The Middle School Curriculum Guide, 2010-11

The Design of the Middle School Curriculum

Our Middle School philosophy of education is put into practice by organizing the curriculum around the following principles:

- a holistic view of education through which we aim to develop a well-balanced person with artistic, intellectual, physical and social skills;
- an interdisciplinary perspective which emphasizes the link between the subjects at each grade level;
- an intercultural awareness that leads students to value people's differences;
- a greater emphasis upon mastery of life-long learning skills, such as research and communication skills, rather than on mastery of a pre-ordained body of knowledge; and
- the complete integration of information technology skills into the academic program.

Instruction is organized by the following subjects: the study of literature and of the fundamental skills of communication (via English), the study of a second modern language (French), the Social Studies (including History and Geography), a hands-on Science program (integrating biological, physical, earth and technological sciences), Mathematics, the Arts (the fine arts, music, and theater), Physical Education, and Technology. In the academic subject areas, our curriculum is designed to meet the standards currently established by the most demanding state and professional organizations in the United States, as well as preparing students for the option of the International Baccalaureate Diploma program.

The Advisory Program

Interpersonal Relations

As developing adolescents mature, they are learning new and increasingly complex social roles. While this can lead to a growing richness in one's life, there are also obstacles along the way. Advisory aims to assist students in taking on these new roles in a secure and healthy way. It can provide a social support group in which the student can stretch, explore, and take risks. It is a forum for discussing matters such as friendship, becoming aware of stereotypes we may hold about others, and one's changing relationship with parents.

A key outcome at the beginning of the year is for each student to feel solidly part of the Advisory group and of the grade level team. This revolves around the shared experiences that take place during the Outward Bound trips. One not only feels that one belongs to the group, one learns how to work successfully with others. These experiences will continue to be points of reference throughout the year, and will be built upon through other shared experiences: performing skits together during an assembly, taking field trips (from planning through debriefing stages); and celebrating holidays.

Advisory can also be a place where students receive specific social skills training and learn to develop good communications skills.

Identity

As Middle Schoolers grow so rapidly, both physically and emotionally, they are likely to explore a variety of different roles and to question: Who am I? There is a gradual transition from being my parents' child to being Me. Hence, Advisory aims to guide students in taking on genuine roles that are both healthy and fulfilling.

Part of the process of developing a clearer identity may involve a degree of doubt or uncertainty. The program aims to support the student in developing a positive self-concept. One way this is done is by assisting students in learning to identify their talents and abilities.

Another part of this process is answering the question: What do I believe in? Advisory assists students in understanding their personal values and in developing a better understanding of ethical norms. Much of this education will focus on the three key values that the ASP community strives to live by: *respect, responsibility and honesty.*

Intercultural Understanding

Our Middle School community includes people from many different cultures—languages, religions, races, ethnic groups, etc. Not only do we aim for each student to develop a sense of tolerance for those who are different, we aim for each student to explore this internationalism and learn as much as they can about similarities and connections between different cultures: to celebrate diversity. Advisory may lead students to explore a bit more about our planet's human geography, and to engage in cultural research. The program will aim to identify and challenge cultural stereotypes.

One approach to improving this understanding is by discussing and marking certain holidays (sometimes by sharing special foods) during the year: Thanksgiving, Ramadan, the French feast of the three kings, the Scandinavian feast of Santa Lucia, etc..

In addition, there is a specific focus on helping students adjust to French culture. This is particularly important for new students at the beginning of the year.

Community Membership and its Responsibilities

What are the different communities to which I belong? What responsibilities do I have to these communities? These are two questions explored in Advisory. For many students, living in France will be their first experience outside their native country, and Advisory will help them understand their responsibilities as residents in this country. But the program will also assist students in understanding their broader civic responsibilities in whatever country they happen to be living in. Sometimes, this awareness will also be aroused by the discussion of current events. Apart from learning one's civic responsibilities, Advisory seeks to lead each student to learn one's responsibility to serve the community.

Each Advisory also elects one member to sit on the Middle School Student Council and the Advisory group gets regular reports of the Council's discussions and plans. The Council coordinates the student-led activities throughout the year that serve both the school community as well as international charitable causes.

School Culture and Academic Success

What does it take to be a successful student at ASP? This is a key concern for every student, particularly if one is new to the school. Advisory aims to provide the guidance students need in order to succeed.

An important part of being a successful student is becoming organized: using the Agenda effectively, organizing a locker, and learning to manage time well. In addition, students are made aware of the responsibilities the school gives them, such as making up for missed work during an absence.

Success also involves knowing your strengths and weaknesses as a learner, your own learning style and 'what works for you'.

Advisory also involves conferencing with each student to discuss teacher evaluations such as Progress Reports and Report Cards. In addition, it is a place where students engage in reflection and self-evaluation, along with setting goals for the next term.

Problem Solving and Decision Making

Advisory aims to help students understand the responsibilities they have as Middle Schoolers and to look ahead to the responsibilities they will be taking on as adults.

An important part of this is learning to make the right choices in problematic situations they may now be facing, such as confronting moral dilemmas, facing peer pressure, being encouraged to smoke or drink, etc. Students are thus given a chance to anticipate their options, role-play how they might handle these situations, and weigh the consequences of different possible responses.

