

# JUNIOR HIGH CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

## Grades 6, 7, 8

### OVERVIEW

The school has organized its educational programs to be consistent with its Catholic mission and philosophy, recognizing that all students are unique individuals, created in the image and likeness of God.

The Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten programs promote learning in a developmentally appropriate manner. In Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 2, children are seen as learners, thinkers and investigators. They are encouraged to interact with the world through a variety of activities.

The Grade 3-5 program is designed to encourage students to actualize their potential as independent, self-motivated and well-rounded students. Creative projects allow students to express themselves through a variety of media.

The Middle School years are a particularly important time for developing personal responsibility, decision-making and higher order thinking skills. The curriculum emphasizes the importance of planning for long-term assignments and projects.

### RELIGION

In Catholic schools, no matter the subject, teachers have the opportunity to catechize by infusing the message of the Gospel throughout all aspects of the educational process. Whether teaching the sciences, history, art, or physical education, each subject area provides a venue for opening the eyes of faith. Catholic teachers have a unique role as catechists because they have the privilege of working with students throughout the week and over many years of education. They have the opportunity to “teach as Jesus did” in a setting that creates the learning community within the context of faith.

The National Directory for Catechesis further states the following about catechesis in the Catholic schools:

***“The Catholic school affords a particularly favorable setting for catechesis with its daily opportunity for proclaiming and living the Gospel message; for learning and appreciating the teachings of our Church; for acquiring a deep understanding, reverence, and love of the Liturgy; for building community; for prayer; for proper formation of conscience; for development of virtue; and for participating in Christian service. In addition, Catholic schools strive to relate all the sciences to salvation and sanctification. Students are shown how Jesus illumines all of life – science, mathematics, history, business, biology, and so forth. For these reasons, whenever possible, parents should send their children to a Catholic school.” (NDC no.9d)***

Religion at Presentation of Mary Academy is approached as a way of life rather than a subject to be taught. All students at PMA are required to take Religion classes taught by a classroom teacher or a religion teacher beginning in pre-k through grade 8. Religion classes examine the stories of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and the life and teachings of Jesus as well as Christian morality, following the traditions of the Catholic faith through the development, study and lived experiences of the sacramental programs. Through religion classes, students study the ways personal and community values develop and what it means to be individuals of faith and integrity.

### FOR STUDENTS OF OTHER FAITH DENOMINATIONS:

The Religious Studies curriculum encourages each student’s spiritual growth while providing a foundation of Biblical and religious literacy. Built on a Christian foundation, religious education classes provide a welcoming and safe environment for students of all religious backgrounds to learn and grow. Through intentional incorporation of the core values and themes from our Christian traditions, classes foster a loving environment for students to listen to each other’s beliefs, practices and questions.

#### ***Presentation of Mary Academy students excel at***

- connecting the core values to lessons in the Scriptures;
- actively and respectfully participating in worship services;
- respecting the diversity of religious faith and practice in the world and within the Christian tradition;
- connecting lessons from scripture to everyday decision-making;

- actively listening to the ideas, beliefs, and questions of their peers;
- engaging with Bible stories through skits, songs, art, sign language, and class discussion;
- putting faith into action through outreach programs, such as Soup Kitchen, and collections for natural disasters;
- participating in Lenten projects, and faith based multi-media competitions.

As much as possible, all students and staff participate in monthly liturgies, a time to nurture the community's spiritual life through the Eucharist. The students serve in leadership roles at liturgies as greeters, readers and acolytes. The entire school community gathers for special prayer services throughout the school year that highlight the liturgical cycle.

## **ENGLISH/LITERATURE**

The Presentation of Mary Academy English Department strives to cultivate a love of literature and to develop the skills necessary for students to read closely, think critically, and write clearly. We also intend the work done in our classes to be meaningful and to help students to define themselves and their world. This balance between skills and authenticity is present throughout our program.

Our students are introduced to a broad range of literature, including classic American and British texts, as well as more recent and global works. In each grade, students tackle different prose styles, explore new ideas, evaluate characters' choices, and link literature to their own experiences. In the younger grades, there is a focus on working with broader themes and developing independent readers; in later grades, there is a spotlight on understanding increasingly complex language. These classes allow for immersions into diverse perspectives, cultures, and literary styles.

## **WRITING**

All grades practice the writing skills necessary to respond intelligently to literature and to ideas. We challenge our students to care about their writing and to strive for originality and substance in their papers, and we teach stylistic and editing techniques to help students convey their thinking more powerfully. Every English class includes opportunities to write creatively and personally. Students might emulate the style, tone, and perspective of a particular author. The students also frequently develop their own short stories, poems, memoir pieces, and personal and persuasive essays.

