

THE
Peck
SCHOOL



Upper School Curriculum Guide
2025-2026

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English



GRADE 5 English

In Grade 5 English, students strive to become comfortable and confident readers, writers, thinkers, and speakers. Reading closely and critically, students learn strategies to examine, annotate, question, and respond personally to text through discussion and writing. Contemporary and classical literature selections include novels, poetry, short stories, and mythology such as *Auggie & Me*, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, and *The D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths*. Literary themes connect to Peck's InDeCoRe program to support individual character education, as well as the grade's essential question: *How do structures and challenges shape a society?*

Written responses to literature promote higher-level thinking, while creative writing encourages clear, thoughtful, and imaginative expression. Instruction in grammar, usage, and mechanics furthers students' sentence construction. With a strong foundational understanding of what makes a good sentence, students learn to build solid paragraphs. Vocabulary instruction includes the study of word parts for decoding and understanding unfamiliar words. Throughout the year, the use of spoken and written words expands students' understanding of themselves and the world around them.

GRADE 6 English

In Grade 6 English, students explore a rich and diverse selection of readings to examine their own beliefs, to determine who they are, and to better understand the larger world. With guided discussions around core texts such as *Hoot*, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, and *The Giver*, students acquire foundational skills empowering them to support their opinions with textual evidence, to develop sound reasoning, and to openly question ideas. As they strengthen their skills in annotation and critical reading, students come to value personal responsibility and the contributions of others when taking part in open and respectful dialogue. To reinforce the concept of self-reflection, Grade 6 focuses on the essential question: *How do our thoughts and actions impact others?*

Throughout the course, students acquire the language and communication skills essential to sharing ideas and engaging with literature. They try on different voices in their writing and write in a variety of forms. Assignments include poems, personal narratives, persuasive and analytical pieces, as well as a multi-paragraph essay. These experiences provide further opportunities to learn from yet another perspective — that of the writer. Grammar and vocabulary underpin the year's studies in English.

GRADE 7 English

This course helps students develop a thoughtful and responsible approach to language. Students continue to forge connections between literature, real life, and their own identity. Through literature and discussion around core texts such as *Night*, *Shooting Kabul*, and *I am Malala (Young Readers*

Edition), students strengthen their critical reading, writing, and thinking skills. In both collaborative and independent pursuits, they learn to take risks, to navigate challenges, and to appreciate each other's successes.

Special attention is given to crafting students' five-paragraph essays. Through these expository writing assignments, students learn to form clear, specific thesis statements; include textual evidence; acquire strong vocabulary; select appropriate language; and edit their own work through the drafting of various AXEXES body paragraphs. This structure prioritizes students' ability to build and support a strong claim while maintaining clarity and an appropriate academic tone.

Additionally, through student-driven Harkness discussions, individuals develop greater ownership of the learning process. Students learn to listen carefully to the views of others, to disagree respectfully, and to work together to deepen the collective understanding of the class. Students wrestle with the year-long essential question: *How can one work to understand the perspective of others?*

GRADE 8 English

In Grade 8 English, students hone their reading, writing, annotation, and discussion skills. Using various poems and short stories, and core texts such as *Lord of the Flies*, *A Separate Peace*, *Born a Crime*, and *March: Books 1-2*, students consider character, motivation, conflict, and purpose through the lens of the grade's essential question: *How does one make a difference in a community?*

Eighth graders employ increasingly complex vocabulary and concepts in discussion and writing. By constructing expository essays that exhibit critical analysis of the literature, students refine their practice of the AXEXES format, composing effective, streamlined body paragraphs that feature precise evidence from the text. Classes reinforce students' ability to build a strong, clear argument that remains focused throughout the entirety of a five-paragraph essay. As they gain confidence with the structures, students take more and better intellectual risks in search of their authorial voice in both analytical and creative writing assignments. Increasing independence during Harkness discussions facilitates this skill development; as students learn to articulate their perspectives, they translate this practice to both their expository and narrative work.

