



EMMA WILLARD  
S C H O O L

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# Jestermester Course Catalog 2025-2026

Students, please enjoy this year's Jestermester Course Catalog! Read through it carefully: many of last year's Jestermesters are running again, but there could be slight variations in the course descriptions. There are also a number of **brand new** Jestermesters running for the first time this year! On Friday, September 26th, you will have an opportunity to learn more about these courses at our Jestermester Fair, where you can ask more specific questions of the teachers leading each experience. Then, you will have an opportunity to register for your top ten Jestermesters.

If a course has prerequisites or an associated cost, those will be listed immediately below the description in italics. If you see nothing there, assume the course is for everyone and free of charge! For those courses that involve overnight travel and therefore do incur a cost, financial aid is available. Tentative itineraries for each Jestermester will be listed on MyEmma on the dedicated "Resources" tile.

Ms. Boyajian, Mr. Calos, and Ms. Carton are available to answer any initial questions that you may have about Jestermester. Please don't hesitate to reach out!

## Courses:

### Are the Winter Olympics Melting?

Winter sports are already feeling the effects of climate change. Warmer winter seasons and less natural snow have had a substantial impact on sporting events like the Winter Olympics. For this Jestermester, students will travel to Lake Placid, the host city of the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympic Games, to explore the history of the games, learn about and experience various winter sports, and delve into how climate change is affecting the winter sports season. The facilitators are Ms. Labbate, Ms. Loffredo-Dempsey, and Ms. Towne.

*Prerequisites: This Jestermester includes a significant amount of physical activity and exposure to winter weather. While students are not required to know how to ski and skate or have their own sporting equipment, they must be willing to learn how to do these sports. Students must also be willing to be outside in the cold for hours at a time.*

*Estimated Cost: \$1200 per student. Cost does not include winter-appropriate attire.*

## **Art From Art**

In this creative Jestermester, students will visit a variety of local museums and art-focused spaces to find inspiration in the art that they see. They will learn how to engage with different types of visual art and explore the ways in which they can connect with art on a personal level. Most importantly, students will create a sketchbook, where they will journal and experiment with their own creativity, inspired by experiences that resonate with them.

Through this Jestermester, we hope to inspire artistic practices that last beyond the week. Students should consider themselves creative in whichever capacity most speaks to them, from poetry to painting. The facilitators are Ms. Snyder and Dr. Shilo.

## **Choose Your Own Adventure: Reader's Theater**

Ready to step into the spotlight and create your own story? Join our Choose Your Own Adventure Reader's Theater Jestermester and discover how to work with a team to make creative decisions, from character development to plot twists. This Jestermester contains many different adventures, and the path you take will be determined by the choices you make along the way. The success (or failure!) of your adventure will depend on those choices, so think carefully before choosing. By the end of the week, you will have adapted and transformed a simple adventure story into a dynamic, interactive reader's theater performance! The facilitators are Mx. Lawson and Ms. Mariah.

## **Citizen Journalist**

"Journalism is what we need to make democracy work," said Walter Cronkite, because it gives us the information we need to understand the perspectives of the community we are a part of. In this Jestermester, we will explore the role of journalism in our democracy with a special focus on telling the stories about the people we live among, the issues that affect them, and *why* these stories are necessary for building a stronger society. As a citizen journalist, you will put your knowledge into practice by reporting on our very own community during Jestermester!

During this Jestermester, students will consider and expand their news diet (how

they engage with news); analyze the purpose of the news, both generally and for their immediate community; visit local publications and talk to journalists; and learn how to read and how to write 'the news.' The facilitators are Ms. McNamara and Ms. Norton.

## **Côte D'Ivoire**

Join us for a 10-day immersive journey through Côte d'Ivoire (West Africa), where culture, language, and hands-on learning come together in unforgettable ways.

Throughout this experience, you will collaborate with Ivorian students, take part in vibrant workshops with local artists, and explore the rich cultural traditions of West Africa—learning to weave, drum, and dance alongside masters of their craft. You will use your French in real-world settings, from everyday conversations to decoding the fast-paced and expressive local dialect, nouchi.

Our journey will take us across three distinct regions of Côte d'Ivoire as we examine the country's history, from its ancient kingdoms to the realities of post-colonial life today. This Jestersemester is designed for students who are ready to step outside their comfort zones, unplug from their phones, embrace new perspectives, deepen their French skills, and experience the world with open minds—and open appetites.