No matter the grade level or the assignment, students work to understand their own patterns of error, to improve the clarity of their sentences and ideas, and to support their ideas with concrete details. Students write often and are given frequent opportunities to revise. Sentence skills, developed in earlier grades are expected to be incorporated into their personal writings.

### **Grade 6**

Sixth graders are encouraged to examine their efforts critically and to work independently. They strive to improve their oral and written skills and to further develop their vocabulary. Through the literature curriculum, students explore the genres of poetry, drama, novels, short stories, non-fiction, and mythology. A deeper commitment is made to further expand student knowledge and understanding of the universal literary elements. Students are given reading assignments for homework with follow-up work that includes class discussions, quizzes, creative writing assignments, and book reviews. For their independent reading, students select from a reading list or choose literature that is approved by the teacher. Students continue to read aloud in class to gain fluency, expressiveness, and clarity of speech. Students improve their writing skills through a continuous process of drafting, revising, editing, and finalizing, while conferring with peers or the teacher as needed. Grammar, spelling, sentence structure, capitalization, and punctuation are emphasized. Students write to achieve desired stylistic and narrative effects.

### **Grade 7**

Seventh Grade is an exciting beginning to our English program. Seventh graders read, write about, and emulate multiple genres of literature, generally focused on themes of morality, tolerance, friendship, and freedom. Students develop the thinking and participatory skills necessary to become more reflective and organized writers.

In addition to short stories, plays, excerpts from novels, and poetry, recent Grade 7 books have included *Woods Runner*, *Fever: 1793*, *Johnny Tremain*, and *The Last Treasure*. Genres include folktales and myths, historical fiction, and biographies. Students also at times read independently and in workshops, and teachers continually make suggestions to match each student's reading ability and interest. Some recent choices have included: Agatha Christie mysteries, the *Hunger Games* trilogy, and the *Percy Jackson* series. Authors include Avi, Gary Paulsen, Laurie Halse Anderson, Shakespeare, O. Henry, Ann Rinaldi, and Mike Lupica.

### **Grade 8**

Eighth graders continue their exploration of literary genres and writing styles, now learning how to approach more complex fiction and drama (including Shakespeare). Students practice responding to the reading critically and creatively, and they take part in acting and conceptual projects that help bring the literature to life.

In recent years, in addition to short stories, plays, excerpts from novels, and poetry, the literature has included: *The Red Badge of Courage*, *A Christmas Carol*, a Holocaust biography, *Flowers for Algernon*, *Helen Keller: The Story of My Life*, and *The Diary of Anne Frank* (in play form). Authors include Lois Lowery, Agatha Christie, O. Henry, and Edgar Allan Poe. Again, students are at times asked to read independently during the year.

## **SOCIAL STUDIES – HISTORY**

### **Grade 6**

A thorough study of the ancient civilizations of early humans, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome provides the students with the opportunity to explore the similarities and differences of the ancient world with contemporary society. Geography skills are developed through examination of the five themes of geography, geographic terms, exploration of the continents, and participation in the annual National Geographic Bee. Students follow the process of developing, researching, and preparing long-term projects. In addition, they make oral presentations both individually and in groups.

### **Grade 7: U.S. History, European settlement – mid 1800's**

A tightly focused thematic survey of U.S. History, from the European settlement of North America to the mid 1800's, is the focus of the seventh grade curriculum. Students see the rise of the United States and the Atlantic world and look at some of the challenges faced by the young nation. The course also embodies a unit on civics to help orient students in contemporary political processes and issues. The course will focus on helping students to develop the vocabulary and conceptual skills for talking about and comparing governments, on developing strong organization and note taking skills, and on producing polished written assignments and projects.

### **Grade 8: U.S. History, Civil War - present**

A tightly focused thematic survey of U.S. History, from the time of the Civil War until the present, is the focus of the eighth grade curriculum. Students see the rise of the United States and the Atlantic world and look at some of the challenges to the world position of the U.S. in the 21st century. The course covers the development of U.S. political institutions and the challenges to those institutions as the nation grew domestically and in global reach. The course emphasizes skill development in research, written and oral expression, and analysis of primary and secondary sources. Research, writing skills, and critical reading skills that enable students to understand the vantage points of different historians continue to be developed.

