

Overview

The eighth-grade year is a challenging and powerful experience for students at DCD. Demanding academics are blended with an Advisory program that nurtures personal growth and self-awareness. Students are expected to work hard in order to master a wide range of academic material in their classes, and they are likewise expected to bring a consistent focus to the formation of a personal identity as an ethical, involved member of our community. While students at this age cannot be left entirely on their own, eighth graders at DCD are expected to assume a significant measure of responsibility for their own education, both academic and personal. Each member of the eighth-grade class acts as a Big Buddy to a kindergarten child, leads morning assemblies, helps to raise funds for a class gift, and serves as a general, de facto leader of the student body. Eighth-grade students facilitate cross-grade middle-school reading groups, serve as athletic-team captains, and take significant leadership roles on student council, in community service, and in admissions activities.

A significant part of the eighth-grade year involves each student's preparation for secondary or high school. For many students, this process includes school visits, completing applications, and securing recommendations; for all students, the act of considering and executing consequential life decisions is a major part of eighth grade. It is our belief that this process helps students to refine their ideas about themselves, their education, and their values, and works hand-in-hand with the eighth-grade Advisory program in aiding the establishment of a personal identity with confidence, conviction, and courage.

English

The eighth-grade English curriculum is designed to instill students with an understanding of the power of language and the ability to express this power through their own writing. The students explore different genres of writing throughout the year as part of this model, including novels, short stories, poetry, memoir, essays, journalism, advertising, and Shakespearean drama. Class is usually organized as a seminar-style discussion based around a text currently under consideration; in addition to reading and discussing this range of texts, students also participate in occasional writing classes that consist of a mini-lesson examining a particular grammatical concern or writing skill, followed by dedicated writing time and reinforcement of vocabulary.

The course begins with an introduction to basic elements of narrative fiction. Students read John Knowles' novel *A Separate Peace* over the summer preceding eighth grade, and upon returning to school in the fall, examine this text through the lenses of plot structure, character, narrative voice/point of view, and imagery. A closer look at each of these concepts follows in the fall term, treated one by one through a series of short stories (authors include Eudora Welty,

Shirley Jackson, Katherine Mansfield, Kurt Vonnegut, Dorothy Parker,, Eugenia Collier, Toni Cade Bambara, Steven Millhauser, Amy Tan, et. al.). Irony and symbolism are introduced during the fall short story unit as further tools at an author’s disposal. The fiction unit concludes with a consideration of theme as a binding element; students read a short story of their own choosing and produce a written analysis of one element of the text, oriented around a thesis statement that connects the author’s literary strategy with the themes of the story.

The fall term concludes with a study of poetry typically organized around New England poets including Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, and E.E. Cummings. Basic elements of poetry covered in this unit include meter, rhyme, sound devices (including alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia), and structure; the poetry unit also builds on foundations of imagery, voice, and theme begun in the fiction unit. Students end the term with a written analysis of a contemporary song of their own choosing, using the techniques and strategies covered in the previous three weeks.

The winter term in English is oriented around William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Students read the text of the play through the term, supplemented by two film interpretations (1968: Franco Zeffirelli; 1996: Baz Luhrmann). The classroom experience includes a range of approaches to the play, including group reading; editing, blocking, and acting individual scenes; poetic analysis of language and imagery; character analysis; creative writing; and the memorization of a soliloquy or speech of at least 25 lines.

Eighth-grade English concludes in March with a cumulative exam that covers principles and concepts from the fiction and poetry units as well as a major thematic essay on *Romeo and Juliet*.

Texts:

Advancing Vocabulary Skills

Various short stories

Romeo and Juliet (Signet Classic Edition)

A Separate Peace

Sherrie L. Nist

Various authors

William Shakespeare

John Knowles

Grade 8 English meets 5 days per week in the fall and winter terms.

Humanities: Mini-term

Between Thanksgiving and winter break, English and history are combined into a three-week interdisciplinary multimedia unit exploring the circumstances and legacies of the 20th-century civil-rights movement in America. Building on their experience in the seventh-grade Humanities course, students use a combination of primary historical sources, documentary film, short

stories, and music to focus closely on many aspects of a single historical event during the Mini-term.

