



THADEN SCHOOL

Intensives Course Offerings

Middle School
Academic Year 2025-26

Contents

Letter From the Head of School	3
Mission and Guiding Principles	4
Overview	5
Courses for Grades 5-7	6
Art and the Natural World	6
Casting Traditions	6
Disc Golf	6
da Vinci's World	7
Introduction to Coding	7
Junk Journals: The Soundtrack to Your Story	7
The Middle School Millennial	7
Northwest Arkansas History on Two Wheels	8
Science with Everyday Things	8
Skin Deep: The Science of Dermatology	8
Thaden TEDx	9
Unlocking Bridge	9
Grade 8 Capstone: A Civil Rights Tour of the South	10

Letter From the Head of School

Thaden Families,

Our faculty members have worked creatively and collaboratively to prepare a compelling set of Intensive course offerings for our Middle School students in May 2026. As you will see, our academic program's pathways are incredibly robust, providing interesting, engaging, and challenging opportunities for students to pursue interests and develop passions across all disciplines.

These pathways, varied as they are, lead to a common goal: independence. Whether students are reading "Macbeth," exploring the culinary and cultural roots of the American South, testing the laws of physics, or writing and staging a one-act play, they are learning to think, speak, and act for themselves. At its core, a Thaden education is designed to cultivate the critical thinking skills our students need to become discerning consumers of information and citizens with courage in their convictions, built on free inquiry and civil debate.

Of course, the strength of a Thaden education ultimately resides in the quality of the faculty members who ignite in our students a passion for discovery and lifelong learning. Our students thrive under the guidance of exceptional educators recruited from across the United States and many parts of the world.

Thaden is creating the next generation of leaders to be dynamic, innovative problem solvers through a challenging educational experience grounded in critical thinking, collaboration, and real-world application.

Michael Maloy
Head of School

Mission and Guiding Principles

Our mission is to provide a balanced and challenging education that ignites in our students a passion for discovery and learning, prepares them to succeed in college, and inspires them to lead lives of integrity, purpose, and responsible global citizenship.

In pursuing our mission, we are guided by these principles:

- The diversity of a school is essential to the quality of education that it provides.
- In a small school, students are better able to form close relationships with teachers that will give them a strong sense of belonging, self-confidence, and responsibility.
- There is an art in masterful teaching, which requires resources, mentorship, and recognition.
- A well-balanced curriculum empowers students:
 - To think ethically, critically, and creatively about global issues and their local manifestations;
 - To see connections among the humanities, sciences, and mathematics as integrative disciplines in the search for knowledge, meaning, and beauty;
 - To build coherent, compelling, and innovative arguments;
 - To establish their voice in the world by writing and speaking well and expressing themselves creatively;
 - To work independently and collaboratively.
- Activities outside of the classroom (such as acting in a play, competing on a team, or working on a sustainability project) give students essential opportunities to develop as leaders, volunteers, and contributors to the life and spirit of the greater community.
- A school must create a safe and healthy environment where students have time and space for reflection, freedom to make important decisions, and opportunities to learn from mistakes.
- The harmony of a school community depends on a shared commitment to honesty, compassion, and fair play.

Overview

Intensives are a two-week period of study in which students eschew their regular weekly schedule to participate in educational experiences that are not always easily facilitated during our typical 60- and 90-minute class periods. Intensives also allow for the development of creative interdisciplinary course offerings that are complementary to but distinct from Thaden's core curriculum.

Intensives leverage the special interests and expertise of our nationally recruited faculty by giving them considerable discretion in the design of their courses. The Intensive course offerings represent our faculty's passion, creativity, and interdisciplinarity. Similarly, throughout Intensives faculty use a wide range of pedagogical methods – from seminar-style discussions to hands-on activities – that collectively enhance students' versatility as problem solvers who can work creatively and collaboratively in a rapidly changing world.

All students in Grades 5-7 are required to enroll in two Intensive courses. Each course meets three hours per day for two weeks and carries $\frac{1}{3}$ credit, awarded on a Pass/No Credit basis.

Students in Grade 8 participate in the Grade 8 Capstone: A Civil Rights Tour of the South. This course meets for two weeks. In addition to on-campus learning, it also features a five-day trip to civil rights landmarks in Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi. The Civil Rights Tour of the South carries $\frac{2}{3}$ credit, awarded on a Pass/No Credit basis.

