



**MIDDLE SCHOOL  
CURRICULUM GUIDE  
2025-2026**

Welcome to the Middle School at Princeton Day School, a lively and engaging place for students in Grades 5 through 8. Our goal is to create a culture where students feel safe, valued, celebrated, and known.

In the Middle School at PDS, we encourage our students to be involved in activities both in and out of the classroom. We encourage them to take risks and value their own voice in the classroom. We believe in giving students opportunities to make mistakes, and then learn from them in a caring and supportive environment. In addition, we place great emphasis on keeping a growth mindset. We want students to view effort as the key to success; to keep focused on continued—life-long—growth; and to keep trying even though they may experience setbacks.

Class sizes are kept small, and teachers, students and parents work very closely together. Dedicated and talented faculty foster clear, thoughtful communication between home and school, forming a partnership that values educational excellence.

At Princeton Day School, we teach skills and knowledge, but also, more critically, we teach our students how to think and learn. Our Middle School teachers serve as role models and instill life skills, such as character, teamwork, creativity, ethics, resilience, curiosity, time management—all that is needed for a successful school career and, ultimately, a fulfilling life.

Please explore these pages and contact us if you have any questions. We would be delighted to speak to you and tell you more about the Middle School at Princeton Day School.

Sincerely,

Renée Charity Price, Assistant Head of School for Academic Life  
Head of Middle School

## Index:

### Middle School Programs

- Advisory Program
- Focus Assembly
- Athletics
- Mini-Course Week
- Da Vinci Program
- Service Learning

### Middle School Curriculum:

- Humanities
- English
- History
- Mathematics
- Computer Science
- Science
- Languages
- Performing Arts
  - Theater
  - Dance
  - Music
    - General Music
  - Concert Ensembles
    - Treble Choir
    - Concert Choir
    - Chorale
    - Discovery Band
    - White Band
    - Blue Band
    - Allegro Strings
    - Sinfonia
    - Extra-curricular Opportunities
- Visual Arts: Supporting Emerging Artists
- Eighth Grade Electives
- Health & Wellness
- Physical Education
- Grading

## **Middle School Programs:**

**Advisory Program:** The Middle School advisory program nurtures students during the transformative time of early adolescence by providing them the tools necessary to ethically navigate and balance the diverse emotional, social and academic worlds in which they live.

Every student is matched with a faculty member who becomes their advisor for one school year. The advisee to advisor ratio is approximately 8:1. Students meet with their advisor and other students in their advisory group every morning and also in longer advisory sessions where character, balancing academics and extracurricular activities, stress management and other topics are explored. Advisors are a source of guidance and support and an excellent contact for parents.

**Focus Assembly:** Once each 7-day cycle, the entire Middle School gathers for a Focus Assembly featuring several 8<sup>th</sup> Grade students who deliver a Focus Speech about an important personal experience. From 5<sup>th</sup> Grade on, students know that one day, they'll have their turn. The students work closely with their English teacher to develop ideas and deliver poised, and often moving, speeches that bring the community together. Parents and family members often attend to hear these remarks. Announcements also occur at Focus so students stay informed.

**Athletics:** Our Middle School program promotes participation, providing interested students an interscholastic sports program appropriate for sixth, seventh and eighth graders. Our goals are to teach fundamental skills and strategies, develop a sense of team and to foster responsibility and commitment.

### **Fall**

Girls: Field Hockey, Tennis, Soccer, Volleyball

Boys: Soccer

Coed: Cross Country, Panther Fit, Football (Middle School only), PE Squash

### **Winter**

Girls: Basketball, Dance, Intramural Basketball

Boys: Basketball, Dance, Intramural Basketball

Coed: Ice Hockey, Squash, Panther Fit

### **Spring**

Girls: Lacrosse

Boys: Lacrosse, Tennis

Coed: Baseball, Track & Field, Skating, Panther Fit

**Mini-Course Week:** Every year in mid-February, daily coursework is set aside for a special, one-week interdisciplinary experience. Students choose from a menu of cultural, scientific and historical studies

with courses such as the Amish Experience, Gettysburg, Chocolate Immersion, NY, NY and Food, Flavors and Formulas. They spend the week in focused, experiential study, visiting museums, farms, research institutes and historical parks to learn firsthand about their subjects. Mini-Course Week is a signature Middle School program.

**Da Vinci Program:** The Da Vinci Program is an innovative program that aims to engage students as the captains of their own learning with courses from 3-D Printing Bonanza to Cooking in the Garden to Improvisation to Mock Trial to Prop Making and everything in between. Furthermore, every year features new courses entirely designed and sometimes even led by students. Each Middle School student will take at least four courses per year that they choose in which they take risks, explore individual passions, develop new interests, and use multiple disciplines to solve problems and create original solutions.

### **Service Learning**

Middle School students participate in grade-level service learning initiatives that have been decided upon collectively by the division. Once the organization has been identified, time is devoted to learning about the organization, ideating on opportunities for community partnership, and brainstorming solutions to community challenges. These initiatives might take place in academic classes or advisory groups.

