



The Middle School Course of Study

GRADE SPECIFIC PROGRAMS

Required for all students.

GRADE 8

EXPOSITIONS

During their final year in the Middle School, each eighth- grade student delivers a multimedia presentation to the entire Middle School community. The students select a topic for their exposition at the start of the school year. They conduct research, which must include an interview with someone directly related to their topic, write an expository paper, develop their multimedia presentations throughout the fall, and rehearse their expositions in front of the faculty. They are instructed in effective research techniques, the proper way to conduct an interview, PowerPoint design, and public speaking. Exposition presentations take place in January and February. Previous themes have included Rhode Island, Natural Phenomena and Environmental Issues, Decades, and People Who Have Made a Difference.

VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS: Grades 6-8

STUDIO ART

All Middle School students have Studio Art two times a week. Students will advance their foundational drawing techniques, strategies for design, and color theory comprehension in this graded course. Students develop problem solving skills and conceptual thinking by working with a variety of materials, from paint to clay, as they apply the elements and principles of art and design. Projects stem from exposure to art history and contemporary art, multicultural perspectives, and interdisciplinary connections. Documenting the creative process, digital portfolios, visual references, and student-driven presentations are some of the ways the Ipad is used by the Middle School students in art.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Instrumental music is a graded elective course open to all sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. Prior experience on a wind instrument in fifth grade is desirable, but not necessary. Middle School students focus primarily on music for performance, supported by exercises in musicianship, stressing tone, intonation, and scale technique development. The Middle School Band performs a Winter and Spring Concert. The music performed is appropriate to difficulty level and programming is drawn from serious concert band literature and lighter jazz and pop repertoire. Students are prepared for and encouraged to further their instrumental development in the Upper School Band.

CHORUS

The Middle School Chorus meets three times per week for the year as a graded elective course. Choir students learn to use their instrument to create a correct and pleasing singing sound. In addition to learning proper vocal production and technique, students learn music reading skills, sight-singing skills, and performance skills. Chorus also offers opportunities for students to develop team building and leadership skills. This is a performance-based class. Participation in concert performances outside of regular class hours is required. During weekly sectional and full chorus rehearsals, singers are asked to concentrate on greater refinement of previously acquired choral skills. These skills include diction, articulation, dynamics, octavo reading and producing a beautiful tone. Emphasis on part-singing and sight-reading are also part of this class. A variety of literature in multiple languages and styles are chosen at the conductor's discretion, commensurate with the group's ability.

ENGLISH

GRADE 6 – ENGLISH

The theme of English 6 is the hero. Students read about and study heroes both from the ancient civilizations that are the subject of their history course, and from the modern world in novels, poetry, and short stories. Students are encouraged to identify and appreciate the heroic qualities within themselves and their contemporaries. While reading a variety of adaptations of classic tales and selections from contemporary writers, they are asked to identify plot, analyze character, recognize theme, and develop their interpretive skills. Students are introduced to the elements of the writing process, with the goal of expressing their ideas clearly, logically and concisely. The major emphasis of the writing program is on the paragraph (topic sentence, supporting evidence, critical analysis) and the importance of editing and revising. The English Department supports students in the presentation of research projects in the Modern Language Association (MLA) format. Students study vocabulary and grammar, both in the context of their own reading and writing, as well as through textbook lessons. Students are also required to complete and respond to independent reading beyond the works assigned for class.

GRADE 7 - ENGLISH

The theme of English 7 is self-discovery through storytelling; students read novels, poetry, and short stories that deal with the themes of growing up and belonging and are encouraged to find and tell their own stories. While reading a variety of adaptations of classic tales and selections from contemporary writers, students are asked to identify plot, analyze character and structure, recognize theme, and further develop their interpretive skills. Students review and practice the elements of the writing process with the goal of expressing their ideas clearly, logically and concisely. The elements of the analytical essay are stressed, as is the importance of editing and revision. The English Department supports students in the presentation of research projects in MLA format. Students study vocabulary and grammar, both in the context of their own reading and writing as well as through textbook lessons.

Students are also required to complete and respond to independent reading beyond the works assigned for class.

GRADE 8 – ENGLISH

This course is an introduction to literary genres (short stories, novels, poetry, and drama) and is meant to provide a foundation for the study of genres in Upper School English 9. While reading a range of selections, both classic and contemporary, from world literature, students are asked to identify plot, analyze character, discuss theme, and further develop their interpretive skills. The structural differences between the different genres and the significance of these differences are stressed. Students are expected to strengthen and improve writing skills developed in earlier grades, with the goal of being able to express their ideas clearly, logically, and concisely. The elements of the analytical essay (introduction, thesis, body, support, and conclusion) are emphasized, as is the importance of editing and revision. Students also practice personal and fiction writing. Students are required to write at least one research paper (using traditional as well as electronic sources) and present the results in MLA format. Students study vocabulary and grammar both in the context of their own reading and writing as well as through textbook lessons.