Adventure. Connection. Growth. Authentic experiences. This is not just a trip. It's an invitation to see, feel, explore and think differently. Facilitators are Mme. Sabatier, Ms. Schmidt, and Ms. McGivern. Please watch this [informational video](#) for more details!

Pre-requisites:

- *Current enrollment in French III-V, with preference given to students in IV and V.*
- *Vaccination against yellow fever by the time of departure*
- *A valid passport until September 2026 minimum*
- *An e-visa (course facilitators will guide this process, cost included)*

*Estimated Cost: \$3200*

## **Democracy: Yea or Nay?**

The country is in crisis. A long war has just ended, and not well. A devastating plague continues to affect how we live. There has been political upheaval and even political violence. Longstanding institutions have failed. Will democracy persist? Should it? What year is this, 403 BCE or 2025 CE? In this Jestersemester, you will become an ancient Athenian and join the people's Assembly in a role-playing game to decide the future of democracy. You'll debate, give speeches, wheel and deal, and strategize. Outside of the game, you'll read political theory by the likes of Plato and Thucydides, watch an ancient Greek

comedy about democracy, and interview present-day lawmakers about democracy. Facilitators are Dr. Matera and Ms. Evans.

## **A Different Land: Journey to Refugee Justice**

Maybe you've heard on the news about ongoing global crises of the displacement of vulnerable communities. However, it is incredibly difficult to imagine what that life-altering experience is like if you've never lived it. You may also hear on the news about the important work being done by a multitude of non-profit organizations globally and locally that support those who are displaced and resettled, and wondered "How can I help?"

In this Community Engagement focused Jestersemester, students will hear the voices of refugees and immigrants in the Capital Region. They will visit and work with the organizations that support their journey and resettlement in this new and different land. Through food, film, guest speakers, and children's storybooks, participants will dive deep into the vast array of stories and experiences of those who are forcibly displaced. At the end, they will have the knowledge and skills to amplify the voices of refugees and immigrants and support the newly resettled members of the community. The facilitators are Ms. Halfi, Ms. Mroczka, and Dr. Cecilia.

## **Fitness Flurry**

In this fun and challenging Jestersemester course, students will experience a variety of fitness, wellness, and athletic-related activities that will help to propel their personal journey as student athletes. Fitness Flurry will encourage students to examine and actively work on improving their athletic goals by developing a holistic approach.

Students in this Jestersemester will engage in daily activities that will provide them with a wide variety of fitness and wellness offerings. These are targeted to create a toolbox that will help students to further their strength, agility, endurance, flexibility, and balance. Examples of activities are Zumba on land and in water, yoga, boxing, Pilates, and Barre, HIIT exercises, nutrition and mental performance information sessions, reflexology, and more. Course members will also learn from multiple guest speakers from the sports medicine and nutrition fields and will be enrolled in a course to become Adult CPR/AED and First Aid certified. No prior experience in sports or athletics is required, but students in this course should be excited to engage in joyful movement each day. The facilitators are Ms. Parry and Ms. Shields.

## **Food for a Happier Planet: How Farming, Social Justice, Sustainability and Food Are All Interconnected**

Ever wondered where our food comes from and how farmers conscientiously work on the responsibility of feeding our planet? Are you curious what working on a farm feels like? If so, come and join us for exciting hands-on farming experiences! We will be visiting and helping local farmers, hearing what inspires them and how they see their work in connection to Social Justice and

Sustainability. We will be staying 2 nights at Essex Farm (near the Canadian border and Lake Champlain) and working with the farmers during our stay. There, we will make our own maple syrup, help on the farm, and cook our own meals with food exclusively grown on the farm. Lastly, we will meet with the owners of SunHee's (and savor their delicious food!) to hear their stories of Social Justice and food... for a happier planet! The facilitators are Ms. Lovenduski, Ms. Robbins, and Ms. Duglin.

*Estimated cost: \$350 per student. You will need clothes and appropriate shoes for the farms (we can help you find what you need).*

## **Game Masters: Exploring Creativity and Strategy Through Games**

Students in this Jestersemester will help to select and play a variety of games throughout the week as they consider how games can reflect the values of a culture and what skills are developed through game play. Over the course of the week, students will reflect on their personal strengths and weaknesses and consider how the skills learned through gaming are used in society. Students may draw connections to politics, leadership, economics, marketing, design, human behavior or other areas of interest. In addition, students will work in groups to develop and create their own board games!

