

Overview

The sixth-grade year at DCD is a time for exploration, new choices, and high expectations. As newcomers in the Middle School, students must tackle the challenges and responsibilities of the sixth-grade academic program while they cope with issues characteristic of early adolescence. The development and reinforcement of strong study habits and organizational skills is crucial for their success in the middle school years. Class meetings and the Advisory program offer opportunities to articulate feelings, address common issues, and make meaningful contributions to communal endeavors.

English: Literature and Composition

The sixth-grade Literature and Composition course develops students' reading, writing, and speaking skills. The daily curriculum is comprised of literature selected so students can discuss and analyze the important ideas that arise in their reading. Students begin the year reviewing their summer reading book *Seedfolks* and then move to *Becoming Joe DiMaggio* with its themes of immigration, discrimination, goal-setting, baseball, and American history. Given the writing style of the book (short vignettes written in open verse), students have the opportunity to write several short personal pieces about their lives and goals. Students practice active reading skills by "talking to the text."

Students study grammar in order to enhance their communication skills. Diagramming is introduced as a way to teach parts of speech, the relationship between words in a sentence, and the structure of a sentence, and the fall focuses on subjects and verbs as well as adjectives, adverbs, and possessives. Students reinforce their knowledge of grammar through web-based instruction, practice, and assessments on ixl.com, as well as through more traditional paper assessments. Throughout the entire year, students develop their vocabulary by using the online *Membean* program.

Between Thanksgiving and winter break, English and history are combined into a three-week interdisciplinary unit exploring activism. Students read the story of Malala Yousafzai, reflecting on her life and achievements and exploring possible roles they might occupy as actual or potential advocates for causes in which they believe.

During the winter and spring terms, students read *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. This text is used to stimulate discussion and writing around themes of discrimination, prejudice, racism, and personal courage from both historical and personal perspectives. During the winter term, grammar focuses on diagramming to build an understanding of prepositional phrases and direct and indirect objects. During the spring term, diagramming focuses on linking verbs and coordinating conjunctions.

A noteworthy activity of the spring term is the *Burning Question* project, undertaken as time allows, in which students identify an adult expert to answer a “burning question” they have. In this project, students pose a particular question that interests them — cultural, scientific, intellectual, or other — and identify through research an individual expert in this field. They then learn to compose a formal business letter in which they request an answer to their question from the selected expert. Responses from these experts can range from illuminating to cryptic to comical, and are assembled in an illustrated book by students at the conclusion of the project. Optional, extra-credit work includes reading books nominated for the Massachusetts Children’s Book Award, where students are given several options for reviewing the books, from formal analysis to more open-ended, creative portrayals. Vocabulary instruction focuses on words found in the literature studied, and is supported through direct vocabulary instruction in the language skills course (details below in language section). Grammar focuses on diagramming increasingly complex sentences with an emphasis on compound subjects, verbs, and objects, as well as compound sentences.

Texts:

Seedfolks
Becoming Joe DiMaggio
I am Malala
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Paul Fleischman
Maria Testa
Malala Yousafzai
Mildred D. Taylor

Literature and Composition meets five days per week.

Mathematics

The sixth-grade math course provides a strong, traditional base of computation and problem solving. Daily note-taking and homework assignments reinforce important concepts and algorithms. Some algebra is introduced, including solving equations and evaluating algebraic expressions. Students complete a project on graphing and statistics during the winter term. In this project students collect data using a tally chart and then graph the results using a bar graph, a line graph, and a circle graph.

During the months of September and October the sixth graders are deliberately split into three heterogeneous groups based on their math ability. After observing and working with the students for two months, the three math teachers then divide the students into three ability-based groups, with the flexibility to create groups of any class size as well as any ability. The makeup of the students in the specific sixth grade drives the groupings. For example, last year we sectioned them into high, middle, and low groups. In any given year, we might have a high group and two, mixed middle-low groups. Or we might have a low group and two, mixed middle-high groups.

Some core sixth-grade topics include:

- Operations with whole numbers, fractions, and decimals
- Number theory
- Ratios and proportions
- Percents
- Formula-based geometry
- Operations with integers
- Graphing on a coordinate plane
- Solving word problems using various strategies

Texts:

Mathematics: Course 1

Prentice Hall

Grade 6 Mathematics meets five times a week.

World Studies

The sixth-grade World Studies course helps students gain a greater global perspective through its focus on geography, history, government, and cultures in Europe, Asia and Africa. Each term, the class focuses on one continent and on one core academic skill to practice and develop. Throughout the year, students learn about current events and make connections between what is happening in the world today and the history studied in class.

In the fall, students investigate the geography and history of Europe and practice a variety of different note-taking techniques. The note-taking focus begins with students learning how to identify key points in material and summarizing what they have learned. As the class moves through its study of Europe, students practice different styles of note-taking, such as outlining and the use of two columns, and discover the advantages and disadvantages of each style. The fall culminates with a project in which students will choose a topic to explore further. They are introduced to the research process and have an opportunity to put their note-taking practice to good use.

In the winter, the class changes its focus to the study of geography and governments in Asia. The unit begins with an examination of the physical features of Asia and then moves into a more focused study of history, government, and economics. A focus on writing begins with short responses to prompts. Students practice creating thorough responses and supporting their ideas with facts. As the term progresses, students complete assignments with increasing length and depth.