MODERN AND CLASSICAL LANGUAGES: Grades 6-7

FRENCH I: PART 1&2

This two-year course (Part 1 in Grade Six and Part 2 in Grade Seven) introduces students to French: the language and culture. This class will allow students to progressively acquire a solid knowledge and mastery of the language in preparation for French 2. Language is taught through the analysis of various materials and the incorporation of activities that allow students to listen, speak, read, and write in the target language. Grammar and vocabulary are taught in an inductive way, enabling students to understand, practice, and master French syntax. Students will have the opportunity to take the Introductory National French Exam (FLES) and will also be able to sit for the first level of the DELF (an international diploma recognizing French proficiency at various levels) once in the Upper School.

SPANISH I: PART 1&2

This two-year course (Part 1 in Grade Six and Part 2 in Grade Seven) introduces students to Spanish: the language and culture. This class will allow students to progressively acquire a solid knowledge and mastery of the language in preparation for Spanish 2. Language is taught through the analysis of various materials and the incorporation of activities that allow students to listen, speak, read, and write in the target language. Grammar and vocabulary are taught in an inductive way, enabling students to understand, practice, and master Spanish syntax. Grammar explanations are done by the students for their classmates on the Explain Everything app. Speaking practice is encouraged through tea chats, skits and presentations such as “Their Crazy Family Tree.” Presentations on various aspects of the Spanish culture are required twice a year. Singing and reciting in Spanish is done regularly to improve the students’ pronunciation.

MODERN AND CLASSICAL LANGUAGES: Grade 8

8th grade students take language classes in the Upper School

FRENCH I

For incoming 8th graders and 8th graders who haven't successfully completed Level I: Part 1&2

This is the introductory language course for students who have studied little or no French, as well as for those who might previously have experienced difficulty in learning the language. This class introduces the question of identity (as a student, a friend, a family member, a citizen, etc.) through the analysis of various materials that allow students to learn to listen, speak, read, and write in the target language from the beginning. Grammar and vocabulary are taught in an inductive way, allowing students to be involved more fully in understanding the language as they work out different rules, and to increase their motivation. Culture, geographical, and historical facts are interwoven throughout the class. All classes aim to be taught exclusively in the target language.

SPANISH I

For incoming 8th graders and 8th graders who haven't successfully completed Level I: Part 1&2

This is the beginning language course for students who have studied little or no Spanish or for those who might have experienced difficulty in learning the language previously. Students discuss the cultures of Spain and Latin America and make basic cultural comparisons. Dialogues, reading, writing, and grammar study are presented to students in lively, everyday situations, ranging from simple survival tasks such as introducing themselves to more complex topics such as making travel plans. All classes aim to be taught exclusively in the target language.

FRENCH II

Prerequisite: successful completion of Level I: Part 1&2

This course continues to introduce major grammatical and conversational points and includes a review of those studied in French I. While still considered a beginner level course, students are taught to express themselves with more sophisticated vocabulary and grammar. Students learn how to appropriately behave and act in real-world situations and analyze various authentic materials in order to allow them to strengthen both their linguistic and cultural proficiency in the target language.

Grammar and vocabulary are taught in an inductive way, allowing students to be involved more fully in understanding the language as they work out different rules and to increase their motivation. All classes aim to be taught exclusively in the target language.

SPANISH II

Prerequisite: successful completion of Level I: Part 1&2

This course begins with a brief review of the first-year program, and continues the study of Spanish with greater emphasis on oral communication in daily contexts. Students learn many

new verb tenses and apply their correct usage to both their writing and speaking proficiency. Students expand their vocabulary and participate in more analytical discussions of cultural comparisons. All classes aim to be taught exclusively in the target language.

MATHEMATICS

Below is the standard sequence of mathematics courses in the Middle School. 6th & 7th Grade students with advanced ability and performance in mathematics may be placed in the next level course, based upon teacher recommendation. Advanced 8th Grade students may be placed in the Upper School Honors Geometry course.

GRADE 6 — MATHEMATICS

The year begins with the concepts of decimal and fraction operations, metric measurement, patterns, and number theory. Next, students are introduced to the new concepts of ratio, proportion, percent, and probability, all of which are learned through the study of real-life data. In learning new material, students often discover through investigation as they work cooperatively to understand mathematics. Periodically throughout the course, both geometric and algebraic concepts are presented as students build a base for future mathematics courses.

GRADE 7 — PRE-ALGEBRA

In this course, there are two key goals. The first is to reinforce the skills necessary for beginning algebra students. The second is to use present skills in greater depth and to apply them to new situations. In preparation for Algebra I, students study the order of operations, integer operations, variables, and equations. The early and frequent introduction of variables and equations helps promote the transition from concrete to abstract thought. Analytical thinking is encouraged through the extensive and ongoing interpretation of various graphic representations, such as bar graphs, line graphs, pie charts, and scatter plots. Much of the data studied throughout the course is student-generated, and many of the activities are done in small, cooperative groups.

