



GERMANTOWN ACADEMY MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM GUIDE



Updated April 2021

Middle School Visual Art

Philosophy

Our Middle School Art program revolves around the bigger picture of what happens during the act of creating. Taking time to explore a medium, discuss ideas, think about possible solutions, and work through obstacles is vital to not only making art, but also to creating a well-rounded, confident individual. Through the development of these crucial skills, the Middle School art program enhances every student's development using exploration, active learning, and self-reflection.

Course Content

The Middle School Art curriculum builds on techniques and concepts students learn in our Lower School art program, and then prepares students for art in our Upper School program. Through hands-on learning students develop problem-solving skills, explore their own creativity, and investigate new, complex three-dimensional building techniques.

During this semester-long course, students are exposed to a wide range of two and three-dimensional media, including drawing, painting, printmaking, clay, collage, mixed media, metal-working and wood-working. Art history is referenced for each project, and trips to art museums are scheduled in the sixth and eighth grades.

Faculty

Romy Burkus, MS Visual Arts Department Head

Elizabeth Buckman

Keeley Jennings, Intern

Middle School English

Philosophy

In the Middle School, students grow and develop into competent readers, writers, speakers, and listeners. We encourage students to become lifelong readers and writers. Students combine openness to new ideas and cultures with intelligently formed preferences based on the breadth and depth of their reading. We reinforce basic reading and writing skills and offer age-appropriate strategies to help students open their minds to experiences beyond their own, form thoughtful opinions, and develop imaginations.

The objectives of the program are to help students become more competent, critical, and active readers, writers, and thinkers; develop their vocabularies and appreciate the beauty and power of language; see and experience the interconnectedness of reading and writing; and develop their writing skills through work in a variety of written forms.

Course Content

We believe that students should have a wide variety of reading and writing experiences. Our classes include both common readings as well as opportunities to make individual reading selections. Students engage in formal and informal writing experiences on both common and individually selected topics. We study the reader's and writer's processes as well as vocabulary, grammar, usage, and mechanics. The reading requirements of the program are intended to challenge most students and provide an exciting reading experience for all students. However, some students may wish to stretch themselves beyond the requirements and choose additional works of literature to expand and enrich their reading lives. One way of doing this is participating in the countywide Reading Olympics program.

Students are required to submit a piece of writing each year for possible publication in the Middle School literary magazine, *In Our Own Write*, or other magazines of student writing that reach a broader audience. Students regularly have opportunity to share their work orally in the classroom. Students may also present their work in assemblies and morning meetings or write articles for the Middle School blog.

Sixth grade highlights include readings of *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbitt) *One Crazy Summer* (Garcia), *The Giver* (Lowry), and *A Long Walk to Water* (Park). Students also explore a collection of short stories, the writing of personal narratives, and the introduction to analytical essays.

Seventh grade includes Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and *Twelve Angry Men* (Rose). An interdisciplinary unit allows students to select from eight different novels, two of which are *Copper Sun* (Draper) and *Jefferson's Sons* (Bradley). Units on the short story and poetry are also explored. The analytical essay is revisited and expanded.

Eighth graders study *Night* (Wiesel), *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare), and *Piecing Me Together* (Watson). Selections from *America Street*, *A Multicultural Anthology* are included in the short story unit. Students also immerse themselves in the reading and writing of memoir.

Faculty

Kristen Donches, Middle School English Department Head

Glenda Daulerio

Andrew Dolan

Sara Goodwin

Peter Jennings

Middle School Health and Wellness

Philosophy

The Middle School Health and Wellness Department focuses on providing students with an opportunity to understand the changes that will occur during the Middle School years. As students begin to gain more independence throughout adolescence, they start to make decisions by themselves on a more frequent basis. Throughout the course, students learn how to handle peer pressure, changing friendships, developing and understanding their own identity, as well as the challenges of puberty. The main goal of Middle School Health and Wellness is to provide students with the knowledge and confidence to live a healthy lifestyle.