The year culminates in a personal essay designed with graduation and high school in mind. Students apply skills workshopped throughout many personal narrative exercises to produce an impactful final piece. Here, students reflect upon their growth as members of our school community, looking forward to their future with the confidence of a Peck education.

History



GRADE 5 The Ancient World

Students in fifth-grade history explore the grade-level essential question: *How do structures and challenges shape a society?* As well as: *How does geography shape a civilization's development? What makes a civilization succeed or fail?* The year begins with a brief study of the beginning of farming. Students then delve into civilization's beginnings in ancient Mesopotamia and the early Mediterranean region. This is followed by studies in various ancient civilizations, including Egypt, India, Greece, Rome, and Africa. Study skills such as organization, time management, note-taking, mapping, and critical reading and writing are emphasized. Students learn the importance of primary sources and how to use them effectively. Through the guided research process, students learn to support a thesis statement as they complete research-based activities and projects.

GRADE 6 The Modern World

Sixth-grade history focuses on the grade-level essential question: *How do our thoughts and actions impact others?* And also respond to the question, *What are the defining moments and characteristics of the modern age?* The year begins with a research-skills unit, as students complete an exhibit for the National History Day competition. This is followed by a historical exploration of the modern world. Units of study include the Industrial Revolution (with a field trip to New York's Lower East Side), Imperialism, World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. A continued focus is placed on refining skills such as organization, time management, mapping, note-taking, and critical reading and writing. Students are guided through the research process, including developing a thesis statement and using parenthetical citations, as they write a formal 2-3 page research paper on a significant event from World War I. The year ends with a unit on various Cold War topics.

GRADE 7 The Eastern World

Through the lens of the grade-level essential question: *How can I work to understand the perspective of others?*, students focus on three traditional content units about Chinese, Russian, and Korean history. They also explore: *How can the combination of historical culture and foreign interaction influence the modern state of a country's government, people, and foreign relations?* The course includes two project-based units: a National History Day website (on a student-selected topic connected to the 7th-grade curriculum) and a research paper (on a student-selected Middle Eastern country). Students are introduced to the Harkness method of discussion, and a significant focus is placed on learning and refining skills such as geography, note-taking, research, primary source analysis, and critical reading and writing. Additionally, seventh graders attend a class trip to Washington, D.C. There, they enjoy a bike tour of important monuments and government buildings that they will learn about in eighth-grade history.

GRADE 8 U.S. History

Eighth-grade history focuses on the grade-level essential question: *How does one make a difference in a community?* And also, *What does it mean to be an American? How has the immigrant experience shaped our nation?* Through a combination of lectures, project-based learning, role-playing activities, and Harkness-style discussions, students explore the history of the United States. The year begins with a unit on Indigenous communities, colonial society, and the American Revolution, which is supplemented by a field trip to the Old City of Philadelphia and the Museum of the American Revolution. Students then develop their research skills as they complete a project for the National History Day contest. Later in the year, students study the Constitution and the U.S. Government, slavery and the Civil War, Western Expansion, and the Civil Rights Movement. Students also complete a research paper that allows for an in-depth study of an influential American.

Mathematics



GRADE 5 Mathematics

The Grade 5 curriculum builds on the strong mathematical foundations and number sense developed in the Lower School and provides students with opportunities to grow as independent learners and thinkers. Students are encouraged to meet challenges, to take intellectual risks, to become better self-advocates, to ask questions, and, most importantly, to see math as a problem-solving tool that is useful in many contexts within their lives.

The curriculum includes: place value; operations with whole numbers and decimals; number theory and fractions; operations with fractions; geometry and measurement; ratios, proportions, and percents; probability; and problem-solving strategies.

GRADE 6 Pre-Algebra

The sixth-grade Pre-Algebra course features a student-centered approach to mathematics that emphasizes problem-solving strategies and uses a range of methodologies to develop and extend sound conceptual understanding. The curriculum pushes students beyond an algorithmic understanding of math into the *how* and *why* of mathematical theories. Students develop an appreciation of mathematics as a system for solving problems and as a way of thinking.