GRADE 8 — ALGEBRA I

This course introduces the fundamental principles of algebra while supporting and developing skills already learned. Students learn to solve and graph linear functions and investigate the use of exponents and the arithmetic of polynomials, systems, and quadratic equations. A major goal of the course is to build confidence and to show students that mathematics can solve real problems. Students take advantage of manipulative materials and various technologies. They also use probability, data analysis, and inequalities. Word problems are emphasized throughout the course. A student who successfully completes this course is ready for Geometry in the Upper School.

SCIENCE

GRADE 6 – PHYSICS AND PHYSICAL SCIENCE

How was the Earth formed? Why do earthquakes occur? How does gravity work? These mysteries and more are explored as the class examines both Physical Science and Physics. During the first semester, the unique coastline of the campus, as well as the beautiful Jamestown rock formations provide the perfect setting to learn about the Earth's amazing processes. Rocky Hill's extensive rock and mineral collection give hands-on experiences in conjunction with the dynamic campus to fully study the Earth, oceans and coastal erosion. Mid-year the class transitions to a STEM study of the basic principles of Newtonian physics through the use of Lego EV3 Robotics. Largely conceptual physics, this course starts with concrete experiences from students' daily lives, e.g., from sports, transportation and safety. The physics concepts are clearly illustrated through the multiple applications and functions of the robots.

GRADE 7 – LIFE SCIENCE

Life Science is the study of the biological world around us. The goal of this course is to encourage an understanding of the living world while fostering a love of science and stewardship for our planet and for our own bodies. Throughout our journey this year we will explore life underwater, on land, and in the air and encounter many single- and multi-celled organisms ranging from amoebas to trees to humans. We will gain a general understanding of the living organisms found on our planet and the worlds they live in. We will begin our study in the microscopic world and build bigger, investigating the idea that cells work together to form tissues, tissues work together to form organs, organs to make organisms etc. This organizational hierarchy will be focusing on the interconnectedness of all life. Our journey will also prepare us for the 8th Grade and beyond by encouraging independent science explorations, data collection, in-depth data analysis and full lab reports.

GRADE 8 – THE SCIENCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Continuing the journey of seventh grade, the 8th grade science curriculum will focus on the various systems that make up our local environment. We will begin the year exploring and doing field research on the salt marsh that is in our backyard. Monitoring invasive species, mapping plant zones, and learning about the factors that make this habitat so special are highlights. The winter is spent becoming proficient in measurement, scientific inquiry, and interpreting and graphing data. Molecules, atoms, and the chemical and physical changes elements undergo will be the focus of various individual and group experiments. This foundation in chemistry will prepare us for learning about and understanding the complex subject of climate change. We will learn about how greenhouse gases work to regulate temperature and examine the science behind increasing greenhouse gas levels. Calculating ecological footprints and investigating real-world solutions to local issues related to climate change will conclude the unit.

SOCIAL STUDIES

GRADE 6 — ANCIENT HISTORY

This course uses the study of Egypt, Greece, India, China, and Rome to introduce students to the wonders of the ancient world and to help them develop the skills they will need in future social studies courses. In studying these civilizations, emphasis is placed on how each culture built on the achievements of others, while also developing its own unique solutions to the problems all humans face. Topics covered include government, religion, language, social development, art, and architecture. Throughout the year, careful reading, good note taking, and geographic awareness are stressed. Projects help the students improve their research, public speaking, and time management skills.

GRADE 7 — WORLD GEOGRAPHY

In today's changing world, global awareness is an important part of any education. This course concentrates on the skills needed to understand the earth, with a particular focus on the five themes of geography: location, place, region, movement, and human environment interaction. Students examine charts, graphs, and maps, as well as connect people and their common characteristics, to gain a sense of the world's many regions. Much of the course is Internet-based in order to access more resources. This approach enables students to find up-to-date information on countries, global issues, and world events, with an emphasis on some of the geopolitical "hot spots" that are dominating our lives, such as the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Many skills are taken away from these studies, including vocabulary development, identification of main ideas, understanding of basic map components, and research for essay writing. At the conclusion of this course, students have a greater understanding of nations and a better knowledge of the world's diversity.

GRADE 8 — GOVERNMENT

This course focuses on the history, development, and functions of the United States government and the significant problems facing the nation today. The course reviews the major ideas and events that led to the writing of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Students complete the study of the three branches of the federal government along with an investigation of the country's modern political and election process. Throughout the year, the course uses current events to illustrate and further develop the material presented in the texts. Therefore, students must keep abreast of the news, and are quizzed on current issues weekly. During this course, students develop their note taking, summarizing, organizational, and research skills. In addition, students visit the U.S. District Court in Providence.