
The Middle School

The Birch Wathen Lenox Middle School consists of grades six through eight, and serves as a bridge between the self-contained classroom of the Lower School and the individualized schedules of the Upper School. Students in the Middle School are placed in different groupings throughout the day to allow for variations in teaching and learning styles in the various subject areas. Social dynamics are also taken into account when creating the groups. Our goal is to create an atmosphere where all students feel simultaneously challenged, yet supported, and comfortable taking risks in their learning. The same material is presented to each group; the degree of guidance through the material varies for each student, as do the supplementary challenges.

We have a traditional curriculum in The Birch Wathen Lenox Middle School and yet, innovation and dynamic classroom settings are at the core of student experience. The STEM Initiative coupled with the Service Initiative, Honor Code, House, Leadership, and Peer Relations programs promote critical thinking and problem solving skills essential to 21st century academic success while also reinforcing the emotional, ethical, and empathic maturation crucial to values-based learning and development. Emphasis is placed on student understanding and application of the content presented by our teachers in a conventional but engaging classroom setting. Students are assessed informally through class discussion, in-class writing assignments, laboratory experimentation, participation, and homework; and formally through quizzes, tests, presentations, and projects. While the content of each course is strongly emphasized, we also place a large value on the acquisition of essential academic and life skills during the students' time in the Middle School. This includes, but is not limited to, note-taking and test-taking skills, organization, time management, applied learning, self-advocacy, social tolerance and cues, civic responsibility, Internet safety and "netizenship," and effective communication with peers and adults. While many of these skills are taught formally through our Study Skills program (see page 9), they are also interwoven into the curriculum of every class in the Middle School.

The 6th Grade

The Sixth Grade is a year of transition from the largely autonomous classrooms of the Lower School to the more departmentalized program of the Middle School. Students have different teachers and classrooms for each subject. A large focus is placed on the development of organizational skills and effective strategies for time management. The students are learning how to learn and how that process may vary from discipline to discipline.

English 6

In English 6, students begin to hone the reading, writing, and speaking skills that are essential throughout the Middle and Upper Schools. Literary selections serve to challenge and engage students while laying a solid foundation in close reading and elements of fiction. Students also self-select literature for independent reading. They are encouraged to generate and respond to essential thematic questions, adding fresh perspectives and ideas as these questions are revisited. Students will better their understanding of expository and creative writing, by engaging in writing at home and in class, and will learn to manage working on longer projects. Along with building vocabulary, students will establish a foundation of grammatical skills, such as understanding parts of speech, sentence structure, issues of agreement, and punctuation. These skills are practiced through exercises and extensive creative writing.

History 6

The History 6 curriculum comprises the study of the ancient world, from prehistoric human development through a variety of classical civilizations. Beginning with basic skills in geography and mapping, students move on to the Old and New Stone Ages, touching upon the tools and skills used by historians and archeologists. The civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China, Greece, and Rome are covered in considerable depth, emphasizing an understanding of the major trends influencing the growth of cultures. Close attention is also paid to the legacies of ancient societies and their echoes into the present. Ongoing attention is given to geography, study skills, and citizenship. Students participate in class discussion and lessons that include a great variety of both primary and secondary sources and that are applicable to a wide range of learning styles. Encouraging students

to be critical thinkers and enabling them to form generalizations is accomplished through a variety of activities that includes reading and writing assignments, projects and presentations, and short research explorations. Time is also put aside for discussion of current events, particularly when they touch upon ideas or issues from the cultures under study.

Math 6

The Math 6 curriculum helps students master the basic computational skills needed for everyday life and understand the process of problem solving. Students are expected to gain fluency in the use of whole numbers, fractions, decimals, and percents. Students are introduced to statistics, where graphing data is developed. An integration of the metric system is incorporated into the curriculum throughout the year. Basic algebraic and geometrical concepts are also gradually introduced to the students. References are constantly made to the use of mathematics in all fields and to real-life situations.

Science 6

The primary focus of Science 6 is on developing an understanding of earth science. Topics covered include Earth's internal processes, energy sources, weather, rocks, minerals, water resources, and astronomy. This course will build a strong foundation for future learning in biology, physical science, and chemistry. In addition to content, scientific inquiry and observation are learned by conducting at least one laboratory experiment a week. During the year, students learn how to write laboratory reports by breaking down the process into manageable steps, allowing students to master this important component of the science curriculum. This course culminates with the Sixth Grade Annual Design Fair.

