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TASOK  
Course Overviews  
Middle School



2011-2012

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## Middle School at TASOK

It is the aim of the TASOK middle school to create an environment that recognizes and celebrates the rich set of abilities and uniquely social nature of students at this level.

While they share many developing capacities—and likewise struggles—middle school students vary widely in their interests, developmental levels and areas of academic readiness. Instruction for our middle school students is therefore flexible and differentiated, to recognize and value students' varied needs and encourage student engagement in the complex process of learning. Units of instruction, assessments, and the classroom environment are designed to engage middle school students positively through the fundamental questions that preoccupy them as people: questions of identity and belonging, of empowerment, choice, and responsibility.

Middle school students are deeply engaged in realizing their own identities—as individuals, as members of their families, and as participants in the world around them. With their growing sense of themselves as people, students at this level are developing a new global awareness and sense of justice, and when encouraged, can be powerful advocates for their own, and others' rights. Student voice is an important part of our middle school.

To ease the difficult changes a student experiences during their middle school years, both personally and at school, TASOK offers the Metamorphosis Program. This consists of two trimesters in each year of middle school, of lessons and activities geared toward study skills, social skills, health, career awareness, team building, and learning *how* to work in a group successfully.

Students at this level explore challenging topics and consider real-world problems. Problem-solving is a significant focus of the middle school program across disciplines, and students have ongoing opportunities to develop their skills, both individually and collaboratively.

While developing a sense of themselves and their identities, TASOK middle school students also learn to recognize and honor difference. Inclusive processes, collaborative learning opportunities, and classroom structures that value multiple perspectives help students develop skills in collaboration and group dynamics, and an appreciation for one another.

Middle school students are increasingly capable individuals. Our middle school program aims to provide flexible structures that offer practical support for academic and social success, while encouraging students' developing independence, decision-making capacities, and sense of personal responsibility.

# Language Arts

## English 6

### About the Course

Students in 6<sup>th</sup> Grade English explore key elements of literature through a variety of genres and extensive writing and reflection. Students hone their skills as readers, writers, and literary critics through peer editing and teacher feedback. Students practice identifying the elements of a story and creating work that is polished and complete. Emphasis is placed on exposing the students to a wide variety of genres and texts, and students will use reading and writing workshops to edit their own work.

The course is organized thematically, with reading selections and writing assignments that reflect and reinforce the theme. Each thematic unit is delivered primarily through reading and writing workshops. Wherever possible, cross disciplinary links are forged with art, music and their social studies course.

### Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Students at this level are emerging as creative, independent thinkers, and naturally concerned with questions of identity, self-worth, and the value of uniqueness versus conformity. This class encourages students to ask questions about literature and themselves, and engage in critical thinking to come up with their own answers. Students in 6<sup>th</sup> grade investigate such questions as: What is a story? Why do we write? How do authors create character? What is genre? How can literature relate to my own life? What constitutes identity? Why is culture important? How can I truly express myself through writing?

Students in English 6 complete the Personal Anthology Project, in which collected works of short fiction and narrative responses to literature are bound into a formal final product. Students also keep a year-long reading journal and accumulate feedback from classmates and the teacher.

### Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students at this level learn to express themselves clearly in writing, through formal essays, narratives, and literary letters. They think critically about literature and learn to recognize symbolism and other literary devices. Grade 6 students practice authentic literary criticism and form independent opinions about literature.

### Topics for the Course

The course covers a variety of units, including Elements of a Story, Historical Fiction, Fantasy, Poetry, Personal Narrative, Identity, and Essay Writing.

### Assessment

Students learn to evaluate their own progress through formative assessment, such as class discussions, role-plays and other forms of creative expression. Students write weekly in a reading journal and participate in peer editing and self-reflection during reading and writing workshops.

Summative assessments, which are the source of student grades, include formal written work, such as essays and short stories, formal presentations, graphic displays of information, and quizzes and tests.

Students in English 6 are encouraged to read books individually at home and during reading workshop. Students also read core texts together as a class, such as *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* and *The Egypt Game*.

# English 7

## About the Course

Students studying English in Grade 7 focus on developing their reading, writing, comprehension and visual literacy skills. Emphasis is placed on exposing students to a wide range of texts. Students develop skills and knowledge in order to use the English language increasingly effectively, creatively and critically.

English 7 is delivered through thematic units which expose students to many facets of the English language. Each thematic unit is delivered primarily through reading and writing workshops. Wherever possible, we forge cross-disciplinary links with art, music and social studies.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Students in Grade 7 are comfortable thinking independently. They are becoming critical thinkers, able to entertain multiple perspectives and accept that a question may have more than one right answer. At this age students are also deeply concerned with matters of identity. This course exposes students to a wide range of texts, encouraging them to think both broadly and deeply, and engages student interest through a special focus on identity.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

Grade 7 students further develop their writing, reading and comprehension skills. They are gradually exposed to the meta-language of English to give them a strong scaffold to describe, discuss and differentiate texts. Students in Grade 7 begin to explore the idea of intertextuality, learning to identify, compare and describe connections between spoken, written or visual texts with similar subject matter. They also gain an understanding of perspectives and points of view presented in imaginative and factual texts.

## Topics for the Course

Students focus on writing for different audiences and purposes during our Castaways unit. The Memoir project lets students discover, explore and celebrate ideas connected with identity and perspective. With *The Giver*, we discuss the strengths and weaknesses of community. We sample quality historical fiction with *Good Masters, Sweet Ladies*, and explore a range of fantasy fiction and drama as well.

Developing greater visual literacy is an ongoing focus for students in the course.

## Assessment

Students evaluate their progress through formative assessments such as class and small-group discussions, creative writing and reading journals. Summative assessments, which are the source of student grades, include longer written compositions, formal presentations and creative presentations such as monologues, graphic displays of information and tests.

Students in this course read a wide array of books from the library, and are expected to read at least three books per quarter. Students also study some core set texts including *The Giver* and *Good Masters, Sweet Ladies*.

# English 8

## About the Course

Students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade English explore key questions of identity, transformation, and culture through a variety of genres and extensive writing and reflection. Students hone their skills as readers, writers, and literary critics through reading and writing workshops, peer editing, and teacher feedback. Emphasis is placed on exposing the students to a wide variety of genres and texts.