## **Middle School Curriculum:**

### **Humanities:**

#### **Assessment and Goals:**

The Humanities program seeks to develop critical and creative thinkers who can effectively communicate and transfer their understanding, which they learn how to pursue through self-directed inquiry and questioning. As scholars, our students are also taught how to confidently engage with fiction and non-fiction texts, to express their analysis and interpretations, and to explore diverse topics, including ones that enable them to connect their own identities to our studies. Based on a shared set of learning outcomes, students in 5th through 8th grade Humanities classes are regularly guided by feedback in their opportunities to develop several Core Competencies. They are also routinely encouraged to define personal goals around these competencies through reflection. Included in various forms of assessments, the Humanities Competencies focus on the following areas: critical thinking, collaboration, reading, habits of a learner, preparation and organization, communication, inquiry, and creativity.

#### **Fifth Grade**

Students examine the organizing question "What are the elements of culture?" by creating unique cultures in each Humanities class. These become part of a project-based archaeology experience in which students excavate and analyze the representative artifacts of each class's culture. This first-hand understanding is used to examine various ancient cultures as a class, along with other cultures students select as part of independent Guided Inquiry projects. Students are challenged to continually compare different cultures using a set of specific reading strategies. Students also study and practice multiple genres of writing, both as readers and writers, engaging in creative and expository communication while also experiencing whole-class novels and individualized reading partnerships.

#### **Sixth Grade**

Students examine world history from the fall of Roman civilization through Medieval Islam to the Renaissance, regularly reflecting on cultural diffusion and its impact. The course's guiding questions are: "How do cultures interact with their environment?" and "How do people communicate their ideas and beliefs?" Students compare cultures and civilizations and analyze their influence upon contemporary ideas, customs, beliefs, and institutions. They are also encouraged to experiment with multiple genres of writing, both as readers and writers, utilizing key strategies, teacher feedback, and guiding questions to deepen their insights. Through regular project-based learning and Guided Inquiry, students hone their creative and expository writing skills, while also enhancing their literary thinking through whole-class novels and individualized reading partnerships.

### **English 7:**

Students in English 7 focus on reading, writing, discussion, and public-speaking skills. Using a variety of texts (short story, historical novel, poetry, non-fiction) students strengthen analytical, interpretive, and

close-reading abilities. Additionally, students establish and frequently practice a writing process that includes: brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising. Through regular grammar and vocabulary study, students enhance their understanding of language structure.

### **English 8:**

Students in English 8 work to advance reading, writing, and presentation skills. Through novels, short stories, poetry, and non-fiction, students are challenged to examine diverse perspectives in relation to their own world, while developing skills in close reading and literary analysis. Students apply the established writing process; this includes journaling, outlining, drafting, editing, and publishing. Building upon public speaking skills from grade 7, students use varied presentation apps to generate Focus presentations and Social Justice Project podcasts. Additionally, students continue regular study of grammar and vocabulary, working to apply the skills in their writing.

### **History 7:**

History 7 examines the early history of the United States from early indigenous cultures through the Civil War. Through our essential question, “Is America a Land of Opportunity for All?” students investigate the American experience through several lenses and the importance of their individual roles as citizens in a democratic society. In addition to acquiring content knowledge, students are taught skills to enhance their historical thinking and writing skills, such as close reading, analysis of evidence, development of questions, and formulation of a thesis supported by an effective argument. A variety of activities help students to practice collaboration, empathy, a growth mindset, and executive functioning skills. In order to deepen their understanding of the formation of our government, students take a field trip to a related museum in Philadelphia.

### **History 8:**

Students in History 8 begin the year with a unit focused on Identity, which they use as a lens through which to examine key Movements over the remainder of the year, including the Labor Movement, Women’s Movement, Civil Rights Movement, and Resistance Movements. Their studies culminate in a Social Movements Symposium, in which students use the Guided Inquiry Design process to explore global examples of groups seeking social change. Throughout the year, students engage in the inquiry process to hone their skills as critical and creative thinkers, further developing their research strategies, questioning skills, ability to analyze evidence, and aptness to organize an effective argument. At the conclusion of each Movement, students share their new understanding in writing and with the larger community, allowing them to practice their collaboration, communication, and presentation skills.

### **Mathematics:**

For more information on our math course pathways for students in grades 5-12, please see our website, under [Curriculum](#).

### **Fifth Grade**

The Fifth Grade mathematics program uses Bridges in Mathematics, a comprehensive curriculum that

supports the development of deep conceptual understanding, fluency with key skills, and strong problem-solving abilities. Instruction is grounded in equitable teaching practices and fosters a joyful and rigorous experience that helps students become confident mathematical thinkers and doers.

The year emphasizes fractional reasoning, operations with decimals, multi-digit division and multiplication, volume, and geometric classification. Students build conceptual understanding through rich discussions, visual models, and hands-on activities. Mathematical discourse, collaboration, and reasoning are core components of daily instruction.

Throughout the year, students regularly engage in powerful daily routines that reinforces foundational skills, promotes flexible thinking, and provides continuous exposure to important mathematical ideas. Students are also encouraged to articulate their reasoning, explore multiple strategies, and connect mathematical ideas across domains.