Library 6

This course provides sixth graders with an introduction to the resources available to them in the Middle and Upper School library. Students gain hands-on experience with a variety of print and electronic information sources. Independent reading is interspersed with exercises developing information literacy skills.

The 7th Grade

In the Seventh Grade, students continue to take courses across all of the major disciplines. An emphasis is placed on inferential thinking skills, advancing student cognitive abilities toward the next phase of development, i.e. analytic reasoning. Proper note-taking skills become increasingly important during the Seventh Grade year, and the teaching of these skills is woven into the curriculum. As the students mature and yearn for more independence, we meet this need by placing a high value on their ability to effectively self-advocate and self-monitor in both their academic and personal lives.

English 7

English 7 is distinguished by an increase in the variety of reading and writing objectives, with a focus on developing more analytical readers and writers. Students delve more deeply into literary convention and form and derive a better understanding of genre and elements of fiction. Students also explore a variety of these literary genres through required but self-selected independent reading and reading responses. Through consistent and progressive writing practice, students begin to understand structure and organization, textual support and detail selection, intent, and audience. Creative writing exercises in both prose and poetry help further develop vocabulary and descriptive writing skills. Fundamentals of grammar, usage, and mechanics are reinforced through the students' own writing, as well as through whole group focus lessons. Students also hone their skills in oral presentation and performance through project presentations, dramatizations of scenes, and poetry recitation.

History 7

The Seventh Grade studies the history of the United States from Pre-Colonial times through the Civil War. The students use both their textbooks and a wide variety of primary and secondary sources to trace the beginnings of our nation and to understand the ideas and motives that have driven our geographic expansion and our social, technological, and political growth. Particular attention is paid to the early explorers, the Revolutionary War and its aftermath, the Constitution and Bill of Rights, immigration, the Industrial

Revolution, and the causes and events of the Civil War. Regular writing assignments put a premium on thoughtful analysis, and research skills are developed through papers, projects, and presentations. Map work is constantly reinforced, and time is put aside for the study of current events, particularly as they relate to the topics under study.

Math 7

Two courses in Mathematics are offered in Seventh Grade: Pre-Algebra Honors and Pre-Algebra. Placement is recommended on an individual basis according to past achievement and readiness. In both courses, students learn to work beyond the “how” of math to the “why” of math. Both courses continue the study of fractions, decimals, and percents. Problem-solving techniques are also integrated into every topic. Further algebraic and geometric connections are integrated throughout the year. Pre-Algebra Honors is taught to students identified by the Math Department as ready for more abstract mathematical concepts. Critical reasoning and analytical thinking take on crucial roles in the Pre-Algebra Honors course. Both courses, however, explore numerical and algebraic expressions and require students to evaluate expressions and solve equations. Special emphasis is put on mathematical applications and writing and solving equations.

Science 7

Students in Science 7 spend the year developing a foundation of biological literacy. The goal of the course is to help students learn biological science, while challenging them to push themselves beyond that which is easily comprehensible. The course focuses on investigative and hands-on scientific discoveries. The emphasis of the first trimester is on the scientific method, cellular components, cell processes, and cell reproduction. During the second trimester, genetics, evolution, and plants are investigated. The third trimester explores human body systems and ecology. Students use the scientific method in their laboratory work and the metric system for precise measurements, and they learn the correct use of citations. Students continue to develop and refine the process of writing laboratory reports.

The 8th Grade

In the final year of Middle School, the goal is to help students move away from concrete thinking and to begin to reason abstractly. The ability to think on this level demands both developmental readiness and environmental stimulation. With this goal in mind, individuals are encouraged to engage in inferential thought using techniques of comparative thinking, logic, and abstraction.

In addition to the academic preparation is the focus upon the students' development of greater self-reliance, social maturity, study strategies, and time management that will be required of them in the Upper School.

English 8

In English 8, students intensify their examination of language and their development of reading, writing, and speaking skills through the study of a variety of complex literature including novels, short stories, and plays. Students' exploration of character and reading for meaning is deepened, preparing them for further development in analytical writing. Isolated lessons on the development of thesis statements, introductions, body paragraphs, conclusions, and textual evidence stress the logical underpinnings of thoughtful writing. As students are guided in critically looking at their own work, they focus on the vocabulary and grammar skills essential to their own success.