The eighth-grade Humanities course is currently oriented around the desegregation of Little Rock's Central High School in 1957-58, coupled with a poetic and thematic examination of blues music and lyrics. Texts used include *Facing History and Ourselves*, *Choices in Little Rock* curriculum, James Baldwin's novella *Sonny's Blues*, and a selection of songs by Billie Holiday, Leadbelly, and Howlin' Wolf (Chester Burnett).

Grade 8 Humanities meets daily for 75-95 minutes between Thanksgiving and winter break.

Humanities: Facing History and Ourselves (Holocaust and Human Behavior)

During the spring term, English and history are combined for a powerful, challenging Humanities course based on the *Holocaust and Human Behavior* curriculum created by Brookline-based Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO). FHAO gives the following description of their program: "Through rigorous historical analysis combined with the study of human behavior, Facing History's approach heightens students' understanding of racism, religious intolerance, and prejudice; increases students' ability to relate history to their own lives; and promotes greater understanding of their roles and responsibilities in a democracy." The FHAO course complements DCD's emphasis on personal identity and responsibility in eighth grade.

Works of fiction and nonfiction as well as documentary and creative film supplement a primary-source resource book for this curriculum. Visiting speakers — typically Holocaust survivors — present their personal stories directly to students in the classroom several times during the term. Students respond to these readings, films, and visits in a journal (managed through Google Docs), offering personal reflections, connecting to their own beliefs, identity, and experience, and asking their own questions in dialogue with the course materials. The course culminates with the class's annual trip to Washington, DC, in late May to visit historical monuments, memorials, and museums, including the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Texts:

Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book
All Quiet on the Western Front
Friedrich
Night

FHAO National Foundation
Erich Maria Remarque
Hans Peter Richter
Elie Wiesel

Facing History and Ourselves meets daily for 75-95 minutes during spring term.

Math: Algebra I

Students in eighth grade take Algebra I Honors, Algebra I, or Pre-Algebra I. Eighth graders are taught to think algebraically and to solve problems in a methodical and organized manner. Students are encouraged to think independently and to take responsibility for their learning.

In the honors section, the pace is accelerated, and concepts are studied in more depth. Students are encouraged to be independent learners. The hope is that they will become more confident in their ability to teach themselves new material.

The honors section also requires students to master graphing equations and inequalities using the TI-83 graphing calculator. Eighth graders in this section will be ready for an honors math curriculum in high school. Students in the regular section of Algebra I complete a full year of algebra, including the quadratic formula, and will be in a position to move on to Geometry or Algebra II in ninth grade. The Pre-Algebra course is designed to cover many of the main topics of Algebra I and set the students up for a successful Algebra I year in ninth grade.

Examples of some core topics in Algebra 1 are:

- operations with variables
- solving linear equations and inequalities
- slopes and intercepts
- exponents
- operations with radicals
- polynomials
- systems of equations and inequalities
- factoring polynomials
- solving quadratic equations four different ways
- solving word problems algebraically with one and two variables

Text:

Algebra I

Prentice Hall

Algebra I meets five days per week.

History: US History

U.S. History explores the evolution of the United States from the debates during the 1787 Constitutional Convention through the decision to enter WWI. The course examines the people, events, and ideas that caused divisiveness and the efforts made to try to bring the country

together during the growth of the nation. A major emphasis of the curriculum is for students to learn how to communicate ideas and opinions effectively both orally and in written form. Students learn to evaluate the credibility and usefulness of resources, synthesize historical and contemporary material, and engage in both the writing and research processes.

Over the summer students read *Just Mercy: A True Story of the Fight for Justice (Adapted for Young Adults)* by Bryan Stevenson providing the class with discussion topics as we begin the year with our civics unit.

The topic of divisiveness is explored during the fall in a unit on the U.S. Constitution as we begin by looking at the debates of the Constitutional Convention. The unit continues with a comprehensive look at the structure and philosophy of the articles and amendments. The class also focuses heavily on the current political landscape, drawing connections between current events and the Constitution. Students are assessed on their understanding through a video-creation assignment, quiz on the amendments, and a test on the entire unit. The fall term concludes with a lesson on the writing process as students choose a U.S. Supreme Court decision and compose a five-page paper. The process includes identifying a developmentally appropriate topic, locating and evaluating print and online sources, using *NoodleTools* software to accumulate and record supporting material and create a bibliography, developing a thesis, writing the paper, and working with others during the editing and revising period.