The curriculum investigates: dividing decimals and fractions; integer operations; algebraic expressions; one-step and two-step equations; factors, multiples, and exponents; ratios, proportions, and percents; spatial thinking; area, surface area, and volume; the Pythagorean Theorem; collecting, displaying, and analyzing data; and probability.

GRADE 7 & 8 Course Sequences

Grade 7 and 8 mathematics provides two distinct sequences. The first sequence provides students with a two-year algebra course, covering Algebra IA in seventh grade and Algebra IB in eighth grade. The second sequence provides for an accelerated route, covering most of Algebra I in seventh grade and the remaining Algebra topics plus Geometry in eighth grade.

The mathematics department issues recommendations for individual students relative to these two sequences in the spring of the sixth-grade year, with final determinations made in June. In each case, decisions are made in the best interest of the student, based on performance and with careful consideration given to providing the optimal foundation for secondary school.

Regardless of placement, both sequences present an advanced track through mathematics, situating all students well in secondary school. All students are given an opportunity to extend their understanding and reasoning to more abstract contexts while further cementing the strong numerical foundations established in earlier grades. When applicable, classes promote a problem-based approach, wherein students use each other as vital resources to further enhance

their understanding. Students must listen to and build on others' ideas, and also must share their own mathematical thinking with the group. In this way, students learn to communicate clearly, recognize alternative approaches, build confidence, and become increasingly agile problem solvers.

- **SEQUENCE 1: (Grade 7 Algebra IA; Grade 8 Algebra IB)** The Algebra IA and Algebra IB sequence is covered over the course of two years. The Algebra I curriculum covers: simplifying and evaluating expressions, equations, and inequalities, proportions, polynomials and factoring, graphs and linear equations, exponents, systems of equations and inequalities, quadratic equations, radical and rational expressions and equations, and distance and absolute value.
- **SEQUENCE 2: (Grade 7 Algebra I; Grade 8 Geometry)** More of the Algebra I curriculum is covered in a single year, leading to Geometry in Grade 8. The Algebra I curriculum covers: simplifying and evaluating expressions, equations, and inequalities, proportions, polynomials and factoring, graphs and linear equations, exponents, systems of equations and inequalities, quadratic equations, radical and rational expressions and equations, and distance and absolute value. The Geometry curriculum covers: reasoning and proofs; angles and angle relationships, parallel lines, and transversals; triangles and triangle congruence, parts of a triangle, right triangles, and basic trigonometry; circles; similar figures; quadrilaterals; area, surface area, and volume. To facilitate retention and strengthen algebraic problem-solving, key Algebra concepts are reviewed and integrated into the second year.

Science



GRADE 5 Exploration, Experimentation, & Engineering

The fifth-grade science program emphasizes exploration and experimentation through the scientific method. Students develop laboratory, problem-solving, logical thinking, and decision-making skills through active investigation. The year begins with an examination of engineering and technology and is followed by matter and its interactions. Students then take a closer look at energy transfer in matter, as well as in Earth's systems. The latter half of the year develops a deeper understanding of weather and the atmosphere, and the flow of matter and energy in organisms and ecosystems.

GRADE 6 Earth & Space Science

The sixth-grade science program continues to build critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving through inquiry and investigation. Using a lens of travel through select cities, students examine and investigate Earth science topics by identifying the intersection of science and society. With this approach, they develop an understanding of the layers and structure of Earth, the forces responsible for changing Earth's surface, and our role within the Earth system. Lastly, students look at Earth's place in the solar system.

GRADE 7 Biology

In seventh-grade life science, students learn about living things through the lenses of cells, genetics, anatomy, and physiology. By incorporating critical thinking, collaboration, problem-solving, inquiry, and laboratory skills, students explore what it means to be alive while examining the structure and function of living systems and their individual components. Students investigate the structure and function of living things through hands-on exploration and dissections of plants, insects, and a variety of different animal specimens. Technology-based lectures, videos, in-class discussions, and hands-on experiences are used to present information that is then analyzed and synthesized. Students also explore concepts related to adolescent development and health as part of the broader Health and Wellness curriculum in the Upper School.