History 8

History 8 takes up where History 7 ends, covering topics in American history from Reconstruction to the present. Through the use of the textbook, primary and secondary sources, and multimedia, students analyze the main concepts and historic trends of the period. The course emphasizes analytic reasoning, and students are expected to evidence such skills in written and oral form. An ongoing aspect of the course is an inquiry into the richly pluralistic development of our nation.

Math 8

Two courses in mathematics are offered in Eighth Grade: Algebra I Honors and Algebra I. Placement is recommended on an individual basis according to past achievement and readiness.

Algebra I Honors and Algebra I place special emphasis on problem-solving, critical reasoning, and analytical thinking. Both courses require an in-depth study of properties, integers, rational numbers, equations, inequalities, exponents polynomials, factoring, graphs, linear equations, systems of equations, absolute value, rational equations, rational and radical expressions, and quadratic equations. These courses prepare students to transition smoothly to math courses in the Upper School.

Science 8

In Science 8, students apply analytic skills to the investigation of the basic principles of physics and chemistry. Students are expected to apply the scientific method in hypothesizing, interpreting events, and predicting outcomes. The laboratory program focuses on classical physics and introductory chemistry. Some of the investigations the students pursue are accelerated motion, momentum, energy conservation, and single replacement reactions. The students engage in a colloquium after each investigation and write formal laboratory reports. Math skills and scientific skills are developed throughout the course.

Middle School World Language

Students select French, Spanish, Chinese or Japanese in the Sixth Grade. Their study of one of these languages in the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Grades comprises the first level of BWL's required three-year world language sequence. Classroom instruction is given in the target language.

Students in the Eighth Grade are also able to participate in yearly trips to French and Spanish speaking countries.

World Language 6

In World Language 6, students develop a foundation for continued language study in Middle and Upper School. Students in Sixth Grade choose to study French, Spanish, Chinese or Japanese. Communication is emphasized as students learn vocabulary in thematic units. Basic elements of grammar including verb conjugation, gender agreement, and sentence construction are introduced. Dialogues, skits, songs, and games supplement the linguistic and cultural dimensions of the course.

World Language 7

French, Spanish, Chinese 7 and Japanese stress a functional and communicative approach to language learning. Students develop more complex sentence structure and acquire vocabulary evocative of everyday life. Grammatical instruction is geared towards accurate expression. Video and audio technology are used in conjunction with the textbook. These, combined with authentic materials, allow students to further their language proficiency and develop an appreciation of many different people and cultures.

World Language 8

French, Spanish, Chinese 8, and Japanese continue the development of the four language skill areas (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Using text as well as audio and video technology, students

learn an increasingly rich body of vocabulary, structure, and idioms, all linked to real-life situations. This course is designed to build solid written and oral communication skills to prepare for intermediate and advanced levels of language. The curriculum is supplemented by activities fostering a deeper understanding of culture and civilization.

Middle School Skills

Sixth and Seventh Grade students in the Middle School take a Study Skills course that reinforces and strengthens concepts taught in the Middle School curriculum. Over two years, students explore a variety of strategies to improve learning including the Cornell method of note-taking, the SMARTS program for executive function skills, CANOE strategy for homework completion, and SQ3R for close reading of text. Sixth grade students focus on transitioning into the Middle School, working on basic organizational skills, time management, reading comprehension, vocabulary development, listening skills, following directions, summarizing, note taking, and outlining.

Seventh Grade students further develop their vocabulary and strengthen their proofreading, essay writing, outlining skills, and note-taking techniques to enhance their abilities to complete the coursework in their classes. Each trimester Sixth and Seventh grade students perform self-assessments through the mock report card activity. Organizational skills are reinforced so that students are able to keep their materials and lockers in good order. In addition, students continue to enhance their executive functioning skills to help meet the more demanding expectations in their courses. Students work on preparing for the CTP-4 Standardized test, as well.

The **Foundations** course in Sixth and Seventh Grade is a small-group supplementary literacy program designed to support student learning in both reading and writing. Through a combination of phonics and word study, comprehension strategies, and close reading, student will study the details of written language and learn how words “work.” The goal of this course is to bring students to grade level competency or beyond in both reading and writing by the end Seventh Grade.

Strategies for Learning is an additional skills class available to Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Grade students who are not yet ready to study a world language. Strategies supplements the other major subjects being studied and hones the skill sets required for success in these academic classes. In Strategies 7, students focus on further strengthening their critical thinking and reading skills as well as continuing to develop their skills in writing and test-taking. Students in Strategies 8 work on becoming more independent learners as they examine information in a more analytical manner. The skills learned in this course will help prepare students for Upper School.