The winter term delves into the American Civil War. In addition to the textbook, the material for the unit consists of sections from the historical novel *Killer Angels*, the film *Glory*, primary resources (both online and from a handwritten letter), and historical maps from the time period. We examine each of these resources, paying close attention to their usefulness and limitations in our study of the Civil War. The unit test assesses both the students' knowledge of the material and their capability of extracting information from a few of the sources. The following unit on Reconstruction on the process of writing an in-class essay.

The winter term concludes with a close examination of several events in the physical and ideological growth of the United States. Students are given the opportunity to choose a specific topic during the period from Reconstruction through the beginning of WWI and to teach the class about the topic. The focus is on how to effectively present a topic with a thesis and create a presentation that is both educational and interesting to the audience.

The course concludes with a two-hour cumulative exam at the end of the winter term in March. The focus is both on the material from the two terms and on how to prepare for a lengthy comprehensive exam. We spend time on how to approach specific types of questions and on the various strategies of studying for the exam.

Texts:

American History

Pearson

Just Mercy: A True Story of the Fight for Justice (Adapted for Young Adults) Bryan Stevenson

U.S. History meets five days per week during Fall and Winter terms.

Science: Physical Science

The eighth-grade Physical Science course offers a study of introductory physics and chemistry, with an emphasis on lab work, inquiry, measurement, foundational concepts, and the analysis of results in both formal reports and the presentation of the engineering design process.

The curriculum emphasizes the use of tools and technology to acquire data and mathematics and graphing skills to interpret it. A variety of teaching methods are incorporated in the course, including laboratory experiments, guided discovery, engineering challenges, projects, demonstrations, and textbook readings. Students' work is assessed individually, but they learn to function effectively in teams as well as to gain confidence in their individual skills. The development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills is a major focus throughout the year.

During the fall and winter terms students learn about forces, simple machines, motion, Newton's laws, and density. Some experiments incorporate the scientific method, while others employ the engineering design process or simple observation and discussion. Students determine the maximum or minimum force that it takes to pull a brick one meter, as they study forces and friction, using student-generated methods to increase or decrease friction. During the study of motion, students match their motions to a computer-generated graph and identify the significance of the shapes of different types of graphs. Later, they will design, build, and test a simple self-propelled car at the end of their studies of momentum and Newton's laws.

The simple-machines unit taught in the fall culminates in a project undertaken in the three-week Mini-term between Thanksgiving and winter break during which students design and construct an original complex machine, incorporating at least three interconnected simple machines, that must perform a specific task.

The eighth graders finish the year studying chemistry concepts, including physical and chemical changes, atomic structure, bonding, and different types of equations. Students use the characteristic properties of a substance to separate and collect two substances, design molecules using ball-and-stick models, and observe physical and chemical reactions.

At the end of the year, students take a two-hour cumulative exam, featuring vocabulary, word problems, and situations that they must explain using the concepts that they have studied throughout the year. To take the focus away from memorization, students are allowed the use of a three-by-five index card containing formulas, labels, or whatever facts they might choose to include.

Texts:

Motion, Forces, and Energy

Prentice Hall

Chemistry and Matter

Prentice Hall

Matter: Building Blocks of the Universe

Prentice Hall

Language: Spanish 1-B

This course is the second half of a two-year curriculum that begins in seventh grade and leverages the Comprehensible Input (CI) Methodology to spur proficiency. 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. Students in this course continue to study Spanish language through activities based on authentic self-expression. Students begin the year with a review of the material covered in their seventh-grade year. Key grammar and vocabulary points are reinforced through oral-communication activities and writing exercises.

Newly introduced grammar topics include additional tenses, strategies for extending expression and opportunities for project-based learning. Assessments occur as part of class time, and all grades are expressed within the context of proficiency development instead of standard letter grades.

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

Spanish 1-B meets five days per week.

