

GERMANTOWN FRIENDS SCHOOL



Middle School Curriculum

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MIDDLE SCHOOL is a time of spectacular growth. At Germantown Friends School, students are welcomed into a dynamic learning community that is engaging, inspiring, and supportive. Our sixth, seventh, and eighth graders mature in leaps and bounds, interacting with peers and adults in significant ways and making new discoveries about themselves along the way. Our job is to help children navigate the delicate transition from childhood to adolescence, and the independence and intellectual challenges that await them in Upper School. Yes, Middle School is a time of dramatic change—but these are exciting changes.

Our academic program, which builds on our long tradition of excellence and freshly relevant Quaker values (Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship, the SPICES), is a blend of discipline-specific work, interdisciplinary study, project-based learning, and skill development. Technology is integrated throughout the program in meaningful ways, allowing students to connect globally and acquire the necessary tools to enhance their education.

Outside the classroom, students take on leadership roles in student government, in community and environmental action, and on our stages and playing fields. Through our strong advisory program, they experience a wonderful sense of community as they are guided by faculty to be their best selves: kind, thoughtful, empathetic, self-disciplined, inclusive, and respectful of differences.

The Middle School years at GFS are a time of personal discovery, and **EVERY STUDENT CAN FIND A PLACE TO SHINE.**

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

QUAKERISM

Germantown Friends School's Quaker identity fundamentally influences the Middle School program. The study of Quaker values—Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship (the SPICES)—is woven into the curriculum in a variety of ways, including classwork and community projects. In seventh grade, students take a required Quakerism elective with a special focus on equality and racial justice, environmental stewardship, or peace and community.

The Germantown Monthly Meeting is central to the life of the school. The Middle School has its own weekly Meeting for Worship, when students and faculty come together in the Meetinghouse for shared, silent reflection. In addition to gathering as a full division, we foster a deeper connection to Meeting through mixed-grade worship sharings, “informal” Meeting for Worship, and Meeting for Worship by grade.

ADVISORY PROGRAM

Advisory groups function as a “home base” in Middle School, with advisors helping to facilitate students' overall academic and social growth. As such, students feel known—and parents know that someone is keeping a close eye on their child's school experience. The advisor functions as the point person for families, as well as a “holder” of the whole child within the school.

Students meet in their advisory groups (homerooms) at the start of each day for a morning greeting and daily announcements. Advisories also convene at least once each week during Community Block (with sixth graders meeting more frequently), as well as attend grade- and division-wide events together.

Advisors help foster students' social and emotional growth as individuals and members of the community, and the advisory program helps set the tone for a safe and nurturing learning environment.

COMMUNITY, CHOICE & COLLABORATION

EXPO

The EXPO (Explore, Experience, Express) program provides an opportunity each season for seventh- and eighth-grade students to take a “mini” course that meets twice during each 8-day schedule cycle, working with a

local Germantown community organization (e.g. volunteering at Holsey Temple CME as a “play helper” with preschool children or taking an introduction to sign language at the neighboring Pennsylvania School for the Deaf) or pursuing an area of personal interest (e.g. black-and-white photography, theatre, animation, or bushcraft). In seventh grade, students are required to take a Quakerism course and a programming course, and can choose their third elective. In the eighth-grade year, students participate in a grade-wide musical in the fall, and choose electives for the other two trimesters.

CLUBS & ACTIVITIES

In addition to our community involvement and elective EXPO courses, Middle School students participate in a wide array of activities and clubs that are scheduled into the school day during Community Block. Generated by the interests of students, offerings may include A Cappella, adventure club, cooking, fiber arts, science club, *Graffiti* (literary and art magazine), *The Corner* (award-winning online newspaper), yearbook, and community action, among others.



INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

The sixth-grade program continues the Lower School emphasis on thematic studies. For example, students learn writing and research skills, history, science, literature, geography, music, and art within the context of studying the European Renaissance, Pre-Columbian civilizations, and the Age of Exploration. In seventh and eighth grades, the opportunity to use thematic units occurs within the structure of the departments through team-taught programs. Teachers coordinate assignments and field trips, assign joint projects, and use shared core period times for group work.



MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

ENGLISH

GFS students are poets, journalists, playwrights, storytellers, griots, and essayists, and our program places student voices at the center of the classroom through a variety of writing projects, including journaling, freewriting, short story workshops, and thoughtful work around the structure of more formal, analytical pieces.