Middle School Arts

Visual Arts

In the Sixth and Seventh Grades, students experiment with a variety of media and techniques, ranging from acrylic painting, collage, and watercolor to sculpture and mixed media projects. Using group discussion and critiques, students strive toward developing the verbal and visual skills necessary to talk about their work and ideas. By working on group projects, students are given the opportunity to exchange ideas and share decision making in the creation of collaborative pieces. Several projects will be coordinated with information from other course studies so that students can better understand their relationship to art. Students are encouraged to explore, take risks, and express their own concepts and individuality.

Illustration 8

The Illustration 8 course is designed to help perfect students' drawing skills by working in pencil, ink, and watercolors. Illustration projects will develop throughout the course and will be based on written works including students' original compositions and others assigned to the class. Students also keep a journal throughout the course.

Middle School Performing Arts

Music and drama hold an important place in the Middle School, giving students a showcase for their talent and providing them with opportunities to perform in front of an audience of their peers, parents, and other members of the community.

The Middle School music program continues the music appreciation cultivated in the Lower School by offering required music courses across all three grades. In Music 6, students rotate through three trimester-long units of chorus, instrumental, and electronic music. If students exhibit passion, talent, and a demonstrated commitment to their chorus or instrumental units after the 1st trimester, they may stay in these respective sections for the entire academic year, pending departmental and parental approval. In the Seventh Grade, students choose between Chorus, Instrumental, and Electronic Music which they continue through the remainder of Middle School. Every year, students in the Chorus and Instrumental classes perform at our Holiday and Spring Concerts.

Middle School students have several opportunities to participate in drama activities. There are three theater productions each year including a Middle School play in the fall, an Upper/Middle School musical in the winter, and a Middle School musical showcase in the spring. Participation in these productions is voluntary and requires after-school rehearsals. Students who would like to be involved, but are not interested in acting or singing, may choose to be a part of the backstage tech crew. During school hours, students may also elect to participate in a weekly improvisational theater activity.

Middle School Computer

The Middle School Computer Science program focuses on 21st century computing skills designed to take students beyond the walls of the computer lab and into a world of endless opportunities. The goal of the course is to help students become more productive by motivating them to use computers to their advantage. Students actively learn many useful skills that can be applied in real-life situations, including healthy online strategies and “netizenship” that are in keeping with our Honor Code and Code of Conduct. Proper keyboarding and writing skills are emphasized throughout the course. Subjects taught include advanced word processing, spreadsheets, graphing, video and audio editing, programming, and graphic and web design. The teachers encourage innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, and organization. The Technology Department expects students to perform at a high level while creating a safe, inquiry-based learning environment where students are encouraged to ask questions about what they watch, hear, and read in the media. Students will leave Middle School with the technical skills required to be competitive in an increasingly global and digital world.

Health Education and Issues

The Middle School Health curriculum provides students with the opportunity to develop an understanding of health concepts, including the intellectual, social, and emotional aspects of healthy living. Each class is a forum for discussion, providing students with an opportunity to identify their own attitudes and beliefs concerning critical health issues. In Health 6, topics taught include mental and emotional health, personal health, nutrition, tobacco, alcohol and drugs, family health, and sexuality. Health 7 topics include alcohol and drugs, peer pressure and refusal skills, family health and sexuality, the reproductive system, body systems, nutrition, and social, physical, and emotional health. Health 8 topics include family health and sexuality, gender and consent, STDs, first aid, fitness, tobacco, alcohol, and drugs.

Physical Education

The Physical Education and Athletics program provides students with opportunities to participate in a variety of activities through sequential instruction and movement.

The foundational skills introduced in the program are practiced and strengthened through cooperative participation in group activities. Organized warm-ups, drills, and practice sessions help students attain proficiency in specific sports skills and the development of physical fitness. Students learn rules, skills, and strategies related to physical activities.

The three main areas of activities for the Middle School program are health-related physical fitness, individual sports and activities, and team sports and activities. All Physical Education and athletic activities stress a sense of healthy competition, fair play, leadership, and sportsmanship.