GRADE 8 Physics & Chemistry

Physics and chemistry concepts are the focus of eighth-grade science. Students are guided by the questions: *What is the universe made of?* and *Why do matter and energy behave the way they do?* Hands-on investigations and the design thinking process support student exploration and understanding of topics such as the fundamentals of chemistry and Newtonian physics, culminating in the annual Bridge Breaking project. Engineering, experimental design, and scientific communication in the form of presentations and lab reports are significant parts of the eighth-grade science experience. Students also continue to explore concepts related to adolescent development and health as part of the broader Health and Wellness curriculum in the Upper School.

World Languages



Language Exploration

During their fifth-grade year, students rotate through each of the languages offered in the Upper School — French, Latin, and Spanish. These experiences help faculty, students, and their families to make an informed decision about which language to study for their sixth through eighth-grade years at Peck. The descriptions below present the curricula for each of the language classes over the course of the year.

GRADE 5 World Languages

French

The French program in Grade 5 introduces students to the study of the language with a focus on practical communication, reinforced with grammatical understanding. The skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening are sharpened daily through immersive and interactive activities, along with supplemental texts, including the magazine *Allons-y*. Skills are reinforced through the use of technology and teacher-developed materials. Students gain a global perspective through the study of Francophone countries.

Latin

The Latin program introduces students to the study of the language and culture of Ancient Rome with a focus on reading, writing, and speaking in the language. Comprehension and application skills are strengthened through immersive and interactive activities, including games, songs, skits, and the textbook *Minimus*. Students immerse themselves in the language through the use of technological and teacher-developed materials. Class time is devoted to the acquisition of core Latin vocabulary words and their roots in English derivatives. Lastly, students gain an appreciation for the ancient world through cultural activities and lessons focusing on the ancient city of Pompeii, notable events in Roman history, Greco-Roman mythology, and the Roman foundation myth.

Spanish

The Spanish program builds on the knowledge acquired in kindergarten through fourth grade. Students study the language through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. 80-90% of the class instruction is in Spanish through the integration of comprehensible input. This method of acquisition introduces new concepts via storytelling, teacher-facilitated discussions, and student-driven conversations. A wide variety of games, songs, and technological resources are used to develop listening and speaking skills. Reading and writing skills are introduced and reinforced through the integration of a novel entirely in Spanish titled: *El Capibara con Botas*, and its supporting materials. Grammar and spelling

exercises familiarize students with the structure of the language, and a global perspective is developed through the study of Spanish-speaking countries.

GRADE 6 World Languages

French

The sixth-grade French course builds on the knowledge acquired in fifth grade and employs a wide variety of technological resources to develop listening and speaking skills in conjunction with the textbook *D'accord*. Vocabulary is introduced in context and practiced nightly. Students listen to, create, and perform conversations in French that are relevant to their daily lives. 80-90% of class instruction is delivered in French through conversation, immersive activities, and storytelling. A global perspective is developed through the exploration of cultural diversity within the French-speaking world.

Latin

The focus of sixth-grade Latin is to read simple prose in Latin within the context of classical Roman history and culture. Students build a comprehensive Latin vocabulary and strengthen their English vocabulary skills through the study of derivatives and word formation. Knowledge of parts of speech and their various functions within sentences is deepened, which has benefits for both Latin and English. The basics of syntax are introduced progressively and systematically. Students learn all six tenses in the active voice of all four conjugations and some basic irregular verbs. Although the progressive ability to read Latin is emphasized, writing skills are not neglected. The exercises in the text and workbooks require students to translate passages and analyze linguistic patterns in the language. Utilizing the *New Steps in Latin* textbook series, as well as the *Lingua Latin* and *Ecce Romani* series, students gain an early command of grammatical structures and reading comprehension.

