

Oakwood Friends School
Academic Program Description
Middle School

Overview

Our middle school offers a rich and challenging curriculum for students in grades 6 to 8. We offer middle schoolers an academic program that is taught with a variety of learning experiences in each subject area. Athletics, arts, and community service are essential parts of our program. Students progress towards our college preparatory high school program with classes geared for the middle school age. Our overall goal at Oakwood is to educate the student as a whole person for a life of conscience, compassion, and accomplishment. Friends' (Quaker) values and beliefs are woven into all aspects of our school program.

In the middle school years, young people are developing at rapid speed in mind, body, and spirit. We provide a variety of learning experiences so that students can discover what they are interested in and develop skills to pursue these interests. In our classes, we teach not only the content of our subject areas but also organizational, thinking, and study skills, including reading and researching, listening and speaking, writing and illustrating, questioning and reflecting, analyzing

and synthesizing information. Teaching students how to approach the learning of a new or difficult topic is as important to us as teaching the topic itself.

Developing healthy relationships with others is important both for the academic success and the overall wellbeing of middle schoolers. We work to create and sustain a vibrant school community where students can learn and practice good social and leadership skills. Students work closely with teachers who provide guidance for academic and personal growth. Through community service and academic fieldtrips, students begin to learn about the wider world and to develop leadership skills for exploring and contributing to the wider world.

English

Our English curriculum provides students with a wide variety of literature to help them grow as readers, writers, and thinkers. Students read several books or more each year, as well as short stories, memoir pieces, poetry, and works in other genres. Each grade also reads a Shakespearean play. Class discussions and written assignments invite students to look more deeply into each work they read, focusing on theme, setting, character motivation, plot, and composition, and also appreciating the skillful way authors use language to tell a story and express ideas. Students are also encouraged to reflect on the insights and inspiration that good literature gives them for their lives.

Some works that students are reading in sixth grade during the 2008-09 school year include *Crash*, *The Devil's Arithmetic*, and *The Wednesday Wars*. They are

small group basis. The goal of the program is to give students a repertoire of strategies to enhance their learning in the classroom and in independent study time. Whenever possible, strategies are taught and applied while working on the student's content area assignments. Each student's program is individually designed and includes skills in the areas such as reading, writing, note-taking, outlining, researching, test preparation and test taking, time management, and organization. An important goal of the program is to help students develop self-advocacy skills so that they can effectively communicate their needs to their teachers. The Academic Support Center oversees the implementation of each student's accommodations, including extended time on tests, recorded books, and computer use. This is a full-year, ungraded course.

After School Program

Our after school program provides supervised activities for middle school students from 3:30 – 5:00 every day, with no extra charge to parents. During this time, students work on home homework, have a snack and relax with friends, and have art classes. Pottery classes are part of the program this year – students have learned to build clay pieces and have worked on the potter's wheel. Students also play outside, attend upper school sports games, play board games, and have other activities geared for middle schoolers.

announcements of upcoming events. Students also participate in school meetings to discuss issues relating to community life. Students lead middle school meetings and help plan and lead middle school events. Teachers seek ways to give students leadership roles depending on a student's interests, skills, and talents. Students may also ask to take on certain roles. Helping to raise funds by selling bagels and other items and helping to organize community service projects are other ways that students take leadership. Student leadership is an area of our program we are seeking to build.

Advisory

Each student has an advisor and is part of an advisory group, a sort of home base for each student. Teachers serve as advisors, and follow the educational development of students, making sure homework is done and materials are organized, and more importantly, watching over the wellbeing of each of their advisees. Advisory groups discuss school matters and other issues as they arise and do some recreational/community building activities, too. Advisors relay information about students' overall growth and development to parents, serving as the primary school contact for parents.

Academic Support Center

The Academic Support Center offers a Learning Skills Program for middle schoolers. This provides support services for students with documented mild learning differences. Students meet with a learning skills teacher three or four times a week on a one-to-one or a

reading selections from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as an introduction to Shakespeare. Seventh graders are reading *Fever*, *The Outsiders*, selections from *Much Ado About Nothing*. Eighth graders this year are reading *The Wave*, *The Pearl*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Alive and Well in Prague New York*, and *Warriors Don't Cry*. They will also read *Macbeth*. Students in each grade are reading a number of shorter works as well.

Students strengthen their reading skills as they progress through middle school, becoming able to read a greater diversity of genres and texts of increasing complexity. Students also develop their abilities to analyze, discuss, and write about a text. We work to increase student vocabulary and their understanding of metaphor and other forms of figurative language.

Developing proficiency in written English is central to our program. Works of literature become examples that students learn from as they develop their own writing abilities and style. Students write often, and learn to compose writing pieces in a variety of genres. We teach grammar formally, and help students use correct grammatical forms in their own writing. Since the minds and ideas of middle schoolers are growing in complexity, it is important for students to learn the grammar and other language mechanics needed to express themselves well.

History and Geography

The goal of our history and geography program is to help students know the world we live in and understand how it came to be as we find it today. We also want them to have a strong sense of world geography and

the world's people living in many different cultures, each with its own beliefs, practices, and religions. In addition to this information, we want our students to develop the ability to imagine and empathize with people who have lived in other places and times.