## **MATH**

### **Grade 6**

Sixth grade math marks a transitional year for students as they master the four mathematical operations with whole numbers, fractions, and decimals and begin to investigate abstract algebraic concepts. Students learn about variables, evaluating expressions, and solving one-step equations using inverse operations. Students also discover and utilize geometric formulas and learn integer concepts and operations. Independently and in groups, students practice and determine the efficiency of various problem-solving strategies and use tables, graphs, written language, and symbolic rules to examine and analyze visual and numerical patterns. They participate in engaging simulations that enable them to connect their learning to the world around them. Students are evaluated through homework assignments, class work, tests, and projects and are provided with additional instruction and challenging tasks as needed. They are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and value the importance of mathematics in everyday life.

### **Grade 7**

Seventh grade math continues to exercise the four mathematical operations with integers, fractions, decimals, and begin exploring more abstract algebraic concepts. Students discover and utilize geometric formulas and how to solve both one and two-step problems using inverse operations. They continue to use and evaluate more complex mathematical expressions. Independently and in groups, students practice and determine the efficiency of various problem-solving strategies and use tables, graphs, written language, and symbolic rules to examine and analyze visual and numerical patterns. Through practical applications, students explore rates, ratios, proportions, and percentages. They participate in engaging simulations that enable them to connect their learning to the world around them. Students are evaluated through homework assignments, class work, tests, and projects and are provided with additional instruction and challenging tasks as needed. They are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and value the importance of mathematics in everyday life.

### **Pre-Algebra**

This is an introductory course that covers many of the topics in an algebra course. This course is designed to help students strengthen their basic skills and increase self-confidence in their mathematical ability. Topics include: operations with integers, rational numbers, solving multi-step equations with variables on one or both sides, factoring, and solving equations.

## **Algebra 1**

In Algebra 1, the basic algebraic skills are reviewed as more complex concepts are introduced. The following topics are studied: linear equations and inequalities, functions, polynomials, rational expressions, operations with radicals, and graphing systems of equations and inequalities. Emphasis is placed on problem solving skills. Quadratic equations and some basic Algebra 2 skills will also be introduced and discussed.

## **SCIENCE**

### **Overview**

An understanding and appreciation of the natural world are broadened and enhanced by a scientific perspective. To shape an informed, judicious group of young adults, it is essential that an in-depth, current look at the physical and biological sciences be provided, and that the body of content is connected to the experimental process. In the Junior High School we focus our efforts to produce students who are literate regarding the natural world and practiced in the scientific method, while teaching them to think critically and preparing them to tackle high school level studies. We believe this is best achieved by providing comprehensive courses of study in the fundamental sciences that maximize full development of concepts and practical applications. We aim to instill an interest and enthusiasm for the scientific pursuit, being mindful that our student body has various interests, learning styles, and strengths.

### **Grade 6**

In the sixth grade science program, the scientific method and an immersion in content are equally emphasized. The skills developed in earlier grades are used to form a more sophisticated attitude toward scientific problem solving. A greater emphasis is placed on the importance of controls and variables in the experimental setting, and a higher level of interpretation is pursued. To achieve these goals, students carry out investigations in the earth sciences. This course teaches students the fundamentals and interrelationships of the basic earth sciences, from the study of rocks, minerals, and plate tectonics, to understanding the Earth as a dynamic water planet with its many important natural resources, and the necessity to maintain and use them wisely.

### **Grade 7 General Science**

Students begin with the introductory concepts of Life Science. What is life? Using the inquiry system, the students start with the origin of life, from bacteria to plants. They are then introduced to the use of the microscope. This course also addresses the fundamental physical and chemical properties of matter. Students learn to distinguish among mixtures, elements and compounds, and to recognize the underlying principles governing physical and chemical changes. Atomic theory is examined and applied as students learn their way around the Periodic Table of Elements. As students focus on the chemistry of matter, they will study: atomic bonding, types of chemical reactions, factors influencing reaction rates, and solution chemistry. Other aspects of physical science addressed in the program are electricity, magnetism, and wave motion. We emphasize a hands-on approach in which problem-solving, independent thinking, communication, and procedural skills are developed. Students are expected to share ideas as they interpret data and form substantiated conclusions. As a culmination to activities, students learn how to write a formal laboratory report, paying close attention to the purpose and intent of the various steps involved. Seventh graders are introduced to the study of astronomy, and field work, with an integration of technology. They also participate in an Annual Science Fair.

