

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 cultivate a love of literature while strengthening students' reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. Through a diverse selection of texts, students explore well-developed characters and meaningful themes, providing rich opportunities for literary analysis and thoughtful discussion. Over the course of the year, students learn to engage with texts more deeply and express their ideas with clarity and confidence.

The year begins with a creative project inspired by the summer reading novel, *The First State of Being*. In the fall and winter, students read *The Lost Year* and *The Giver*, two novels that prompt meaningful conversations and writing on topics such as family, personal freedom, and the role of historical memory. In the spring, students participate in book groups, selecting from a curated list of novels to read and discuss in small groups.

Class discussions and written responses serve as key tools for both engagement and informal assessment. Students build writing stamina through frequent informal responses as well as more structured analytical essays. A key focus of writing instruction is the ability to support ideas with strong textual evidence, including the effective use of direct quotations and detailed analysis.

Vocabulary words are drawn from the assigned novels and understanding is reinforced through practice and assessments on targeted word lists. Grammar instruction begins with a review of the eight parts of speech and progresses to identifying complete sentences, followed by a unit on sentence variety and structure. Throughout the year, students apply grammatical concepts directly to their own writing, solidifying their understanding through practice and revision.

Whole-Class Texts:

The First State of Being
The Lost Year
The Giver

Erin Entrada Kelly
Katherine Marsh
Lois Lowry

Sample Book Group Texts:

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

Gordon Kormon
Kate Milford
Geoff Rodkey
Gary Schmidt
Ellie Terry

English 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 also complete a project on graphing and statistics. 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 practices core academic skills. 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. 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 focus is on Asia. Students will continue to study geography and practice note-taking and other academic skills, such as research, writing, and public speaking. The particular focus will be on China and how its culture and trade influenced and interacted with the Asian countries surrounding it. Students will come to understand how ideas, religions, and goods traveled far and wide *via* the ancient Silk Road and will also learn about China's Belt and Road initiative, a modern-day version of the Silk Road. The unit will end with a debate in which students practice formulating arguments backed by specific evidence as well as considering counter-arguments.

In the spring, focus shifts to the study of the geography and history of Europe. Students will learn about the French, Industrial, and Russian revolutions, and those revolutions' monumental impact on the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries—and beyond. Students will continue to practice note-taking, research, and making presentations. Throughout the term, students will keep a current events journal on a European country of their choice.

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 listening to exemplar recordings, 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). However, students will focus mainly on the nominative, dative, and accusative case. Students will also learn three verb tenses: present, imperfect, and perfect.

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.

Regardless of the subject matter that is brought to class by any group, a very similar selection 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 experience of learning a heritage language. Class is structured as a partial 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.

In addition to reviewing concepts taught in DCD's Lower School, students learn the possessive (both constructions), question words, expressions with "*ir + a*" plus, the present progressive, high frequency verbs list, reflexive verbs, stem-changing verbs, *ser v. estar*, expressions with *tener* (review), commands, *gustar*, and verbs like *ir*, "go" verbs, preterite and imperfect tenses, and preterite irregular verbs.

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. Students receive most grammar instruction in English.

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.

HAWK LAB

HAWK Lab has been created to support our students who would benefit from extended learning support in English Language Arts, Executive Functioning, and Study Skills. This class is an alternative to Spanish or Latin and is available to middle school students with identified learning support needs. HAWK Lab uses direct, evidence-based instruction to support student growth in reading fluency, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. Reading materials include fiction and non-fiction literature. The materials used and strategies taught are differentiated and designed to be complementary to the grade-level English class curriculum. The skills addressed and the literature chosen are based on the students' learning needs as well as their interests.

Grade 6 HAWK Lab meets five days per week.

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.

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 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.