Class discussions and written assignments focus on the skills of finding information and learning to assess its sources. Students are also asked to think critically about historical events and to consider how different decisions might have led to different outcomes. We take time to delve into topics in depth. Students learn skills for processing information they learn, including researching, note taking, outlining, test taking, and analytical writing.

In the 2008-2009 school year, students in all grades have focused on learning about the U.S. government and its electoral process in order to understand the 2008 presidential election. The sixth graders are studying geography and have completed projects on different countries, regions, and cultures of the world. Seventh graders are studying periods of U.S. history from the time before European settlement through the Civil War. Eight graders are studying periods of U.S. history from the time following the Civil War to the present. In addition to ongoing class lectures, discussions, and tests, students have completed a number of short research projects and analytical essays.

Mathematics

The goal of our middle school mathematics program is to help students build and strengthen skills, develop conceptual understanding, and gain

period of reflection after someone has spoken or a class has studied a particular topic.

Students are encouraged to be mindful of the Quaker testimonies, beliefs with a spiritual basis that Friends have put into action in the world. While there are many testimonies, we focus on the ones we call "The SPICES" – Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship of the Earth. Testimonies are talked about in the context of decision making within the school community, they may lead us to take on particular community service projects, and they inform our classroom practices. direct community service projects we take on the way these projects are done, and inform curriculum and project choices for our classes.

Our community service projects are done in a spirit of service and with reflection, and are meant to embody Friends testimonies.

Community Life and Student Leadership Opportunities

As members of the school community are important in a Friend School, all students take leadership roles at different times, and in different ways. We take time to build our community and tend it. Fostering friendships and helping students respect one another is a fundamental part of our program.

In addition to meeting with the upper school each morning for Collection, a time when announcements are made and birthdays and accomplishments are celebrated, the middle school meets two or three times a week for further sharing of news and to make

understandings, and learn Quaker forms of decision making. The beliefs, values, and history of other world religions are also explored.

Community Service and Service Learning

In middle school, students learn about social issues and take part in efforts that help both the school and the Poughkeepsie community. We teach about the social issues involved in the students' service, and set aside time to reflect on their experiences. Students have helped out in a local food bank, an animal shelter, a nursery school, and other local organizations. Students also help with projects on campus to help maintain and beautify our middle school buildings and the school grounds. Our whole school sets aside two days a year, what we call Workshare Day in the fall and Earthshare Day in the spring, to work together as a community to care for our school, and to volunteer in local organizations that show care for the people and the environment of the Hudson Valley.

Quaker Life

Students have meeting for worship once a week, a time to sit together and pray, meditate, and/or think quietly together. In the tradition of un-programmed Friends meetings, our meeting for worship is silent. If someone feels led to share a thought for the group, they are welcome to do so. Sometimes questions, visual displays, or stories are used at the beginning of meeting to inspire reflection on a particular topic.

Moments of silence are used in other times of the school day. We use silence to gather ourselves to add a

confidence in a variety of areas. Because students can do more advanced work in math when they have mastered basic skills, we focus on helping students become proficient in all operations using whole numbers and fractions, and positive and negative numbers. Students learn ways to analyze math problems and to select strategies for solving them. Students participate in class demonstrations and projects that allow them to verbalize their math learning, and create individual math projects that allow them to explore math concepts more deeply. With the support of the math teacher and the help of computer technology, students complete projects on fractions, percentages, number theory, and relating mathematical models to equations.

In sixth and seventh grade, students explore a variety of math topics in a class that prepares them for Algebra and Geometry. Our math program emphasizes proficiency in fractions and percentages, and positive and negative numbers so that students will have a good foundation for exploring higher levels of math later. Students also study estimation, measurement, and the basics of solving equations and graphing information. The size of this mixed-grade and mixed-ability class is small, so students receive immediate feedback to correct mistakes and clarify their understanding before moving to the next level of challenge or on to a new topic.

Eighth graders take Pre-Algebra or Algebra I, depending on their level of achievement. Pre-Algebra focuses on variables, and the basics of solving and graphing equations. Algebra I is open to students who have shown proficiency in these areas and who are ready for the high school level class. Eighth graders taking Algebra I are in a mixed class of eighth and ninth graders and receive high school credit when they pass this class.

Science

Our science program combines hands-on, experiential activities with scientific concepts to give students meaningful activities to connect students with the world they live in and to help them begin to explore and understand basic scientific concepts. Mastering the vocabulary of science, being able to discuss scientific concepts, understanding some of the controversies among scientists, and knowing how to ask questions and pursue answers are all key components of our science program.

Students take fieldtrips to places both right around the corner and some distance away to experience first hand aspects of the natural and scientific world. Students maintain a garden on campus and grow plants in their classroom. Demonstrations and experiments occur regularly in the classroom. Students learn to make accurate observations, read scientific writings, take notes, build their test taking skills, and undertake multi-step research projects.

Middle-school students have the opportunity to take part in the school's spring musical and sometimes help with other upper-school theater productions.

