

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 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 literary genres. 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 theme of the seventh-grade curriculum is justice in both the aspiration and implementation of it; that is, in the goal of creating a fair and reasonable society, and the administration of the law or authority in achieving that state. 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 several of Sherlock Holmes short stories, a short biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to understand the connection between his life and his works, and even of an interesting connection to Boston. 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 begin a close reading of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech. Upon returning to school in January, each student illustrates and writes a short analysis of a different paragraph from the speech for inclusion in an oversized children's picture book.

During the winter term, students view and discuss the 1957 film *12 Angry Men* and explore the impact that personal courage, discrimination, prejudice, and racism have on the pursuit of justice in our judicial system. In the spring, students study the same theme by reading the short story *A Jury of Her Peers* and the young adult novel *Monster* and write essays on each one.

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 uses the Let's Diagram website to teach diagramming as a strategy for understanding the structure of increasingly complex sentences. Topics covered over the course of the year include the eight parts of speech, basic sentence structure, direct and indirect objects, prepositional phrases, and subordinate clauses.

Texts:

A Scandal in Bohemia

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

The Red Headed League

The Man with the Twisted Lip

The Adventure of Silver Blaze

Selected chapters from

A Dab of Dickens and a Touch of Twain:

Elliot Engel

Literary Lives from Shakespeare's Old

England to Frost's New England

I Have a Dream

Martin Luther King, Jr.

A Jury of Her Peers

Susan Glaspell

Monster

Walter Dean Myers

Advancing Vocabulary Skills

Townsend Press

Grade 7 English meets between four and five days a week for all three terms.

MATHEMATICS: PRE-ALGEBRA

Students in seventh grade take Pre-Algebra in either an accelerated, regular, or introductory section. All 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 Intro. to Algebra I 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.

Seventh grade history introduces the students to the types of sources used in the study of history and investigates the strengths and weaknesses of each of these sources. Students learn about bias and accuracy in sources and how to gather and understand information in light of those biases. The class also focuses on three content themes: the meeting of cultures, the origins of American democracy, and conflict within our democratic society. There are three skills themes, which are expressed in these questions: "how do we know what we know?" (sourcing information), "how do we write about what we know?" (taking notes and writing persuasive essays), and "how do we talk about what we know?" (public speaking and presentations).

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 comparison of the bias and accuracy of popular news media outlets, 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?”

The class then starts its study of history by examining what happens when two different cultures meet for the first time. This includes meeting of the Portuguese and Japanese, the Spanish with the Taino and Aztecs, the French with indigenous Canadians, the English with the Powhatan and Wampanoag. From there, the class transitions to looking at the origins of democratic government in the United States including the English Civil War, The Protestant Reformation, Mayflower Compact, the establishment of the House of Burgesses, and how the aftermath of the French and Indian War led to the American Revolution. The focus of the class then shifts to looking at how conflict has existed in the United States focusing on The Constitutional Convention, The Missouri Compromise, the causes of the Civil War, and the start of the labor movement during the Industrial Revolution.

Throughout the year as content focus shifts, conversation will circle back to the ideas of what the sources of information are, what biases those sources may have, and how to understand the information those sources provide us with given those biases. Ranging from learning about how the 16th century Portuguese thought about the Japanese and vice versa to how current events are reported on by various news outlets, the students are presented with ways to evaluate the accuracy of the information that they encounter. Having achieved a better understanding of the value of sources, students will write persuasive essays in which they need to cite credible sources to support the reasons that they make in their arguments. In the spring term, students apply these same concepts to preparing oral presentations and taking part in debates – making points and supporting those points with sourced evidence.

Texts (partial list):

American History

American History Customized Reader

Classroom Atlas

A History of Us (multi-volume series)

Pearson/Prentice Hall

Pearson/Prentice Hall

Rand McNally

Hakim

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: ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

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 projects, students explore how human activity impacts the precious ecosystems on our planet.

In this course, students learn primarily through project-based learning where they actively engage in personally meaningful projects to solve real-world problems. During the fall, students participate in a mapping activity to help them gain greater familiarity with our school environment, learn about food waste and composting, conduct a campus food waste audit, learn about the importance of native pollinator species, and help maintain a pollinator garden. These studies lead to the “Wonder Workshop” Mini-term unit between Thanksgiving and winter break, where students conduct a project based on a topic that excites them.

Later in the year, students gain practice using the engineering design process to build robots that help solve real world problems, such as invasive species removal on campus. Students will also participate in citizen science projects while learning about water quality, biodiversity monitoring, and climate change. Students will create a civic media campaign to share their awareness about their findings and to share the word about pro-environmental behaviors that they feel could have a meaningful impact on our world.

The project-based course includes discussion, demonstration, and activities. Assignments include student oral presentations, research writing, group and individual projects, and readings from a variety of sources. 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.

Environmental Science meets four to five days per week.

LANGUAGES

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 of 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 group projects and presentations.

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 [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines](#).

Heritage speakers follow an accelerated track that uses classroom work as a springboard for more advanced and independent work. Since heritage speakers arrive at DCD with a variety of competencies, each student receives individualized projects designed to aid their growth.

Spanish 1-A meets five days per week.

Language: Latin 1-A

The seventh grade Latin course will begin with a comprehensive review period on topics introduced in the 6th grade survey course. Students will work on mastering 1st, 2nd, and 3rd declension nouns and adjectives in six cases (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, ablative, and vocative). Additionally, students will learn the comparison of adjectives and learn to decline various pronouns (relative, demonstrative, etc.). Students will also learn four verb tenses (present, imperfect, perfect, and pluperfect). The class will work throughout the year on reading the stories in the textbook which center around a main group of characters in the textbook. We will also dive into Roman history and culture predominantly focusing on imperial Rome.

Students will also be introduced to adjacent cultures through learning about the various Roman provinces.

Students will be graded on tests and quizzes, homework assignments, classwork, participation, and projects.

Texts:

Cambridge Latin Unit 1 and 2

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.

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.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Grade 7 students participate in various 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. As part of our wellness program, Juanita Allen Kingsley, a health educator, meets with the seventh grade over the course of four days to teach sex education using the Advocates for Youth curriculum.