Course Content

Our curriculum concentrates on educating students about the physical, mental, and social aspects of Health and Wellness. Topics covered include proper decision making, building positive relationships, and the developing body. Throughout the course, students are assigned reading materials, videos, and have open discussions that help make the content of the course relevant. The use of real-world examples allows for students to be active participants in class discussions.

The sixth-grade curriculum is geared to help students understand the major components of Health and Wellness, such as how to make proper decisions, build positive relationships, reduce stress, and understand the changes occurring to their bodies.

The seventh-grade course helps students understand some of the major stress points they may encounter as they continue to grow into young adults and look to gain more independence. These conversations focus on the influence social media have, how to be a better friend through kindness and empathy, and the effect of drugs and alcohol.

Finally, in eighth grade, the curriculum focuses on helping students to understand and become comfortable with their own identity, combat socially defined roles, and help them learn to make proper decisions as they continue to mature and prepare to enter high school. These topics lead us into discussions regarding gender, race, and sexuality, as well as the roles and stereotypes that surround these identity traits. The class also explores how to navigate relationships and the social pressures that come with them.

Faculty

Jay Wright, Middle School Health and Wellness Department Head

Misha Horsey

Peter Jennings

Andrea Kurtz

Bayard Templeton

Middle School History

Philosophy

We believe that only through the study of history can we understand our world, and only by understanding our world in its historical context can we make informed decisions about its future. History is the tool by which we make these connections. It is a logical study of the dynamic interaction among people, geography, economics, customs, and politics. It is the sum of the past and determines the direction of the future.

Course Content

The Middle School history curriculum is chronologically organized to give students a sense of the struggles and triumphs that have brought us to today. Students gain this sense through a continual exploration of the relationship between our past history and the events of today. Our goal is to develop critical thinkers who make insightful connections between different periods of history and contemporary society.

Sixth grade history is primarily an overview of four ancient civilizations – Sumer, Egypt, Greece, and Rome – as well as an exploration of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation. Emphasis is placed on having students understand that in order to succeed as a civilization, certain elements must be present. We connect those elements to how countries are organized today.

Seventh grade history begins with how European countries expanded beyond their borders. This ultimately results in the colonization of America and leads students into the study of 18th and 19th century America. We specifically concentrate on the period that begins with the first permanent settlement of Jamestown in 1607 and concludes with the end of the Civil War. A significant amount of time is devoted to the New Republic helping students to understand how our government was formed and how the Constitution, as a living document, has brought us into the 21st century. Embedded in each unit is the theme of activism as students pay particular attention to America's social history by studying the people who helped shape the social conscience of the country. Special consideration is given to the enslaved. To facilitate this, all 7th graders read and discuss *Never Caught: The Story of Ona Judge*, by Erica Armstrong Dunbar and Kathleen Van Cleve.

Eighth grade history continues the study of American history beginning with the period of Reconstruction followed by the Gilded Age/Progressive Era, and a focused look at the 20th century including imperialism, World Wars I and II, the Cold War, the Civil Rights movement, and events that brought the 20th century to a close. Students come to understand America's interaction with other countries and its place in the world. They also do extended research on a specific topic from the first half of the 20th century.

Faculty

Jim Eichstadt, Middle School History Department Head

Bayard Templeton

Aisha Dawe

Mark Stephens

Allison Guenther

Middle School Modern and Classical Languages

Philosophy

The Middle School Modern and Classical Languages Department believes that the study of a world language is fundamental to the education of every student. The study of a world language develops attitudes and skills that are essential in a world of diminishing distances and cross-cultural interactions. The study of another culture is important because it cultivates an awareness of and ability to appreciate difference and empowers learners to engage others with a sense of cultural fluency. Further, the skills of proficiency we sharpen in the language classroom prove valuable in a variety of contexts and prime learners to be successful communicators. Knowledge of a new language also enhances students' appreciation and understanding of their own language and cultural heritage. We strive to develop in our students a love and appreciation for languages other than their own and for them to possess the skills and confidence to both broaden and deepen their ability to communicate.