Spanish

The Spanish program in grade six continues to build on the skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening through immersive and interactive activities. Contextual vocabulary and grammatical concepts are practiced nightly. 80-90% of the class instruction is in Spanish through the integration of comprehensible input. This method of acquisition introduces new concepts via storytelling, teacher-facilitated discussions, and student-driven conversations. A wide variety of games, songs, and technological resources are used to develop listening and speaking skills in conjunction with the vocabulary and grammatical concepts presented in the textbook series *Encuentros*. Students read and reflect on a novel entirely in Spanish, titled *La Perezosa Impaciente*, in order to practice pronunciation and check comprehension. Students also enhance their global perspective as they become increasingly familiar with the Spanish-speaking world around them.

GRADE 7 World Languages

French

In this pivotal year, students communicate across three different tenses — past, present, and future — while they continue their study of French through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The class is conducted almost entirely in French, and students are encouraged to take risks and communicate in the target language. New vocabulary and grammar are brought to life through both oral and written activities. Technological tools continue to aid in the learning process. Students gain awareness of French culture, geography, and history by completing student-centered projects. All students are expected to be active participants in and outside of class, as they are asked to become increasingly involved in the French-speaking world around them.

Latin

This course is a continuation of sixth-grade Latin, using the *New Steps in Latin* series. Students resume a comprehensive study of Latin vocabulary and English derivatives while translating Latin prose into English. Students strengthen Latin skills using a systematic approach to the language. Concepts and grammatical constructs begin to become more complex with the introduction of genitive and dative cases, as well as more complex sentence structures. Noun and adjective agreement is mastered for all declensions of adjectives. The students also cover the passive system of all four conjugations. Students continue to learn about the rich cultural history of the Roman Empire and its influence on today's Western civilization.

Spanish

Students continue their study of the Spanish language through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The class is conducted nearly entirely in Spanish through the integration of comprehensible input. This method of acquisition introduces concepts via storytelling, teacher-facilitated discussions, and student-driven conversations. A wide variety of games, songs, and technological tools continue to aid in the learning process. New vocabulary and grammar points are introduced and reinforced in each lesson in conjunction with the textbook series *Encuentros*. Students will also continue to read and discuss short stories, such as *El Escape Cubano*, to build their reading comprehension skills and confidence in the target language. The integration of Latin American and Spanish culture is a key component of the course, and students will complete several projects to enhance their awareness of the various cultures that comprise the Spanish-speaking world.

GRADE 8 World Languages

French

In the culmination of Upper School French, students continue their focus on both language and culture. Pronunciation, fluency, oral comprehension, reading, and writing remain a focus of the course and are reinforced through interactive and immersive activities and projects. Students sign *Le mot d'Honneur* pledging to communicate in the target language daily. They also read and discuss French texts to strengthen comprehension and speaking skills. Geography, history, current events, and everyday life build an ever-stronger connection with the French-speaking world.

Latin

Latin 8 culminates in the completion of the *New Steps in Latin* series, as students master the equivalent of high school Latin I. The material approaches the systematic mastery of new Latin vocabulary and grammar through the reading of passages in progressively more complex prose. Students continue the study of participles, infinitives, and other structures, such as indirect statements. By the end of their eighth-grade year, students will have gained a comprehensive view of Ancient Roman history and culture.

Spanish

In the culmination of Upper School Spanish, students continue to focus on both language and culture. Pronunciation, fluency, oral comprehension, reading, and writing remain a focus of the course and are reinforced through interactive and immersive activities and projects. Students are expected to communicate in the target language daily through the integration of comprehensible input. This method of acquisition introduces concepts via storytelling, teacher-facilitated discussions, and student-driven conversations. New vocabulary and grammar points are introduced and reinforced in each lesson in conjunction with the textbook series *Encuentros*. Students will read and discuss several current events and novels, such as *Tumba* and *Esperanza*, to strengthen their reading comprehension skills and broaden their global perspective. By the end of their eighth-grade year, students will have completed the coursework equivalent to that of high school Spanish I.