### **Resources:**

- *Bridges in Mathematics*, The Math Learning Center: Number Corner, Student book, and Home Connections
- IXL Software
- Manipulatives and visual models for conceptual understanding
- Supplemental activities for differentiation and extension
- State and national mathematics competitions

### **Key Goals for Students:**

- To develop fluency with whole number and decimal operations
- To build strong conceptual understanding of fraction addition, subtraction, and multiplication
- To apply multiple strategies for division, including area models, ratio tables, and numeric methods
- To explore volume and geometric classification through hands-on modeling and measurement
- To deepen understanding of the coordinate plane and mathematical patterns
- To develop mathematical reasoning, perseverance, and confidence in problem-solving
- To engage in mathematical discussions that promote clear communication and collaborative thinking

## **Sixth Grade**

### **Pre-Algebra 6**

The Sixth Grade Pre-Algebra program introduces topics that lay the groundwork for future algebraic studies as well as revisiting topics seen in previous years of math class with more depth and sophistication. Students focus more on algebraic and geometric modeling as well as learn more advanced computation with negative numbers and powers. Our program successfully prepares students to start their formal study of Algebra in 7th Grade, at which time all students begin a two-year program and complete Algebra 1 by the end of 8th Grade. Our goal is to provide a rich experience that provides our students the best opportunity to gain a strong understanding of and appreciation for the

material. We will cover a wide range of topics including: positive and negative numbers, basic solving equations, number theory, rational numbers, ratio and proportion, percents and two and three dimensional geometry.

**Resources:**

- Glencoe Math
- IXL Software
- Supplemental materials for remediation and enrichment
- State and national mathematics competitions

**Key Goals for Students:**

- To gain useful familiarity with vocabulary and concepts of algebraic and proportional reasoning
- To review and increase mastery of arithmetic processes using fractions, decimals and integers
- To experience a substantial preview of geometric ideas and apply equation-solving techniques to geometric objects in two and three dimensions
- To build a background of information and experiences to prepare for future math study
- To gain an understanding and appreciation of math's place in the world by constant word problems and teaching methods designed to see how the numbers play out in real world situations
- To use the calculator appropriately

**Seventh and Eighth Grade**

**Algebra**

This comprehensive two-year Algebra I course covers all the traditional Algebra I topics in depth and is supplemented by special units, developed by PDS faculty, which extend and enrich these topics and which provide a challenging review of arithmetic processes. Extending the Algebra 1 course time frame to two years enables the students to engage in mathematically rich investigations to build deep understandings and ensures that topics are aligned appropriately to the student's cognitive development. The result is a richer course of study in Algebra and a level of understanding that has served our students well as they have progressed in the study of higher levels of math and science.

**Resources:**

- Glencoe Math
- IXL Software
- TI-84 Graphing calculators
- Supplemental materials for remediation and enrichment
- State and national mathematics competitions

**Key Goals for Students**

- To gain a thorough understanding and mastery of the processes for solving and modeling solutions of linear and quadratic sentences (equations and inequalities) and systems of

equations

- To gain an appreciation of the relevance and importance of algebra in the real world and learn how and when to apply algebraic skills to investigate real-life situations
- To use graphing calculators appropriately
- To gain familiarity and basic manipulative skills with exponential expressions and equations, polynomials, functions and quadratic and rational equations
- To build a background of information and experiences to prepare for future study in the areas of Geometry, Calculus and Statistics
- To review and extend skills with arithmetic processes

## **Computer Science:**

### **5th Grade Computer Science**

This course introduces the students to text based coding using LOGO via the lynx coding site. LOGO is a turtle based language that uses simple english to teach students programming concepts used in the more complicated languages to come. In the process they learn problem solving and algorithm creation, with a little bit of graphic creation to create a fun maze game.

### **6th Grade Computer Science**

This course explores physical computing using Makecode and micro:bits. Students learn the fundamentals through a wide variety of projects, including a step-counter, a proximity beacon, and a laser cut touch sensor guitar. The rotation's final project is to design and build a purpose driven prototype using both the micro:bit and the Hummingbird Robotics Kit. With creative robotics, the students practice programming in a meaningful and collaborative way.

### **7th Grade Computer Science**

This course delves into javascript and project based learning with an emphasis on planning out both the visuals and the functionality of a unique game of their choosing. The first half of the rotation is learning how to program in javascript to use variables, if-then statements, loops, and sprite interactions. The second half of the rotation is used on creation of their game.

### **7th Grade Engineering and Design**

This course is centered around the engineering design process, creativity, and movement. Projects examples include hand-crank/motorized automatons, laser cut Calder style mobiles, and a robotic kinetic sculpture race. The students will engage in various design challenges with their creations while practicing perseverance and teamwork in the iterative process.

## **Science:**

### **Fifth Grade**

Fifth grade science begins with an investigation into the questions “How do I think?” and “How do I learn?” Making use of the PDS garden, greenhouse and the scientific method, students will explore the ways they send information to their brain through their senses and compare those processes to how plants experience the world. The focus will then shift to animal cognition and the students will complete an inquiry-based research project to gather evidence of animal thinking and present their findings in infographic form created using Canva.com. Finally, students will explore artificial intelligence and the question "Do computers think?" They will use micro:bits and block coding during this part of the unit, ending with designing their own code and building a magic eight ball.