The groups also explore future adult responsibilities our students will eventually have, such as managing time, money, and work. This might also include, for example, discussion of different types of careers.

The Core Academic Curriculum: French

The French teachers, all native speakers, are committed to students becoming comfortable and autonomous in the language, as well as learning to enjoy and appreciate the culture of this country. The program emphasizes the spoken language at the Beginners and Intermediate levels and the written language in the Advanced and Francophone levels. The courses take full advantage of our presence in France through its media, films, and museums. They aim to promote intercultural respect as well as constructive and creative thinking. Interaction in the classroom, teamwork and language learning are closely tied together to provide the atmosphere most conducive to the enjoyment of French.

Beginners' Level

In each grade, teachers stimulate students to actively learn French through simulations of real-life situations: dialogues, role-playing, acting out skits, etc..

For listening, speaking and reading, students develop basic knowledge and communications skills in situations such as describing people and objects, counting, finding their way, expressing their needs and preferences, getting information, accepting or refusing offers, answering the telephone, filling out forms, and learning everyday vocabulary. This is done in a natural and idiomatic manner through reciting dialogues, role-playing, games and other exercises. Authentic documents and materials are used, including video clips, maps, pictures and songs.

For writing, students learn French spelling and grammar rules by writing short sentences linked to their oral activities along with completing workbook exercises. The grammatical content includes: the verbs être and avoir, -er, non-er and several irregular verbs; the genders; possessive and demonstrative adjectives; and pronouns. Along with the present tense, there is an introduction to the passé composé, imperfect and future tenses.

Cultural competence is integrated into the teaching of the language and includes recognizing and respecting French cultural customs, and acquiring some basic geographical and historical knowledge of the country, especially via Paris and its monuments.

Materials used could include a textbook, an exercise book, video documents, extracts from the press, and songs and poems that reinforce the development of vocabulary and the understanding of grammar.

Intermediate Level(s)

Intermediate students continue to develop their language skills via the audiovisual and simulation methods used at the Beginners Level.

For listening, speaking, and reading students develop an improved ability to communicate in French by working on more complex situations and structures, such as getting to know people, facing new situations, expressing opinions, etc. They will continue to be exposed to authentic documents, dialogues and excerpts from television presentations.

For writing, students will themselves write dialogues, poems, and short articles/essays. There will be further development of the basic verb tenses.

Cultural competence will carry on as at the beginners level, but will involve more extensive

preparation for their grade-level field trips by studying related historical background, stories and legends, films, songs, etc.

Materials used could include a textbook, an exercise book, video documents, extracts from the press, and songs, poems and short stories that reinforce the development of vocabulary and the understanding of grammar.

Depending on the number of students at this level, the group may be split into two ability groups: Intermediate I and Intermediate II.

Advanced Level(s)

By this level, classes are conducted exclusively in French. For listening and speaking, students will conduct interviews, create and interpret stories, interpret texts, and make oral presentations based on press articles.

For reading, students will work on press articles, documents related to their monthly field trips and Social Studies program, and short stories or novels, excerpts from novels read in class and home. For writing, they will prepare summaries of articles, short paragraphs about their short stories, reports on results of interviews that they have conducted, and reports on books they have read. Grammar will focus on the correct use of gender with nouns and their adjectives, and the more extensive conjugation of verbs. In addition to strengthening their use of the basic verb tenses already studied, they will be introduced to the conditional and subjunctive.

Cultural competence will involve deeper exposure to French and European traditions, such as carnivals and seasonal celebrations. Current affairs will also be followed and students will discuss wider historical topics such as the major wars of this century, slavery, etc.

Students at this level are exposed to a greater variety of texts, grammar books and authentic documents from the press, video clips, songs, poems, as well as short stories/novels/comic books to reinforce vocabulary, grammar structures and spelling.

Depending on the number of students at this level, the group may be split into two ability groups: Advanced I and Advanced II.

Francophone Level

These classes include students who tend to have two different profiles. The first are native speakers whose oral French is fluent but who are working to develop their oral expression and writing. The second includes those who are still learning French as a second language but who are approaching the competence of a native speaker.

Students deliver oral presentations, learning to clearly distinguish between familiar and formal French. As these are given, others engage in focused listening and note-taking followed by structured questioning and debate.

For reading and writing, students work on literary and other texts with the aim of extending their vocabulary and perfecting their syntax. They will also approach these texts with an appreciation of them as works of literature and/or with the aim of developing a critical perspective on different types of narratives: realistic, historical, science-fiction and fantastic. They also analyze textual tone through the study of excerpts of major authors. Their written skills are enhanced by learning how introduce the narrative sequence in their essays and to employ a more formal style.

Cultural competence is developed largely through the study of important French writers, though the course will also extend what is being studied in the Social Studies program for each grade.

- ***In grade six,*** examples of the kinds of text that may be chosen would include: *L'île aux mots (CM2), A livre ouvert (CM2), Cahier du Jour/Cahier du Soir (6ème), C'est pas sorcier (CM2), L'oeil du loup* by Daniel Pennac, *Les Fables* by La Fontaine, poems by Victor Hugo, Verlaine and Apollinaire, and *Exercices de style* by Raymond Queneau. They study the Middle Ages through *Le faucon déniché* by Jean-Côme Noguès, stories from *Contes et Légendes du Moyen Age;* the rise of Islam is approached through stories from *Contes et Légendes des Mille et Une Nuits;* they discover Imperial China through *Comment Wang-Fô fut sauvé* by Marguerite Yourcenar; and the Renaissance is covered with *Le petit peintre de Florence* by Pilar Molina de Llorente.