Team Sports

Fall	Winter	Spring
5/6 Intramural Soccer*	5/6 IM Basketball (Boys)	5-6 Running Club*
5/6 Intramural Volleyball*	5/6 IM Basketball (Girls)	5-6 Intramural Yoga*
5/6 Intramural Lacrosse*	7/8 Basketball (Boys)	7-12 Varsity Tennis*
7/8 Soccer*	7/8 Basketball (Girls)	7/8 Track and Field*
7/8 Volleyball (Girls)	7-12 Swimming*	7-8 Lacrosse (Boys)
7/8 Cross Country*	8-12 Varsity Ice Hockey (Boys)	
	6-7 Club Ice Hockey (Boys)	
	7-12 Squash*	

Service Learning & Leadership Development

Students in the Middle School are expected to reach out, in meaningful ways, to their communities and not only serve them but, in their service, learn the value of civic responsibility and the power of the individual to take part in strengthening these communities. The Middle School will help raise awareness of needs in our communities and offer many opportunities for students to work with, and learn from, different local and global organizations. Student preparation, action, and reflection lead to an enriched learning experience. Students are also expected to seek opportunities to serve on their own. While BWL does not require a set number of hours to be completed for the year, students are expected to participate in one in-school service project per trimester, a total of three for the year. In the Spring, a select group of Middle School students attend a service-learning trip to New Orleans, Louisiana, focusing on continued recovery efforts in the city. The school expects that students will become global citizens who take an active role in shaping their world through consistent and willing participation in these projects.

Such civic responsibility culminates in 8th grade through our Leadership curriculum and class that meets twice a week with members of the Middle School administration. Building upon the premise that leadership and ethical decision-making are not innate but rather learned and cultivated, our 8th graders are challenged to become the everyday leaders of our middle school. Beginning with an exploration of the habits and qualities of what makes an effective leader, students then search out those qualities in themselves, asking not just what they value but why. The leadership journey then moves outward, first by aligning such discovery more profoundly to our BWL community and values, and then applying those values to the community beyond our walls—from New York to the United States to the world at large. Partnering with WE and other civic-minded organizations, students ultimately collaborate on a capstone project they identify as an essential commitment and responsibility, which is completed and presented to our Middle School faculty.

STEM Initiative

The goal of the STEM Initiative is to arm students with 21st century skills that enable them to thrive in and improve the world. Within and beyond the classroom, STEM programs, including our WISE Speaker series, K-12 Robotics program, AIRS (Accelerated Independent Research in STEM) program, public lectures by University professors, and interdisciplinary projects, empower students to engage the world and solve problems through inquiry and innovation. Additional programs, like the bi-annual Design Fair, highlight the importance of being a global citizen by using scientific and technological fluency to build a more sustainable world. The school is committed to ensuring that all of our students, particularly those who do not traditionally continue on to study STEM subjects, develop problem solving skills at all levels.

Special Projects and Field Trips

The Middle School takes advantage of the richness of New York City by taking many field trips that supplement the curriculum. These may include visits to The Museum of Natural History, field observations at Central park paleontological dig sites, the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Tenement Museum. A small group of Middle School students can also attend a service-learning trip to New Orleans, Louisiana in the Spring. In addition, the Seventh Grade goes to Old Sturbridge Village and Lowell in Massachusetts, and the Eighth Grade goes to Greenkill Outdoor Education Center in upstate New York. These overnight trips build class spirit as well as a sense of responsibility in the students.

Advisors and Homeroom

Middle School students are divided into advisory groups that meet every day for a short period of time with an advisor. The advisor oversees academic progress for these students and maintains contact with parents and the administration. During the advising period advisors touch base with advisees, make announcements, and often discuss issues of friendship, community, and ethics. Advisory groups may sponsor special service projects that might involve the entire grade or Middle School.

Houses

Each advisory group in the Middle School is part of a House System that works to celebrate our school values and to encourage school spirit and service. Houses are named for our school colors and values (Green-Integrity, White-Loyalty, Gold-Civility, and Blue-Honor) and are comprised of one homeroom from each grade level, 6th through 8th. Each House works as a team to earn House points through participation in school events, service opportunities, extracurricular activities, sports, and then displays of academic progress, good attendance, and adherence to the Code of Conduct and Honor Code. Individuals also have opportunities, each day, to earn points for their Houses by demonstrating exemplary behaviors that show kindness, good manners, active participation, a positive attitude, service, motivation, and responsibility. The year culminates with the awarding of the House Cup to the House that has earned the highest number of points that school year.