

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, and serves as a general, de facto leader of the student body. Eighth-grade students facilitate cross-grade middle-school discussion groups, serve as athletic-team captains, and take significant leadership roles on student council, in community service, and as student Admissions Ambassadors.

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: LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

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, 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.

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 and poems

Romeo and Juliet (Signet Classic Edition)

A Separate Peace

Sherrie L. Nist

Various authors

William Shakespeare

John Knowles

Humanities: Mini-term

Between Thanksgiving and winter break, English and history are combined into a three-week interdisciplinary unit called "Decades of Progress?," in which students consider the trajectory of women's rights between the 1920s and the present. In small groups, students research one decade, investigating events, people, milestone Supreme Court cases, music, fashion, as well as depictions of women in advertisements, TV, and film to better understand women's status during their assigned decade. In addition to the group research projects, students read and analyze Dorothy Parker's short story "A Telephone Call" (1930), breaking out into small discussion groups to discuss the stories' themes, which center on women's roles in society.

Mini-term culminates with each research group creating a multimedia presentation through which to share their findings about their decade with classmates.

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 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 each student independently researching and presenting on a topic or theme from the course, followed by 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
Friedrich
Night

FHAO National Foundation
Hans Peter Richter
Elie Wiesel

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

MATH: ALGEBRA 1

Students in eighth grade take Algebra I Honors, Algebra I, or Intro. to 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 graph equations and inequalities using the TI-83 graphing calculator.

Students in the regular section of Algebra I strive to complete a full year of algebra, including quadratics. Some students will be in a position to move on to Geometry or Algebra II in ninth grade, while others would benefit from a repeat of Algebra I. The Intro. to Algebra I 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 Structure and Method
Big Ideas Math-Algebra I

Houghton Mifflin (honors section)
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, which provided 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 various methods. The fall term concludes with a lesson on the research and 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 Civil War unit concludes with the process of writing an in-class essay. The winter term concludes with a close examination of Reconstruction and several events in the physical and ideological growth of the United States.

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

Savvas

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 and informal fashions, responses to lab questions, 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, and Newton's laws. Some experiments incorporate the scientific method, while others employ the engineering design process or simple observation and discussion. Students work to determine the minimum force needed to pull a brick one meter, as they study forces and friction, using student-generated methods to 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 study of 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 and bonding. Students use the characteristic properties of a substance to separate and collect two substances, design molecules using ball-and-stick models, and observe and identify 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

Matter: Building Blocks of the Universe

Prentice Hall

Prentice Hall

LANGUAGES

Language: Spanish 1-B

Our capstone year of Spanish is demarcated by project-based learning paired with reading and writing practice with authentic resources. The summer read is Sonia Sotomayor's '*Solo Pregunta!*' based on which students create their own autobiographies that they present to their classmates in an "author talk."

This course is taught using a full immersion model. No English is spoken during class time. Students in this course continue to study the 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.

Heritage speakers continue to follow an accelerated track that uses classroom work as a springboard for more advanced and independent work. Some students are invited to co-teach and or tutor peers. Students also sit for the Global Seal of Biliteracy Exam, which is an international credential acknowledging language skills.

Spanish 1-B meets five days per week.

Language: Latin 1-B

In eighth grade, students will continue to build on their grammar and vocabulary skills and continue to read stories in Latin. The beginning of the year will focus on reviewing the previous year's grammar topics (cases, tense, various sentence structure, and vocabulary) as well as cultural and historical content. The class will focus on the Cambridge Latin Course's third book. Through this book, students will learn the fourth and fifth declension noun endings and continue to master the comparison of adjectives and adverbs. They will also learn two new tenses, the future and future perfect, and learn participles in the various tenses and voices. In addition, students will get exposure to the subjunctive mood. Students will also get experience reading and translating more complex sentence structures. When/if we finish the third book, we will begin the fourth book in the series which will introduce remaining grammar topics and introduce students to Roman authors and reading authentic Latin texts. Students will be graded on tests and quizzes, homework assignments, classwork, participation, and projects.

Texts:

Cambridge Latin Unit 3

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. The HAWK Lab program in eighth grade intentionally complements the eighth grade English curriculum. Students read a variety of texts, including novels, plays, graphic novels, and non-fiction articles. Texts include *West Side Story*, *Romeo and Juliet* by Gareth Hinds, and more. Students are given in-depth guidance around the writing process, with a focus on research skills, organizing their output and revising their work. In addition, students work on building their vocabulary knowledge using *Vocabulary from Latin and Greek Roots* and grammar skills. It is expected that students will be well-positioned to start a world language option upon entering secondary school.

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 the CDC, Amaze.org, and Planned Parenthood websites are used at times to support student questions and research. Outside readings from newspaper and magazine stories are sometimes used as a springboard from which to address issues and current events.

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

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 a retreat at the opening of the school year. Advisors and students participate in cooperative games and leadership exercises and enjoy outdoor activities as a bonding experience.

Eighth-grade Advisory meetings throughout the school year typically take place two to 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,” sometimes 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 and selecting speakers for Closing Exercises. 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.

Another important aspect of the grade eight Advisory program is the K-8 Big Buddy program. In September each eighth grade student is randomly paired with a Kindergarten buddy with whom they will participate in a range of activities throughout the school year. Activities include reading, free play, art, field trips, and a school-wide scavenger hunt. The Buddy program is designed to allow eighth grade students to develop leadership and communication skills and to experience meaningful responsibility in a guided context.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Grade eight 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. With the focus on preparing students for life beyond DCD, students practice skills to build their social emotional competence, including tools and strategies for self-management and self-care.