This Jestersemester will take place primarily on campus but does include two field trips. On Tuesday evening, we will visit the Bard & Baker Board Game Cafe in downtown Troy. On Friday, we will spend a full day at a local "makerspace" building our games. The facilitators are Dr. O'Brien and Dr. Grimm.

## **Horse N' Around: Equine Science and Horses for Sport**

Love horses? Can't get enough time in a barn? Always wanted to learn more? Join Horse N' Around! This Jestersemester will provide students with a look into some of the various aspects of the equine world. This course is designed so there is a little something for everyone. Experienced equestrians will get a chance to see some areas of the horse world they might not normally get to interact with such as a tour of an equine surgical facility and an equine rehabilitation center, visiting the museum of racing, working with a therapeutic riding & driving center, visiting a military school riding academy, getting a glimpse into the ISHA opportunities for continuing riding in college, and visiting a hunt club and working with the beagles/bassets and foxhounds.

Students new to horses will get a chance to learn basic horse safety, how to groom a horse and basic horse care as well getting a nice introduction to the world of horses on the aforementioned trips. More experienced students will get a chance to share their knowledge with their peers as well. This course is primarily focused on horsemanship and will not be riding focused. There will hopefully be one opportunity to ride during the course. This Jestersemester will not

involve any overnights, but will have trips to various places nearby. Expect most days to have a 1-2 hour car ride to our destination for the day. The facilitators are Ms. Utterback and Ms. Del Brocco.

*Prerequisites: No experience with horses is required. However, students will need sturdy footwear with a low heel that covers the ankle. Students should be comfortable around horses and dogs as well as other farm animals.*

## **The Intersection of Biodiversity and Culture in Puerto Rico**

This is predominantly an experiential learning trip, exposing students to things they normally only get to discuss in a classroom. We will engage in a variety of biodiversity-related physical activities such as kayaking through a bioluminescent bay; swimming with those same dinoflagellates out in the open water; snorkeling in crystal clear waters with fish, turtles, and other sea creatures; and hiking both in the day and during the night up to the El Junque cloud forest (the only tropical rainforest that is technically a part of the US National Forest system). We will go horseback riding through the rainforest and out to the beach as well. We will pay close attention to exploring authentic Puerto Rican culture and cuisine, acting as mindful guests in this unique destination. Each day will be a different experience that students can reflect on in the evenings, especially considering our role in preserving biodiversity in regions as rich as this. The facilitators are Ms. Egan, Dr. Dettmar, and Dr. Matthews. Please watch this [informational video](#) for more details!

*Estimated Cost: \$3,400 per student*

*Prerequisites: Priority will go to students who have taken or who are concurrently enrolled in Biology, AS Biology, or Marine Biology at EWS. All participants must have passed the swim test by October 15. There are weight restrictions for certain activities (horseback riding and kayaking have a max of 235 lbs. and there is a slightly higher weight limit for the adventure hike). Participants should be fit enough to be active all day long for several days in a row. Note that we are going to pursue as many authentic, local cuisines as possible, so dietary restrictions may be challenging to accommodate. Please reach out to discuss your dietary or movement restrictions before registering if you are concerned they may present a challenge. We will be happy to talk through options with you.*

## **Look Around: The Revolution is Happening in New York**

Students in this Jestersemester will have first-hand encounters with American Revolution history in New York State through site visits, conversations with reenactors and historians, and guided tours. Locations to visit include Saratoga Battlefield, Schuyler Mansion, Johnson Hall, Cherry Valley, and Fort Ticonderoga. Each of these locations provides a crucial link in the story of the American Revolution in New York and will highlight separate aspects of the story, from women's experiences to Native history to the lives of ordinary soldiers in the militias and continental armies. The facilitators are Dr. Riley and

Dr. Ofori.

