5th/6th Grade Catechism Instruction

This curriculum is designed to accomplish the following different objectives, in providing an overview for students in 5th or 6th grade Catechism class:

1. It requires no previous knowledge of the Catechism, Bible, religious terminology, or Bible stories
2. It aims to leverage the specific developmental characteristics of students in this age group
3. It focuses on vocabulary acquisition and other Bible study skills, while also providing an opportunity for students to examine certain subjects more deeply
4. It is aimed towards mastery, with tiered activities and review.
5. It provides proper Law and Gospel content in each lesson.
6. Attempts to couch new description in narrative form, for easier retention by students.
7. Correlates with the new Luther's Small Catechism, Anniversary Edition.

Let's discuss each in turn.

1. It requires no previous knowledge of the Catechism, Bible, religious terminology, or Bible stories – Perhaps it is easy to overestimate the amount of background information students have when you prepare a lesson. This curriculum was created for a public-school catechism class, for whom I had no information. The basic premise was that I needed to assume that they had no previous information regarding church, the Bible, religious vocabulary, or any Bible stories. I would need to teach and reinforce all skills I wished them to have. I would need to give them all of the words and definitions I wanted them to know. And they would need to receive these in a manner that would not overwhelm them. The methodology provided reaches most of those goals. Each phase of the curriculum aims to teach a specific lesson in Bible study skills, through brief introduction, and ample practice. All vocabulary lessons are taught in narrative form, and a simple definition is provided. All Bible stories are taught in context of the lesson, in simplified form. In doing so, all students have the opportunity to be successful in this most important class, regardless of their previous experience.
2. It aims to leverage the specific developmental characteristics of students in this age group – Students in grades 5-6 tend to be developing their organizational skills, and seem to prefer a mastery style of learning. They are very interested in fairness, and seem to enjoy learning new ideas in context. They are growing in their ability to think abstractly, and enjoy

social activities. Finally, they are very interested in learning God's Word, and want to talk and read about it. This curriculum aims to honor that by providing opportunities for mastery of content, social interaction, 100% effort basis, new approaches to thinking, and a regular dose of God's Word.

3. It focuses on vocabulary acquisition and other Bible study skills, while also providing an opportunity for students to examine certain subjects more deeply – Central to the curriculum is a glossary of words which the students will keep and study. Once a week, students will review their understanding of the glossary through quizzes. The content of the glossary is cumulative throughout the year; students will need to retain old information as well as learn new information. By the time they are done, they should be able to instantaneously recall many important glossary words and their meanings, as well as being very familiar with many others. Each glossary word is developed as a result of Bible study and/or contextual stories. These stories help the students to connect their new words with an existing schema, so that they can be more easily retained. Periodic review of existing glossary words is provided both in the text as well as in scheduled opportunities throughout the year.

4. It is aimed towards mastery, with tiered activities and review – Mastery learning can be pictured as a spiraling curriculum, with the following characteristics:
    o Content is limited to the most important items
    o The expectation and goal is that students learn the topic as experts
    o The instruction is aimed not only at instruction, but also at practice and review, with explicit skills instruction and reteaching
    o Grading is based on performance at the mastery level only
    o All content taught to mastery is assumed to be available at all times.
    o Social activities reinforce the push for mastery.

5. It provides proper Law and Gospel content in each lesson—Since the proper division of Law and Gospel is an essential element in each Lutheran teacher's repertoire, each of these lessons is designed to include specific Law and Gospel in two groupings: once in the first half of the Lesson, and once in the second half of the lesson. This is designed to consider both the need for daily specific Law and Gospel, should the class be taught in two weekly classes; or the opportunity for two interactions with Law and Gospel, should the lesson be taught in one longer weekly class. The framework and Bible passages/truths are provided—it is the minister of the Gospel's job to give it Spirit-borne power through his or her words.

6. Attempts to couch new description in narrative form, for easier retention by students—Kids in upper elementary school love stories, so all new content is provided with an example of a narrative introduction that connects the new information to a known piece of background knowledge. All are designed to be instructional and/or memorable. The teacher should replace the given examples with his or her own, as they suggest themselves, and as opportunity provides. There may be a temptation to skip this portion, as it may be time-consuming. It is essential for the information imparted to be tied into both context and emotion, for retention into mastery. Other methods may be used, but some method should be used. Using no method invites frustration and disconnection.
7. With the recent publication of Luther's Small Catechism, Anniversary Edition, the opportunity provided itself to correlate the content and passages to this newest edition. Every effort has been made to do so. In situations where this violated one of the previous guidelines, a notation has been provided for an alternate approach, as well as an explanation of the reasoning behind the variation.