The second semester starts by widening their view to see how they can affect the world around them, answering the question “How can I use my thoughts and actions to make a positive impact on the world around me?” Students will review the fundamentals of electric current, the law of conservation of energy, and the constraints of our world’s resources. Taking on the eye of social entrepreneurs and inspired by local New Jersey business, TerraCycle, students will inventory their own trash to find objects they can prototype into a new usable product.

Fifth grade science ends the year by hosting a Design a Difference Fair. After reading several non-fiction works about real-world problems surrounding waste and energy use, students will be challenged to choose a problem and design a solution by following the engineering design process.

### **Sixth Grade**

In this life science course, students will explore the science of living organisms and their relationships with one another and also the environment. Using the scientific method and inquiry-based learning, our young scientists will begin the year by investigating the diversity of life and evolution. Afterwards, an examination of biological cells will ensue, with a special focus on microscope usage. Then students will learn how cells are organized into various body systems in humans, in animals, and also in plants. Through these units, teachers will find ways to make connections between concepts learned in class and the real-life applications of our PDS garden. Finally, students will study the ecological relationships that bind all living things to the environment and we will make sense of how to transform our world into a more sustainable place. Much of the project-based learning that will happen in this course centers around design thinking and technology-based engineering.

### **Seventh Grade**

Through this earth and space science course, seventh graders will learn to see the earth as a dynamic system. In particular, the content includes topics in astronomy, geology, natural disasters, oceanography, meteorology and the origin and evolution of the universe. With a particular focus on data, students will practice utilizing their analytical skills to draw general conclusions based on empirical observations. Connections will be made to the physical properties of land and water, as well

as to the mathematical understanding of coordinate graphs and slope. In addition, students will discover the relevance of earth science to their local PDS context, seeking to answer the important question of how a deeper understanding of these earth science concepts make people better stewards of the globe. Finally, students will be given opportunities to incorporate technological and engineering skills into projects that will manifest their scientific learning.

### **Eighth Grade**

In this introduction to the physical sciences, eighth graders will venture into the science of investigating matter, namely chemistry and physics. Every unit is rooted in a student-driven lab experience, in which data is collected and observations lead to the construction of theory. We begin the year by reviewing mass, density and volume and very soon, we begin to explore the nature of atoms and molecules, both from the perspective of the periodic table and also from the vantage point of chemical bonding. After a brief survey of various types of chemical reactions, our students zoom out towards larger material objects and describe their motion. We will slowly review the three basic laws of Newtonian physics, as well as momentum and impulse, using experimental testing as our basis. Finally, the year will culminate with an engineering design project, for which we will enlist our understanding of forces and acceleration in order to undertake an egg-crash car project.

### **Languages:**

World language study broadens and intensifies in Middle School. Fifth graders choose either French or Spanish. In 6th grade, students continue to study French or Spanish, and they are also introduced to Latin. The goal is twofold: to reinforce their command of grammar through the presentation of basic concepts of Latin grammar (which will be useful for their grammar acquisition in English, French or Spanish); and to introduce them to a language that they can choose to study full time in 7th grade. In seventh and eighth grade, students focus on one language exclusively, studying Latin, French or Spanish. Each year the language department successfully integrates students new to PDS at each grade level.

### **Spanish 1**

The Spanish 1 course begins with a geographical tour of the Spanish-speaking countries. Students see and understand at the outset the large number of Spanish-speaking countries, with the corresponding diversity of climate, culture, and customs. Grammar structures are presented within the context of natural dialogues and conversations. As we develop the four communication skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking) we fine-tune correct sentence structure, as well as authentic pronunciation. Thematic vocabulary includes family, clothing, school, weather, physical descriptions, the house. Students expand their mastery through the reading of a short novel. One of the main goals for Level One is for students to reach a mastery of the fundamentals of the present tense, and the concept of agreement – subject/verb; noun/adjective. We focus on an immersive setting in which students ask and answer questions about daily activities and interests with teachers and classmates alike. Students make important linguistic and cultural connections in Spanish class, allowing them to compare and contrast these with their first language, and family culture. The overarching goal of Spanish 1 is to spark an interest in both the language and the cultures, and to facilitate students' sense of gratification as they

begin communicating in the target language. We strive to motivate and inspire students to continue their study and exploration of the Spanish language and culture.

## **Spanish 2**

In Spanish 2, students begin the year by critically analyzing the origins and expansion of the Spanish language, exploring topics such as the geography of Spanish-speaking countries. Throughout the year, students engage with distinct aspects of various Spanish-speaking cultures. Students continue to be challenged to maintain an immersive environment in class. Student collaboration happens daily and is essential to developing communicative competence. A special focus is a series of projects that give them opportunities to develop their live and recorded presentational skills. Further, students fine-tune their understanding of the two “to be” verbs in Spanish. The year concludes with a reading of a short novel, interspersed with a variety of comprehension and communicative activities. By year’s end, our goal is for students to advance to the next level motivated to deeper and wider in their Spanish exploration.