Course Content

The Middle School Modern and Classical Languages Department offers four languages: Mandarin Chinese, French, Latin, and Spanish. Each course of study focuses on the mechanics and elements of language expression equivalent to one year of Upper School language curriculum. All courses foster the interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational language skills, and we endeavor to create immersive experiences that invite students to discover language in context. The culture related to each language is also studied in depth through readings, audio, games, and films.

Chinese: In the study of Chinese, primary attention is given to oral proficiency. The pronunciation of Chinese, with its tonal system, is introduced early and remains one of the focal points of the course of study. Writing, both Pin-Yin and in Chinese characters, is taught, but is less of a focus than oral communication. Cultural topics range from modern-day Chinese holidays to everyday life topics such as school and family.

French: In the study of French, the curriculum targets the pillars of language fluency: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Cultural topics include life in France, and the curriculum will also highlight compelling aspects from other parts of the Francophone world, including Belgium, countries in North and West Africa, Louisiana, and Canada.

Latin: In the study of Latin, focus is placed on reading the language fluently. This fluency is built up through oral, aural, and written work that is both accessible and understandable. In addition to considering their own culture, students will also explore ancient cultural topics such as classical mythology, daily life in ancient Pompeii, and the provinces of the Roman Empire.

Spanish: In the study of Spanish, fluency in both written and oral communication are emphasized from the start: reading, writing, speaking, and listening are all important aspects of the course of study throughout Spanish in the Middle School. Cultural topics range from everyday life in various Spanish cities (Madrid, Barcelona) and Spanish-speaking countries (Mexico, Cuba) today to the challenges faced by undocumented Spanish-speaking immigrants in the U.S.

Faculty

Jarrett Anderson, Department Head; French & Mandarin Chinese

Lauren Fosnight, Spanish

Heather Galante, Latin

Jonas Jeswald, Spanish

Zora Meddahi-Larbi, French

Axel Galeano, Spanish

Middle School Mathematics

Philosophy

The Middle School mathematics curriculum is designed to prepare students for a rigorous Upper School program that includes the study of algebra, geometry, trigonometry, statistics, and calculus. The arithmetic, algebraic, probabilistic, and geometric foundation for this work is built during the middle school years. Our program emphasizes process, problem-solving, critical thinking and the joy of discovery. We want our students to appreciate the intrinsic beauty of mathematics as well as understand how mathematics serves as a way of making sense of the world.

Course Content

In order to serve the needs of all of our students, we offer a variety of courses taught at three different levels. Most students follow the first sequence shown below. Honors sections are reserved for students with exceptional ability, strong study skills, and a history of hard work and exemplary achievement. The sequence beginning with Math 6 is designed to give students extra time to review fundamental ideas and to master new concepts. A process is in place for students to move between levels, so that students are not locked into a particular sequence during their time in Middle School. Placements are re-evaluated at the end of each school year and level changes made for the following school year if necessary. Placements are based on demonstrated achievement, ability, and effort. Teacher recommendations, grades, and scores on standardized tests, placement tests, and final examinations are considered.

	6 th grade	7 th grade	8 th grade
Sequences	Pre-Algebra →	Algebra A →	Algebra B
	Pre-Algebra (Honors) →	Algebra A (Honors) →	Algebra B (Honors)
	Math 6 →	Pre-Algebra (7) →	Algebra A (8)

The Math 6 course focuses primarily on arithmetic operations with fractions, decimals, and integers, in addition to application problems that build mathematical reasoning skills. Pre-Algebra courses introduce students to algebraic expressions and equations, as well as expands students' understanding of topics such as ratios, proportions, percent, data analysis, and probability. In Algebra A courses, students solve and graph linear equations, continue to build problem-solving skills through applications of linear equations and inequalities, and perform operations on polynomials. In Algebra B courses, students solve systems of linear equations, simplify rational and radical expressions, and also study various types of equations including rational, radical, and quadratic equations with applications. All students who satisfy the requirements of their 8th grade algebra courses take Geometry courses during 9th grade.