- ***In grade seven,*** examples of texts chosen would include: *Français 5ème* (Hatier), *Kamo, l'Agence Babel* by Daniel Pennac, Excerpts from *Exercices de style* by Raymond Queneau, *Histoires Pressées* by Bernard Friot, *Le Petit Nicolas* by Gosciny and Sempé, *Himalaya, l'enfance d'un chef* by E. Brisou-Pellen, *Sept Contes* by M. Tournier. Students may study excerpts from *Sous la Révolution française* by Dominique Joly. Studies are linked to the seventh grade Social Studies program, for example, during the Revolutions unit, when students study excerpts from the philosophers of that time along with contemporary paintings and pamphlets.
- ***In grade eight,*** examples of texts chosen would include: *Bled (6/5); Zéro Faute; L'Art de lire (5ème); Les Misérables* by V. Hugo (classique Bordas) ; short stories: *La Mort d'Olivier Bécaille* by E. Zola, *Le Papa de Simon, La Parure* and *Aux Champs* by G. de Maupassant, excerpts from *La Promesse de l'Aube* by R. Gary, and *Le Malade imaginaire* by Molière; and poems by Baudelaire, Eluard and Verlaine. The course is linked to the eighth grade Belle Époque and World War I units through the study of art and architecture Art Nouveau and of *Paroles de Poilus* and Verdun, *Années infernales* by H. Castex, and to World War II with *Paroles d'Etoiles, Mémoires d'enfants cachés (1939-1945).* For the press, students read articles from diverse magazines and newspapers such as *Courrier International, Le Monde, Astrapi* and *Je bouquine.*

The Core Academic Curriculum: The EAL* Program for Non-Native Speakers

***E**nglish as an **A**dditional **L**anguage

The EAL Program has been designed for students who have limited experience in English. They are taught the language intensively in very small classes from one to three periods a day, depending on their level. The focus is on mastering the essentials of English as quickly as possible and, at the same time, making progress in their other subjects.

Immersion is the beginner level of EAL. Immersion students receive individual and small group instruction in English and Social Studies in order to gain skills and boost confidence in English as quickly as possible. For subjects that traditionally are less language-based, Mathematics, Physical Education, and the Specialist classes, Immersion students are integrated with the mainstream. They may also be placed in French and/or Science, depending on their ability. Teachers adjust assignments and expectations to match students' needs. For the first trimester, primary focus in on language acquisition, so students do not receive formal grades in their academic courses.

When students reach the ***Intermediate*** level, they are integrated more fully into the mainstream program. At first, they are in regular classes except for EAL English and EAL Social Studies but as they progress, they go down to having only one of these classes a day. The regular classroom teachers continue to make accommodations for these students' needs.

Once they reach the ***Advanced*** level, students formally exit the program and are entirely in mainstream classes. However, the EAL teachers continue to monitor their progress and are available to assist students in making this transition.

The Core Academic Curriculum: Grade 6

The Sixth Grade establishes the transition from the largely self-contained classes of the Lower School to the team-oriented approach of the Middle School. Students are increasingly guided toward making more choices and taking on a greater sense of responsibility.

Advisory offers a safe place where students can more closely share with others and grow together as independent learners. The key Advisory themes include: adjusting to middle school, *bienvenue*

à Paris, acceptance of others, study skills, friendship, conflict resolution, values, maturing, citizenship and responsibility.

Trips play an important role in the life of a sixth grader. In September, students go off to the Savoie region for a week of Outward Bound team-building activities with their classmates and teachers. In addition, they go on several day trips into Paris throughout the year: a walking tour of the Latin Quarter, exploring renaissance art at the Louvre and learning about biology and evolution at the Musée de l'Histoire Naturelle. In the spring, 6th graders will complement their study of medieval and Renaissance architecture with an overnight excursion to Guédelon, a medieval castle construction site, Ratilly, an authentic medieval castle, and Fontainebleau, a Renaissance palace constructed by France's Renaissance king, Francois I.

A sample interdisciplinary event: Medieval Day. Students culminate their study of the Middle Ages with a day devoted to presentations and celebrations. Each student represents a member of a medieval community: noble, peasant, merchant, serf, cleric, or actual historical figures. The aim is to reach a more personal understanding of the food, art, customs, and beliefs of that era in European history. The day includes a theatre improvisation led by our drama teacher, student presentations, medieval snacks, and a medieval parade.

Social Studies 6 explores various world civilizations from the fall of the Roman Empire to the European Renaissance, with emphasis on Western Europe and especially France. Which factors help civilizations thrive? Which lead civilizations to decline? We explore these essential questions while learning about European, Arab, Chinese and African civilizations during the years 500 -1500. The program challenges students to think both creatively and critically, to understand events in history, and to become active global citizens. Considerable emphasis is placed on developing social studies skills such as research, oral presentation and writing. Through projects and field trips, students begin to develop a more personal appreciation of history.