Language: Latin 1-B

The continuation of Latin I has the same goal as the beginning course in seventh grade, which is the ability to read and comprehend Latin. Precise pronunciation, knowledge of forms and syntax, a broad vocabulary, the study of Roman culture, and the relationship between English and Latin are all integral parts of the program. Because facility in reading Latin is the main objective, there are frequent opportunities to translate in writing and by sight. Students also

practice translation back into Latin. Homework is given on a daily basis and includes both memorization and written exercises. Progress is assessed through chapter quizzes and unit tests.

The fall term begins with a review of the major concepts covered in seventh grade. Over the first weeks of the school year, students review the forms and use of first-, second-, and third-declension nouns, verbs in the present and imperfect indicative, and first- and second-declension adjectives. Following the review period, the class begins the study of new material with a look at third-declension adjectives and verbs in the perfect tense.

In the winter, students complete their knowledge of the major cases in Latin by studying the dative case. From there, the class continues to add to their knowledge of verb tenses by covering the forms and translations of verbs in the future, pluperfect, and future-perfect tenses. At the end of the winter term, the class takes the Level 1 National Latin Exam. Prizes are given to those who score higher than the national average.

In the spring, the eighth grade learns the forms of nouns in the fourth and fifth declensions. At this point, the students have been exposed to all forms for regularly declined Latin nouns. Other major topics include the forms and use of pronouns and demonstrative adjectives. Time permitting, the class may move into the *Ecce Romani II* book and begin work on relative clauses and passive voice.

At the end of the year, the class takes a comprehensive exam on their work throughout the year in Latin. The exam focuses on translating from Latin to English and incorporates topics seen since the beginning of the year.

Texts:

Ecce Romani IB

Prentice Hall

Ecce Romani IB Language Activity Book

Prentice Hall

Latin 1-B meets five days per week.

Growth Education

Eighth-grade growth education is a weekly course held during the spring term designed to give students a forum to discuss growth-related issues related to health, sexuality, gender, and peer norms.

Open discussions of sexuality, birth control, gender identity, anatomy, sexually transmitted diseases, peer pressure, sexting, date rape, and the challenges of “starting over” in a new

school are arranged around the theme of "making responsible choices." The course is intended to help students look toward the future and to guide them in the development of strategies for facing complex decisions; this theme complements the DCD eighth-grade holistic focus on identity, responsibility, and choice. Clear and unbiased information is presented, and students are encouraged to share personal opinions and strategies with their peers in a respectful fashion.

There is no textbook for the course, but outside readings from newspaper and magazine stories are sometimes used as a springboard from which to address issues. Recent readings have included "This is me, this is who I am," the story of a transgender boy's transition from a *Boston Globe* article (February 2014), and a series of articles from the *Globe* (March 2010-August 2010) describing a senior student's efforts to bring her same-sex partner to her Mississippi high-school prom.

Growth Education meets one day per week during the spring term, and is taught by a team of one male and two female teachers along with the school nurse.

Advisory

The eighth-grade Advisory program is intended to guide students in solidifying an authentic, ethical personal identity and in exercising decision-making and collaborative skills with tolerance and respect for others. The program commences with an overnight retreat at the opening of the school year. Advisors and students travel to the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Chickatawbut Hill education facility in the Blue Hills Reservation, where they participate in cooperative games and leadership exercises, prepare meals, and enjoy outdoor activities as a bonding experience.

Eighth-grade Advisory meetings throughout the school year typically take place three days per week; meetings can take shape either as small-group gatherings that focus on values, character, and identity issues or as all-grade meetings to conduct "class business," often on a consensus basis. In the fall and winter terms, the Advisory focus is oriented toward small-group meetings that challenge students to consider such topics as conformity and facades, how to set and strive for personal goals, stress and schedule management, online "digital citizenship," and community values. In the spring term, Advisory meetings are more likely to include the whole grade in one body, deliberating through a consensus process on topics that include production of the yearbook, selecting speakers for Closing Exercises, fundraising for and selecting a class gift to the school, and more. The Advisory program also serves as a flexible resource for the grade to address immediate concerns within and among the eighth-grade students, whether social, behavioral, or academic.