Courses for Grades 5-7

All students in Grades 5-7 will enroll in two of the following courses.

Each course meets three hours per day for two weeks.

Art and the Natural World

Step outside the classroom and into nature in this Intensive that blends observation, creativity, and exploration. Students sketch in the campus gardens, visit nearby nature sites, and travel to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art for inspiration. Students strengthen their drawing and painting skills to create botanical studies and en plein air artworks using watercolor, colored pencil, and ink. Discover how artists across history have been inspired by the natural world. This Intensive culminates in a celebration of learning as students share their knowledge of materials, write an artist statement, and present their finished works in an exhibition for the Thaden community.

Casting Traditions

Calling all anglers! This Intensive is designed for beginning and experienced fishing enthusiasts alike. Treating Northwest Arkansas as its anchor, the course combines modern angling techniques with indigenous cultural traditions, providing students with a well-rounded introduction to the history, art, and real-life applications of fishing. Students learn the essentials of gear setup, casting, and trip planning, with dedicated sessions on both basic and fly fishing techniques. Students also engage with Native American fishing practices and think critically about sustainability and stewardship rooted in regional geography and history. Beyond catching fish, students develop practical skills in preparing and cooking their catch. With guided instruction and outings on local waterways, this Intensive offers a chance to build confidence, connect with nature, and learn through adventure!

Disc Golf

Let's play disc golf! This Intensive invites students to jump into this rapidly-growing sport, growing both individual and collective skills and learning how public recreation impacts communities. Learn what makes a spinning disc travel long distances, what influences its flight path, and what disc makers think about when they design and manufacture different types of discs. This course assesses and discusses how disc golf courses fit into different locations and landscapes, and how, as a free public good, they can open up recreational opportunities for people of all fitness and skill levels. Gain an understanding of how disc golf etiquette – concepts such as “right-of-way” and “casual relief” – make us better team members and citizens.

da Vinci's World

Step into the mind of Leonardo da Vinci – artist, inventor, scientist, and observer of the world. In this Intensive, students explore the life and legacy of one of history's greatest polymaths, cultivating their own curiosity while investigating the connections between art and science. Through a hands-on approach, students examine da Vinci's famous notebooks, watch excerpts from Ken Burns' "Leonardo da Vinci" documentary series, and analyze da Vinci's iconic works of art and lesser-known inventions. Along the way, students develop their own powers of observation, keep visual journals, and engage in creative experiments inspired by da Vinci's wide-ranging interests – from anatomy and flight to painting and engineering.

Introduction to Coding

In this Intensive, students learn the fundamentals of Python programming through the Carnegie Mellon University Computer Science Academy Exploring Programming curriculum, which introduces coding concepts using art, animation, and interactive simulations. Students create their own digital art, animations, and interactive projects, bringing their unique creative ideas to life through code. The course emphasizes creativity, exploration, and problem-solving while building a strong foundation in computational thinking.

This course also serves as a direct pathway into the Upper School Programming curriculum, preparing students for more advanced topics in computer science, software development, and algorithmic thinking. By the end of the course, students will not only understand the basics of Python but will also have a collection of creative coding projects that showcase their imagination and technical skills.

Junk Journals: The Soundtrack to Your Story

Everyone has a story worth telling, and in this Intensive, students discover inventive ways to capture their own through the art of junk journaling – part scrapbook, part sketchbook, part diary, and entirely personal. Drawing inspiration from music, sports, food, travel, and nature, students explore how sound and memory intertwine while experimenting with collage, drawing, and found objects to create unique visual narratives. Readings from autobiographies and journals of notable figures spark reflection, while off-campus visits to places like the Scott Family Amazeum, Hillfolk craft store, and Two Friends Books provide fresh inspiration. At the conclusion of this Intensive, each student will have crafted a one-of-a-kind journal – a tangible soundtrack of their life and imagination.

