

# ***Seventh and Eighth Grade Curriculum Guide 2007-2008***

## **7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Humanities: *American History and Literature: Early United States History (1500-1870)***

### **English**

This year's English course focuses on the study of early American literature, from pre-colonial to post Civil War, and key components of the writing process. The literature students read in class underscores the themes of the changing character and diversity of the American experience with an emphasis on freedom and pivotal moments in American history. Additionally, students work to improve writing and editing skills in order to prepare for high school. Students are assessed on a variety of assignments, including creative writing, essay writing, group and individual projects, and tests. Guiding questions include: How can the study of American literature inform our understanding of the United States historically and in the present? What constitutes American culture and who decides? How do time period and context influence people's actions and attitudes? How does culture influence who we are as individuals and members of a community? Each of these questions will be examined in class through discussion, project-based assignments, oral and written presentations and a variety of collaborative and individual tasks.

### **Writing**

It is essential for middle school students to gain confidence in their skills as writers and speakers. In this course, students journal and write poetry, memoir, and critical essay. Students review more difficult components of grammar with the goal of incorporating concepts into their own writing and editing processes. Specifically, students begin refining their essay writing skills with 1-paragraph essays, proceeding to 3 and 5-paragraph works. Students write effective and convincing essays that include a strong thesis, an argument supported with evidence, and a conclusion that displays insight into a topic of study. Students have the opportunity to write both creative and expository pieces with a priority placed on enhancing students' abilities to express ideas and complete a comprehensive written analysis. Ultimately, writing is both an individual and collaborative process, and time is spent in class working with peers as well as individually revising written work.

### **Literature**

Students read and analyze some of the salient works of early American literature. Through this study, they identify major themes in pre-colonial to post Civil War American literature and read both critically and for enjoyment. The American literature selected for the year corresponds with the historical periods examined in social studies in order for students to gain greater understanding of the culture and life experiences of the time period. Emphasis is also placed on connecting themes from the literature to students' own life experiences and current global issues. Major works read in class may include literature by Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, Stephen Crane,

Lois Lowry, Frederick Douglas, and Emily Dickinson. Additional authors, poems, short stories and plays are also included in the course. In addition to assigned work, students are expected to spend time each week reading a book of their own choice. Once a trimester, students will present on a book agreed upon by both student and teacher.

### **Grammar and Spelling**

An understanding of grammar is essential in order for students to improve their skills as they become more advanced writers and communicators. Lessons focus on reviewing previous grammar concepts and introducing complex grammar models. In particular, students review: parts of speech, phrases (adjective and adverb phrases, prepositional phrases), misplaced and dangling modifiers, clauses, subject/verb agreement, complements, figures of speech, active/passive voice, use of comma and semicolon, capitalization, and types of sentences. Spelling concepts and rules are reviewed. Through study of both spelling and grammar, students develop skills as editors of their own writing and their peers' in order to immediately utilize these concepts. The primary text for spelling is *Megawords 7*.

### **Vocabulary**

Studying vocabulary helps students develop their skills as readers, writers, and speakers. Vocabulary development in the middle school focuses specifically on Latin roots and contextual usage. Students develop skills to first learn new vocabulary words, recognize them in context and finally use them in their own speaking and writing. *Vocabulary from Classical Roots B* is the text used for vocabulary lessons.

### **History**

The focus of this year is early American history. Using *The American Nation* and primary sources as a framework, the class will explore early American civilization through the Civil War. Students will study the social, economic, and political history as well as the events that have shaped the country we live in today. The class will examine how interpretations and meanings of freedom, equality, slavery, and democracy have developed over time. Guiding questions include: How can the study of American history inform our understanding of our country today? How is American history to be understood in a global context? How have geography, environment and expansion shaped life and events in this country? What are our responsibilities as citizens of the United States?

Through class discussion, response questions, and careful study of primary documents, students will learn to construct and articulate strong and informed arguments with solid supporting evidence. Students will develop close reading skills by learning to identify key and supporting themes and arguments, and then summarizing, critiquing and elaborating on these arguments in class. Mini-research projects and presentations allow students the opportunity to gather, organize, and synthesize information. The course is writing intensive. Along with reading every night, students respond to questions and formulate their own questions for discussion. Through practice essays, students learn to write clearly and concisely utilizing historical evidence to support their arguments and convey meaning. By examining primary documents contextually and participating in

such activities as mock trials, debates, and writing editorials for period newspapers, students practice adopting different perspectives in order to increase their understanding of history and get a window into the thoughts and opinions of the past.

