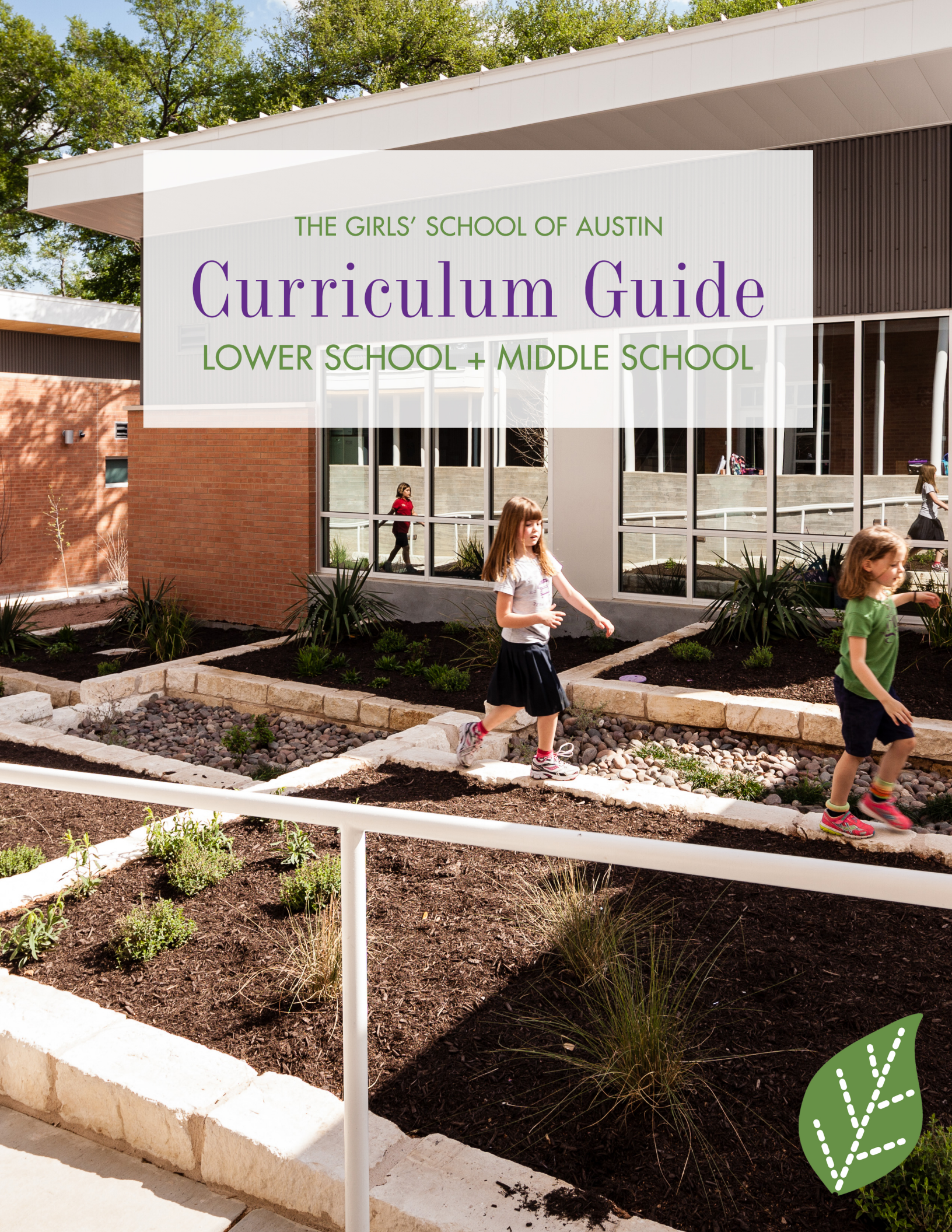

THE GIRLS' SCHOOL OF AUSTIN

# Curriculum Guide

## LOWER SCHOOL + MIDDLE SCHOOL

THE girls' SCHOOL OF AUSTIN

A PRIVATE SCHOOL FOR GIRLS K-8

# CURRICULUM GUIDE

**Mission Statement**

The Girls' School of Austin provides an intellectually challenging education for girls in a supportive and creative environment. Our community's mission is to inspire girls to achieve personal excellence and prepare them to lead distinguished and fulfilling lives.

**Non-discrimination Statement**

The Girls' School of Austin shall admit students of any race, color, religion, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. It shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion or sexual orientation, in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic or other school sponsored programs.

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## CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

The Girls' School of Austin offers a liberal arts education beginning in kindergarten including fine arts, music, Spanish, physical education, social-emotional learning, drama, and service learning in addition to the core subjects: math, language arts, social studies, and science. Computer literacy is introduced in third grade and technology skills, including coding, are added in later years.

The curriculum is interdisciplinary and place-based; significant use of the local resources in Austin—natural, artistic, governmental-- is included in the program, providing real-life examples of the topics being studied.

Fine arts instruction begins in kindergarten. Art classes meet twice a week. Seventh and eighth grade students submit work to the Regional Scholastic Art competition. Students of all grades are encouraged to participate in various art competitions as they are made available.

Every student at the GSA is required to study a musical instrument, either strings or piano, and participate in grade-level music classes. Music instruction is three times a week for grades K-6 and twice a week for grades seven and eight.

Spanish is taught beginning in kindergarten, two times a week, and gradually increases in frequency. By seventh grade, students study Spanish five days a week and will complete two year of high school Spanish by the end of eighth grade.

Physical education classes are creative and teach a variety of skills that build coordination, balance, strength and stamina. Physical education classes meet three times a week. Topics in health and wellness are taught in all grades, and sex education begins in sixth grade. Before and after-school activities supplement the physical education program.

