

Overview

The seventh-grade year at DCD is a pivotal one. No longer the newcomers in the middle school, seventh graders can be viewed metaphorically as a rubber band that represents an elastic developmental spectrum. In seventh grade, the rubber band expands as students' performance and maturity levels widen; some remain sixth graders physically, intellectually, and emotionally, while others grow more quickly into eighth graders. The group is often less homogeneous physically, emotionally, and academically than in their sixth-grade year — and they will return to a more homogeneous group in eighth grade — but in seventh grade the rubber band stretches to its greatest length. This year is one where managing and guiding students' different rates of growth is the paramount challenge.

The continued development of study habits and organizational skills is crucial in the seventh-grade year as assignments become increasingly demanding. Besides fulfilling their academic obligations, seventh graders contribute their time to recycling as a contribution to community service, and they strengthen their sense of community by taking part in Advisory activities and a variety of class trips, including to Hale Reservation for a one-day ropes course activity, the Christa McAuliffe Challenger Science Center at Framingham State University, and to Pinkham Notch in New Hampshire for a three-day ecology and wilderness experience.

English: Literature and Composition

The seventh grade Literature and Composition curriculum builds on the critical reading and writing skills developed in sixth grade through continued exposure to a variety of literature genres and themes. Areas of focus in skill development include active-reading and note-taking skills as well as ongoing strategies to bolster the revision and proofreading of written work. The seventh-grade curriculum is organized by themes, allowing students to compare and contrast how different writers comment on a chosen theme. Students show their mastery and understanding of material through different media including visual and multimedia presentations, collaborative projects, essays, and exams. Assessments are based on a combination of effort, participation, and achievement.

The year begins with an exploration of the authors Arthur Conan Doyle and Edgar Allan Poe. Students often enter seventh grade with an appreciation for the iconic detective Sherlock Holmes, as he is a touchstone for contemporary true-crime literature and television shows today, as well as the direct inspiration behind recent Hollywood films and the CBS and BBC series. Students read *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the short story, "The Speckled Band," learning about the deductive method by completing and studying a jigsaw puzzle related to the short story. The class also reads a short biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Students continue the fall term with various short stories by Edgar Allan Poe — oriented around Halloween — and

learn to appreciate Poe's unique ability to describe the psyche of a character through the use of first person narration. Students also read a short biography of Poe to understand the connection between his life and his works, and to learn the connection Poe has to Boston. Students write an essay on Poe during the fall term.

Between Thanksgiving and winter break, English and history are combined into a three-week interdisciplinary unit exploring the broad topic of race in America by studying the American civil-rights movement. To gain an understanding and appreciation of this time period, students watch and discuss the "Eyes on the Prize" documentary and read poetry by a variety of African-American writers. Upon returning to school in January, the students undertake a close reading of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, and each student illustrates and writes a short analysis of a different paragraph for inclusion in an oversized children's picture book.

During the winter and spring terms, students read *To Kill a Mockingbird* and explore themes of personal courage, discrimination, prejudice, and racism. Students write an essay on courage and an evaluation of Atticus Finch as a parent over the course of the spring term.

Building on their experience in the sixth grade, students continue to broaden their vocabulary on which they are assessed regularly. Students are encouraged to use the words in class discussion and in their writing. Throughout the course of the year, students reinforce their understanding of the words by finding them in use outside of the classroom and by creating vocabulary cartoons.

Grammar instruction continues the focus established in sixth grade on diagramming as a strategy for understanding the structure of increasingly complex sentences. Topics covered over the course of the year include adverb, adjective, and noun clauses. Ongoing grammar work is augmented by web-based instruction, practice, and assessment on *grammarbytes.com*. Grammar and punctuation study continues throughout the school year.

Texts:

The Tell-Tale Heart

Edgar Allan Poe

The Black Cat

The Cask of Amontillado

The Masque of the Red Death

The Raven

The Hound of the Baskervilles

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Selected chapters from <i>A Dab of Dickens and a Touch of Twain: Literary Lives from Shakespeare's Old England to Frost's New England</i>	Elliot Engel
<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>	Harper Lee

Literature and Composition meets five days per week.

Mathematics: Pre-Algebra

Students in seventh grade take Pre-Algebra in either an accelerated, regular, or introductory section. Both sections reinforce the basic computational and conceptual mathematical skills previously taught in sixth grade, introduce algebraic concepts and emphasize the use of mathematical thinking and skills to solve a rich variety of problems. Students are prepared to take Algebra I Honors, Algebra I, or Pre-Algebra in the eighth grade.

Nightly assignments are given based on each day's work. Assessments are given regularly. Quizzes are given approximately half way through a chapter. A chapter test is given at the end of each chapter.