Computer Literacy

While young people often make extensive use of the computer, they still benefit greatly from formal instruction in using the keyboard efficiently, doing research, discerning the reliability of information on the web, setting up and using files, and using a variety of browser, email, Word, Excel, and Power Point programs. Students take a computer class for one term each year.

Health

For one term each year, students learn basic facts about the human body and what the body needs to be healthy throughout a lifetime. Nutrition, exercise, and other areas of daily health are studied. The consequences of the unhealthy use of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol are taught. Human sexuality and reproduction are also taught.

Quakerism

For one term each year, students learn about the history, beliefs, and practices of Friends. Classes especially focus on the Quaker *testimonies* of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship of the earth, and on how they can serve as the basis of a peaceful personal and community life. Students learn different ways to center themselves in meeting for worship, use *queries* to explore their own beliefs and

seeing.

The middle school Introduction to Photography class is held in a real photography studio and lab. Children of our digital age have the opportunity to work with traditional photographic equipment to discover the art of photography with tools that allow them to explore mechanical, technical and scientific tools for creating this visual art. Students are involved in all aspects of hands-on projects, using the use of 35mm cameras, processing film, and making black-and-white photographic prints. Artistic composition is emphasized as is the process of critique and the social protocol necessary for enjoying individual creativity in a controlled group environment.

In Studio Art class students explore a variety of two- and three- dimensional mediums to create an appreciation and understanding of art and culture. Students have specific projects designed around the different historical eras in art, allowing them to see and appreciate aesthetic approaches for self-expression and communication.

In middle school music classes, students learn about specific topics in music as well as how to listen to and appreciate music both from Western tradition and from many parts of the world. Students also sing together and create music. Students are encouraged to broaden their understanding of music and to try different forms of musical performance, whether or not they consider themselves musicians.

Theater arts classes are given on an informal basis.

Sixth and seventh graders follow a two-year curriculum in Life Science and Earth Science. This allows students to work as a larger, mixed grade group or as smaller, grade-level groups, depending on the goals for learning.

Life Science explores the world of living organisms. Students learn to use microscopes and study cells and their processes. They also study decomposition, composting, genetics, evolution, and the classification of various organisms and their characteristics and needs. **Earth Science** focuses on oceanography, weather, the history of the earth and geology, and astronomy.

Eighth graders study **Environmental Science**, which focuses on the way that organisms interact with their non-living environment and with each other. The class emphasizes learning about the effect of human activity on the environment, locally, regionally, and globally. As an interdisciplinary course, students are introduced to methods used in the disciplines of biology, geology, and chemistry.

Languages

Middle schoolers study both Spanish and French. Students develop skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They also learn about some of the cultures in which these languages are spoken, including cultural groups in the United States. Language classes are highly interactive. Through dialogues, games, music, film, and cooking projects, students are introduced to spoken French and Spanish and are regularly encouraged to speak. A text book provides the basis for learning written French and Spanish, and regular reading and

writing assignments support the learning of vocabulary and grammar.

Sixth and seventh graders have a half year of French and a half year of Spanish, which gives them familiarity with both languages and the cultures of the speakers of these languages. Eighth graders choose to take either Spanish I or French I, a high school level class. They receive high school credit for this class when they pass it with a grade of C or above.

Physical Education and Athletics

Physical education is an important part of a student's educational experience at Oakwood. Our primary goal is to help students develop a healthy approach to exercise and fitness. The program consists of learning and developing a variety of motor skills, and then helping students use them in a variety of activities, games, and sports. Practicing good sportsmanship, teamwork, communication, cooperation, healthy competition, and mutual respect are also important parts of our program. During sports, students are introduced to the sport education model; in addition to learning each sport, students are taught and given the chance to practice the skills needed to be a coach, warm-up leader, captain, score keeper, reporter, and official. Students also learn the rules, strategies, and skills to play particular sports, including soccer, basketball, volleyball, and tennis. In addition, students learn about fitness and take part in cooperative games and teamwork activities. Students learn activities they can do throughout their lifetime.

The middle school has two interscholastic sports teams, soccer and basketball, in which we play other schools in the Hudson Valley and New York/Connecticut area. Middle schoolers have the opportunity to try out for some upper school sports teams in the spring.

Being physically active is encouraged through the school day. Recreational equipment is available during our two recesses and during the after school program.

Middle School Art Classes

Middle school art classes provide students with a creative environment to promote self-expression through critical thinking and problem solving. Class projects introduce students to a wide variety of resources, materials, and techniques to establish skills that enhance and enrich the creative process. Students are encouraged to approach art from a can-do perspective. For example, the ability to write the alphabet is, in fact, all the artistic skill needed to be able to draw using the art of seeing and of appreciating spatial relationships.

Every year, students have one-term classes each in photography, studio arts, and music. Students explore art and culture using various materials and genres, learning the skills to produce specific kinds of artistic work. Each term, students create several pieces of art, some of which are displayed in gallery locations on campus.

Visual art classes focus on projects to allow students to explore various cultural and artistic sensibilities and to develop an aesthetic appreciation through the art of