## **Spanish 3**

Spanish 3 is an immersion course that goes deeper and wider with the course concepts presented in Spanish 1 and 2, while introducing new grammar and relevant thematic vocabulary. A major thrust of the course is the introduction of two foundational past tenses: the Preterite and Imperfect, while reinforcing the Present and Present Progressive tenses. Through readings, videos, and other resources, we explore varied Spanish-speaking cultures. Throughout the course, the aim is for deeper understanding of students’ own culture, while acquiring respect and genuine appreciation for Hispanic cultures, both here in the United States, as well as abroad. Toward that end, students read Mira Canion’s short fiction, “El Escape Cubano,” as well as other literary selections. The cultural connections students make through these readings are key components, and serve to heighten students’ global awareness. As a cumulative project, students use their skills narrating in the past to portray their lives, incorporating the year’s content. We aim for all students to move on to the next level confident in oral expression and curious to further their Spanish language and cultural study.

## **Spanish 4**

As a continuation of the skills and competencies developed in earlier courses, Spanish 4 includes a review of earlier topics, while exploring broader topics-- both cultural and linguistic. The goal is to maintain the target language in class, and students are encouraged to stay in the target language for the entire class period as they continue to develop their language skills through a variety of activities. Some of the oral and written materials used in the class are authentic and guide students through an exploration of important cultural topics relevant to the Hispanic world. Spanish 4 allows students to prepare for a transition into Upper School Spanish II, III, or III-Honors. Placement for the Upper School is done in the spring by the current teacher in agreement with the Language Department.

### **French 1**

Students practice meaningful communication from the start, using everyday vocabulary, elementary grammar, and basic syntax. Through individual, paired, and group exercises, we encourage students to express themselves in typical situations. Topics include, among others: greetings and introductions, classroom interaction, the family and pastimes. Students learn conjugation in the present tense with regular as well as irregular verbs, concept of noun gender, and adjective agreement. Since culture is an essential component of the curriculum, students are offered short readings and activities related to cultural aspects of the Francophone world.

### **French 2**

Students expand their knowledge of vocabulary, verb tenses (with the future tense *futur proche*) and general communication. New topics include, among others: school schedules, hobbies and sports, and the weather. The emphasis is on advancing and integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Students read a short story to enrich the full immersion in the French language. Projects link students' interests with aspects of contemporary Francophone cultures. Videos and songs reinforce essential vocabulary, cultural knowledge, and listening comprehension.

### **French 3**

Students continue to expand their knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures of intermediate difficulty (such as the past tense *passé composé* with *être* and *avoir*, expressing quantity), and general communication about food, clothing, shopping and housing. The emphasis is on advancing and integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Students read short authentic texts and perform skits and songs. Projects linking students' interests with aspects of contemporary French and francophone cultures allow them to practice researching information online. Authentic media reinforce linguistic structures, cultural knowledge, and listening comprehension.

### **French 4**

Students continue to expand their knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures of intermediate difficulty (the two past tenses *imparfait* and *passé composé*, object pronouns, reflexive and pronominal verbs), and general communication about the cityscape, travel, holidays, details of daily life at home and school, food shopping and cooking. The emphasis is on advancing and integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Students read more authentic texts, and are asked to write narratives with past tenses and speak extemporaneously. Projects and media are used as in French 3 but at higher levels of sophistication. French 4 allows students to prepare for a transition into Upper School French II or III. Placement for the Upper School is determined in the spring according to each student's command of the language.

### **6th grade – Latin Component**

Students are introduced to the basic foundations of Latin as they spend some time making connections to their chosen Romance language. Students also get a taste of the daily life of the ancient Pompeians

prior to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

### **Latin 1**

Students in Latin 1 use the modern book series, *Suburani*, which gives teachers and students a new perspective on the ancient world, providing voices for more members of the Roman Empire than only the aristocratic classes. English and Latin grammar are studied through reading historical fiction as students follow the daily lives of a diverse group of characters from the Subura of Rome and their travels around the Empire. Emphasis is placed on the building blocks of Latin grammar: the noun case system and verb conjugation patterns. Students will also dabble in Roman mythology and history throughout the course through collaborative projects and activities.

### **Latin 2**

This class aims to broaden the students' foundations beyond the basics of Latin. Students will move through *Suburani* Unit 1 and into Unit 2. Through daily translations, students continue to learn about the lives of the ancients throughout the far reaches of the Roman Empire, such as ancient Carthage and Greece. In preparation for the National Latin Exam in early spring, students will learn about the earliest foundations of Rome, the ancient kings, and strive to understand the transition from monarchy to Republic to Empire. Additionally, students will engage in larger projects on topics such as chariot racing and leisure, and travel and commerce. Further connections are made to various Romance languages and English vocabulary.

## **Performing Arts**

### **Theater**

The study of Theater Arts is introduced in Middle School. All Middle School students experience Theater class for one term during each of their four years. Classes are process oriented, geared toward affording the development of confidence, flexibility, adventurousness, and collaboration. Performance opportunities include in-class performances, the Eighth Grade Fall Play, various Da Vinci courses for seventh graders, and the Eighth Grade Musical, a class project produced each Spring.