The course is organized thematically, with reading selections and writing assignments that reflect and reinforce the theme. Each thematic unit is delivered primarily through reading and writing workshops. Wherever possible, cross disciplinary links are forged with art, music and their social studies course.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Students at this level are independent thinkers, and naturally concerned with questions of identity, self-worth, and the value of uniqueness versus conformity. This class encourages students to ask questions about literature and themselves, and engage in critical thinking to come up with their own answers. Students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade investigate such questions as: Who am I? What constitutes identity? Why is culture important? What is the value of standing out from the group? How do authors create identities for their characters? How does literature connect to my own life? How can I truly express myself through writing?

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students at this level learn to express themselves clearly in writing, through formal essays, narratives, and literary letters. Students think critically about literature and learn to recognize symbolism and other literary devices. Students practice literary criticism and form independent opinions about literature.

## Topics for the Course

The course covers a variety of units, including Identity and Autobiography, Fiction and Fantasy, Persuasive Writing, Poetry, Visual Literacy, Drama Transformations, and Historical Fiction.

## Assessment

Students learn to evaluate their own progress through formative assessment, such as class discussions, role-plays and other forms of creative expression. Additionally, students will write weekly in a reading journal and participate in peer editing and self-reflection during reading and writing workshops. Summative assessments, which are the source of student grades, include formal written work, such as essays and short stories, formal presentations, graphic displays of information, and quizzes and tests.

Students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade complete the Identity Project, in which they develop an autobiographical essay, a visual presentation, and a formal presentation to the class that clearly expresses aspects of their own identities. Students keep a year-long reading journal and accumulate feedback from classmates and the teacher.

Students are encouraged to read books individually at home and during reading workshop. Additionally, students read some core texts together as a class, such as *A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah and *The Diary of Ann Frank*.

# Mathematics

## Math 6

### About the Course

In Math 6 students build their ability to understand the basics of statistics, real numbers and arithmetic, practical geometry, and the pre-concepts of algebra. Students critically think about the topics and their real world applications.

Students in Math 6 begin studying basic statistics and looking at the real world use of whole numbers. As the course continues, students explore different numerical concepts, patterns and the basics of geometry, all of which is focused upon on real world applications.

### Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Math 6 fosters Grade 6 students' curiosity to learn and growing cognitive skills, and helps to make a social transition for the students into middle school. A supportive and safe learning environment provides students the opportunity to explore fearlessly new and sometimes difficult concepts. Students are encouraged to support each other through the learning process in collaborative groupings.

### Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students in Math 6 develop their mental math skills, their fluency in mathematical vocabulary and principles, their ability to apply mathematical models and to use these models to find solutions to real-life situations. Furthermore, students develop effective verbal, numerical, and graphical communication skills in math.

### Topics for the Course

Beginning with a study of the basics of statistics, and connecting arithmetic to algebra, students continue to the study of real numbers including decimals, fractions, and integers.

Students' understanding of these numbers is then extended to adding, subtracting, multiplying and decimals, fractions and integers. Students will also explore basic geometric concepts including patterns, measurement, ratios, proportions and percents.

### Assessment

Student progress is monitored through daily problem-solving assignments done in collaboration or independently, teacher observation, as well as through quizzes, projects and unit tests.

The text for the class is Scott Foresman and Addison Wesley, *Middle School Math*, Course 1.

# Math 7

## About the Course

In Math 7 students continue to build their ability to understand the basics of statistics, real numbers and arithmetic, practical geometry, and the pre-concepts of algebra. Students think critically about the topics and their real world applications.

Students in Math 7 build upon the foundational knowledge they developed in Math 6, studying basic statistics and looking at the real world use of whole numbers. As the course continues, students explore different numerical concepts, patterns and the basics of geometry, with emphasis upon real world applications.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Math 7 fosters grade 7 students' curiosity to learn, and their growing cognitive skills. A supportive and safe learning environment provides students the opportunity to explore fearlessly new and sometimes difficult concepts. Students are encouraged to support each other through the learning process in collaborative groupings.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students in Math 7 develop effective verbal, numerical, and graphical communication skills in math. They also hone their mental math skills, their fluency in mathematical vocabulary and principles, and their ability to apply mathematical models and to use these models to find solutions to real-life situations.

## Topics for the Course

Beginning with a study of the basics of statistics, and connecting arithmetic to algebra, students move to the study of real numbers including decimals, fractions, and integers.

Students' understanding of these numbers then extends to adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing decimals, fractions and integers. Students also explore basic geometric concepts including patterns, measurement, ratios, proportions and percents.

## Assessment

Student progress is monitored through daily problem-solving assignments done in collaboration or independently, teacher observation, as well as through quizzes, projects and unit tests.

The text for the class is Scott Foresman and Addison Wesley, *Middle School Math*, Course 2.

# Algebra I

## About the Course

In their last year of middle school math, students develop a foundation of basic algebraic principles, upon which they will build in later years. This course aims to help students understand the real-life applications of mathematical principles, and to teach them the pleasure of mathematical problem-solving.

The classes are structured to introduce students to new concepts and give them time to practice the concepts individually and in groups. The course provides students with opportunity to develop understandings of algebraic concepts first by considering simple functions, then by using these understandings, investigating more complex functions.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Students at this level are beginning to develop greater need for and abilities to create abstract representations of the world. Algebra I introduces students to abstraction in the form of algebraic representation.

Algebra I provides a supportive learning environment through cooperative groupings, and plenty of time to practice and master new skills and new ideas in mathematics. The course is differentiated to allow students both to experience success, and feel encouraged to challenge themselves. Students benefit from frequent modeling of mathematical and problem-solving strategies, and are encouraged to work collaboratively in working out independent and creative solutions to algebraic problems.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students in Algebra I are developing problem solving and critical thinking skills in a mathematical context. Students learn to analyze, create, and generalize numeric and visual patterns. They differentiate relationships between symbolic expressions and graphs on the coordinate plane, with particular attention to the horizontal and vertical intercepts, points of intersection, and slope (for linear relations). Students in the course develop a basic understanding of rate of change, including connections between slope of a line and constant rate of change and their meaning in context.

## Topics for the Course

Topics for algebra include: variables, properties of numbers, solving, writing, and graphing linear equations, solving and graphing linear inequalities, systems of linear equations and inequalities, exponents and exponential functions, quadratic equations and functions, polynomials and factoring, rational equations and functioning, and radicals and connections to geometry.

Students' confidence is also developed through mathematical games and frequent opportunities for mental math.

### Assessment

Students in Algebra I are assessed on an ongoing basis through teacher observation during class discussions and class work, through practice and problem-solving workshops, and through quizzes and tests.

Self-assessment is an important part of Algebra I. Students in the course learn to evaluate their understandings, recognize when they don't understand, and celebrate their successes.

The text for the course is McDougal Littell *Algebra 1: Equations, Graphs, Applications*.