In small and large group discussions, students seek to understand and unpack a diverse group of texts and authors. They are invited to reflect, both in conversation and on the page, on the significance of writing, and the ways in which literature lifts up marginalized voices. Interdisciplinary approaches allow students to consider readings through art and music as well.

Students emerge from the Middle School with a better understanding of writing as a process. They are asked to peer edit each other's work, and then revise what they have written with their classmates' comments in mind. Vocabulary and grammar lessons, often gleaned directly from texts, help students gain expressive flexibility and strength. Through these and other practices, our teachers hope to guide students toward a lifetime love of writing and reading.

HISTORY

In our history classrooms, students and faculty explore and challenge ideas together, building on the foundational Quaker belief in continuing revelation. Examining differences and empathizing with multiple perspectives are central to this process. We endeavor to help students make meaning out of a variety of sources through thoughtful questioning, close reading, analysis, and research. Students and faculty practice communicating ideas clearly and directly, supported by evidence. Creating historical consciousness—the understanding that people in the past

had different values, assumptions, and worldviews from people in the present—is central to our work together. Our hope is to gain a deeper sense of our own identities, develop moral understanding, and foster engaged citizenship that will contribute positively to the world.

In sixth grade, students explore questions related to environment and cultural identity and the way societies are organized. We begin our study of history by investigating the wide variety of Native American culture groups that thrived in North America prior to the arrival of Europeans, with a focus on the Lenape, Lakota, and Pueblo tribes. We then do a case study of the kingdoms of West Africa. The final part of our year is an examination of aspects of the European Renaissance and the impact of contact between the cultures of North America, West Africa, and Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries. Throughout the year, we introduce and practice historical methods, including archaeology, material culture analysis, and close reading of primary and secondary documents.

Seventh- and eighth-grade students embark on a two-year study of U.S. history. The seventh-grade year begins with European colonization, and extends through the period of territorial expansion, increasing sectionalism, and the Civil War. The history of Germantown and Philadelphia is central to this study, with field trips to local sites. Students grapple with questions regarding who gets to tell the story of history, and who the “we” are in “We the People” at various points in our history. The eighth-grade course builds on the foundation laid in seventh grade, and explores U.S. history through thematic units, including civil rights, foreign policy, immigration, and economics. Students examine these themes from the time of reconstruction to the present.

The development of critical thinking, public speaking, and research and writing skills is central to each of these courses.



MATHEMATICS

Our mathematics instruction is designed to equip all students with the skill set to reason and communicate proficiently in mathematics. They dive into the language of math and become successful problem solvers. They explore number operations, probability, and algebra. Our approach blends problem-centered instruction with basic skills work as students learn to use vocabulary, forms of representation, materials, tools and techniques, and intellectual methods of the discipline. The program draws upon material from the Connected Mathematics program as well as other sources.

In sixth grade, students continue to develop enthusiasm for math and confidence in their ability to approach a variety of problems. Overarching goals include developing comfort with handling mathematical concepts and approaching a variety of problems, determining which tools and strategies can be used to solve them; developing and solidifying arithmetic skills and understanding of math processes and procedures; confidently approaching problem-solving by combining solid skills with number sense; and developing the ability to communicate mathematical thinking.

The main objective of seventh grade mathematics is to provide students with the tools and conceptual building blocks to make sense and meaning of the content of a formal Algebra I course. Throughout the year, students learn to shift their perspectives between concrete and abstract representations of numbers, patterns, and relationships. Through projects and activities, they identify, represent, and extend patterns in tables, graphs, and equations, and develop their proportional reasoning skills using problem-solving and exploration as they develop a strong conceptual understanding of the role of constant rate of change to describe a linear function. Students also learn to model problems and data in probability and statistics.

In eighth grade, we emphasize better understanding of previously introduced algebraic concepts and applications, as well as proficiency in problem-solving, mathematical reasoning, and higher-order thinking skills. Our goal is to prepare students for the study of higher level and increasingly abstract mathematics, with an emphasis on using the language of algebra to model real-world problems and situations. We strive to instill in our students an appreciation for the intrinsic beauty of math, confidence in their algebraic ability and understanding, and a strong engagement in mathematical thought and work.



