age appropriate book and ask the children to comment on how the book relates to their personal experience/lives (e.g. do they brush the teeth before going to bed and which color is their toothbrush...) to encourage conversation in Italian. Visual aids to support the overall class will also include colorful pictures as well as videos of short Italian cartoons to attract our little students’ interest and select topics for conversation/further interaction.



Class for 6 to 10 Year-Old Bilingual Children

Teacher: Ilaria Costa – Intermediate Level

This class is targeted to children who are almost fluent in Italian and are starting to write and read in Italian. This program is designed to encourage further development of reading and writing skills. It also attempts to engage children in the Italian culture through the interactive use of songs, games, videos and multimedia tools. Various activities are

focused on teaching basic notions of the Italian grammar in a playful way. A 'read aloud' and /or 'discuss the book of the month' game are used as tools to engage children in a conversation in Italian about their thoughts and comments on the book. Team games will also be part of the class routine.

Via an interdisciplinary approach, students will also be exposed to Italian art, music, theatre and culture. A few Italian theater pieces and/or stories will also be used to give children an opportunity to express themselves and play games with their classmates while improving their knowledge of idiomatic expressions/cultural traits. Stories will be written with the aid of illustrations. Children are encouraged to select their own roles.

Finally, select classes will be dedicated to 1-2 Italian children movies. Age-appropriate exercises, crafts and games will be used to reinforce key learnings and discussions about the movie's content.