# Science

## Science 6

### About the Course

The overarching theme of Science 6 may be expressed as a series of essential questions: *What am I? What am I made of, and what is my place in the natural world? How does that natural world function?* Science 6 encourages students to develop inquiring minds, and builds upon their curiosity about science and the natural world. We explore the structure of the living world and its hierarchies, appreciate the benefits and limitations of science, and investigate its application in technological developments.

Students in Science 6 examine the big ideas of the course thematically through the three major lenses of Earth Science, Life Science and Physical Science, exploring the Earth's structure and some of its important systems, and investigating some important physical processes that make life possible on this planet.

Throughout the course students are encouraged to relate the ideas of the course to themselves, as part of the system of living things, coexisting on a complex planet.

### Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Grade 6 students are transitioning from elementary school to middle school. At this level they are introduced to the elementary processes of inquiry used by scientists and to some of the skills they will need in becoming good scientists themselves. Students begin to communicate scientific ideas, observations and practical experiences accurately, in a variety of ways.

Every other year students in Science 6 participate in TASOK's Science Fair.

### Focus on Skills and Understandings

In Science 6 students develop their skills in communicating scientifically. They learn to formulate and test a hypothesis through simple labs, and analyze data tables and graphs. They work towards noting their observations objectively and reporting them coherently, using appropriate scientific vocabulary, both in writing and through basic graphic representations.

Students at this level familiarize themselves with the science classroom, the lab and lab equipment, and perform basic laboratory operations, observing safety in the lab. They learn to relate science to technology in practical and theoretical terms, and conduct some supported independent research.

### Topics for the Course

The course begins with an investigation of planet Earth, rocks and minerals, earthquakes and volcanoes. In Life Science students investigate their own place in the earth's ecological ecosystems and biomes, the interdependence of these, and the ways in which they yet function as independent living entities. This leads us into Physical Science, in which we investigate the natural phenomena that keep the planet itself functioning, such as light and magnetism.

### Assessment

Assessment for the course is ongoing and consists of performances such as simple planned labs, research projects, class discussions, simulations and model-building, and hypothesis testing, as well as quizzes and written tests.

The texts for the course are Prentice Hall *Earth Science*, 2009; Prentice Hall *Life Science*, 2009; and Prentice Hall *Physical Science*, 2009.

# Science 7

## About the Course

Students in grade 7 explore the interface between biological, physical and geological changes and processes under the overarching questions of *What does it mean to be responsible keepers of our planet?*

Students examine the big ideas of the course thematically through the three major lenses of Earth Science, Life Science and Physical Science. In physical Science we investigate weather and climate, and human impact upon these. In Life Science students explore the diversity of life on planet Earth and how the human species has caused extinction of others. Our study of Physical Science focuses upon motion, forces and energy.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Students in grade 7 are characterized by an innate curiosity about themselves, the physical, emotional and mental changes that they and their peers are going through, and about the world around them. Students at this level problem-solvers, beginning to ask themselves what role they can play in addressing some of the important issues of our environment. At this challenging stage of their development, grade 7 students benefit from the course's many opportunities to explore and reflect on some of the essential questions that preoccupy them.

Every other year Science 7 students participate in TASOK's Science Fair.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

In Science 7 students make links between scientific knowledge and their own experiences of the world, extending their understanding beyond the classroom to understanding equatorial Africa and the Congo Basin.

Students in the course have ongoing opportunities to develop appreciation and respect for themselves and for others, and for their shared environment.

## Topics for the Course

Topics for the course include cells and heredity, motion and forces, sound, weather, climate and climate change, global warming, and Earth's water.

## Assessment

Assessment for the course is ongoing and consists of performances such as labs and open-ended investigations, research essays and projects, class discussions, simulations and model-building, as well as quizzes and written tests.

The texts for the course are Prentice Hall *Earth Science*, 2009; Prentice Hall *Life Science*, 2009, and Prentice Hall *Physical Science*, 2009.

# Science 8: We Are Stardust

## About the Course

The overarching theme of Science 8 asks, *What does it mean to be extra terrestrial?* Science students at this level investigate the major similarities and differences between Earth and the other objects in the universe. We study the planet's major building blocks and their interconnections, and work out how it is that human physiology enables us to function on Earth.

Science 8 is an integrated science course combining elements of chemistry, physical science, earth science, and biology. The course prepares students for further studies in the discrete sciences of Chemistry, Physics and Biology.

Students begin their investigations with the chemical building blocks of our planet, atoms and molecules, and go on to contrast the makeup of the Earth with that of other celestial objects such as the solar system. We finish with a study of human physiology and how it is suited to inhabit planet Earth.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Grade 8 students have acquired the skill, objectivity, coherent reporting, and deeper understanding necessary to explore the big topics in Physical Science, Earth Science and Life Science. They are able to think analytically, critically and creatively to solve problems, judge arguments and make decisions in scientific and other contexts.

Science 8 provides ongoing opportunities inquiry, for whole and small-group discussions and investigations, and a wide range of authentic problem-solving activities designed to foster students' independent thinking and scientific curiosity.

Every other year, students in Science 8 participate in TASOK's Science Fair.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students in Science 8 learn to communicate scientific ideas, arguments and practical experiences accurately in a variety of ways. They also develop skills of scientific inquiry, to design and carry out scientific investigations and evaluate scientific evidence and to draw logical conclusions.

## Topics for the Course

Science 8 course is organized thematically. Students begin by investigating the structure of chemical building blocks, elements and compounds, bonding of elements and chemical reactions. The course focus then turns to astronomy, the solar system, stars, galaxies and the universe and the Earth's changing surface. Finally, we study human biology, the body digestive systems and health, the sense and the brain.

### Assessment

Assessment activities will vary depending on the topics being covered. Students develop power point presentations, research essays, and projects that demonstrate understanding through application of concepts and principles; they conduct open-ended investigations, and write quizzes and tests.

The texts for the course are Prentice Hall *Earth Science*, 2009; Prentice Hall *Life Science*, 2009; and Prentice Hall *Physical Science*, 2009.

## Social Studies

### Social Studies 6: Ancient Civilizations

#### About the Course

In sixth grade students study patterns in the origins and the development of the world's first civilizations, and contrast these with the patterns of our modern world. We investigate the transformation process from hunter gatherer communities to urban centers and sprawling empires, and explore the ways that available resources shape human society.

Although Ancient Civilizations is primarily a regional study of human society from prehistory to the Roman Empire, our study of history encompasses many fields of investigation in the social sciences, especially physical and cultural geography and archaeology.

#### Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Students at this level are emerging independent thinkers. This social studies class encourages students to ask questions systematically and evaluate answers critically. We look for patterns in history and experiment with making predictions. In particular, students at this level are beginning to evaluate and challenge perspectives on history—their own, and others'.

Students in sixth grade begin to approach history formally as a discipline, and investigate such questions as: What do historians investigate, and what do they leave out, that we think is important? If history has repeating patterns and cycles, can we really avoid repeating the mistakes of the past? Who makes it into the textbook, and who does not? How do we decide when to preserve something, and when to knock it down and make something new?

#### Focus on Skills and Understandings

In the context of social studies class students develop their writing skills in a variety of genres, and speaking skills through formal and informal presentations. Students at this level are beginning to conduct supported independent research, and to report their results; to interpret graphs, charts and diagrams, particularly maps and timelines; and to use primary and secondary sources appropriately.

#### Topics for the Course

Following a discussion of global prehistory, we explore the growth and development of Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, West Africa, Indus River Valley Civilization, China, Greece and Rome.

In addition to our 'regional' investigations, we also explore the "tools" of history, especially the interpretation of fossils, artifacts and ruins, and examine the nature of oral and written histories. Students will discuss processes of innovation, and new technologies such as fire, agriculture, writing, mathematics and architecture; evolving social structures, and modes of living: individual vs. community life, and urban vs. rural life.

### Assessment

Students learn to evaluate their own progress through formative assessment, such as class discussions, role-plays and other forms of creative expression. Summative assessments, which are the source of student grades, include short written compositions, formal presentations, graphic displays of information, quizzes and tests.

Each year the class participates in the Ancient Greece Simulation, an in-depth exploration of life in ancient Greece, lasting several weeks. Sixth grade students also participate in TASOK's History Day fair, which is held in alternate years.

The text for the class is MacDougall Littel, *Ancient Civilizations* 2006.

## Social Studies 7: Medieval and Early Modern Empires

### About the Course

Students in Social Studies 7 study world civilizations ranging chronologically from the Roman Empire to the mighty empires of South and Central America. Emphasis is placed on understanding patterns and cause and effect throughout history, and the effect of historical civilizations on our modern world. Students use both primary and secondary sources to complete historical research.

The course is organized chronologically and by region. We begin with the Roman Empire, and move into the Middle East, Africa, Asia, The Americas, and Europe. Our study of history will be cross-curricular, and incorporate scientific discovery, literary movements, anthropology and archeology.

### Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Students at this level are becoming independent thinkers. This social studies class encourages students to ask questions on a systematic basis and engage in critical thinking to find their own answers. Students look for patterns in history and experiment with making connections and predictions.

In particular, students at this level are beginning to evaluate and challenge perspectives on history—their own, and others'. Students in 7<sup>th</sup> grade investigate such questions as: who makes it into the textbook, and who does not? What do historians investigate, and what do they leave out, that we think is important? How does geography affect history? How do interpretations of the past change? If history has repeating patterns and cycles, can we really avoid repeating the mistakes of the past? How have history and geography affected our modern world? How do we decide when to preserve something, and when to knock it down and make something new?

Students in History 7 take part in the Roman Fair, an extensive simulation of daily life in the Roman Empire. During our study of China and Japan, students engage in Martial Arts practice with a trained instructor. Students also participate in a Middle Ages Trading Fair and a World History Quiz Show.

### Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students at this level conduct supported independent research using both print and online resources, and to report their results; they interpret graphs, charts and diagrams, particularly maps and timelines; to use primary and secondary sources appropriately. Students practice making historical claims and supporting them with evidence, as well as identifying historical patterns and making predictions.

### Topics for the Course

We begin by exploring the Roman Empire, and comparing Roman democracy with the types of democracies that we see today. We move from Rome into a unit on Islam and the rise of the

Muslim states, followed by Central and Southern Africa, China, Japan and Korea, Feudal Europe and the Crusades, and the civilizations of South and Central America.

In addition to our regional studies, we also explore the “tools” of history, the interpretation of fossils, artifacts and ruins, and the interpretation of primary and secondary sources.

#### Assessment

Students learn to evaluate their own progress through formative assessment, such as class discussions, role-plays, and other forms of creative expression. Summative assessments, which are the source of student grades, include simulations, Webquests, written essays and narratives, formal presentations, graphic displays of information, quizzes and tests.

The text for this class is MacDougal Littell *Medieval and Early Modern Times*\_2006.

## History 8: The Coming of America

### About the Course

Grade 8 students study American history from the first migrations to the Americas to the Roaring '20s. Emphasis is placed on understanding cause and effect throughout history, and the effect of the past on the US and the greater world today. Independent research is a key component of this course and students use both primary and secondary resources to complete projects.

The course is organized chronologically, with topics including early inhabitants of the Americas, the 'discovery' of America, the Thirteen Colonies, Independence and the Constitution, the Civil War, industrialization and World War I.

### Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Students at this level are becoming independent thinkers. History 8 encourages students to ask questions on a systemic level and engage in critical thinking to come up with their own answers. Students look for patterns in history and experiment with making connections and predictions. In particular, students at this level are beginning to evaluate and challenge perspectives on history—their own, and others'.

Students at this level also begin to use research to defend a position in class discussion and in writing. Students in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade continue their investigation of such essential questions as: who makes it into the textbook, and who does not? What do historians investigate, and what do they leave out? How do interpretations of the past change?

Students in History 8 take part in various events during the year including creating a museum exhibit, debates, dramatic productions and writing a blog.

### Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students at this level conduct supported independent research using both print and online resources, and report their results; they interpret graphs, charts and diagrams, particularly maps and timelines; and use primary and secondary sources appropriately. Students practice making historical claims and supporting them with evidence, as well as identifying historical patterns and making predictions.

### Topics for the Course

We begin by exploring how people first arrived on the continent and end just after the turn of the century, focusing on major events in America's history.

Students in History 8 also explore the "tools" of history, the interpretation of fossils, artifacts and ruins, and the interpretation of primary and secondary sources.

### Assessment

Students learn to evaluate their own progress through formative assessment, such as class discussions, role-plays, and other forms of creative expression.

Summative assessments, which are the source of student grades, include simulations, written essays and narratives, formal presentations, graphic displays of information, quizzes and tests.

The textbook for this course is *The American Journey* by Appleby et al, 2009 edition.

# ESL

## About the Program

In high school ESL classes students receive highly differentiated language development support designed to allow them to participate fully in their academic program. In addition to their language study, students in ESL investigate, explore and come to understand more fully the content and ideas of each of their core classes.