MODERN AND CLASSICAL LANGUAGES

Modern Language courses are designed to produce fluency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Text, film, music, video, computer-based activities, and creative projects are integrated into instruction, as students are exposed to the cultures of the many countries where these languages are spoken.

The study of Latin or Ancient Greek provides students with basic grammatical concepts, a rich vocabulary, and exposure to the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean—a world fascinatingly similar to our own and yet different in interesting and instructive ways. Our Latin and Greek courses encourage students to build their knowledge gradually and surely, while providing extra time for the study of vocabulary and Classical culture.

Students entering the seventh grade begin their study of another language and culture by choosing Ancient Greek, Latin, French, Mandarin, or Spanish. French and Spanish are both taught in the target language.

Languages that begin in seventh grade continue in eighth grade to complete Level I. Eighth graders have the opportunity to add a second language, Latin or Ancient Greek. Students leave Middle School prepared to take Level II courses in their chosen language(s).

In sixth grade, students take the year-long Anatomy of Language course, an in-depth study of languages and grammar. They explore the world's languages and how they are related to one another, and learn English grammar by analyzing sentence structure. Students build a linguistic vocabulary and study global language families, writing systems, and the spread of literacy and knowledge. They leave sixth grade with a strong sense of the world's dialects, a good handle on geography, and a solid grasp of English grammar.

SCIENCE

The focus of Middle School science is exploration. Students begin their sixth grade year studying the characteristics of life, moving from cells to organ systems to organisms. Along the way, they learn how to create a scientist's sketchbook, use a microscope, and hone their observation skills.

In seventh grade, students begin with a comprehensive study of matter and its properties, including an in-depth unit on chemistry, then move into an investigation of important principles of Earth Science. They spend six weeks on a robotics unit, tackling physical challenges with their robots using introductory programming skills.

The eighth grade year is devoted to the study of the many cycles of the Earth and its interconnected systems in an environmental science course. As a culminating experience, students put their research skills to the test as they conduct experiments on an independent project for our annual Science Night. In addition to writing a research paper and a lab report, they create scientific posters and present their findings to peers and parents.

ART

In Middle School, students begin their study of art with a course that emphasizes developing visual skills and experiencing various media, including painting, collage, 3D design, photography, and digital media. They learn how to critique and deepen their understanding through the study of artists and periods in art history. Finally, students take on increasingly challenging projects that build on their vocabulary, their skills with various media, and their visual literacy. It is critical that each student, regardless of his or her skill level, feels successful and supported in art.

Students participate in a sequential program, where they are introduced to appropriate skills and concepts at each grade level. New materials and technology are explored and integrated with previous learning as students progress from simple exercises to complex assignments requiring increased independence. Using a problem-solving format, concepts are first presented and examined, then students develop individual solutions to creatively answer assigned problems. Frequent use of critiques helps students recognize quality and appreciate the uniqueness and diversity of effective responses.

Each spring, there is an All-School Art Show, where every student's work is on display for the community to celebrate. Student work in color theory, symmetry, asymmetry, still life, portraiture, conceptual art, 3D design, and digital media is exhibited.

MUSIC

The Middle School music program provides students from all backgrounds and experiences the space to explore musical growth and artistic inspiration. Students have numerous opportunities to develop their musical literacy and understanding, artistic expression, and love for music while tapping into our deepest roots of community and personal connection.

Our curriculum has three main components: the study of music fundamentals; musical exploration through listening, historical study, and analysis; and musical creation through singing and playing a variety of instruments. Students in sixth grade participate in classes in recorder, handbells, xylophone ensemble, and world percussion. In seventh grade, students choose between courses in ukulele, keyboard skills, music composition with NoteFlight, and instrument making. Students in eighth grade consider how and why music is such a powerful force in the human experience by exploring various genres, including opera, film scores, protest music, American folk music, and 20th-century classical music. During the eighth-grade year, all students participate in the annual musical, which showcases the vocal, acting, and theatre tech skills students develop through months of collaborative work.

All Middle School students also have the opportunity to participate in any of three performing ensembles: orchestra, chorus, and jazz. These groups rehearse two to three periods per cycle, in addition to the regularly scheduled, required music classes, and perform throughout the year at community assemblies and evening concerts.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

In Middle School, the goal of the Physical Education program is to help students develop their individual movement skills and discover their interests through participation in coeducational classes at each grade level. By providing opportunities to develop competence in movement and an appreciation for the diversity of fitness and skill levels, we hope that our students will participate actively in class activities and beyond.