Arts



GRADE 5 Art Classes

Music

Fifth-grade students participate in group music-making in both instrumental and vocal contexts. Music from around the world welcomes students as they enter the class and promotes global perspectives and commonalities between groups. Rhythmic complexities are developed and explored via drumming, body percussion, and movement. Melodic understanding is achieved by recorder playing, xylophone activities, and singing. Class activities inspire students to refine their skills for the K-8 Sing performance at the end of each semester.

Tech, Innovation, & Design

Fifth-grade students engage in a project-based curriculum as an introduction to coding and computer science using the Micro:Bit microcontroller and a block-based coding and simulation environment called MakeCode. In doing so, students will learn fundamental concepts that will allow them to solve a problem or serve a purpose as they design and develop products and solutions. A new addition to the course this year is the “Try Something New” project, in which students propose, complete, and reflect on an experience that pushes them beyond their comfort zone. The goal is to encourage curiosity, appropriate risk-taking, and self-discovery as students learn through doing something entirely new.

Visual Art

Fifth-grade students explore the question: *What is the role of the artist in our world?* They journey through a wealth of experiences that examine contemporary and historical art while advancing their understanding and engagement with artists’ roles in society. Themes include: The Artist as Designer, The Artist as Observer, The Artist as Architect, The Artist as Expressionist, and many more. As students explore the roles that artists play, they are challenged to create original works of art that enhance skill development, thinking processes, and creativity. Students work in 2D, 3D, and technology-based mediums and showcase their work in a Google Slides Digital Portfolio.

Woodworking

Fifth-grade students are provided instruction in the use of hand tools beyond those learned in Lower School. Following a review of safety, children are presented with a mechanical drawing that helps them learn and understand scale, read dimensions, and recognize views. The scale drawing guides students in measuring, cutting, and assembling parts of a replica board game tied to their history studies of ancient cultures.

GRADE 6 Art Classes

Music

Sixth-grade students participate in group music-making in both instrumental and vocal contexts. Music from around the world welcomes students as they enter the class and promotes global perspectives, traditions, and commonalities between cultural groups. Rhythmic complexities (from whole note to simple 16th note subdivisions) are developed and explored via drumming, body percussion, and movement. Melodic understanding is achieved by xylophone activities and singing a variety of pop and traditional repertoire in class. Class activities inspire students to refine their skills for the K-8 Sing performance at the end of each semester.

Tech, Innovation, & Design

Students will engage in activities intended to acquire, develop, and hone critical technology and design-related skills during the intensive. Students learn to effectively use tools, including web-based applications, to collaborate in designing, building, and programming robots. While using computers, students will exercise good citizenship. Students will engage in a project-based curriculum as an introduction to robotics. Working as individuals and with partners, they will undertake a series of challenges designed for them to apply key concepts, take risks, fail forward, collaborate, innovate, and be creative.

Visual Art

Sixth-grade students explore the theme of Art and Identity. Through a series of creative projects inspired by contemporary and historic artists, students examine the intrinsic and extrinsic factors contributing to their individuality. They learn valuable skills such as contour and volumetric lines, proportion, figure drawing, 3D volume, and perspective. Putting their skills into practice, they work with materials that include: wire sculpture, mixed-media drawing, photography, acrylic painting, and digital art. Each student documents their original works in a Google Slides Digital Art Portfolio.

Woodworking

Sixth-grade students are introduced to the use of power equipment in the manufacturing of a project. After a review of general shop rules, students learn safety procedures, parts, and the proper operation of specific power equipment in the woodshop. Each student demonstrates competency in operating a tool. More advanced joinery is required for sixth-grade projects, and students are encouraged to work with a keener eye toward quality when developing and executing a project.

GRADE 7 Art Classes

Music

Seventh-grade students participate in group music-making in both instrumental and vocal contexts. By featuring music from diverse cultures upon entry, the class actively promotes an understanding of global perspectives, unique traditions, and shared cultural ground. Rhythmic complexities (from whole note to advanced 16th note subdivisions) are developed and explored via drumming, body percussion, and movement. Meter is expanded to include odd and even expressions. Melodic understanding is achieved by delving into the modal scale sets expressed in pentatonic and diatonic xylophone activities. Singing techniques use Curwen solfege to analyze a variety of pop and traditional repertoire in class. Class activities inspire students to refine their skills for performance at the end of each semester.

