



ASHLEY HALL

FOUNDED 1909

THE LEARNING  
SPIRAL

## MCBEE PLAID

The cover of *The Learning Spiral* features a swatch of Ashley Hall's signature, McBee Plaid. Inspired by school founder, Mary Vardrine McBee, the deep purple represents both our commitment to the school's rich traditions and the respect for Ashley Hall students' passion for learning. This plaid can be seen in the girls' uniforms from early elementary age through Upper School. A symbol of pride, McBee Plaid beautifully distinguishes an Ashley Hall girl.



FOR OVER ONE HUNDRED YEARS,  
ASHLEY HALL HAS BEEN COMMITTED  
TO THE SAME CLEAR MISSION:

TO PRODUCE AN  
EDUCATED WOMAN  
WHO IS INDEPENDENT,  
ETHICALLY RESPONSIBLE,  
AND PREPARED TO  
MEET THE CHALLENGES  
OF SOCIETY WITH  
CONFIDENCE.

---

*POSSUNT QVAE VOLUNT*  
GIRLS WITH THE WILL  
HAVE THE ABILITY



**ABOVE:** *The exquisite cutaway of the interior of the chambered nautilus reminds us of the growth, maturity, and progression that Ashley Hall students achieve each year.*

THE LEARNING SPIRAL:  
EDUCATING WOMEN *for the* WORLD AHEAD

---

As we enter our second century of service to young women, we have undertaken to articulate as clearly and comprehensively as possible the pedagogical philosophy informing our curricula and teaching methods.

While specific programs and course offerings evolve over time in response to new understandings, the fundamental principles governing our decisions remain consistent. Recognizing that the processes of childhood development—social, emotional, and intellectual—are not linear but recursive, that children learn by incremental repetitions, we refer to our approach to education as *The Learning Spiral*, taking for our emblematic image Oliver Wendell Holmes' *The Chambered Nautilus*.

*Which as its spiral grew,  
...left the past year's dwelling for the new,  
Stole with soft step its shining archway through,  
Built up its idle door,  
Stretched in his last-found home, and new the old no more.*









Similarly, we believe, the student moves through a succession of “chambers,” each more spacious than the last, each inseparable from one another, a growth both continuous and organic, not a series of discrete and measured (or accurately measurable) steps. Thus it is vital that we keep constantly in mind our determination to insure for every student that continuity of experience from our Early Education Center to our graduating seniors.

---

**LEFT:** *The Ashley Hall academic program is based on a classical curriculum firmly rooted in the traditions of scholarship, yet continuously seeks ways to embrace innovation and experimentation.*

---

*the children's innate  
curiosity—their natural  
inquisitiveness and  
wonder—becomes the  
engine of their learning.*

## EARLY EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

*(Co-educational ages two through five)*

---

Inspired by the practices of early education professionals in the Italian city of Reggio-Emilia, our own Early Education Center has adopted similar approaches to create what is called emergent curriculum—that is, instructors collaborate with their students to design projects or investigations based on the students' expressed interest. In this way, the children's innate curiosity—their natural inquisitiveness and wonder—becomes the engine of their learning. Students exposed to this approach tend to become more confident, more independent, and more capable of championing their own education, rather than relying passively on the direct instruction provided by a teacher.





THE ADVANTAGES OF  
SINGLE GENDER EDUCATION

---

“GIRLS’ SCHOOL  
GRADS ARE SIX TIMES  
MORE LIKELY TO  
CONSIDER MAJORING  
IN MATH, SCIENCE, AND  
TECHNOLOGY COMPARED  
TO GIRLS WHO ATTEND  
CO-ED SCHOOLS.”

– *Goodman Research Group*

---

**CREDIT:** *Taken from research commissioned by the National  
Coalition of Girls Schools.*



## BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

Even in these early years, students prove themselves increasingly capable of caring for their learning environment as well as for the needs of others, thereby taking initial steps toward becoming “ethically responsible” citizens. The instructional strategies deriving from the Reggio-Emilia approach to early childhood education necessarily require continuous monitoring and documentation of the students’ activities and discoveries. Teachers become intimately aware of each student’s contribution to the collective enterprise, encouraging collaboration while respecting individual students’ pace and performance. The practical skills and more academic understandings students will inevitably need to succeed as they continue upward on *The Learning Spiral* emerge organically out of the investigations themselves. In this way, learning becomes an experience of discovery, of invention, and of wonder.

---

**RIGHT:** *The Early Education Center features an atelier, or arts space, for the young students to weave creativity into their daily explorations. It is overseen by the atelierista—or arts teacher—who encourages the children to express their knowledge and observations through song, movement and art.*







THE ADVANTAGES OF  
SINGLE GENDER EDUCATION

---

“MY DAUGHTER LOVES  
SCIENCE AND MATH  
AND HER TEACHER IS A  
FANTASTIC MENTOR  
TO HER, SHOWING HER  
THE POSSIBILITIES  
OF CAREERS IN  
THOSE FIELDS.”