English 6 guides students to the recognition and mastery of effective communication in both written and spoken forms. An appreciation of the history and roots of the English language sets the groundwork for learning to write by strengthening the Six Traits of Writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and spelling/punctuation conventions. Using the writing workshop model, students engage brainstorming, drafting, revising, individual conferences with the teacher and peers, and self-evaluation. The study of literature focuses plot structure, character development, conflict, setting and irony. At the same time, students learn to appreciate and value the beauty of the writer's craft. Works for classroom discussion include various poems and short stories, *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster, a dramatized version of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, and *The Great Gilly Hopkins* by Katherine Paterson. There is also a selection of medieval and Renaissance literature, including excerpts from Shakespeare plays, which links to the Social Studies program. Vocabulary study occurs within the context of the chosen literature. Students also engage in independent reading for which they prepare oral, artistic and written projects that demonstrate creative thinking skills as well as their mastery of literary concepts. In addition, semi-weekly reading journal entries on their independent and classroom reading encourage students to further explore literary concepts while making personal connections to literature.

Science 6 – The Local Environment integrates physical, biological, earth and technological sciences and applies the knowledge of these sciences to environmental issues. The subject is approached through experiential, hands-on learning. Students conduct investigations in small collaborative groups based on the research team model. In the *Ecology* strand of Science 6, students investigate the local and worldwide environments to find basic biological, geological, and meteorological interrelationships in natural systems. Concurrently, in the *Physical Science* strand, they develop the foundational concepts of matter, state change, and energy needed to explain physical aspects of the environment. A *Relational Study* strand draws together concepts and skills from the Physical Science and Ecology strands, applying them to the practical issue of how society can deal with an

environmental hazard. Topics and problems lend themselves to the development of basic principles of the physical and ecological sciences. Data, for the most part, point to specific conclusions. Students learn to handle data, design experiments, interpret results, and manipulate standard laboratory equipment. By the end of the course, students feel confident and bold in their approach to new laboratory problems.

The Mathematics program offers two alternative courses.

- *Math 6* is designed to consolidate the basic skills that students have learned in previous grades and to provide a transition to the more abstract work necessary for future studies. The topics of study include: number sense and algebraic thinking; measurement; operations with decimals and fractions; and ratio, proportion and percents. Problem solving is emphasized throughout the year. This is the standard course for students of both average and above-average ability.
- *Pre-Algebra* is an option for exceptional sixth graders who have thoroughly mastered all concrete mathematics and who have also demonstrated a facility with abstract mathematics concepts. Normally, this is the advanced seventh grade course. This course leads students directly to the high school Algebra I course next year. (See the seventh grade curriculum for further details.)

The Core Academic Curriculum: Grade 7

Seventh graders, entering their teenage years, are in the middle of their Middle School experience. Our goal is to provide them with the skills and confidence that will ready them for the physical, intellectual, social, and emotional challenges of adolescence. A key aim is to enable them to further develop their unique sense of self and to be recognized both as individuals and as members of the group.

In Advisory, the teachers create a program that provides security and support for students' personal development, as well as structure and encouragement that will foster their academic achievement. The key themes are: communications, teamwork, service to the community, tolerance and intercultural awareness, respecting the environment and resisting peer pressure. Other topics arise as needed; for example, time management skills may form an Advisory unit if a group needs help in organizing and prioritizing assignments.

Early in the year, seventh graders are introduced to Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences. Work on this continues throughout the school year in Advisory and provides the structure for the end-of-year student-led conferences with their parents.

A series of trips enhances the program throughout the year. In September, seventh grade students and teachers spend an intensive week together at an Outward Bound team-building course in the Lake District of northern England. During the year, trips are planned around the Team's various interdisciplinary units, including a visit to the Picpus Cemetery around the *Revolutions* unit. Students also visit Bohemian Montmartre when studying the various artists who lived there, as well as Marcel Aymé's short stories. Finally, at the year's end, students have the chance to attend an open-air Shakespeare production in the local Bois de Boulogne.

Two sample interdisciplinary units:

Revolutions-- This unit spans the disciplines and culminates in a learning fair wherein the students work in teams and groups to present their answer to the essential questions: *What is Revolution? How does a revolution begin? What are the outcomes of revolution?* Their work can take such diverse forms as filmed skits, debates, poster or model presentations, *PowerPoint* presentations and live performances.

Inventions – Once again, all disciplines are involved. Failed and successful inventions alike are investigated along with the various motivations that drove the inventors. The unit culminates with a Living Wax Museum of inventors, a poetry bubble, a "Building Big" chance to engineer various architectural structures, and a mathematical probability project ending in *Maybe Day*.

Social Studies 7 focuses on the development of democracy in America from 1607 to the present, while also investigating parallels in France and other countries. The major themes are: *Democracy*—the characteristics, beliefs and foundational ideas of democratic governments; *Immigration*—the immigrant experience, why people immigrate, and why governments do or do not allow immigration; Revolution – complete changes in political and other systems; *Civil Liberties – Struggles for Equality,* and how this relates to democracy in general, the experiences of women, minorities, and everyone interested in individual rights; *Inventions* – the spirit and mind set of creativity and change. Throughout the course, current world issues are discussed in the context of these themes, with the aim of leading students to make connections between the past, present, and personal experiences. There is an emphasis on study through inquiry, and the development of sophisticated research and synthesis skills. Whenever possible, the themes are taught in coordination with the other subjects.