Tech, Innovation, & Design

Seventh-grade students engage in a project-based curriculum using Code.org's Computer Science Discoveries curriculum. In doing so, students will have a choice to learn fundamental concepts of website development, game and animation design and development, AI/machine learning, and physical computing, which is how software and hardware work together.

Visual Art

Seventh-grade students explore the theme *Art and Change*. During the semester, students use their art as a vehicle to examine concepts such as changing perspectives, the contrast of traditional versus contemporary, and art as a vehicle for social progress. They will work with a wide variety of materials, including ink brush painting, multi-media sculpture, and stop-motion animation. Through these projects, students develop their skills of observation, expression, creative thinking, and craftsmanship as they recognize the power of art to foster change.

Woodworking

Seventh-grade woodworkers build on skills developed in the sixth grade in the safe and proper use of power tools. A project requiring more advanced methods of manufacturing is selected as a means of improving fine motor skills and furthering the students' understanding of equipment capabilities. A completed project with intricate design, carved and shaped elements, and detailed finish can transcend utility to a work of art.

GRADE 8 Art Classes

Music

In eighth-grade music, each student is able to choose an area of specialization to guide their work during each of the semesters. Concentrations vary per semester, with offerings ranging from vocal, ukulele, barred instruments, steel pan, percussion, and dance. The class builds student agency and allows eighth-graders to make a unique contribution through their performance during the fall and winter Sing. Class activities inspire students to refine their skills within a context of Orff Schulwerk-inspired expression.



GRADE 8 Arts Electives

In Grade 8, students select two semester-long electives from the following choices:

The Art Studio

In the eighth-grade art elective, students explore the theme of “Art and Investigation.” Honing in on their passions and curiosities, students each ponder a question, subject, or concept to use as a focus for their artistic explorations. Taking the next step, students engage with works of art from various contemporary and historical artists to seek inspiration, learn about new materials, and develop skills and techniques that expand the scope of their artistic focus. Through a combination of independent and “breakout” projects, each student works with their choice of 2D, 3D, and technology media to construct a robust portfolio of original work. At the end of the semester, students will craft an original artist statement to accompany their artwork in a Google Slides digital portfolio, highlighting the breadth of their artistic investigation.

Drama

Students are immersed in a creative, explorative process that delves into improv, character, and emotion study. The semester’s work culminates in a full-length play performed at the end of the school year for the entire Peck community. In addition to honing acting skills, students have the opportunity to contribute to the many responsibilities inherent in a play production — including set, prop, lighting, and sound design; direction; costumes; playbill design; and advertising. Each student actor experiences the joy of theater while being part of a committed ensemble.

Electronic Music Production

Electronic Music Production is an exciting 8th-grade course where students explore how technology shapes the music we hear every day. Using Apple’s Logic software, they’ll learn the basics of digital audio production—creating musical sketches, experimenting with sampling, and layering sounds to bring their ideas to life. Throughout the class, students discover how music is produced for different contexts such as advertisements, animated videos, and podcasts. By the end of the course, each student will record and produce their own original piece tailored to a chosen context, gaining hands-on experience as both a composer and a producer.

Tech, Innovation, & Design

In Technology, Innovation & Design, students work collaboratively to identify an area of campus life they'd like to improve or change and then design and build a project to address that need. This year, the class selected the ambitious challenge of creating a fully functional vending machine for the 8th Grade Commons. Through this project, students move through the complete product development cycle—applying design thinking, engineering principles, and programming skills while collaborating with various school departments and developing a formal proposal for administration. The course emphasizes collaboration, engagement, computational thinking, and core engineering design practices such as problem decomposition, systems thinking, and solution evaluation.

The Roots of Blues, Pop, Rock, and Beyond!