Our class is supported by a skeleton of grammar and writing instruction, which is enriched by work from the students' content-area classes. So for example, students might be encouraged to reflect on a reading assignment from a classroom teacher through discussion in ESL that reinforces speaking on the topic as well as mastering reading comprehension and points of grammar.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Students in ESL grow in their capacity to use language in a variety of contexts. English language learners are often excellent learners in their native languages; the design of this program helps them transfer those learning skills to English. Each language learner is a unique individual, and the ESL program seeks to meet the individual needs of every student.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

ESL class focuses on skills of English writing, speaking, listening, reading comprehension and effective communication. Students develop these skills through guided activities that build on lessons from the classroom.

## Topics for the Course

ESL topics are the product of collaboration with the student's classroom teachers. The ESL teacher works together with classroom teachers to bring topics to ESL for clarification in a collaborative, sheltered and supported learning environment.

Activities in ESL unique to that class reinforce the essentials of grammar, vocabulary and effective learning strategies.

## Assessment

Students evaluate their own progress through formative assessments such as class discussions, group projects and other forms of expression in the classroom. Summative assessments are based on a portfolio of student work developed over the course of the year, on recordings of students' conversational progress, and a rubric which evaluates a variety of language learning goals.

Each student is given a test of English language proficiency, called the *Maculaitis Assessment of Competencies*, to gauge his or her abilities in speaking, listening, reading and writing of English.

Along with grammar workbooks, ESL students use their subject textbooks, and literature of their own choice in this course.

# French

## French 6

### About the Course

Grade 6 French is a course designed through differentiation to meet the needs of students with no previous experience in French, as well as those who have some knowledge but still require a sound review of the basics. Students in the course acquire basic conversation and formal writing skills.

The principle focus of this course is communication. Students are introduced to fundamentals of French grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary, and learn to express basic functions both orally and in writing. The course also introduces students to French culture and the francophone world.

Students in French 6 are encouraged to use French in reaching out to their families at home and to others within the school and in the broader community.

### Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Sixth grade students are highly sociable and deeply interested in issues of the world around them. This course is designed to encourage them to share, in French, ideas about things that matter to them in their daily lives, and to discuss the real world problems about which they are becoming increasingly aware. Students also increase their global awareness through study of the richness and variety of the multi-cultural French-speaking world. And the daily-life lesson themes encourage students to learn about one another and appreciate their classmates' similarities and differences.

As they progress through the program in manageable steps, students experience success in using the French language for communication, and can assess their own progress in authentic contexts.

### Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students in French 6 learn to greet people and socialize, talk about the present, ask and answer simple questions, describe people, places and things, and talk about future plans through simple descriptions.

### Topics for the Course

The year's main topics are: greeting and meeting people, time and weather, family and friends, family relationships, food and restaurants, money and shopping, school and education, daily activities, getting around the city, describing oneself and home.

### Assessment

Students are evaluated regularly as they progress through the course, through daily oral review, class discussions, and quizzes. Summative evaluations, which are the source of their grades,

include unit tests, cultural awareness tests, listening comprehension performance tests, speaking performance tests, writing performance tests and multiple choice test items.

The text for the course is McDougal Littell, *Discovering French Nouveau! Bleu 1a*, 2004. There are two workbooks for the course: McDougal Littell, *Discovering French Nouveau! Bleu 1a*, 2004, and *Activités pour Tous Workbook, Discovering French Nouveau! Bleu 1a*, 2004.

ClassZone.com presents a variety of engaging resources, from WebQuests to test preparation tools, all correlated to *Discovering French, Nouveau!*

# French 7

## About the Course

French 7 is a highly differentiated course designed to meet the needs of a diverse group of students. Students in this course are in the process of acquiring the foundational tools they will need for continued success in the study of French.

The focus of French 7 is cultural as well as linguistic: students are encouraged to develop positive attitudes toward linguistic and cultural diversity while expanding their own individual language skills.

Students in French 7 continue to develop the fundamentals of grammar and pronunciation and build vocabulary, while investigating French culture and francophone world. They review and learn to express more basic functions both orally and in writing.

The course encourages students to develop their fluency and confidence by using French in reaching out to their families at home and to others within the school and the community.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Students at this level interested in one another and in issues of the world around them, as well as in their own developing identities. The daily-life lesson themes give students frequent opportunities to think and speak about themselves, while learning about the richness and variety of the multi-cultural French-speaking world.

Many of the themes and topics which are explored in French class parallel and reinforce concepts students are investigating other areas of study; thus students in French 7 build skills that can be equally well used in social studies, language arts, or math classes.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

In the context of this French class students develop their oral and written skills through discussion and reflective writing. Students talk about the present, ask and answer questions, describe people, places and things, describe future plans, narrate past events, and describe people, places and things in extended description.

## Topics for the Course

The year's main topics are: money and shopping, getting around the city, home and furnishings, sports, fitness, daily routine, clothing, appearance, leisure activities, music, entertainment, vacation, travel, transportation, food and restaurants.

## Assessment

Students are evaluated regularly as they progress through the course, through daily oral review, class discussions, and quizzes. Summative evaluations, which are the source of their grades,

include unit tests, cultural awareness tests, listening comprehension performance tests, speaking performance tests, writing performance tests and multiple choice test items.

The text for the course is McDougal Littell, *Discovering French Nouveau! Bleu 1b*, 2004. There are two workbooks for the course: McDougal Littell, *Discovering French Nouveau! Bleu 1b*, 2004, and *Activités pour Tous Workbook, Discovering French Nouveau! Bleu 1b*, 2004.

ClassZone.com presents a variety of engaging resources, from WebQuests to test preparation tools, all correlated to *Discovering French, Nouveau!*

# French 8

## About the Course

This level 3 program allows students to practice real-life communication skills in French and exposes them to the culture typical of France and the French-speaking world. By comparing French language and culture with our own community, students gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the similarities and differences that exist between the two.

Students are introduced to fundamentals of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. They learn how to narrate past events orally and in writing, and how to engage in longer communication exchanges. They begin to explain and describe daily events, expressing their opinions about them, reading and understanding a variety of texts and short stories and engaging in more spontaneous use of the French language.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

At this level, students are interested in issues of the world around them, as well in as their own developing identities. Through their investigations of the history, customs and traditions of people who live not only in France but also in parts of Canada, Europe and Africa, students learn about a diverse and dynamic segment of the world community—and something about themselves as well.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

In the context of this French class students develop their oral and written skills through discussion and reflexive writing. Students to talk about the present, ask and answer questions, describe people, places and things, describe future plans (simple description), narrate past events (simple narration), discuss daily routine (simple narration),and describe people, places and things (extended description).