### **Fifth Grade**

This course introduces students to the study of theater arts. Using storytelling, mime, movement activities, and guided improvisation, the course offers students experiences in the realm of imagination and creativity. It provides the foundation for further study in the development of the language of theater, and establishes the environment particular to the theater classroom. This course gives a general overview of theater, covering both performance and playwriting.

### **Sixth Grade**

In the sixth grade course we focus on communication and collaboration through activities involving creative choices for physical movement and verbalization. This course is an introductory acting course. We begin to explore acting and creating characters using scripts, learning how an actor approaches a role and develops it for performance. Students build confidence in their public speaking abilities, learn

to memorize and perform short scenes, and dive into the various aspects of staging a scene.

### **Seventh Grade**

The seventh grade course is an introduction to technical theater and design. Students begin the course by studying movement and physical theater as it relates to directing, staging, and design choices. Students learn how to create the physical world a play lives in, while exploring the fundamentals of design components such as costumes, props, lighting, sound, and scenery.

### **Dance**

#### **Sixth Grade**

*"If you can walk you can dance"*, a Zimbabwean proverb, is the motto for sixth grade dance so that all students can participate no matter the level of ability. In this class, we look at dance through a broad global lens while relating dances back to our own culture. Along with learning Native American hoop dancing, "working" dances from Africa, and the origins of the Virginia Reel, students will also learn basic movement building blocks for creating their own choreography through large group games, small group collaborations and individual research.

### **Music**

The Middle School Music program builds upon the foundations established in Lower School, but helps prepare students for more specialized programs as they mature.

Throughout their Middle School careers, students explore improvisation and composition, musical form and design, and develop sight-reading skills in their general music classes. Choir, Orchestra and Band are also an integral part of the program, and all students in the fifth and sixth grades are required to participate in one of the ensembles. Seventh and Eighth grade students can also participate in the advanced ensembles. Private individual lessons are available for an additional fee (please see description below).

#### **General Music**

The Middle School general music course curriculum is designed to have students experience music in a way that is different from how they approach it in the performing ensembles. In the ensembles, students address the discipline of learning an instrument or using their voice. They focus on executing their parts as they prepare for a concert. The prime creative force is the composer while the ensemble is tasked with interpreting and performing the composer's work. The general music classes counterbalance the ensembles by having the students assume the role of composer and improviser. The main emphasis is on student creation and discovery.

#### **Fifth Grade**

Fifth grade students explore the "what" and "how" of music. Students learn rhythm, melody and harmony. These core foundations of music are explored through movement, playing instruments

(Arabic and African percussion, boomwhackers and xylophones), active listening lessons, Noteflight composition software and a plethora of games and competitions to reinforce what is taught.

### **Sixth Grade**

The 6<sup>th</sup> grade music class uses percussion and ukuleles as performance and composition tools. Students experience these instruments in both individual and group settings. The main goal is for the students to develop an understanding of theoretical music concepts and structures. Through the use of audiation, students are able to internally conceive their own musical ideas and bring them to light on the instruments. Class instruction is accomplished by giving the students a fundamental framework upon which they build their own ideas. They also analyze the works of major composers and performers to find inspiration for their own work. Students perform their works individually and in groups.

### **Seventh Grade**

Music technology is the primary focus of the seventh grade class. Students use the iPad and the app GarageBand as their primary means to create music. They also spend the majority of their time in the MIDI computer lab where they get to hook up their iPad to hardware such as MIDI controllers. They learn the fundamental building blocks of popular music such as beat, chord progression, bass line, and melody. They use these components to arrange familiar pieces and also compose their own originals.

### **Concert Ensembles**

The Middle School offers many opportunities for students to perform in an ensemble. Whether you are a straight out beginner or an advanced player, we have a place for you. There are multiple choirs, orchestras, and bands to suit the needs of every student. Fifth and Sixth grade students are required to be a member of an ensemble of their choice. Seventh and Eighth grade students can elect to be in one of the advanced ensembles.

#### **Treble Choir**

This ensemble provides fifth grade students an opportunity to sing in an introductory choral ensemble. Students are introduced to a variety of music, from folk songs of various cultures and traditional choral repertoire to contemporary pop music. They begin the year singing in unison and in canon, and progress to two-part harmonies. Choir members reinforce note reading and solfège, and are taught score reading of the music they perform. They are also taught the beginning fundamentals for sight singing. This choir meets three days each cycle and performs throughout the school year.

#### **Concert Choir**

Concert Choir is our sixth grade vocal ensemble. Students build on their knowledge of folk music from a wide variety of cultures, and sing in many languages, genres and styles. Students start the year singing in unison and in canon, and end the year singing in two or more parts. Choir members begin to sight sing, and are asked to analyze the music they perform. This choir meets three days each cycle and performs throughout the school year.

### **Chorale**

Chorale provides seventh and eighth grade students a chance to sing in a choral ensemble. Students continue to sing Folk music from a variety of cultures, and sing in many languages, genres and styles. As they engage with more challenging repertoire, sight reading increases with difficulty and students are asked to take on more responsibility for their learning. Repertoire is generally sung in three or more voice parts. This choir meets three days each cycle and performs throughout the school year.