The Middle School Millennial

Step into the shoes of a middle school millennial! In this Intensive, you'll time-travel back to the early 2000s to explore the cultural, technological, and societal shifts that shaped a generation. Through the lens of Y2K world events and millennial youth culture, you'll ask essential questions

such as: How do world events shape identity? What role does technology play in connecting – or dividing – us? Along the way, you’ll build empathy and curiosity through first-person storytelling in a “human library,” sharpen your skills in media literacy, interviewing, curation, and presentation, and work hands-on with retro tech, fashion, and music. Learning will extend beyond the classroom as you gather stories, artifacts, and perspectives from the community. The Intensive culminates in a student-designed “Millennial Museum,” an interactive exhibit featuring artifacts, oral histories, and multimedia displays that bring the early 2000s to life.

Northwest Arkansas History on Two Wheels

Explore the rich history of Northwest Arkansas through the lens of a unique mode of transportation: the bicycle. This Intensive combines outdoor activity with engaging historical learning experiences. Visit local historical and cultural sites such as Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, The Walmart Museum, The Peel Museum & Botanical Garden, and the Museum of Native American History. Deepen your understanding of how our home region has evolved into what it is today and consider the important role cycling plays in our community.

Science with Everyday Things

Discover how the science of the everyday can be just as exciting as what happens in a laboratory! In this hands-on Intensive, students explore chemistry, physics, and biology through experiments that use simple, accessible materials found in grocery and hardware stores. From testing the chemistry of baking soda and vinegar, to building simple machines out of household supplies, to investigating the physics of bubbles and surface tension, students learn to ask scientific questions, make predictions, test ideas, and share their findings.

With an emphasis on curiosity, creativity, and collaboration, each day of this Intensive offers a new challenge – mixing, measuring, building, or testing – and by the end of the course, students see how science is woven into the world around them, from the kitchen counter to the backyard. No lab coats required, just curiosity and a willingness to get messy!

Skin Deep: The Science of Dermatology

Your skin is your body’s largest organ, and it’s way more interesting than you might think! In this hands-on, high-energy Intensive, students explore the science of skin from the inside out. Have you ever wondered why freckles appear, what makes sunscreen work, or how a lotion actually keeps your skin soft? You’ll find out, and test it yourself.

Take a deep dive into the science of skin, zooming in with microscopes to examine its intricate layers and studying the microbes that live on its surface (most of them friendly!). Experiment in the lab creating your own lotions, lip balms, and safe exfoliants, while testing the pH of cleansers and the

SPF strength of sunscreens. Investigate how sunlight, diet, and environment influence skin health and explore the many career paths connected to medical and cosmetic skincare.

Thaden TEDx

Are you ready to take the stage and share your ideas with the world? In this Intensive, students dive into the world of public speaking and discover the secrets behind the captivating TED Talk format. Explore the power of storytelling and the techniques used by the most engaging TED speakers. Students brainstorm, plan, and create their own TED Talks to be recorded and shared with the Thaden community. Through activities and discussions, students uncover what makes a great presentation and how to connect with an audience. Learn to express your thoughts with confidence and creativity!

Unlocking Bridge

Dive into the exciting world of bridge with this fun and interactive Intensive! If you enjoy games like Uno or Spades, you'll love discovering the strategic depth of bridge. Learn how to play this classic card game from scratch, mastering tricks, strategies, and teamwork along the way. With easy-to-follow lessons, hands-on card play, and plenty of opportunities for competition, you'll develop your critical thinking skills while enjoying the intellectual challenge of the game. By the end of the course, you'll be ready to challenge family and classmates to exciting bridge matches. Join us for a fantastic adventure in card play and see why bridge is a game loved by millions!

Grade 8 Capstone

All students in Grade 8 will participate in the Capstone.
The Capstone includes travel by chartered bus and overnight stays.

A Civil Rights Tour of the South

The Grade 8 Capstone Trip offers students the opportunity to learn about the history of the Civil Rights Movement and reflect on its resonances in their own worlds. The course meets for two weeks. In addition to on-campus learning, it features a five-day trip to civil rights landmarks in Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi. The trip includes museum visits, reading and journaling time, and engagement in the cultural life of several hub cities along the [Civil Rights Trail](#) and fits chronologically into the curriculum of American Studies, while also emphasizing interdisciplinarity and the connections between past and present. Explorations of food, music, and visual art complement an overview of the major events and leading figures of the Civil Rights Movement. The goal is for students to return to Bentonville with a new understanding of the quest for racial justice in the US, particularly as manifested in the Civil Rights Movement and the urban South.