### **7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics**

The focus of the seventh and eighth grade mathematics courses is to develop a mastery of algebra, the basic language of science and the foundation of higher mathematics. Through developing problem-solving abilities and demonstrating skills in hands-on, applied math projects, students pass through the gateway to higher mathematics.

Seventh grade students begin their exploration of higher mathematics with a study of mathematical ways of thinking, number sequences, functions, symmetry, and mathematical curves. The primary text for this unit is *Mathematics, A Human Endeavor, 3rd ed.*, by Harold Jacobs. Mid-year, students begin to formalize their study of algebra as they begin work in *Algebra I: Expressions, Equations and Applications*, by Paul Foerster. Students explore the use of algebraic expressions and equations; master operations with signed numbers; explore polynomials and factoring; and briefly study quadratic equations. By year's end, each seventh grader is comfortable assigning and substituting variables; manipulating equations to express a desired variable; solving equations containing a single variable; and graphing linear and parabolic functions.

Students in eighth grade continue work in *Algebra I: Expressions, Equations and Applications*. They learn the utility of the variable; the use of formulae; equations with two unknowns; the complexities of rational and radical algebra; inequalities; and advanced functions and their graphs. For much of the year, students focus on solving word problems and applying algebra as a tool for prediction and modeling. At the completion of this course, eighth grade students have a strong foundation in algebra that prepares them for the higher mathematics courses offered in high school.

In addition to mastering the mechanics of algebra, each student is encouraged to further develop his/her own creative problem solving abilities. This objective is accomplished through a variety of challenging problems calling on varied techniques to reach solutions. Students study problem solving techniques such as guess and check, finding a pattern, and matrix logic, as presented in the text *Crossing the River With Dogs* by Ken Johnson. Throughout, each student is encouraged to think and reason while drawing on all of his/her previous mathematics study.

Hands-on applied math/science projects such as building cranes and catapults or calculating stream velocities and discharge give students the opportunity to practice and develop skills such as estimation, technical drawing, the use of functions and equations to predict outcomes, data analysis and statistics. Students prepare for standardized tests by practicing test-taking strategies, working on computational speed in daily warm-ups and completing spiral review of skills and material from previous years. Students are challenged by this demanding yet rewarding course as they explore the power and utility of algebra.

### **7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Science: Physical Science**

The physical science course, a combination of chemistry and physics, introduces 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> grade students to the basics of laboratory science. In this course, students regularly employ the scientific method to understand questions and uncover the theories, principles and laws that govern the physical world.

Students begin the year exploring mass, volume, density, force, motion and energy. In this unit they build and analyze model structures such as cranes, bridges and towers and study projectile motion while building catapults. Then the class examines matter's building blocks, states, and properties as they explore the properties of solids, liquids and gasses. This unit leads into a study of the periodic table and an introduction to chemistry. Students learn basic lab safety as they perform experiments such as electroplating, electrolysis, and learn the proper techniques of glass bending to make basic laboratory apparatus. Students complete individual research projects on fuel cells, alternative energies and the prospect of hydrogen power. To finish the year, the class studies forensic science. In this unit, students combine their knowledge of physics, chemistry and biology as they learn to analyze fingerprints, hair samples, and hand writing samples. Students learn to blood-type and examine the role of DNA as evidence. In a mystery powder unit, students use various lab tests to determine the composition of various unknown powders. Finally, the class combines reasoning and laboratory skills to solve a mock crime.

Formal documentation of experiments and findings is an essential skill for success in the advanced science classes taught in high school. Throughout the year, students are expected to write ever-increasingly detailed lab reports for experiments and projects. Students learn to analyze error both quantitatively and qualitatively. Throughout the course, students regularly call on their developing algebra skills as they work with formulas, balance chemical equations and graph experimental results. By the end of the course, students can clearly explain the laws governing the physical realm, document their work in detailed lab reports, and design and carryout safe and informative laboratory projects and experiments.

### **7<sup>th</sup> Grade Spanish**

This group is at an intense stage of language learning. They have built up a substantial vocabulary, investigated sentence structure and practiced verb conjugation. Students now review what they have learned and explore more verbs, verb conjugations, and complex sentences. Spanish is spoken in the classroom for instructional purposes and used by students during performance-based projects and skits. Service projects and interaction with the Hispanic community provide experiences to bolster classroom learning.