### **Discovery Band**

Discovery Band is the perfect ensemble for fifth and sixth grade beginners with no previous study on a woodwind, brass or percussion instrument. Instruments offered are Flute, Clarinet, Saxophone, Trumpet, Trombone, Baritone, and Percussion. Instruments will be chosen with the assistance of the director in the fall during the first two weeks of the school year. Students will present two evening concerts during the year. Classes meet three times per cycle.

### **White Band**

White Band is geared for the growing intermediate musician with at least one year of experience on a woodwind, brass, or percussion instrument. Students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade are eligible for this ensemble. Students work on building their musicianship and technical skills. Students will prepare repertoire to perform in two evening concerts each year. Classes meet three times per cycle.

### **Blue Band**

Blue Band is an advanced ensemble for the woodwind, brass, or percussion player who is ready to engage challenging repertoire and expand their technique. Students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade are eligible for this ensemble. Admission into this ensemble is by audition only. Auditions are held in the spring term for placement in the fall. If you are new to PDS, the ensemble director will contact you directly to arrange an audition if they think this ensemble will be suitable for you. Students will prepare repertoire to perform in two evening concerts each year and daytime school assemblies. Classes meet three times per cycle.

### **Allegro Strings**

Allegro Strings is a small group of dedicated students who wish to begin learning the Violin, Viola, Cello or Bass. The class meets three times per cycle and is available to all fifth and sixth grade students. Students participate in at least two concerts during the school year.

### **Sinfonia**

Sinfonia is an ensemble made up of students with prior experience on the Violin, Viola, Cello or Bass who want to perform in a large ensemble and continue to develop their playing technique. The class meets three times per cycle in two sections - a 5th/6th section and a 7th/8th section. Students perform in at least two evening concerts and participate in school assemblies throughout the school year.

## **Extra-curricular Opportunities:**

### **Private Lessons**

Princeton Day School has an outstanding adjunct music faculty available to students for private lessons. Lessons are scheduled once a week at a mutually convenient time for student and teacher. Lessons are available for the following instruments: piano, voice, guitar, all string, woodwind, brass and percussion instruments. Rates and policies for private music lessons are found in the FAQ and Private Lesson Contract. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Tomasz Rzeczycki.

## **Visual Arts**

### **Grades 5-8**

#### **Fifth Grade**

##### **Art**

Students in grade 5 visual arts explore a variety of art forms, expressions, and mediums. They work with watercolor, India ink, charcoal, pencil, paper, and other materials. They use these materials to explore color theory, mark making, gesture, movement, and landscape. They create abstract pieces, collage, learn to mix shades, and more.

#### **Sixth Grade**

##### **Art**

Students in grade 6 visual arts learned how to do printing making using lino block carving. They design two blocks over the course of their arts rotation. The blocks represent heroes and villains, their symbols, and meanings. They will print on paper as well as cloth, and explore the history of printing. Through this process students learn how to simplify drawings, explore negative and positive space, and use carving tools.

#### **Seventh Grade**

##### **Art**

Students in grade 7 visual arts study abstract art, one point perspective drawing, and landscape. Students have the opportunity to experiment with each type of drawing and decide on a focus area for their final pieces. For their final project, students incorporate the lessons and skills learned to make an 11x17 final piece, incorporating line, value, texture, and color.

## **Eighth Grade Electives**

### **Architecture**

The 8<sup>th</sup> grade Architecture elective is an intensive course in design. Students' skills in construction, print reading skills, scale, and proportion are developed throughout the term. Once the students have grasped these skills, they begin to explore and create models of their own design. A final project is required. It will end with a model including their structure on a plot of land fully landscaped.

### **Ceramics: Foundations in Wheel Throwing**

This semester-long course provides a solid foundation in potter's wheel techniques, enabling students to create diverse functional ceramic pieces. Students will also learn to apply surface design principles, bridging the gap between two and three-dimensional art. This course focuses specifically on wheel throwing; hand-building and sculpture are covered in the Upper School's year-long Intro to Ceramics course.

### **DJ and Film Music (Spring)**

This course is an extension of the concepts of music composition learned in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade music technology class. Students will have the opportunity to create their own music on software and equipment used by professional artists and producers. We will primarily focus on how DJ's and film composers create their pieces. Projects will include creating loop based pieces with Ableton Live software and Launchpad hardware and also composing soundtracks to film scenes.

### **Artist Workshop (Fall)**

Ready to get your hands messy and your imagination flowing? In the Artist Workshop, you'll dive into exciting projects like murals, graffiti art, theater tech, graphite art and more! You'll learn how to create large scale pieces, explore a variety of mediums and techniques, and discover what it's like to be a professional artist. Whether you're new to art or already love creating, this workshop is all about having fun, learning new skills, and making something amazing.

### **Drawing and Painting: The Self-Portrait (Spring)**

Students will create a variety of portrait styles over the course of the semester; traditional, abstract, anime, symbolic, mixed media, and more. This will be a shift away from traditional grid style which will allow students to gain a deeper understanding of portrait art as well as more freedom of expression.

### **Innovation Lab**

This elective course is designed to give students the tools and experience to access all the MS STEAM Center has to offer. The students first take part in a series of skill building projects that include building by hand, 2D and 3D digital fabrication, circuits and motors, and physical computing. From there, students will be challenged to use machine learning to interact with their robotic designs. These creations will be designed, built, and modified with a deep understanding of the design thinking and engineering process.