English 7 develops students' abilities to articulate their thoughts through effective written and verbal communication. The program embraces literature from around the globe, starting with the summer reading of Applegate's *Home of the Brave*. A challenging selection of literature follows which connects to the themes of Team 7's interdisciplinary units. Students read Orwell's *Animal Farm* during *Revolutions*, poetry from the Angel Island immigration station during *Immigration* and a play version of *The Time Machine,* during *Inventions*. Students also read a variety of French works in translation and explore Paris itself while studying a unit on Bohemian Montmartre. Building on last year's foundation, the *Six Traits of Writing* provides the framework for writing in grade 7. On a daily basis, students share their written work with one another, and attempt various writing styles using a range of author techniques. In this way, students develop critical thinking skills in ways that foster confidence and lead to genuine reflection. Throughout the year, students are encouraged to read broadly according to their individual interests. They become increasingly aware of different learning styles through monthly creative reading evidence projects which provide opportunities to integrate their talents in art, drama and technology.

The Mathematics program includes alternative courses.

- *Math 7* reinforces essential skills in number sense, arithmetic, geometry, and probability, while introducing students to algebra. The topics of study include: the order of operations; geometry fundamentals; operations with integers; statistics and data analysis; solving one and two-step equations and inequalities; ratios, proportions, and percentage problems; geometric figures; and understanding measurement and area. Our goal is to produce students who are confident in being able to use mathematics in real-life situations; thus, there is an emphasis on problem solving rather than computation.
- *Pre-Algebra* is designed for students with a strong degree of mastery of the skills mentioned above. It leads students directly to the Algebra I course in grade eight. The topics of study include: solving multi-step equations and inequalities; rational numbers and equations; solving ratios, proportions and percent problems; geometric concepts such as congruence, similarity, scale factor, distance and midpoint formulas; probability; writing and graphing linear equations; solving systems of linear equations and inequalities; square roots and the Pythagorean Theorem; and trigonometric ratios. For this course, a calculator with square root, sin, cos, tan, sin-1, cos-1, tan-1, and factorial functions is required.
- *Algebra I* is a course for exceptional seventh graders. It is normally an advanced course for eighth graders. (See the eighth grade curriculum for further details.)

Science 7 – Matter and Energy in the Biosphere integrates physical, biological, earth and technological sciences and applies the knowledge of these sciences to environmental issues. The subject is approached through experiential, hands-on learning. Students conduct investigations in small collaborative groups based on the research team model. Science 7 explores the transfer of matter and energy through ecosystems. Through their investigations, students learn that all living organisms are part of a complex, interdependent biosphere. In the *Physical Science* strand, they investigate the nature of light, search for evidence of an atomic structure of matter by analyzing and synthesizing compounds, and investigate the kinetic molecular model of matter. The activities

in the Physical Science strand support the Ecology strand. The *Ecology* strand focuses on matter and energy transfers in ecosystems. As students investigate the processes of photosynthesis, respiration, and decomposition, they develop an understanding of the interdependence of all living organisms and the cycling of matter and the flow of energy in ecosystems. In the *Relational Study* strand, they apply their knowledge and skills by designing garden plots to maximize the yield of one or more products. They also engage in decision-making situations that require them to analyze such global problems as shortages of food or fossil fuel.

The Core Academic Curriculum: Grade 8

As emerging young adults, eighth graders need to be prepared for high school, with its greater academic demands and its need for more developed organizational and study skills. The eighth grade teachers work closely with their colleagues in the Upper School to ensure this gradual transition. Relative to sixth and seventh graders, eighth grades are given increasing opportunities to take responsibility and are expected to become more autonomous.

In September, the students and teachers travel to the Lake District of northern England to spend an intensive week together at the Outward Bound program, where encountering personal challenges is combined with strengthening team-building skills.

The Advisory program, throughout the year, helps students to become more independent learners, more involved members of their community, and more global thinkers. The key themes in eighth grade Advisory are: empathy, tolerance and multicultural understanding, community service, group dynamics and teambuilding, and personal reflection. These themes are developed with challenging activities that are built into the program, such as producing a theme-linked music video, creating and presenting a children's storybook, celebrating cultural diversity through festive lunches throughout the year, and developing a personal profile.

The eighth grade academic teachers work with the specialist teachers to take an interdisciplinary approach to the study of major modern events and issues such as the two world wars, water issues on our planet, and human rights. Field trips animate these connections in such ways as: exploring Paris at the time of *la Belle Époque,* taking an extended trip to Verdun to study the horrors of the First World War, discovering the critical perspective of the Twentieth Century artist at the Musée d'Orsay, and appreciating the global role of the United Nations through a visit to UNESCO headquarters. The year ends by bringing closure to the three years of Middle School through an extended trip to the great Greco-Roman sites in Provence—a reflection on 2000 years of civilization.

Two sample interdisciplinary units:

Water: The Environmental Impact – This unit crosses the disciplines of science, social studies, French, and technology; it engages students in research, analysis, and debate from these multiple perspectives. It includes site visits to study both the canal system and sewer systems of Paris.

World War I – In Europe, the war was an agent of monumental cultural transformation. Students study the period through its literature in both English and French classes as well as studying the Great War as a series of historical events. It includes a two-day field trip to sites which typify *La Belle Époque,* along with an extended visit to the battlefields of Verdun.