In the spring, focus shifts to the study of current and past political and cultural landscapes in Africa. Students have the opportunity to continue to improve their writing skills through

composition of five-paragraph, persuasive essays. Students continue to build their knowledge of world geography while further developing their understanding of the research process.

Text:

World Studies Series

Pearson/Prentice Hall

World Studies meets five days per week.

Humanities

Between Thanksgiving and winter break, English and World Studies are combined into a three-week interdisciplinary unit exploring activism. Students read the story of Malala Yousafzai, reflecting on her life and achievements and exploring possible roles they might occupy themselves as actual or potential advocates for causes in which they believe. Grammar instruction continues with a focus on nouns, pronouns, and adjectives.

Texts:

I Am Malala

Yousafzai

Grade 6 Humanities meets daily for 75-95 minutes between Thanksgiving and Winter break.

Science: Life Science

The sixth-grade science course focuses on subjects in life science. Students start with the classification of living things, moving from those living on our own campus to those in the larger world. The study of cellular structure and function presents the complexity of life on a small scale, moving on to genetics and the understanding of what factors contribute to the evolution of a species as a whole. During the spring, investigations into the functions of the skeletal and muscular systems and circulation and, finally, the human reproductive system provide a glimpse into the workings of the human body on an individual level.

The study of human interactions and systems culminates in a student-designed "Critter Project." Students design a "Critter" and create specific adaptations for their "Critter" as they study various systems and concepts throughout the year.

During the special Mini-term unit in November and December, students choose a topic to investigate and subsequently design, implement, and analyze an experiment related to that subject. Their findings are presented at a science exposition held at the conclusion of Mini-term.

Life Science is taught with a great deal of focus on hands-on observations, challenges, and labs. Students are instructed in both the Scientific Method and Engineering Practices, with emphasis on developing the ability to analyze and present findings in a clear and well-organized

fashion. Note-taking is required, and helpful study skills such as using mnemonics, vocabulary cards, and the use of online resources such as *quizlet* are discussed and reinforced.

Texts:

Human Biology and Health
Cells and Heredity

Prentice Hall (Science Explorer series)
Prentice Hall (Science Explorer series)

Life Science meets five days per week.

Science: Growth Education

Sixth graders study the human reproductive system (male and female reproductive systems and pregnancy) during Science class for three weeks at the end of the spring term. As with all systems taught in Science class, memorization and understanding of terms is measured with in-class assessments, and there is an open discussion about both the anatomy and physiology of the system. Students are helped to word their questions in a respectful fashion, and those questions are addressed honestly.

Language

Sixth-grade world language instruction consists of introductory instruction in Latin and Spanish. Students take each introductory world language course for half of the school year. Language class meets five days per week.

Language: Beginning Latin

In sixth-grade Latin, basic vocabulary including numbers, family members, and items in the classroom are introduced to the students. Much of our vocabulary is focused around English cognates and breaking down their meanings from the Latin words we study. The course also takes a close look at the culture of the Romans and the Roman empire. Topics including Roman gods and goddesses, Roman houses, and Roman daily life are studied and compared with life today and with life in ancient Greece, which they study in fifth grade.

Text:

First Latin: A Language Discovery Program

Scott Foresman/Addison Wesley

Language: Spanish

The sixth-grade Spanish course focuses on the continued development of organic self-expression in the target language. Using content, themes and subject matter that is mostly student driven, classes leverage the power of comprehensible input and a strong focus on

commitment to using the target language to increase student proficiency. Couched in the notion that language acquisition is a journey riddled with “errors,” we use games, play and competition as a way to enjoy the process of learning as a community. Class is intended to be structured as an immersion experience and places value on taking risks with self-expression and recycling what students already know in order to make strides toward increasingly higher levels of mastery.

Regardless of the subject matter that is brought to class by any group, a very similar group of high frequency words and phrases come to the fore and serve as a basis for expression that is then augmented by individualized vocabulary. This process closely mimics the process one would experience while learning their native language.

Grammar instruction is woven into class time and all grammar concepts and vocabulary are reviewed in the context of the target language. All four aspects of second-language acquisition (speaking, reading, writing, and listening) are practiced. However, verbal expression and listening comprehension are paramount to the daily classroom environment. In addition, there are occasional “English days” where students receive explicit grammar instruction in English in order to clarify concepts for the sake of keeping momentum for those students who thrive with more direct instruction.

Assessments occur as part of class time and all grades are expressed within the context of proficiency development instead of standard letter grades. For more information on proficiency-based metrics visit

<https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012>

Grade 6 Spanish meets five days per week for half of the year.

Advisory

The sixth-grade Advisory program devotes its time in the fall to helping the students transition to the middle school. There are new challenges for the students, like having different teachers and classrooms for each subject, and more independence in the management and organization of binders and cubbies. Advisors help their advisees get acclimated to handling these situations. The students are also introduced to the laptop program through instruction in both the use of their computer at school and the acceptable and safe use of technology.

In late September or early October, the class goes on a trip to Hale Reservation for a day of hiking, group games, and getting to know each other better in a more relaxed and informal setting. Later in the year, the Advisory program works to help build the group cohesion of the

class through team-building games and scenarios that require the students to make consensus decisions. In March, the sixth grade goes on a three-day, two-night trip the Farm School in Athol, Massachusetts.