### **Music/Theater: 8th Notes/Fall Play (Fall)**

The 8th Notes and the Middle School Fall Play have combined into an exciting and dynamic performance course that covers all the basics of acting and singing for a NEW Fall Performing Arts Elective. Students will continue to meet to develop a variety of choral repertoire, ranging from simple madrigals to complicated a capella tunes. As a select ensemble, these students will continue to perform at various school events. In addition, this class will work on acting techniques and will form the company that will produce the Middle School Fall Play. At the end of the semester, a Musical Theater Auditioning unit will help prepare students for the 8th Grade Spring Musical audition process.

### **Music/Theater: Eighth Grade Musical (Spring)**

Each spring semester, all 8th grade students launch a full-scale musical production. A culminating experience for the class, the 8th Grade Musical is a long-standing PDS tradition. Students may act, sing, dance, serve on the tech crew, or perform in the pit orchestra. Students interested in being featured onstage in the show may audition in December for the Eighth Grade Musical Elective Course, where they will spend their second semester learning music, choreography, staging, and character development.

### **Filmmaking 8**

This class gives a general overview of film production and storytelling through several short projects and in class assignments in a way that allows everyone to be engaged filmmakers. Students will learn technical skills in class and practice multiple production styles through projects that ask what it means to be media makers, critical thinkers and problem solvers in the visual medium of film. Alongside each production, we will watch short and feature length films to consider story development and structure. Students complete each project from production through editing on their iPads and have the opportunity to check out additional equipment from the studio.

### **Woodworking and Design**

This class will refine students' knowledge of classical woodworking techniques and furniture design. We will explore form vs. function, positive/negative space and spatial relationships. Students will design their own pieces of furniture and learn the fundamentals of ergonomics and composition. Over the duration of the course, students will complete 2-3 major projects.

### **Health & Wellness:**

The Middle School Health and Wellness program seeks to empower our students to successfully navigate the ever-changing environment we live in by promoting a healthy physical, mental and social lifestyle. Students in each grade level study a developmentally appropriate, skills-based curriculum. The curriculum revolves around a number of core topics: sleep, nutrition, physical fitness, substance use, mental health, social media use, time management and human sexuality.

It is our hope that providing students with engaging lessons that are relevant to their everyday life will provide the skills they need to build a productive and healthy foundation for living. This includes teaching students to be critical consumers of health information and identifying valid sources. Speakers from the community are included in the curriculum to provide connections to students from our upper school and other organizations.

### **Physical Education:**

#### **Fifth Grade**

All 5th Grade students participate in a comprehensive physical education program five classes out of each seven-day cycle. The goals of the program are: to encourage physical activity through the

introduction of individual sports, team sports, and skating; to improve each individual's overall fitness level; and to have fun while encouraging cooperation and good sportsmanship. Examples of some of the units include: field hockey, pickleball, squash, skating, lacrosse, volleyball and cricket. 5th grade students do not change for PE so they should make sure they have appropriate footwear on PE days.

### **Sixth to Eighth Grade**

The Sixth through Eighth Grade physical education program is offered each season, and students participate in the course during the PE/Athletics period of the school day. Students engage in a variety of physical activities throughout the season that meet the needs of a range of skill and fitness levels. Key components of the programs include individual and team sports, cooperative games and fitness training.

### **Grading:**

PDS considers grades and comments to be formative and a useful tool for student growth and development. In line with this thinking, students will receive an indication of their grade status at each Semester midpoint. In addition, teachers will prepare a two-part checklist at the end of each semester. The first section of the checklist consists of skills, such as class preparation and homework completion, designed to give the specific feedback that helps children learn how to become better students. The second section is similar, but contains items specific to each department, such as vocal fluency in language or computational accuracy in math. Written narratives about student progress are prepared by teachers at the end of the first semester and at midterm of the second semester in order that students may use them to further their work in each class.

**Fifth and sixth grade students** receive three levels of achievement grades:

Satisfactory (S) 80-100%

Needs Improvement (N) 70-79%

Unsatisfactory (U) 69% and Below

Parents are notified as soon as possible, usually in the form of a written interim report, if the teacher expects that a student will receive a Needs Improvement or Unsatisfactory grade. When a fifth or sixth grade student receives two or more Unsatisfactory grades during a given trimester, it is viewed as an indication that the overall quality of the student's work is insufficient, and the student may be placed on academic probation depending on the situation.

**Seventh and eighth grade students** receive the traditional letter achievement grades as follows: A+

98-100%

A 93-97%

A- 90-92%

B+ 87-89%

B 83-86%

B- 80-82%  
C+ 77-79%  
C 73-76%  
C- 70-72%  
D+ 67-69%  
D 63-66%  
D- 60-62%  
F 0-59%

Parents are notified as soon as possible, usually in the form of a written interim report, if the teacher expects that a student will receive a grade below 80%/C+ or below. When a seventh or eighth grade student receives two grades of D+, D, or D-, or one grade of F during a given trimester, it is viewed as an indication that the overall quality of the student's work is insufficient, and the student is usually placed on academic probation.