Social Studies 8 focuses on world affairs from the beginning of the Twentieth Century to today. While there is an overall chronological framework, certain topics will be explored thematically and in greater depth. These include the impact of geography on history, factors that can lead to war, the foundations and beliefs of the major religions, and an introduction to the major ideologies. A focus will also be placed on the impact of imperialism on Africa and the emergence of a modern China over the past century. Contemporary manifestations of intolerance, racism, and human rights violations are studied, along with their historical background. Students will be encouraged to keep abreast of current affairs throughout the year, and they will be active in gathering information, interpreting and analyzing it, thinking

critically, and engaging in debate. There is also an emphasis on developing their presentation skills, along with their ability to write a well-structured argumentative essay based on quality research. Field trips during the year will play an important role in bringing history to life. Wherever possible, the course themes are linked with the other subject areas.

English 8 is closely linked to the Social Studies program and involves the study of both classical and contemporary literature in all genres. During the interdisciplinary World War II unit, students engage in the literary circle discussion model for novels such as *Under a War-Torn Sky* by Laura Malone Elliott, and *For Freedom: The Story of a French Spy* by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley. The short story unit exposes students to such differing styles as those of Poe, Bradbury, and Dahl. Classical literature includes excerpts from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet.* The final novel, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, draws on historical themes and social issues that figure in our Advisory program. Throughout the year, students study poetry of various styles and publish their own poems at the end of the year. They also report regularly on independent reading. The writing aspect of the program is based on the writing workshop model: students write multiple drafts of their essays, engage in peer editing, and individually confer with the teacher in order to develop their creative and critical analysis skills.

Science 8 – Changes over Time integrates physical, biological, earth, and technological sciences through the study of changes in the earth, the solar system and the universe. Students begin by measuring force, gravity, work, and energy in laboratory investigations. These concepts are basic to interpreting interactions of matter and energy, which students study in investigations of mountain formation, weathering, and erosion. They are also important in understanding theories of the origin and structure of the universe, stellar evolution, the formation of the earth, and plate tectonics. Students develop an operational definition of *life* and identify the structure of organic molecules characteristic of life. They also consider alternative theories for molecular evolution and explore the origin of life on earth. They study local ecosystems and interactions among populations to discover how living things change the environment as they interact with it. The culminating unit considers the role of humans as they gained control over increasing amounts of energy as hunters, agriculturists and industrialists. The year concludes with a series of simulation games in which students as decisions makers balance knowledge and technical capacity with problems of overpopulation, resource depletion, energy consumption and other forms of environmental stress.

The Mathematics program includes alternative courses.

- *Introduction to Algebra* emphasizes problem-solving and mathematical reasoning, while laying the foundation for more focused study in Algebra I in grade nine. The topics of study include: the order of operations, distribution, combining like terms, and using exponents; integer operations; solving multi-step equations and inequalities; operations with rational numbers; solving ratios, proportions and percent problems; square roots and the Pythagorean Theorem; and graphing linear equations. Learning strategies frequently involve group work and they emphasize the importance of being able to communicate mathematical concepts effectively. Because emphasis is placed on strengthening students' math facts, a scientific calculator is only occasionally required.
- *Algebra I* (Math 101 in our Upper School) is a high-school level course that emphasizes abstract thinking and communicating ideas mathematically. The topics of study include: writing, solving and graphing linear equations and inequalities; solving and graphing systems of linear equations; operations involving polynomials and factoring; solving quadratic equations; exponents and radicals. A Texas Instruments TI-84 Plus Silver graphing calculator may be used but is not required; this is the model that will be used in future years in ASP's Upper School. As these graphing calculators are expensive, you should only purchase one if you are not likely to misplace it. Otherwise, the same calculator used in grade seven is fine. Successful completion of the course leads to the award of an Upper School credit.
- *Geometry (*Math 201 in our Upper School) is the course for those students who have thoroughly mastered Algebra I. The concepts, techniques and results of axiomatic and coordinate

geometry are studied in great depth throughout this course. There is a major emphasis on the understanding and creation of deductive proofs. During the year, students will study the properties of lines in a plane, triangles, polygons, similar polygons, right triangles including trigonometric ratios, circles, area and volume. Three-dimensional concepts are introduced as an extension of plane geometry and, throughout the year, algebraic techniques are applied to geometric problems. The computer program *Geometer's Sketchpad* will be introduced and used to enhance understanding. A Texas Instruments TI-84 Plus Silver graphing calculator may be used but is not required; this is the model that will be used in future years in ASP's Upper School. Successful completion of the course leads to the award of an Upper School credit.

The Middle School Specialist Curriculum

The diverse specialist courses are designed to expose Middle Schoolers to a wide range of non-academic experiences that are athletic, creative, intellectual and social. These not only help them to discover their own unknown strengths, and develop new ones, but also lead them to appreciate the diverse skills and talents of their peers. In the nine specialist periods each week, students will be experiencing many of the courses listed below, especially if they opt for more of the short courses rather than the year-long courses.