Faculty

Matt Notary, Middle School Mathematics Department Head

Cindy Cho

Anthony Commale

Dion Lehman

Lauren Robinson

Jeff Thompson

Suzanne Zurcher

Middle School Performing Arts Department

Philosophy

Education in music and theater is an essential part of the Middle School curriculum. Experiences in music and theater help students develop an understanding of how to communicate emotions to others and create aesthetic experiences that have coherence and value to themselves and their audiences. Experiences in music and theater connect students to our shared cultural heritage, and help students develop the ability to expand their horizons while enriching their lives and the life of the community.

Course Content

Music Performance Ensembles

Students may choose one of three ensemble experiences during their Middle School years: Band, Chorus, and String Ensemble. Performing ensembles give students the opportunity to grow as expressive musicians, collaborate with each other in an ensemble setting, gain confidence by presenting public performances, and build discipline-specific skills and knowledge that will enable them to continue their musical growth in Upper School and beyond. Students in Band and String Ensemble are required to take weekly individual private lessons to help build technique and reinforce the work of the ensemble.

Classroom Music

Music A (6th grade), Music B (7th grade), and Music C (8th grade) are classroom-based experiences that allow students to explore topics and experiences in a non-performance setting. Students make music using percussion instruments, technology resources, keyboards, and guitar. Composition activities give students the opportunity to create their own music, and group music-making activities help develop students' collaborative skills. Students encounter music from a variety of traditions from around the world and around the United States, focusing on the building blocks of music as well as the role music plays in society.

Drama

Drama and Public Speaking courses help students develop understanding and skills in the practices of theatrical traditions and development of the speaking voice. All Middle School students take Drama 6, Public Speaking 7, and Public Speaking 8. Drama 6 provides students with an overview of the history of theater, as well as an introduction to theatrical practices. Public Speaking 7 & 8 are designed to build skills in various forms of public address, with a special connection to the English curriculum. An elective in theatrical production is available to interested eighth graders.

Faculty

Christopher Horner, MS Performing Arts Department Head; String Ensemble & General Music

Jeremy Correnti, Band Director

DeLane Doyle, Percussion Instructor, Assistant Band Director, & General Music

Charlie Masters, Choral Director

Joanna Rominger, Drama, Public Speaking, Theatre

Middle School Physical Education

Philosophy

Students participate in activities designed to help them understand the value of physical fitness and its contribution towards a healthy lifestyle. Students receive sequential instruction in a wide variety of team and individual activities giving each student an opportunity to excel.

Course Content

From the time they enter sixth grade, through the end of eighth grade, students participate in twenty-one physical education units. Several units are presented multiple times as to build upon basic motor skills and enhance participation in school sports.

Specific skills are introduced, reviewed, and practiced relating to the following team sports: basketball, field hockey, flag football, lacrosse, soccer, softball, tennis, swimming, cross-country, track and field, water polo, and volleyball. Students who play after school sports enjoy strengthening their leadership skills through peer coaching during that specific unit.

Non-traditional activities include cooperative games, the ropes course, speed ball, handball, table tennis, pickle ball, badminton and self-defense. During the multicultural games unit, students research a game or sport from around the world, write a brief report, and teach the game to their peers. The Physical Education program also provides opportunities for students to participate in eclectic activities such as rugby, cricket, fishing, hurling, Gaelic football and yoga. Fitness Testing is conducted twice a year (fall and spring) to measure the student's endurance, flexibility, and strength.