### **Grade 8 Life Science**

Grade 8 students have a greater emphasis on the Life Sciences. They carry out investigations in specific topics that include animal life, from the invertebrate sponges to the vertebrate mammals, with their behavioral patterns. A deeper understanding of the chemistry of the cell leads them on to the study of probability and genetics, Mendel's work with the DNA connection of human inheritance, human disorders and advances in genetics. Studying each system of the human body, with an emphasis on health, also leads them to a better understanding of who they are as a part of this great miracle of life! In addition, eighth graders are introduced to the study of Environmental Science. Each student develops a *Power Point Presentation* on an aspect of land, air and water resources, with practical applications on the PMA backyard trail.

The scope of the course shifts from local to global to universal over the span of the school year, giving the students a well-rounded introduction to the Life Sciences.

## **FOREIGN LANGUAGE - SPANISH**

The goal of the Foreign Language program is to develop the students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in a foreign language and to encourage and enrich their understanding of foreign cultures. Students in grades Prek-8 study the Spanish language. The study of a foreign language combines a traditional belief in the importance of good grammar with modern methods, stressing the primacy of spoken language.

Spanish in the Junior High Grades emphasizes both spoken and written Spanish. Videotapes, cassettes, interactive activities using the Smart Board, and PowerPoint presentations are used to develop students' ability to understand the spoken language. The eighth grade Spanish program is designed to prepare students for the Advanced Placement Spanish Language classes at the High School level. Careful analysis of a wide variety of conversational situations and reading and discussion of articles, short stories, poems, writing, audio and video activities, songs and selections from video stories strengthen students' speaking and comprehension skills. Written commentaries develop their ability to write clear and focused compositions in Spanish.

## **THE ARTS IN THE JUNIOR HIGH**

### **ART**

The art program is designed to provide our students with the opportunity to develop their own artistic sensibility while cultivating a solid foundation in classical artistic principles. Small and highly personalized classes meet once a week in our well-equipped studio where students are exposed to mixed media, drawing, painting, and sculpture. Lessons are presented through an art historical perspective in order to expose students to a wide array of classical and modern artists and their work. Students also have the opportunity to explore art outside of the classroom through interactive field trips to local art galleries as well as trips to historical sites, where they learn how historians use art to preserve the past.

### **COMPUTERS**

The primary goal of the grades 6-8 computer curriculum is to further the students' knowledge and understanding of the ways in which computers can be used as tools, both for production and research. Students participate in regular classes, which take place in one of the school's labs. Areas covered include: word processing, spreadsheets, and power point using Microsoft Office, graphics, programming and Internet Research. Students at this level are expected to have a working knowledge of general computer terminology and also an understanding of the basic functions of the machine. In addition, regular discussions are held to heighten the students' awareness of computer ethics with regard to such areas as the copying and distribution of software, citing references from electronic data bases, the Internet, etc. Other areas addressed include Internet Safety- social networking, virus/spam protection, etc.

### **LIBRARY**

In our library, the goal is to promote intellectual curiosity and freedom while developing a lifelong love and appreciation of reading. We are continuously updating our media collection in order to focus on the needs and desires of students and faculty. Our commitment is to develop the research skills necessary to be successful in using all types of media, including primary and secondary sources as well as a variety of print and electronic media. The library partners with the computer curriculum to develop joint projects that enrich and aid students in their core curriculum subject areas. This partnership also allows the library to stay current with emerging technologies.

### **MUSIC**

Students are introduced to all facets of music from vocal performance to music history and composition. Singing and performing in the winter and spring concerts is required of all students. Individual private piano and guitar lessons are available to students in grades 2-8 for an additional fee.

### **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

The Physical Education program offers students the opportunity to learn sport skills, cardiovascular fitness, strength training, and flexibility. Students are able to explore and obtain knowledge of physical activity according to their interests and abilities. We believe participating in competitive activities builds morale and character development. Engaging students in regular activity and promoting a healthy lifestyle fosters a positive self-image that allows each individual to take on intellectual, social and emotional challenges in life.

Teachers address the importance of fitness, health and nutrition on the mind and body, and students are encouraged to find a balance between their individual thinking and physical well-being. Physical education goes beyond competitive athletics. Student learning styles (visual, auditory, physical and tactile) are taken into account by methods of teaching used and also by offering a variety of interest levels. Students learn the benefits of an active life style now in the hope that it will carry over into adulthood in a form that is comfortable for them. All lessons and workouts are scaled to the entire class regardless of athletic and fitness level. Students are assessed on their level of active participation, sportsmanship, and respect for the program.