Examples of core topics are:

- operations with real numbers (integers, fractions and decimals)
- number theory with variables and exponents
- manipulation of variables
- ratios, proportions, and percents
- simplifying radicals
- scientific notation and laws of exponents
- solving and graphing linear equations and inequalities
- geometry (including geometric constructions in the accelerated section)
- probability (simple and compound)
- solving word problems algebraically

Text:
Pre-Algebra Prentice Hall

Pre-Algebra meets five days per week.

History: Early American History

Early American history explores developments leading to the founding of the United States of America, from the earliest European explorations and contact with Native Americans through the American Revolution. An integral part of the course is study of the positive and negative ramifications of encounters between different cultures, and how these encounters have shaped our society, past and present. Additionally, through study of North American geography, the students gain an understanding of the relationship between people and their environment and how it has affected the growth of the United States.

The course begins in the fall term with a hands-on examination of historiography: how history is recorded and transmitted through the years via artifacts and primary and secondary sources. A strong emphasis is placed on evaluating the reliability and utility of various sources. Projects in this unit include a simulated archaeological dig and the composition of a formal logbook; a multi-day journal exploring what primary sources are left behind by current events; and an online research activity based around the question “are the ingredients in Twinkies harmful or illegal?”

Following the historiography unit students begin two separate streams of study that run in parallel for the remainder of the fall term: the development and growth of exploration in early modern Europe, culminating in a reading of primary source excerpts from Christopher Columbus’ journal of 1492; and a survey of the indigenous Mesoamerican cultures whom Spanish explorers would eventually confront. Skills specifically addressed in this segment of the fall term include note-taking, map comprehension and creation, and continued evaluation of information sources. Specific units within the Mesoamerican stream cover the Olmec civilization in brief, followed by more in-depth exploration of the ancient Mayan and Aztec civilizations. Significant projects include the creation of an original chronological presentation of Mayan history (student presentations have included timelines, PowerPoint presentations, sculptures, board games, motorized calendar wheels, and more). If time allows, the fall term concludes with a strategy game created collaboratively between teacher and former students that reflects the struggle for power among Mexican city-states in the 14th and 15th centuries.

Following the Humanities Mini-term (covered in the English curriculum above), winter term finds students learning about the early English settlements in North America, specifically Jamestown and Plymouth. Readings from primary source materials, including excerpts from William Bradford’s *Of Plymouth Plantation*, bolster students’ critical and analytical reading skills, and subsequent assessments help develop test-taking strategies and a strong understanding of the material. Written assessments typically take the form of open-book and open-note tests known as “demonstrations of knowledge.” These assessments offer simple identification questions in conjunction with large, synthetic essay questions designed to challenge students’ thematic comprehension. Collaborative and critical thinking skills are developed throughout winter term in

several formal debate projects. The students are also expected to continue to participate in discussions, work in cooperative learning groups, and enhance their communicative abilities with peers and adults.

Spring term in Early American History covers the growth of British colonies from the mid-17th to late-18th centuries. Particular attention is paid to the creation and implementation of the Atlantic slave trade; the struggle for economic and geographic dominance in North America between European powers; and the economic, cultural, and political factors leading to the American Revolution. Primary sources continue to be a major component of course reading, including letters, journals, excerpts from Olaudah Equiano’s memoir, and a complete reading of the Declaration of Independence at the conclusion of the term. Major projects and assessments include several “demonstrations of knowledge”; a creative journal in the voice of a fictional colonist of students’ creation; and a week-long exercise in which students debate online on our proprietary history blog, under pseudonymous colonial identities, the various merits and drawbacks of British legislation and actions leading up to the eventual Declaration of Independence.

Texts (partial list):

American History

Pearson/Prentice Hall

American History Customized Reader

Pearson/Prentice Hall

Classroom Atlas

Rand McNally

Seeds of Change

Hawke, Davis

A History of Us (multi-volume series)

Hakim

Early American History meets five days per week.

Humanities

Between Thanksgiving and winter break, English and history are combined for the three-week interdisciplinary Mini-term unit, which in seventh-grade Humanities provides an exploration of the roots and events of the 20th-century civil-rights movement in America. Students use a combination of primary historical sources, documentary film, short stories, and poetry to focus closely on a selection of topics during Mini-term. Students also undertake a close textual analysis of the rhetorical devices used by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech, culminating in the creation of an annotated, illustrated book of the speech.

Science: Earth Science

Our home planet—blue with water, white with clouds, green with life—is unique in our solar system and probably rare in the universe. Nearly everything we do each day is connected in

some way to Earth: to its land, oceans, atmosphere, plants, and animals. Using hands-on observations, challenges, and labs students explore how weather, energy from the sun, and interactions with other objects in our solar system affect the delicate balance of life on the planet.