## Topics for the Course

The year's main topics are greeting and meeting people, time and weather, family and friends, family relationships, food and restaurants, money and shopping, school and education, daily activities, getting around the city, describing oneself, possessions and their description, sport, fitness, daily routine, medical and dental care, leisure activities, music, entertainment, jobs and professions, helping around the house, and nature and environment.

## Assessment

Students are evaluated regularly as they progress through the course, through daily oral review, class discussions, and quizzes. Summative evaluations, which are the source of their grades, include unit test, cultural awareness tests, listening comprehension performance tests, speaking performance tests, writing performance tests and multiple choice test items.

The text for the course is McDougal Littell, *Discovering French Nouveau!* Blanc, 2007, with its associated workbook. We also use the *Activités pour Tous* workbook.

ClassZone.com presents a variety of engaging resources, from Webquests to test preparation tools, all correlated to *Discovering French, Nouveau!* Blanc.

# Physical Education

## Physical Education 6

### About the Course

A principle focus for Physical Education in sixth grade is progression towards skills development and collaborative learning in sport. Students explore their own strengths and physical potential—and their limitations—while learning to appreciate the strengths and possibilities of their peers.

Students in PE 6 also focus on experimentation and risk-taking: we sample a wide variety of sports, games and activities with the aim of helping students develop skills and confidence in a safe and supportive environment.

PE 6 uses an integrated-units model in which a number of sports units run concurrently, in rotation. So for example, students will participate in four- week blocks of alternating classes in basketball and soccer, with a weekly class in swimming. The model is designed to allow students to focus on a discrete set of interrelated skills and strategies, while providing variety and keeping students actively engaged.

The course incorporates topics in health and wellness, interwoven with sport and activities. The year culminates with the Swimming Gala and Sports Day, both in May. TASOK students also proudly represent their school in various sports against local opposition.

### Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Students in sixth grade develop the skills involved in mastering a wide variety of sports and games. Practice, which both challenges and reassures students at this level, is a significant aspect of the course.

Students at this level are learning to maintain their individuality, while working constructively with others. PE 6 offers students many opportunities to experiment with team, pair, and individual learning situations. The course is designed to recognize students' varying interests and abilities, and to encourage students to celebrate each others' strengths while supporting one another in learning new skills.

### Focus on Skills and Understandings

In sixth grade students sample team games including basketball, volleyball, hockey and soccer; athletics events such as high jump, long jump and triple jump, sprinting and relays, discus and javelin; swimming; racquet sports including badminton, tennis and table tennis; adventure games such as capture-the-flag; and a variety of team-building and fun activities.

Essential questions for the course include “What factors affect my performance? How can I help others perform better? What outside factors affect my performance, and how can I control them?”

### Topics for the Course

In addition to physical skills of sport and games, students learn the skills of working and playing together fairly. Students learn to anticipate where they may encounter personal challenges in physical activity and in motivation, and to take steps to develop their vision and creativity in dealing with challenge.

### Assessment

Assessment in PE is performance-based, and students are evaluated on an ongoing basis. Class discussion is also an important part of the course, through which students have many opportunities to develop and demonstrate their understandings in Physical Education and its role in their lives.

# Physical Education 7

## About the Course

A main focus for Physical Education in grade 7 lies in helping students develop a sense of leadership, or ‘captaincy.’ In addition to encouraging mastery in sport and fitness, students learn how to support, encourage and motivate their teammates, and maintain their own motivation through challenging circumstances.

PE 7 uses an integrated-units model, in which a number of sports units run concurrently, in rotation. So for example, students will participate in four- week blocks of alternating classes in basketball and soccer, with a weekly class in swimming. The model is designed to allow students to focus on a discrete set of interrelated skills and strategies, while providing variety and keeping students actively engaged.

The course incorporates topics in health and wellness, interwoven with sport and activities.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Students in seventh grade are ready to participate in more challenging, complex sports activities and problem-solving exercises. PE 7 gives students opportunities to explore different tactics and strategies involved in a wide variety of individual and team games.

Students at this level are learning to work together collaboratively in different team formations are learning to apply the skills and strategies of one sport in mastering another. Students in grade 7 are more independent learners, beginning to demonstrate more leadership abilities, more objectivity in judging performance (their own and others’) and are beginning to officiate games.

Students at this level are also developing a greater sense of recognition and ownership of their own health and wellness.

The year culminates with the Swimming Gala and Sports Day, both held in May. TASOK students also proudly represent their school in various sports against local opposition.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

In addition to physical skills of sport and games, students learn the skills of working and playing together constructively, purposefully and respectfully. Students learn to anticipate where they may encounter personal challenges in physical activity and in motivation, to take steps to develop their vision and creativity in dealing with challenge, and to help others in the same process.

## Topics for the Course

In seventh grade students work toward greater confidence and depth of understanding, and a higher level of skill in a variety of team games including basketball, volleyball, hockey and soccer; athletics events such as high jump, long jump and triple jump, sprinting and relays, discus

and javelin; swimming; racquet sports including badminton, tennis and table tennis; adventure games such as capture-the-flag; and a variety of team-building and fun activities.

Students in PE 7 investigate topics in health and wellness, and the factors that promote health and well-being in modern society. Essential questions for the course include “Why is it so hard to eat right? What is health?”

#### Assessment

Assessment in PE is performance-based, and students are evaluated on an ongoing basis. Class discussion is also an important part of the course, through which students have many opportunities to develop and demonstrate their understandings in Physical Education and its role in their lives.

# Physical Education 8

## About the Course

Physical Education 8 focuses primarily on the development of students' ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle through mindful pursuit of regular physical activity. Students participate in a fitness-based program that places emphasis on collaboration and teamwork, while encouraging students to undertake independent efforts towards their own physical development.

In Physical Education 8 students learn the importance of applying self-motivation techniques and identifying attainable goals. The course helps students develop the interest and motivation to pursue lifelong wellness through exercise. Students also learn about the factors that influence health and learn to be aware of the practical implications of these factors.

Physical Education 8 is divided into four-week units that focus on either a specific sport or on fitness, in the context of the overarching theme of fitness as an essential and enjoyable aspect of life.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Students entering the eighth grade are experiencing a variety of physical, emotional, and intellectual changes. This course helps them address these changes through understanding the importance of physical exercise, the role of teamwork in developing self confidence, and the meaning of personal motivation. Students learn the principles of collaborative and healthy competition and develop the understanding that not all sports and physical activities have to be competitive.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

In addition to physical skills of sport and games, students learn the skills of working and playing together fairly and constructively. Students learn to anticipate where they may encounter personal challenges in physical activity and in motivation, and to take steps to develop their vision and creativity in dealing with challenge.