The Eighth-grade music elective, titled Roots of Blues, Pop, Rock, and Beyond, is a hands-on class for students to trace the roots of popular American music through listening, analysis, and instrument playing. Class activities highlight chord progression playing, how to play various instruments, song forms, and discussions of iconic artists who paved the way for younger generations of pop and hip-hop musicians. The class performs at community events and makes an entertaining contribution to the Peck community by sharing videos titled "Name That Tune."

Woodworking

Each student is encouraged to choose a project to construct that challenges their capabilities. Sketches are first submitted for approval, then a scale drawing and a plan of procedures are made to serve as guides for manufacturing. Eighth graders review general shop rules as well as power tool safety and proper operation. More complex power equipment—such as the sliding compound miter saw, lathe, table saw, and laser cutter—can be used to help create a baseball bat, bowl, jewelry box, cutting board, bookshelf, chessboard, photo frame, storage chest, table, or other project.

Special Programming



GRADE 5-8 Themes

The Themes program weaves together four essential learning strands – Health and Wellness, Digital Citizenship, Ethics, and Building Belonging. Our age-appropriate programming carves out specific time for the teaching of key life skills, including civil discourse, physical and emotional wellness, conflict mediation, and grade-level executive functioning skills like time management, device management, and self-advocacy. Themes dovetails neatly with Peck’s mission and the Upper School Advisory program by providing students the opportunity to practice and refine the skills necessary to live our InDeCoRe Values. Each strand presents an opportunity for students to engage in meaningful activities and conversations about learning and growth as they begin to develop a greater sense of who they are and why they think the way they think. There is a constant emphasis on character concurrent with what is happening across the campus in class, in Advisory, and in the hallways. Knowing these are skills that can constantly be improved and refined, students rotate through each of the four learning strands every year. Taught by dedicated teaching teams, each strand is structured to build upon previous knowledge while also maintaining the flexibility necessary to help students meet the moment.

We know that intellect and character can work together to produce powerfully positive behavior, and Themes serve as another way for the students to begin to take strong and intentional steps toward becoming the thoughtful leaders they hope to be. We believe skills - from study skills to mindfulness – need to be taught for students to fully embrace their potential.

GRADE 5 & 6 Literacy Lab

Literacy Lab is a time when students engage in interactive lessons designed to support, practice, and extend their literacy skills. While the lessons align with the grade-level English curriculum, they differ in structure and focus.

GRADE 5 & 6 Math Lab

Math Lab supports the learning that occurs within the grade-level math classroom. Differing in structure and focus, the Math Lab classes provide a variety of ways to engage and build computational and mathematical reasoning skills. This block of time serves as valuable reinforcement and enrichment for students.

GRADE 7 Personal Narrative

The purpose of this course is for students to build on the sixth-grade public speaking experience and continue our storytelling journey. Throughout the semester, students will move through the writing process – brainstorming, outlining, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing. However, unlike the English 7 class, which focuses on literary analysis and five-paragraph writing, this class aims to teach students how to write personal narratives, or stories of their lives.

GRADE 8 Capstone Lab

Capstone Lab provides eighth-grade students an opportunity to develop and pursue a project of their own choosing and, in so doing, to cultivate skills of autonomy, initiative, and creative problem-solving. Students engage in a number of introductory exercises, including an in-depth exploration of the Design Thinking Process, as well as brainstorming and critique sessions that help students refine their ideas. Projects are centered around the essential questions: *What problem do I want to work to solve? What question do I want to work to answer?* Once projects are established, class time shifts to accommodate students' individual pursuits. Students set their own deadlines, manage their daily tasks and homework, and arrange any necessary logistics. Final presentations of the projects are scheduled throughout the month of May.

GRADE 5-8 Instrumental Music

The Instrumental Music program is an optional Upper School program that gives students the opportunity to learn a woodwind, brass, percussion, or string instrument. The program runs for the full school year, culminating in various performance opportunities. Students are placed into small lesson groups that meet before school or during Academic Support hours, as well as being placed into their instrument's large ensemble: Concert Band or Orchestra. Students will learn the fundamental skills of how to play their instrument, as well as music literacy skills on how to read sheet music.