The Earth Science course is divided into three units. During the fall term, the focus is on the principles of weather: the composition of the atmosphere; properties of air; wind; precipitation; air masses and fronts; and heat transfer in the atmosphere. An important goal of the weather unit is for students to grasp the relationship between weather and its potential role in environmental sustainability. This study leads into the Mini-term unit between Thanksgiving and winter break, where a focus on passive solar energy leads students to a culminating project in which they design, build, and test the efficiency of a model passive solar home.

During the winter and spring terms, the curriculum encompasses the solar system and humanity's place in the universe. Students examine aspects of the relationship between the earth, sun, and moon: seasons, phases, eclipses, and tides. The astronomy unit culminates in students creating a guide to the solar system.

The course is taught through discussion, demonstration, and activities. Assignments include formal laboratory reports, student oral presentations, research writing, group and individual projects, and readings from a variety of sources (listed below). Through these methods, students learn how to use lab equipment effectively and to collect and interpret data accurately; other skills emphasized include research methods, written and oral communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

Earth Science meets five days per week.

Texts (partial list):

Weather and Climate
Astronomy

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

Language: Spanish 1-A

Language: Spanish 1-A

This course is the first half of a two-year curriculum that concludes at the end of eighth grade. The overall goals of the Spanish 1-A course are to encourage comprehension and communication in Spanish through the use of high-frequency vocabulary and phrases using Comprehensible Input (CI) methodology. CI is a collection of approaches, techniques, and

strategies for teaching language that prioritize the delivery of understandable and compelling messages in the target language. This method also enables students to authentically self-express as well as understand simple authentic texts and media.

At the beginning of the year, the skills from sixth-grade are reviewed in the context of authentic resources and conversation. In order to hone proficiency, class time allows for consistent practice in small chunks and phrases, grammar concepts and vocabulary. All aspects of second-language acquisition are reinforced and require students to use the target language in spoken and written words, as well as extract meaning from “text” and audio. To achieve these goals students use role-playing, cooperative exercises and games as well as creative skits and presentations.

Students are introduced to present-tense conjugations of regular -ar, -er and -ir verbs, some irregular verbs such as *ir*, *estar*, *tener*, and *dar*, and some stem-changing verbs (i.e., *e* → *ie*, *o* → *ue*, *u* → *ue*, *e* → *i*). In some cases, classes move at an accelerated pace and exercises are paced according to the specific group of students.

By the end of students’ seventh-grade Spanish experience, oral proficiency typically ranges from the novice mid to intermediate low range. 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>

Spanish 1-A meets five days per week.

Language: Latin 1-A

This course is the first half of a two-year curriculum. students completing this course should qualify for Latin II in secondary school. The course approaches the study of Latin through a series of stories that follow the daily life of a typical Roman family. As students learn about Roman culture, they build their facility with Latin vocabulary and grammar.

In the fall, students begin the year by looking at basic sentence structure and proper Latin pronunciation. Basic topics in grammar are introduced as students learn the role of subjects and direct objects in both English and in Latin. At this time, students are introduced to the accusative case. We also look at different forms of verbs with an emphasis on identifying and translating person and number.

In the winter, we expand our study of nouns by learning the ablative and genitive cases. With our verbs, we are using all six person-number combinations to translate verbs in the present tense. Students are introduced to the concept of different verb conjugations and practice forming stems from all four (or five) conjugations.

At the end of the Winter term, all students in the class take the National Latin Exam. Those who score above the national average earn a certificate of achievement.

In the spring term, we look at third-declension nouns and forms of first- and second-declension adjectives. Students are also introduced to the concept of verb tenses by learning the forms and translation of verbs in the imperfect tense.

At the end of the year, the students have a chance to consolidate their knowledge of Latin through an open-ended writing project. The students are given requirements that reflect the work they have done throughout the spring term and are asked to create a story that includes these elements.

Texts:

Ecce Romani IA

Prentice Hall

Ecce Romani IA Language Activity Book

Prentice Hall

Advisory

The seventh-grade Advisory program helps students develop academically, emotionally, and socially. In the fall term of each year, students attend a one-day retreat at Hale Reservation. As part of this retreat, they participate in a series of team-building exercises, including a rigorous ropes course where they learn to rely on each other for success. In addition to the retreat, advisors help students create a plan for academic success for the upcoming year, and students have a chance to discuss what they hope to accomplish. They also have the opportunity to discuss school-related concerns, including fears and issues around racism, sexism, bullying, sexual identity, and tolerance. Advisors use these discussions as a time to help students develop trust, reinforce listening skills, and expose them to the world at large. Journal-writing activities complement the discussion by allowing students to reflect on their ideas and to formulate and organize their thoughts more fully. Throughout the year, students divide their time between a number of service projects, which include visiting an assisted-living facility, working with young children, beautifying the campus, and clearing trails at a local nature reserve. All of these projects are intended to help students develop their own sense of awareness and gain respect for others.