## Topics for the Course

Physical Education units include a variety of team and individual activities, including fitness, volleyball, soccer, touch rugby, softball, badminton, swimming and basketball.

## Assessment

Assessment in Physical Education 8 is performance-based, and students are evaluated on an ongoing basis on their effort, personal improvement and skill. Class discussion is also an important part of the course, through which students have opportunities to develop and demonstrate their understandings in Physical Education and its role in their lives.

# Fine Arts and Exploratories

## Program Overview

### About the Program

The Exploratory Program is designed to provide collaborative, non-competitive environments in which middle school students discover their unique abilities, talents and interests. The focus of the program is to build skills in problem solving and creative thinking.

The Exploratory Program offers a series of classes organized by topic to middle school students each trimester. Every middle school student has five different exploratory classes each year. Each is one trimester long, except Metamorphosis which is two trimesters. Band may also be taken for the full year.

### Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Middle School students are in a transitional phase not only in life, but in school as well. They are constantly trying out new behaviors and personas, as they decide where their interests truly lie and what strengths they have to rely on. To this end, each course provides students with ongoing, concrete, experiential learning: hands-on experiences that encourage them to learn through interaction and innovation.

### Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students in the Exploratory program use their minds and bodies to create both products and processes in the different learning areas. Students are encouraged to foster alternative ways of doing things; our overall goal for Exploratory is to create new interests and encourage students to explore new ideas.

### Topics

Exploratory classes include Art, Instrumental Music, Drama, Stomp, Robotics, African Dance and Metamorphosis, a transition program that focuses on study skills, health, self-discovery and guidance.

### Assessment

Each Exploratory class is assessed using performance tasks appropriate for that class; however, since each course is experiential and hands-on, participation is one of the main components of assessment.

# Metamorphosis: Facilitating Transitions

## About the Program

Metamorphosis is a guidance and advisory program for middle school students program. The program is designed to ease the difficult changes a student experiences during his or her middle school years, both personally and at school. The objectives of Metamorphosis are to help students develop social awareness, improve learning and study skills and finally, to foster integration and cooperation amongst students.

Each TASOK MS student has two trimesters of Metamorphosis yearly. Trimesters are organized into units of study that target social skills, study skills, health, career awareness, team building, how to work in a group successfully, and self-awareness.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Metamorphosis acts as an orientation to middle school for sixth graders, and helps all students learn how to be successful in secondary school. The program is designed to ease the anxieties that are common in students at this age and address the challenges inherent during these transition years, such as questions of identity and belonging. Students in Metamorphosis learn about themselves: what their strengths are, and what they need to work on to be successful in school and in life—be it socially, academically or both.

Students in Metamorphosis are assessed through their participation in activities, and through discussion and reflective journal writing as well as quizzes and projects.

*The Metamorphosis Program was originally conceived and developed by Lisa LoPresti-Hupp and colleagues in 2007. It was initiated here at TASOK in 2010.*

# Stomp

## About the Course

Stomp combines music, theatre and dance in an ensemble celebration of the sounds of the modern world. In this contemporary musical/dance form, ensemble performers use everyday objects to produce highly rhythmical music, to which they add elements of dance and storytelling.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Stomp helps students see the creative, expressive possibilities of the everyday. Stomp is energetic and active, creative, cooperative, and noisy—in short, Stomp is uniquely suited to the needs and interests of middle school students. The class fosters mutual trust and personal fearlessness in experimentation and performance, within an atmosphere of joyous collaboration in movement and music-making.

Students begin by ‘playing’ commonplace objects, generating simple rhythmic patterns and interesting sounds, and exploring their variations. As the course progresses, both the rhythms and the instruments become progressively more complicated. Students add movement to their musical performance and explore the importance of stage presence in creating a compelling performance.

In the spirit of collaboration, and in the interests of working out a great performance, we come to recognize that the sound and stage presence of the whole group is more important than that of any one individual.

Stomp also integrates with students’ core academics: students in Stomp study the acoustics of the music they make, while in Science class.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students in Stomp become adept at producing and maintaining basic rhythms in music and movement. Students learn important elements of playing in ensemble, recognizing the importance of all elements in composition and performance

Most importantly, students in the class learn to find great pleasure in creating and performing, and in entertaining others. Every Stomp class has several opportunities to perform publically during the course of the year.

# Computers

## About the Course

In this course, students will be developing their general skills in computers and Microsoft office programs. Students in Exploratory Computers learn what it means to practice safe and ethical use of computer technology.

The course begins with simple introductions and applications, moving to more complex, authentic tasks.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

This course provides middle school students with the essential basics of computer use, through age-appropriate projects, games and ongoing class discussion.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students develop the basic skills required for creating professional word documents, well-organized spreadsheets and effective presentations. The course is essentially project-based; students create knowledge and discover effective solutions to the real problems of electronic communication through challenging and authentic tasks.

## Topics for the Course

The main focus of Exploratory Computers is “computers for everyday needs.” Students learn keyboarding habits, formatting skills, effective use of visuals. In addition, the course helps students understand the importance of audience in effective communication.

## Assessment

Assessment for the course is project-based. Students develop practical and creative products, which are evaluated by rubric. Students also write reflections, reviews and creative works as well as quizzes and tests.

# Robotics

## About the Course

Students who take robotics consolidate and expand their knowledge of simple machines as they build, program and test simple and complex robots, working principally in teams.

Students in Exploratory Robotics build simple robots from plans. Following an introduction to simple principals of robotics and programming, students move toward more complex understandings of levers, force, torque, gear ratios, and sensors.

Along with basic principles of programming we explore systems thinking, understanding how systems fit together and work interdependently. An important focus of the course is learning to use creative and novel approaches to solving problems and challenges.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Robotics lets students experiment with creative problem-solving, in a hands-on learning environment.

Students at this level are ready to work and to solve problems independently, and value both their autonomy and the authentic feedback they receive in this practical course; however the course also fosters students' development of interpersonal and leadership skills through its emphasis on a team approach to problem-solving.

Robotics also provides students a window into careers in robotics and mechanical engineering.

## Assessment

Students in Robotics are assessed in the course of both group and individual work. The course encourages product-based authenticity in assessment: the ultimate question we ask is, *Does this robot do what it is supposed to do?* Students also participate in conferences and write quizzes.

# Biathlon

## About the Course

Biathlon combines endurance swimming and running. TASOK's Biathlon Exploratory provides a supportive, team-oriented structure and environment, allowing students to experience success in focused physical training, in team-building, in learning to encourage others constructively and in maintaining their own motivation.