## **The Lord of the Bikes: The Fellowship of the Bike**

In this international Jestersemester, students will travel to New Zealand for a bike trip in South Island, specifically from Christchurch to the city of Dunedin. The trip is more much about the journey than the destination, and has three main themes: discovery, perseverance, and travel skills. While trips to specific destinations certainly have their merits, students on this trip will spend more time in smaller towns, towns that they probably never would have visited otherwise, and they will discover the beauty and wonder of less mainstream locations. The first day (or two) students will recover from the flight and explore Auckland and Christchurch, and from there students will embark on the real trip, 7 days of biking. Students will alternate taking the lead on these bike excursions, relying on maps and landmarks as the cycling portion of the trip will be completely analog except during emergencies. At the end of each day students will be tasked with vlogging about their experiences during the trip.

The cycling trip will average about 30 miles a day. This will be a difficult trip, and one that could prove taxing to even experienced bikers. However, upon completing the trip, students will feel as though they've accomplished something, in addition to appreciating the vistas of South Island. The facilitators are Mr. Lorino, Ms. Graham, and Aniella. Please watch this [informational video](#) for more details!

*Prerequisites: Ability to ride a bicycle for ~30 miles per day. Students who are assigned to this course will be asked to demonstrate their ability to ride a bike Participation in through a bike test in the evening of 10/13, 10/14, and/or 10/16.*

*Estimated Cost: \$5,500*

## **Marine Mavericks: SeaPerch Underwater Robotics Competition**

Interested in robotics? Curious about underwater warfare? Join Marine Mavericks! Students in this Jestersemester will work in pairs to build SeaPerch robots over the course of the week. The robots created in this Jestersemester will engage in a fierce aquatic battle in our school's pool on Friday, in an event that will open to all available Jestersemesters and community members. Our winners will have the opportunity to move on to compete in a local/regional competition after Jestersemester has ended— and of course, enjoy bragging rights here at Emma for all time. The facilitators are Ms. Shah and Mr. Bardos.

## **The Music Biz**

In this Jestersemester, students will explore the many facets of the music industry and assume different roles throughout the week. Students will have a chance to ponder possibilities and plan creative decisions as songwriter, producer,

recording artist, engineer, manager and performer. Work may be done individually or through collaborations to record and produce an original demo, complete with cover art. The week will have opportunities for varying levels of participation ranging from behind-the-scenes sound tech to the star on the stage! If you have a song in you, this is your chance to bring it out! The facilitators are Mr. Calabria and Dr. LeBel.

## **A Novel Excursion: A Jane Austen Adventure**

In this Jestermeister, students will travel through England to explore the world of Jane Austen. Highlights include visits to Jane Austen's House and Chawton House (her brother's home where she lived later in life), a themed walking tour in Bath, and stops at iconic filming locations from the 2005 *Pride & Prejudice*, including Chatsworth House (aka Pemberly) and Stourhead Garden (where Darcy proposes). Along the way, students will engage in conversations about Austen's life, legacy, and literary themes, while also experiencing British culture through historic sites, a pub dinner, and a bit of shopping in London. The facilitators are Ms. Buinicky, Ms. Ross, and Ms. McClellan. Please watch this [informational video](#) for more details!

*Estimated Cost: \$5,100*

## **Our Land, Our Mind: Indigenous Life and Wisdom**

Students in this Jestermeister will participate in live and virtual sessions with Indigenous speakers, visit online museum exhibits, and travel to the Akwesasne community. There, they will tour a cultural center, engage in dance or storytelling workshops with local artists, visit the Akwesasne Freedom School, and learn traditional basket weaving. Through daily journaling and guided discussions, students will process what they've seen and heard—making space to explore their emotions, assumptions, and moments of learning. Students will connect their experiences to broader themes like identity, values, self-care, and the relationship between land, community, and wisdom. They'll discuss how Indigenous ways of knowing challenge or enrich their own thinking. Over the course of the week, students will create a Mindful Basket using natural materials to symbolically express their inner strengths, values, and future intentions. Through this hands-on project and final presentation, they will turn learning into meaningful action and expression. The facilitators are Ms. Hao and Ms. Rojas.

*Estimated Cost: \$250*

## **Savor the Flavor**

In this culinary journey, students will explore the flavors, cultures, and nutrition in every bite. What does food say about who we are—and where we come from? In this immersive culinary experience, students will explore the cultural and personal stories behind what we eat while learning essential cooking techniques and the principles of a balanced diet. Together, we'll cook and personalize dishes like quiche, pizza, and pasta, visit a local restaurant, meet the dining hall team, and learn by tasting.