Students learn team and individual sports while developing sport-specific skills and techniques. As they move through the Middle School program, they review fundamental motor skills through non-traditional activities—including adventure education—and strengthen social skills through participation in group and partner work, especially problem-solving activities.

COMPUTER SCIENCE & DIGITAL MEDIA

No work in our 21st-century classrooms can be done without the integration of technology, which has become a valuable learning tool in the Middle School. From digital citizenry and tinkering with circuits and microprocessors to learning the basics of coding, the computer science and digital media curriculum helps broaden students' knowledge and access to various forms of creative technologies. Additionally, we work to provide our Middle Schoolers with a thorough understanding of the moral and ethical responsibilities that accompany the use of technology, which is incorporated into each course.

Students use programs like GarageBand in music, learn to use data in math and science, and explore design, desktop publishing, and presentation software in art, English, language, and history. Teachers make assignments, provide resources, and communicate with students through the Google Classroom platform. Additionally, there are EXPO offerings in coding and web design.

THEATRE ARTS

The focus of the Theatre Arts program is to balance introductory skill development with community and character building. Engaging students in new forms of creative expression helps them develop and reinforce positive relationships among their peer group. It's physical, it's communal—and it's fun!

Theatre also gets integrated into classroom teaching throughout the Middle School years. Partnerships between drama faculty and other subject teachers (often English) help to bring the delight and power of theatre into the teaching of curricular texts. It is not uncommon to see the staging of scenes, the recitation of poems, or the dramatic reading of prose in a Middle School classroom, bringing the great texts to life in body and voice.

In seventh and eighth grades, students have the option to elect drama or theatre design during their EXPO blocks. These trimester-long sessions focus on the preparation and production of a short one-act play. Students work closely with theatre faculty on every aspect of the production, including props, lighting, and costumes. The nature of the plays produced vary based on student participation and interest.

The Eighth Grade Musical is a special collaboration between the music and theatre departments, and provides an opportunity for the entire grade to come together and celebrate one another in music, dance, and scene. All eighth-grade students participate in at least one aspect of the production, including set design and construction, stage management, lighting and sound, costume design, and, of course, performance.



FACULTY

Middle School faculty demonstrate a passion for teaching by leading students through a rich blend of traditional studies and hands-on, project-style learning. Interdisciplinary topics promote the development of critical-thinking skills. Teachers join together with students for creative, problem-solving activities, and seek ways to both teach and model collaboration. They design growth experiences that take students outside of the classroom, including grade- and division-wide community days, as well as the now legendary, multi-night camping trips, providing unforgettable bonding experiences for our Middle Schoolers. Faculty members also serve as coaches in the GFS athletic program.



MIDDLE SCHOOL ATHLETICS

The Middle School athletic program is an integral part of our school curriculum. We believe in providing students with the opportunity to learn about a variety of sports, to experience the lessons of teamwork and sportsmanship, and to develop fundamental skills and game strategies in an engaging and challenging environment. Students are placed on teams that reflect their grade and/or ability level. All programs have full practice schedules, and competition levels vary by team and program.

At GFS, we value the sense of community, camaraderie, physical and mental well-being, and skill development that come from engaging in our athletic program. It is our expectation that all students will actively participate and fulfill their athletic requirement.

AFTER-SCHOOL SPORTS OFFERINGS*

FALL		WINTER		SPRING	
BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS
Cross Country	Cross Country	Basketball	Basketball	Baseball	Softball
Soccer	Soccer	Squash**	Squash**	Tennis	Lacrosse
	Field Hockey	Wrestling	Wrestling	Track & Field	Track & Field
	Tennis	Winter Track & Field	Winter Track & Field		
		Theatre Movement Arts***	Theatre Movement Arts***		

*Students in seventh and eighth grades are required to take two (2) seasons of sports; sports are optional for sixth graders.

**Tryouts for boys and girls squash are open to sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, and take place in early November.

***Students may elect to substitute one season of after-school sports with Theatre Movement Arts, which combines collaborative, ensemble-based theatre-making with skills-based classes in various movement-centered disciplines. Each session includes Actor-Ensemble Training, plus two movement-based specialty classes, such as African Dance, Stage Combat, Latin Dance, or Circus Arts.





GFS

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Visit germantownfriends.org

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