– Ashley Hall parent, quote taken from a recent survey







## ELEMENTARY EXPERIENCE

*(Kindergarten through Grade Six)*

---

Students in Ashley Hall's pre-kindergarten program begin the transition from Reggio-Emilia inspired instruction into a more modified approach, which will equip them for the type of environment they will encounter in kindergarten and throughout their years in Pardue Hall, the Lower School of Ashley Hall. Although students do receive more directed instruction in kindergarten through fourth grade, there remains a clear emphasis on other strategies consistent with emergent curriculum objectives. This is evident in our integration of academic standards into student-directed projects and more pronouncedly in our language arts instruction, which adapts techniques derived from the work of Columbia University's Teachers College expert, Lucy Calkins. Stressing the importance of each student directing the development of her own writing project, the Calkins program guides but does not govern by formal instruction and peer review. The student thus becomes the author of her own work, achieving a distinctive personal voice through an authentic process of purposeful revision.

---

**LEFT:** *Encouraging young female engineers, the Lower School features one of the largest Lego League teams in the area. Lego League introduces students to real-world engineering challenges by having them build Lego-based robots to complete specified tasks.*

## GAINING MOMENTUM

---

*we constantly  
seek to create  
opportunities  
for students  
to assume  
responsibility  
for their  
learning, both  
in and out of  
the classroom*

While the academic demands of primary school do not readily admit of the adaptation of Reggio-Emilia strategies throughout the curricula, class projects—designed and developed by students in a manner similar to the investigations conducted in our Early Education Center—do provide for a wealth of collaboration. This allows students to realize their own discoveries and thereby continue to feel more fully engaged in their own education. Such confidence is, again, one of the crucial objectives of Ashley Hall’s mission, and we constantly seek to create opportunities for students to assume responsibility for their learning, both in and out of the classroom. Moreover, these collaborations encourage cross-curricular studies that reveal to the students how seemingly disparate ‘subjects’ are, in fact, mutually reinforcing intellectual disciplines. This creates an understanding which lays the foundation for their future course work in humanities and the interdisciplinary Oral Defense Projects and Senior Theses in Upper School.

There is another dimension of our interdisciplinary studies—the way in which academic studies designed to prepare students “to meet the challenges of society with confidence” also provide opportunities to develop ethical responsibility. For example, students in a Lower School science class not only learn the biology of bees, they learn as well the role humans play in sustaining these creatures so vital to the life of plants—and, therefore, to sustainable agriculture. By harvesting their own bees’ honey and by promoting the sales of locally produced honey from other beekeepers, Ashley Hall students raise funds that go directly to The Bee Cause Project, a not-for-profit undertaking that installs glass observation beehives (like the one in the Pardue Hall lab) in schools throughout the country. These fundraising activities introduce Ashley Hall students to a culture of philanthropy and strengthen their awareness that what they learn in school reveals how they can— and should—conduct themselves as citizens of the world.



---

**ABOVE:** *The Ashley Hall campus features two working beehives. Beginning in Lower School, the girls work with the hives learning basic beekeeping skills and the importance of bees to our ecosystem as pollinators.*

## HOW GIRLS LEARN BEST

The importance of work such as this, especially in the single-gender environment at Ashley Hall, cannot be overestimated. A recent article by Claire Cain Miller in *The New York Times* entitled “How Elementary School Teachers’ Biases Can Discourage Girls From Math and Science” highlights a new study that “points to ... how powerful a little encouragement can be. Early educational experiences have a quantifiable effect on the math and science courses the students choose later, and eventually, the jobs they get and the wages they earn. The pipeline for women to enter math and science occupations narrows at many points between kindergarten and a career choice, but elementary school seems to be a critical juncture. Reversing bias among teachers could increase the number of women who enter fields like computer science and engineering which are some of the fastest growing and highest paying.”

While such pragmatic concerns should not be the sole criteria by which to gauge the value of any curricula, it is undeniably important that we provide our students both the knowledge and the encouragement needed to succeed in these increasingly vital areas of study and—as the only all-girls independent school in South Carolina—Ashley Hall is uniquely positioned to do just that. When girls are encouraged at an early age to feel free to pursue an interest in science or math or any other challenging endeavor, they are more likely to retain their enthusiasm and curiosity into their adult careers.







THE ADVANTAGES OF  
SINGLE GENDER EDUCATION

---

“MORE POSITIVE  
ACADEMIC AND  
BEHAVIORAL  
INTERACTIONS [WERE  
OBSERVED] BETWEEN  
TEACHERS AND STUDENTS  
IN SINGLE-SEX SCHOOLS  
THAN IN COMPARISON TO  
CO-ED SCHOOLS.