Journaling will be a central part of the journey, giving students time each day to reflect on what they've cooked, tasted, and learned. These reflections will help them explore their own food memories, recognize how food connects people across cultures, and trace their growth in the kitchen.

Throughout the week, students will share stories, listen to others' culinary traditions, and celebrate the diversity of flavors that shape who we are. On the final day, each student will prepare a meaningful dish that tells a piece of their personal story. The facilitators are Mme. Bererd and Ms. Miranda.

## **Reality Check: A Week of Experimental Shorts**

Spend the week exploring film from its earliest origins to the age of AI. Each day, you'll learn a new experimental filming technique, view short works that use it, and then create your own short film using those tools. We'll work with stop motion, green screen, and AI, using smartphones or iPads to capture footage and iMovie for editing. Midweek, we'll take an off-campus trip to an art museum or film festival for inspiration. The week will culminate in a collaborative group project that brings together everything you've learned. No prior experience necessary! The facilitators are Ms. Valites and Ms. Curtin.

## **Screenprinting**

In this Jestersemester, students will learn and experiment with the art of screenprinting on both paper and fabric in this jestersemester course. They will learn multiple different ways to make images including abstract, hand-drawn images and photos. The course will also consist of learning to screenprint on different surfaces, including t-shirts and/or bags. There will be an adventure to a thrift store to find some unique items to add your own personal touch too! Students will reflect on the process through sharing their thoughts and images through group discussions and personal notes. The facilitators are Ms. Kralovic and Ms. LaSalle.

## **Table Top Role Playing Games**

This Jestersemester is a chance to experience world-building and engage with creative writing for individual characters and in a world students will create and navigate collectively. Students will spend time planning and creating small-scale sets and maps for their game to take place in, work in the makerspace to create the minis and sets, spend time writing for the characters and world they create together, and engage in at least 1.5 full days immersed within the campaign they create. This is a chance for students to be a team of game developers and authors, as they explore the ways Table Top Role Playing Games (TTRPG) help practice collective decision-making through consensus, resource distribution and logistics, conflict resolution and mediation, and community building across differences. We will spend some time off campus to engage with community members who engage with TTRPGs professionally. The facilitators are Mr. Atkins and Ms. Resler.

## **Unleashing the Senses: An Experiential Journey into the World of Visual Arts and Music**

This Jestersemester is an experiential class that will dive deep into the realms of visual arts and music and will take students on a journey of creativity, imagination, and self-discovery! Whether they consider themselves artists or not, this course will help students tap into their innate creativity and artistic potential and unleash the hidden talents they never knew they had! Through experiential field trips and hands-on activities, students will gain an in-depth understanding of how our senses and emotions inform our art and vice versa. Get ready to embark on a journey where the arts will ignite your senses, inspire your soul, and fuel your imagination. "Unleashing the Senses" is not just a class; it's an adventure of self-discovery and creativity. Let's make this an extraordinary Jestersemester filled with colors, melodies, and boundless creativity! The facilitators are Ms. Slaughter and Dr. Spiro-Allen.

## **Visionary Women of the Empire State: A Tour of Central and Western New York**

Did you know that women in the United States were not allowed to vote until 1920? Susan B. Anthony, Emma Willard alumna Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Matilda Joslyn Gage were among the figures instrumental in the fight for this right. In this Jestersemester, we will travel to Central and Western New York State to learn more about these amazing women and their important work in the movement for women's equality. In addition, we will hear about Harriet Tubman's contributions to the equality movement along with her journeys to free slaves and Lucille Ball's groundbreaking work in show business as an entertainer and as the first woman to run a major television studio. The facilitators are Ms. Price, Ms. Petulla, and Ms. Robson.

*Estimated cost: \$750*

## **The Writer's Retreat**

Do you like creative writing but have trouble finding the time to focus on your craft? Do you envision seeing your name trickle down the spine of a best-seller? The Writer's Retreat offers students—no, writers—the opportunity to step away from their regular Emma lives and enter the world of words and imagination. Over the course of the week, writers will work in whatever creative genre they'd like—fiction, poetry, playwriting, screenplay, or nonfiction—writing both in community and on their own and sharing their work in a supportive community of fellow writers. We will also take a bookstore & coffee shop field trip, visit with a local writer, and present our work in an off-campus reading. The facilitators are Mr. Druckenmiller and Ms. Davis.