Faculty

Sherri Retif, Middle School Physical Education Department Head

Donald Brush

Joshua Dziewa

Misha Horsey

Jay Wright

Middle School Science

Philosophy

We believe that students learn science by doing science. To that end, we strive to provide students with the tools required to engage in authentic inquiry and the time and skills to reflect upon their work and communicate it in a meaningful way.

Course content

We offer an integrated curriculum. Each year of middle school science is dedicated to the study of a particular question about how science impacts students' lives, in both the near term and long term. By focusing on a theme and erasing the traditional distinctions between Life, Earth and Physical sciences, we believe that we provide students with a broader understanding of concepts as well as more opportunities for experimentation and discovery-based learning. *In the 2020-2021 school year, lab simulations and other digital resources have been incorporated to provide safe explorations that are accessible to both our in-person and virtual students.*

The theme for **the sixth-grade** year is *energy*. Students ask the following guiding questions: *What are the sources of energy? How does energy transfer? How is energy used? How do scientists observe energy?* Their study traces the path energy takes from the sun, highlighting the many forms it takes on Earth. This is followed by a look at how energy cycles through the ecosystem. Throughout the year, topics are explored through projects that strengthen and showcase the students' engineering abilities. The projects focus on solar energy and stewardship. The year culminates with a deep dive into issues surrounding energy, water, conservation and sustainability. The capstone event is a project involving the Preserve at GA and its connection to world beyond.

The **seventh-grade course** is a study of *life*. Students ask and answer the following guiding questions: *What makes you alive? What makes you an animal? What makes you human? What makes you, you?* Students begin by defining the characteristics of all living things. They will home in on complex processes such as respiration and photosynthesis, as well as the relationship between living things and their essential processes. They then explore life from its simple beginnings, tracing its increasing complexity through a series of invertebrate and vertebrate dissections. Their life study continues with an examination of various human body systems and wraps up with students learning about DNA and genetics to discover how living things pass genetic information from one generation to another. As the course ends, each student will choose, design, and carry out an individual science research project *incorporating the concepts from throughout the year, focusing on a human body system of their choosing.*

The theme **in eighth grade** is *motion*. The students will explore motion of everyday objects, motion on the atomic level, and large-scale motion on the surface of and within the Earth. The following questions guide their studies throughout the year: *How do we know things move? What causes things to move? What happens when things move?* Students will perform labs and follow an inquiry approach to determine the causes of motion and the laws that govern motion's effects. Throughout the year students will work concurrently on an independent science research project, which will be showcased in the Germantown Academy Middle School Science Fair in the spring.

Faculty

Cory Eklund, Middle School Science Department Head

Katherine Cassidy

James DiFranco

Maura Saurman

Nikki Smith

Sarah Zimmerman

Middle School Technology and Computer Science

Philosophy

We believe that our lives and our students' lives are growing more and more intertwined with technology and computer science. While it has been stated that this generation and future generations are "digital natives," we believe that students need guidance and thoughtful preparation for a world in which their personal and professional lives will be a blend of the digital and physical worlds.

Course Content

In sixth grade, each student is provided a tablet PC by the GA Tech department. The Tech 6 class helps students use their tablet PC to deepen their engagement in the classroom. Units include note taking, recording and editing videos, digital wellness, Student-Led conference preparation and portfolio creation, and an introduction to computer science. This class is meant to provide each student not just equity in the devices the school provides, but equity in the ability to use them productively.

The seventh grade class builds on this foundation by continuing to work with tablet PCs in and out of the classroom. Tech 7 is designed to deepen a few strands of the Tech 6 class, like research, digital wellness, and media literacy through project-based learning.

CompSci Innovations, is an eighth grade course that focuses on building upon students' foundational knowledge of technology and their skills so they can apply them in innovative ways. Additionally, students will explore innovative spaces, programs, and opportunities available to them at GA. This once a rotation course is intended to cover 3D printing and digital design, laser cutting and engraving, the process of making and design thinking, digital art, and computer science.

Faculty

Jim DiFranco

Sarah Kebaugh