Required Specialist Courses

Writers' Theater – This course for sixth graders leads them to explore the essential quality of "voice" in written and oral expression by shaping creative writing pieces into dramatic performances. By brainstorming, organizing, choosing words, and revising, they will discover the process of developing texts that emphasize dialogue, narration and action. Students then bring their texts to life by working in groups to produce classroom-based theater. Classroom rehearsal time focuses on practicing expressiveness, intonation, and inflection. The goal is to give students a purpose for their writing and reading by stepping together into a theater of the imagination. (two periods per week for one term)

Drama Discovery – The aim of this course for seventh and eighth graders is to help learn how to imagine, create and communicate their ideas through drama. Theater encompasses much more than just acting – it is about self-expression, self-discovery, and communication. What stories need to be told? What's on your mind? What needs to be said? How can I communicate how I feel and what I think? (two periods per week; one term each for grades seven and eight, unless the student is taking the Ensemble Theater elective)

Health – In parallel with the Advisory programs, this course for seventh and eighth graders addresses the needs of early adolescents as they are in transition from childhood to adolescence. It helps students to understand the social, emotional, and physical changes that they are experiencing. It also guides them in formulating their values and making responsible decisions with the aim of avoiding what is harmful and embracing what is beneficial. Over the three years, the topics addressed include: healthful diet, physical maturation, addiction and substance abuse (especially related to tobacco and alcohol), and the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases. (two periods per week for one term)

Physical Education – Over the course of the year, students learn to develop skills in a wide range of sports, which include basketball, baseball and softball, indoor hockey, gymnastics, soccer, volleyball, badminton, and track and field. Apart from physical skills, the development of social skills is also emphasized: being cooperative, developing the ability to lead and to follow, doing your personal best, and maintaining a positive attitude. Evaluation criteria place a premium on the progress one makes, rather than upon attaining an absolute standard. The criteria include: improvement in skills, effort, taking on leadership roles, coming to class equipped and on time, setting personal goals, understanding fitness, working as a team member, solving problems, and acting safely and with respect. (three periods per week; yearlong)

Elective Specialist Courses

Fine Arts Courses – Students are required to take at least two terms of Fine Arts courses, but they can decide whether, and how many times, they wish to take any one of them.

- *Ceramics* – As an introduction to working with clay, this class begins with making pinch pots and then following the complete ceramics cycle in which clay is formed, decorated, fired, glazed and then fired again. Students go on to use the coil-building technique to make larger, more involved pieces as well as throwing on the potter's wheel. They then move on to individual projects or themes ranging from sculptures to traditional cups and bowls. (two periods per week per term)
- *Studio Art* – The three terms are divided into units of drawing, painting and sculpture. Drawing includes the media of graphite, pastels and inks. Painting will explore techniques of using watercolors, and acrylics and gouache paints. Sculpture involves working with colored papers, plaster, papier-mâché, wire and recycled objects. There is instruction in color theory as well as informal art history. (two periods per week)

Music Courses – Students are required to take at least one term of music per year, but there are four options. Students may be able to choose more than one at a time.

- *Band* – Students must already be able to play a band instrument (not guitar, piano or strings!) and read music to be able to enter this course. Each grade has its own band. In addition to preparing pieces for performance, which range from classical to jazz, students learn about music theory and work to develop performance techniques for their specific instruments. At concert performance times in December and June, the grade-level bands are combined to create an entire Middle School Band. Qualified students may also audition for an Honor Band Festival held Europe each year and may also prepare for solo or ensemble performances. (two periods per week; yearlong)
- *Choir* – Students need not have any experience to join Choir. The music that is sung represents diverse historical eras, styles and cultures, and singers will develop the physical, intellectual and social skills required to be able to create fine music. Like Band, each grade has its own choir that is also combined with those of the other grades for December and June concert performances. Qualified students may also audition for various European honor choir festivals held each year. (two periods per week; yearlong; students may be permitted to enroll in Choir for less than the full year if they are taking another music course)
- *Guitar* – While the main goal of this course is to teach basic playing skills, students also learn about the history and performance styles of the classical and popular traditions. Taking a hands-on approach, students will also learn the fundamentals of notation and music theory. This course should not be taken by anyone who has studied guitar beyond the beginner's level. (two periods per week for one term)
- *Digital Music* – Employing pre-recorded loops and entering input with digital piano keyboards, students use Apple's *Garage Band* program to create recordings of their own songs. They learn how to structure a song, along with basic elements of music theory. No music background is needed. (two periods per week for one term)
- *Piano Keyboarding* – While the main goal of this course is to teach basic playing skills, students also learn about the history and performance styles of the classical and popular music traditions. Taking a hands-on approach, students will also learn the fundamentals of notation and music theory. This course should not be taken by anyone who has studied piano beyond the beginner's level. (two periods per week for one term)

Technology Courses – All of the core technology skills are taught in the regular academic program as students are doing projects throughout the year. These include increasing levels of mastery of *Word, Excel,* and *PowerPoint,* as well as increasingly sophisticated use of search engines. As a result, the courses listed below are options which are designed to provide creative challenges and to develop new skills.