– *U.S. Department of Education*





## UPPER ELEMENTARY EXPERIENCE

*(Grades Five and Six)*

---

Perhaps nowhere along *The Learning Spiral* is the challenge to help our students acquire the skills they will need “to meet the challenges of society with confidence” more acute than in Lane Hall which houses the Lower School’s Intermediate Program, grades five and six. For girls, the ages between ten and fourteen are especially crucial to their physical, emotional, and intellectual development. Social concerns begin to occupy more of the students’ time and attention while their academic duties become more and more demanding. Recognizing all of these factors, we have designed a two-year sequence of instruction for the fifth and sixth grades that emphasizes the Ashley Hall Hallmarks of compassion, discernment, collaboration, intelligence, creativity, purposefulness and worldliness. For example, when discussing discernment, a Wellness Class might focus on problem solving or how to become more empathetic.

## A PURPOSEFUL TRANSITION

Because these years are so transformative for our girls, we have taken pains to build a dedicated team of teachers who work closely with one another to coordinate their respective course contents. Each individual student is given the proper guidance she needs to make the transition from Lower School’s Intermediate Program to the academic and social environment of Upper School (grades seven through twelve).



---

**LEFT:** *Ashley Hall girls nourish oyster beds as part of a class on biology. Students here are encouraged beginning in the early education center to excel in science and math.*

THE ADVANTAGES OF  
SINGLE GENDER EDUCATION

---

“OUR TEACHERS  
ALLOW US TO  
FIND AND CULTIVATE  
OUR PASSIONS.  
ASHLEY HALL IS AN  
INCREDIBLE PLACE  
TO BE!”

– *Ashley Hall Upper School student*



## COLLEGE PREPARATORY EXPERIENCE

*(Grades Seven through Twelve)*

---

---

*all of the  
preparation  
they have  
undergone  
in preceding  
years now  
begins to  
bear fruit*

As students enter Upper School in Jenkins Hall, they experience a quickening pulse in every aspect of their lives. All of the preparation they have undergone in preceding years now begins to bear fruit in more sophisticated applications of their acquired skills and understandings. Humanities classes conducted as student-directed conversations around a Harkness Table encourage each student to participate on equal terms with her classmates in a manner reminiscent of the investigations she enjoyed as a child in the Early Education Center. The Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) used to assess her fluency in French or Spanish reinforces her understanding of these languages as instruments with which to unlock the doors to other cultures and other climates of opinion and, at the same time, gives her confidence to be a more fully contributing citizen of the world.

With each succeeding year, students in Jenkins Hall discover more and more opportunities to exercise their critical thinking through interdisciplinary studies such as those required by the Oral Defense Project (ODP), the Senior Thesis, and the Senior Project. Each of these activities include a public presentation at which students demonstrate their command of multiple disciplines as they pertain to a single essential question, thereby demonstrating their acquired authority in those fields of study.

---

**RIGHT:** *The Offshore Leadership Program has distinguished itself as one of Ashley Hall's signature programs, building leadership skills and deep love of one's natural surroundings. It features a 10-day offshore sail from areas such as the Caribbean or New England back to Charleston crewed by the girls.*











## ASHLEY HALL AND BEYOND

As students in the Upper School prepare to venture out into the world beyond Ashley Hall's physical boundaries, so too does that world come to our campus. The international boarding students who live in the Elizabeth Rivers Lewine '53 House for Global Studies enrich the intellectual and cultural life of our community in countless ways.

Their presence is a daily reminder that Ashley Hall exists in a network—not virtual but an actual worldwide network—of social, political, economic, and cultural communities. And students exit this level of the life-long learning spiral mindful of their obligations to those communities.

---

**LEFT:** *The school's renowned strings program begins in kindergarten as a core part of the Lower School curriculum. It continues through Upper School as an arts elective for many students whose training began at the elementary level.*

**ABOVE:** *Ashley Hall athletic teams have won numerous State Championships. Our student athletes have been recruited by some of the top colleges in the country.*









With the student featured prominently at its center, *The Learning Spiral* provides a lens through which our school purposefully considers our individual and collective contributions to the fulfillment of its founding mission. It shapes every aspect of our students' matriculation and provides a solid foundation on which a personalized educational experience can be built.

Thus, from those first tentative, toddling steps in the Early Education Center to the confident striding forth for the Commencement processional, every Ashley Hall student enjoys the benefits of a common commitment to clearly defined intellectual, spiritual, and ethical values. She emerges into the world as an educated, independent, and ethically responsible individual prepared by her experience to face the challenges of society with confidence.

---

POSSUNT QUAE VOLUNT  
GIRLS WITH THE WILL  
HAVE THE ABILITY





## OUR HALLMARKS

There are seven Hallmarks that personify an Ashley Hall student, habits of mind and action they strive to cultivate in themselves and one another—namely, to be intelligent, creative, compassionate, discerning, collaborative, purposeful, and worldly.

---

*[www.ashleyhall.org](http://www.ashleyhall.org)*