Classes alternate running and swimming, interspersed throughout with fitness games and activities designed to help students improve their stamina and mental focus.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

At this transitional period of their lives, middle school students benefit from understanding more about their own physical and mental makeup. Biathlon teaches students to strategize in improving mental and physical stamina, and helps them recognize how much they are capable of, both physically and in terms of helping to build a team—something that many students this age have never observed in themselves.

Biathlon teaches students to set attainable goals and modify them as appropriate; to evaluate their performance objectively; and to provide analytical, constructive feedback to others in an atmosphere of encouragement and mutual support. An important focus of the course is learning to recognize the importance of mental focus and motivation in improving physical stamina.

Students in Biathlon recognize that the social skills and habits of mind they develop in this course have application in their academic courses as well.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

Topics for the course include proper warm-up for intense physical activity, practical and strategic thinking, powering the body with proper rest and nutrition, building and maintaining motivation, setting realistic personal goals, and having courage to try.

## Assessment

Students in Biathlon evaluate their own performances, strategizing and problem-solving skills. Peer assessment plays an important role in the course; students learn to give useful, practical feedback and help in goal-setting and motivation for others.

# African Dance

## About the Course

In African Dance TASOK students have an incomparable opportunity to study authentic Congolese and West African dance with professional Congolese dancers, drummers and instructors.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

The class provides an excellent opportunity for students to develop their awareness of Congo's rich cultural heritage, in a high-energy creative atmosphere. Beginning with simple steps and progressing toward more complex movement and rhythms, students are encouraged in individual expression while learning the basics of ensemble dancing.

Middle school students benefit from opportunities to be active, and to express themselves physically in low-risk environments. In this class students experience the power of Congolese music and drumming to inspire us to joyful and creative self-expression.

# Beginning Band

## About the Course

Beginning Band is offered during the Exploratories block, and is a year-long course. The main purpose of Beginning Band is for students to learn how to play a particular musical instrument, and to find joy in making music and in being a musician.

Beginning Band is a performance-based course; most of students' time is spent playing their instruments, in practice and in performance.

This course follows the Essential Elements method book for band, which brings the students systematically through the necessary fundamentals of music, and provides a good foundation for each instrument.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

The students in Beginning Band are mostly sixth graders, although seventh and eighth graders are welcome as well. Middle school students are searching for meaning in life and wondering how they fit into it; they are curious, and ready to try just about anything. This course encourages students to explore music on a more serious level, and discover their gifts, and the ways in which music can enrich their lives.

Students in Beginning Band perform at two concerts, one at the end of November and the other in May.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

The students will be able to play their instruments with correct posture and embouchure, name the notes on the staff, identify basic musical symbols, and count the rhythm in order to stay with the larger group.

## Topics for the Course

The main topics of study in Beginning Band are how to assemble, clean, and hold the instrument; the correct embouchure and posture; notes and musical symbols; counting and rhythm.

## Assessment

Assessment in the course is ongoing and performance-based, consisting of regular reinforcement and encouragement in the making of music. Students perform weekly "quizzes" in which each student plays a piece alone, for more precise assessment and feedback.

The resource we use in Beginning Band is *Essential Elements* method book one.

# Symphonic Band

## About the Course

Symphonic Band continues the musical development of the students on their own chosen instrument. Students in the course work toward greater mastery of their instruments, more fluency in reading music, greater understanding of ensemble playing, and more sophisticated critique of their own, and the group's performance.

The course follows a systematic approach to learning music that combines a number of different methods, as students advance in proficiency.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Symphonic Band is designed for students who have played their instruments at least one year already and are now ready to go beyond the basics. This course takes dedicated, interested students to a new level of musicianship.

Students in Symphonic Band perform in two yearly concerts: one at the end of November and the other in May. There are also opportunities for the students to perform for school assemblies or other events throughout the year.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

At the end of this course students are able to sight-read a simple piece of music giving attention to correct notes and rhythm. They begin to recognize differences in pitch and tone and discover ways to improve these qualities in their own playing.

## Topics for the Course

Students in Symphonic Band focus on developing a deeper understanding of rhythm and counting, producing a good tone, blending with the rest of the band, and fine-tuning the ear to develop good intonation.

## Assessment

Assessment in the course is ongoing and performance-based, consisting of regular reinforcement and encouragement in the making of music. Students perform weekly "quizzes" in which each student plays a piece alone, for more precise assessment and feedback.

The main resource we use in Symphonic Band is *First Division Band Method* book one. The course also uses other sheet music pieces as well as other music books containing etudes, scales, and songs for fun.

# Art

## About the Course

Exploratory Art is an opportunity for students to explore and experiment with their creative potential, build practical skills, and develop significant understandings in elements and principles of fine art.

Students in Exploratory Art have extensive opportunities for guided explorations of the works of major artists, and learn the value of both spontaneous and analytical response to great art.

The principal focus of the course is practical, however. Students engage actively in the process of creating artwork during the class, with a particular focus on drawing and painting.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

Middle school students benefit from an environment that encourages experimentation and fearless creativity. Students in Exploratory Art learn that the purpose of art is often to express an idea; and, perhaps even more importantly, that what we value most in art is often the product of an individual vision—of an artist not doing things the way others have done them.

Students learn to look both critically and appreciatively at their own work, and to offer constructive feedback to their fellow artists.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students learn practical elements of drawing and painting, basic principles of composition, and the effective use of line and color.

# Drama

## About the Course

Exploratory Drama is an introduction to theatre for middle school students. The focus of this exploratory course is for students to investigate various aspects of theatre and learn to work together as a group, which is a prerequisite skill for scenes and plays.

Students in this exploratory explore the craft of acting through games, team building exercises, discussion, acting exercises, improvisation and reflection.

## Meeting the Needs of Our Students

One basic characteristic of middle school students is their “trying on” of different behaviors. This study of real-life character is essential for all adolescent learners, and helps them examine where they fit in the world. Drama addresses the social and developmental goals of this age group through encouraging this important social learning experience in a controlled, healthy environment.

## Focus on Skills and Understandings

Students in the Drama exploratory are introduced to basic acting skills such as movement, voice control, characterization, as well as understanding theatre terminology and how to read a script. They explore the concepts of theatre etiquette, discipline and responsibility in theatre, as well as team building.

## Assessment

Participation is a key element of assessment for this exploratory. Of course, the ultimate assessment of theatre is by performance – an authentic assessment. Students in Exploratory Drama generally present a public performance each trimester.