- *Claymation* – Using a combination of malleable clay, digital cameras, and software tools such as *Windows Movie Maker,* students will be introduced to the mechanics and art of creating sophisticated animated visual sequences and cohesive projects. In addition, they will learn how to publish their animated work in an electronic format. (two periods per week for one term)
- *Computer Graphics* – This is a basic orientation to the concepts and tools of graphic design. Students will use graphic manipulation tools such as *Adobe Photoshop Elements* to manipulate digital photographs, integrate graphic elements, and create original visual products. Special emphasis will be placed upon the artistic principles of visual design. (two periods per week for one term)
- *Digital Animation* – This course will introduce students to the basic tools of the animator -- storyboarding, timelines, "tweening", etc.. Using industry-standard animation software such as *Macromedia Flash,* students will integrate graphic and audio elements to create original animations. (two periods per week for one term)
- *Robotics* – This course will introduce students to the fundamentals of simple robotics. Using Lego Mindstorm's *NXT,* students will write sophisticated programs, assemble robots, and work collaboratively to solve problems and overcome challenges. (two periods per week for one term)
- *Video Production* – All the stages of video production are covered in this course: planning, shooting, editing and publishing. Technology is combined with the creativity processes of thinking and design. Digital cameras, scanners and other tools are used. Projects may involve such topics as creating presentations on the September Outward Bound trips and documenting community service projects. (two periods per week per term)
- *Yearbook* — ASP's hardcover yearbook comes out each June with thousands of photos and as many memories. The Middle School has its own section and member of this class create it by learning how to take great digital pictures, edit them, interview and report on the main events, and finally design the actual pages. They will be well trained in using *Adobe Photoshop* and *INDesign*. Over the three terms, students get seriously involved in the art of publishing. (yearlong)

Other Elective Courses

- *Debate* – For the student interested in world issues, this is an exciting course. Do countries have the right to pollute the air and oceans? Is the death penalty ever justified? Should people be free to immigrate wherever they want? These are the kinds of issues that students may choose as topics, which they will then research, decide what stand they will take, and finally debate in opposing teams. They will also be introduced to the workings of the United Nations: student will investigate current issues before the U.N. and learn to understand these issues from the perspectives of different countries. (two periods per week; yearlong)
- *Ensemble Theater* – This purpose of this course is for students to explore their creativity and their ability to communicate their ideas to an audience through theater. Students will investigate themes that are interesting and relevant to their lives, and will then focus on particular themes of their choice. They will explore ways of seeing, feeling, hearing, thinking, and creating in order to create a powerful form of communication and eventually bring their ideas to an audience. A working theater ensemble will be created where students learn to support their peers, develop a sense of responsibility to the group, and appreciate that each member has a crucial role to play in helping the group reach its potential. (two periods per week; yearlong)

Evaluating Student Achievement

A student's achievement in the different subjects is evaluated in a variety of ways. In doing so, a teacher will consider different criteria, some of which reflect overall school standards, and others which reflect the teacher's specific goals for the course.

The principal assessment criterion considered is the level of mastery of knowledge and skills. This is carried out in a variety of ways that reflect, at least partly, the variety of ways that we learn. This may include: oral work, written work (coursework, essays, problem-solving, tests, projects, etc.), and practical work (knowledge of or use of an apparatus, recording of changes, identification of a problem, construction of a hypothesis, evaluation and analysis, forming conclusions). However, other criteria may include creativity demonstrated, personal initiative taken, class participation, completion of regular homework assignments, and punctuality in submitting assignments. Evaluation can also consider the extent to which a student demonstrates the ability to work independently, as well as to work cooperatively with classmates.

Teachers guide students to engage in reflective self-analysis about themselves as learners and as people in the broader sense. Our goals are:

- that all students understand their personal learning styles, including recognizing their strengths and weaknesses;
- that at the end of each term, students look both backwards and forwards by assessing how well they have met their past goals and by setting new ones;
- that students set goals that are appropriate for their individual ability and needs; and
- that they take personal responsibility for meeting these goals.

The marking system is based on a system of letter grades for most courses: A = consistently meets the standards; B = usually meets the standards; C = sometimes meets the standards; D = rarely meets the standards; F = fails to meet minimal standards. For each of these descriptors, teachers may add a **+** or **-** to indicate where the student stands within the band.

Report cards are issued for each subject in early December, mid-to-late March, and late June, at the end of each of the three terms. These provide a curriculum outline for the past term's work and then give a summary evaluation using a letter grade (A, B, C, D, F). They then present a checklist of the student's learning skills and attitudes. They also include narrative comments from the teacher on notable aspects of a student's work.

Academic Probation may be instated when a student has received a report card with F in an academic subject, or two or more grades of D. This is a mandate for urgent improvement. In such situations, the Advisor and the Guidance Counselor may play a key role in guiding that student to better achievement. Sustained academic probation indicates that a student is in danger of not being promoted to the next grade, or that the student may be misplaced being at ASP.

Standardized tests are taken each spring by our Middle Schoolers: the Comprehensive Testing Program of the Educational Records Bureau in the United States. This series of tests measures ability and achievement in core academic skills and conceptual understanding. They include tests of vocabulary, reading comprehension, writing mechanics, the writing process and mathematics. The results of these tests are largely used for informative purposes, rather than to determine placement in classes.

Awards are given at the end-of-year closing ceremonies. These include:

- the *Academic Excellence Awards*—to the student in each grade with the highest average grade in the five academic subjects;
- the *Service Award*— to the student who best demonstrates the qualities of dependability, generosity, initiative, and commitment to the group, and
- the *Director's Award*—to the student who has strived to excel in every aspect of the MS program: academics, sports and the arts.