The curriculum provides a foundation in the 5 C's of the National Standards for foreign language instruction:

- Communication in the target language

- Connections with other disciplines
- Comparisons that develop insight into the nature of language and culture
- Cultural experiences
- Communities – students learn how to communicate in a multilingual community

Students receive formal language training and explore other cultures and countries through the use of multi-media. Their understanding is at the stage where they can grasp the ideas being portrayed by native speakers, and they are starting to read simple passages in Spanish. This group uses the *¡Exprésate! Level 1* textbook by Holt as well as the on-line textbook to complete homework assignments. The Holt program is unique because it integrates on-line learning and has native speakers introducing new concepts and vocabulary for each chapter.

### **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Spanish**

At this level students are very familiar with the sounds of the Spanish language. They have done extensive cultural explorations and have a working understanding of the spoken and written language. They are able to have conversations in Spanish on several subjects and can write short essays. Classes reinforce what they have already learned in order to build confidence. Spanish is used more often for communication, and students round out this year of Spanish with a solid understanding of the present tense, the simple future, and informal and formal commands.

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Students at this level receive formal language training and explore other cultures and countries through the use of multi-media. Their level of understanding is such that they can pick out meanings in conversations with native speakers, work through a news article and understand the message of the article with some help from a dictionary. This group finishes the *¡Exprésate! Level 1* textbook and reads articles from the Spanish section of the *Daily Planet*, 'Communicandonos.'

### **7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Visual Art**

Art is a process that requires the combination of learned technical skills and the ability to think creatively and conceptually. Students have the opportunity to deepen their particular artistic interests by exploring a variety of disciplines. With a variety of artistic media that matches their interests and skills, students can find an avenue that individually suits their emotional and technical level of meaningful communication.

Visual art is a vital element in the development of the academic and creative mind at the middle school level. Through the actions of daily rituals, artistic "missions" (instead of

“assignments”) and sketchbook exercises, the program is focused on the process of making art rather than the final product. Students will participate in formal and informal critiques of their work in the interest of understanding ‘how’ and ‘why’ individuals work in specific ways, not to compare and see who is the “best”. Discussion will facilitate the formulation of personal preference and opinion in relation to appreciation and historical study, as well as allowing for the development of an “art dialect”.

The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade artists begin their year with observational drawings of the world immediately around them here at school and on experiential trips. Building on previous experience, daily rituals and constant observation, students develop their technical skills through a variety of media. They also increase their knowledge of techniques, two and three dimensional work, artistic style, and art history through drawing, painting, printmaking, clay formation and photography. Emphasis is placed on design elements, art principles, observational skills, creative problem solving, and original thought. Art history, criticism, and aesthetics are integral parts of each lesson. Sketchbook assignments in and out of class provide technical practice, idea generation and preparation for class projects/missions.

### **7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Music**

Taking advantage of the Rock and Roll Academy studio space, the students have the chance to play all the instruments and carve out their own creative space. A “learn by doing” approach encourages students to share their knowledge with each other, completing the essential loop of true understanding. We continue our cultural and historical approach to learning American music, coming to recognize major contributors and significant stylistic periods. We then bring this understanding, feel and technique for the music into performance and feel the power and creative joy of making and sharing this music. Students commonly perform various musical selections on a variety of instruments gaining invaluable musical experience as well as experiencing the teamwork required to succeed in a performance ensemble.

### **7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Physical Education**

The goal of the seventh and eighth grade physical education program is to provide students with physically enhancing and rewarding experiences outdoors that contribute to a lifetime of healthy and active endeavors. Students focus on building general fitness and coordination to improve athleticism. Sound work ethic and sportsmanship is expected and graded. Seventh and eighth graders play sports such as soccer, ultimate frisbee/frisbee golf, dodgeball, and track with a shift in emphasis to the physical training aspects of becoming successful athletes. Students use the skills and concepts of heart rate monitoring, student-led yoga and stretching, breathing, warm-up and cool-down and endurance to encourage the synthesis of mind and body. Students train for winter sports through agility and strength exercises. Classes take place on the Lawson Hill field throughout the school year and in classrooms when weather dictates. Like all disciplines at the Telluride Mountain School, students are expected to uphold the core values of responsibility, respect, integrity, and love of learning.

