

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 is designed to foster an appreciation for literature while developing strong reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. Through exposure to a rich selection of texts, students encounter well-developed characters and themes, which provide opportunities for literary analysis and discussion. Over the course of their sixth-grade year, students will learn to engage with texts on a deeper level and express their ideas clearly and effectively.

Students begin the year by reviewing their summer reading book, *See You in the Cosmos*. They then move on to book groups, where they choose from a selection of books to read in small groups. In addition to discussion and projects, students write several analytical paragraphs about their chosen book, allowing them to review the writing process and paragraph structure learned in earlier grades. Additionally, students learn to strengthen their main ideas by incorporating specific examples and quotations from the text.

During the winter and spring terms, students read *The Giver* and *Kira-Kira*. Both texts stimulate discussion and writing around themes of individuality, freedom, love, and hope. Students hone their discussion skills through whole-class and student-led discussions. They also build their writing stamina through informal responses to the readings and more formal analytical paragraphs, culminating in a multi-paragraph essay in the spring.

Vocabulary instruction focuses on words found in the literature studied, and is enhanced through direct practice with tailored word lists. Grammar instruction begins with a review of the eight parts of speech, progresses to identifying complete sentences, and then moves on to using conjunctions to create compound sentences. Throughout the year, students apply their knowledge of grammar to their own writing, reinforcing these skills.

Sample Book Group Texts:

Greenglass House
We're Not From Here
The Wednesday Wars
Forget Me Not

Kate Milford
Geoff Rodkey
Gary Schmidt
Ellie Terry

Whole-Class Texts:

See You in the Cosmos
The Giver
Kira-Kira

Jack Cheng
Lois Lowry
Cynthia Kadohata

Grammar for Writing

Sadlier

Literature and Composition meets five days a 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.

At the start of the year, the sixth graders are deliberately split into three heterogeneous groups. After observing and working with students, the three math teachers then divide 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. The low group has a smaller class size, works at a slower pace, and offers reinforcement of some basic computation skills. The high math group requires more independence and resilience, works at a quicker pace, and pushes into some other areas like operations with different number bases and algebraic fractions.

For teaching materials, teachers pull from a variety of texts and internet resources.

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

Grade 6 Mathematics meets five days 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 Africa, Asia, and Europe. 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 Africa. They begin by learning basic cartography skills and creating their own physical map of the continent. They also 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 Africa, 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 simulation of an African Union Summit, in which students do in-depth research on one African country's history and the current issues it faces, and then represent that country at the summit. In smaller groups based on common issues, students create resolutions on how to address the issues, and then vote on these resolutions at a meeting of the entire summit.

In the winter, the class changes its focus to the study of Asia. Students will continue to study geography and practice note-taking. They will study a variety of Asian countries, comparing recent history, government, economies, and standard of living, and will consider similarities and differences. 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. Students will also engage in mini-debates about current events.

In the spring, focus shifts to the study of the geography and history of Europe, including the French, Industrial, and Russian revolutions. Students will continue to practice note-taking, research, and writing skills, and will engage in a formal debate to practice formulating arguments backed by specific evidence as well as considering counter-arguments.

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 the power of stories. Students will explore oral histories by reading exemplar texts, conduct intergenerational interviews, and write their own narrative stories drawn from lived experiences. Students will also explore the elements of strong narrative writing, such as character development, plot structure, and descriptive language.

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 circulatory system and the human reproductive system provide a glimpse into the workings of the human body on an individual level.

During the special Mini-term unit in November and December, students study the human brain from a variety of perspectives, using lab, dissection, mindfulness training, and guest speakers to enrich their understanding. Each student then chooses a subject related to the brain to explore in greater depth. They then present the results of their experiments and research 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 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 questions in a respectful fashion, and those questions are addressed honestly.

LANGUAGES

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

The sixth grade Latin uses the Cambridge Latin text as a guide for instruction with each chapter introducing a different element of Latin grammar and Roman history and culture. The first book in the series introduces grammar, vocabulary, and stories through following a family in Pompeii before the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. The second book in the Cambridge series, which we will begin in the Spring, will follow the same pattern of grammar and vocabulary acquisition while exploring cultural topics throughout the Roman Empire. By the end of the year, students will have been introduced to a wide range of topics. This includes 1st, 2nd, and 3rd declension nouns and adjectives in the six cases (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, ablative, and vocative). Additionally, students will learn the comparison of adjectives and learn to decline various pronouns. Students will also learn four verb tenses (present, imperfect, perfect, and pluperfect).

Text:

Cambridge Latin Course Unit 1 and 2

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 a near 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 a heritage 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, students receive most 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 [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines](#).

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

DOUBLE ENGLISH

The Double English program allows for students who need additional reading and writing support to waive their language requirement in order to receive this additional instruction. In Double English, students read a variety of texts, including novels, plays, graphic novels, and non-fiction articles. Students are given in-depth guidance around the writing process, with a focus on organizing their output and editing their work. In addition, students work on building their vocabulary knowledge and grammar skills. At the end of Grade 6, some students will be ready to join/rejoin Spanish or Latin for Grade 7, while others will continue with Double English through Grade 8.

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 the spring, the sixth grade goes on a three-day, two-night trip to the Farm School in Athol, Massachusetts.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Grade 6 students participate in a variety of SEL activities throughout the school year, supported by a team that includes the School Psychologist, Head of Middle School, Advisors and a number of other DCD faculty. During advisory periods, students have opportunities to practice mindful breathing, reflect on kindness, gratitude, and other social emotional competencies. During the winter mini-term, students participate in working sessions that help them identify different types of stress, learn about stress and their brain, and explore coping skills and strategies to help them manage stress.