Recognizing the importance of public speaking for women, public speaking is incorporated into every grade level, both inside and outside of the classroom. A weekly community meeting and presentations of project work including research projects provide ample opportunity for students to present to peers, parents and even the whole school community. As their culminating experience, the eighth graders write and deliver speeches at graduation.

Drama classes offer another opportunity for students to hone public speaking skills. Drama classes in lower school are taught on Fridays. The lower school drama classes encourage improvisation and creativity. In middle school, each grade performs a play each year, complementing the topics studied.

Our social-emotional learning goals are embedded into everything we do from the moment a girl enters the drop-off line in the morning until she is picked up at the end of

the day. In addition, a class after lunch on Fridays, called "friendship class" in lower school and "advisory" in middle school, is used to focus on specific lessons.

The service-learning program links service to curriculum. Each year, students engage in a service program that is connected to one of the grade-level themes. For example, seventh graders study cradle-to-grave design, visit the Goodwill Recycling Center and then conduct a used clothing drive on campus.

Computer literacy instruction begins in third grade when laptops are introduced into the classroom. In third and fourth grade, students are introduced to and practice basic skills such as typing, file management, and web searches. Beginning in fifth grade, students take a technology class – SET - and explore the intersection of science, engineering, and technology.

## ACADEMIC POLICIES

**Homework**

We believe that homework builds the scholarly skills that students will need to be successful, confident, independent learners. Beginning in kindergarten, students are assigned homework—increasing each year in quantity and complexity.
Homework assignments at GSA serve either as reinforcement for classroom learning or as pre-learning for class work. Daily homework assignments may be posted in class and/or on the class webpage. Teachers may choose the method for posting homework assignments and parents and students should know how they are expected to record or access assignments. Developing a system for recording, and then following through on assignments, is a valuable skill.

We also believe that excessive amounts of homework are unnecessary. A reasonable amount of homework is assigned, and each teacher takes into consideration the possibility/probability of assignments by other teachers.

- Homework should be assigned in accordance with the following guidelines:

| | |
|---|---|
| K-1st | Approximately 15-30 minutes a night |
| 2nd-3rd | Approximately 30-45 minutes a night |
| 4th-5th | Approximately 1 hour a night |
| 6th | Approximately 1 ½ hours a night |
| 7th-8th | Approximately 2 hours a night |

- Additional time will be spent practicing the chosen musical instrument.

- Students in grades K-4 are not assigned weekend homework.

- Students who are accelerated in math should expect a slightly higher homework load.

- In general, there is no homework for students over holidays. Teachers are asked to report any holiday assignments to the Head of School before giving them. In addition, the teacher is asked to contact the student's parents to notify them of the assignment their daughter will be expected to compete.

Completion of homework is required. Parents will be notified of a trend in incomplete or missing homework. Teachers may assess a penalty for late work (points deducted from assignment, for example), but the teacher's policy must be announced in advance to students and parents.

**Make-Up Tests**
It is a student's responsibility to meet with the teacher to reschedule missed tests or other assignments. Teachers will designate a time during the school day or after school for make-up tests (K-4 teachers must be sure to let parents know). If a student does not reschedule and make-up the test within a week of the absence (7 calendar days or 5 class days), she will receive a zero for the test grade or assignment.

**Academic Difficulties**
In the event a student's performance is of concern, parents will be contacted as early as possible. Occasionally, there may be a student whose difficulties are greater than a teacher can address in the amount of time the student has available at school. It is also possible that the nature of the problem is such that the student needs additional support or a change in her program. If a need for support has been identified, the teacher will address his or her concern to the Head of School before the students is referred for diagnostic evaluation. If tutoring is recommended, it must be scheduled after the school day with a qualified tutor unless on-campus tutoring is authorized by the Head of School. Parents are expected to follow through with remediation requests made by the school.

**Conferences**
Parent-advisor conferences are scheduled for all parents in the fall before distribution of the first trimester review and conferences may be scheduled by request of the parent or the advisor/teacher at any time.

**Grading and Reporting**
The GSA Trimester Review is designed to give students, parents and teachers as much information as possible about a student's academic experience and performance. Reviews are intended, as well, to provide an opportunity for the student to reflect on her own learning and identify goals for continued improvement.

**Trimester Reviews**
In November, February and May, written performance reviews of each student's academic and social progress are sent home to parents.

**Grading**

*Procedures in Grades K-4*

Academic achievement is evaluated at the lower elementary grade level by written teacher comments. Trimester Reviews for lower school students in grades K-4 include improvement goals written by teachers. Classroom behavior and performance is assessed using the following language:

E=Exceeds standard
M=Meets expectations
P=Progressing
N= Needs improvement

*Procedures in Grades 5-8*

In middle-school grades (5-8), academic achievement is evaluated by the letters A, B, C, D and F with + or – representing performance at the upper or lower end of the range. Teachers are required to indicate a numeric and letter grade. The grading scale at The Girls' School of Austin is as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| A+ | 97-100 |
| A | 93-96 |
| A- | 90-92 |
| B+ | 87-89 |
| B | 83-86 |
| B- | 80-82 |
| C+ | 77-79 |
| C | 73-76 |
| C- | 70-72 |
| D+ | 67-69 |
| D | 63-66 |
| D- | 60-62 |
| F | 59 and below |

Students whose class work is incomplete at review time will receive a letter grade of "I," which may be changed when required work is turned in, no later than two weeks following the last day of the trimester.

*Effort Grades*

At all grade levels and where applicable, an effort grade is given in music, art, PE, SET and health, and is based on the following criteria:

1. The students come to class promptly, with assigned work completed/prepared and correct class materials, ready to begin work.

2. The student pays attention in class and listens to the teacher or student who is speaking.

3. The student contributes positively to class discussion, answers questions raised by the teacher or by a student and shares ideas and insights with the class

4. The student makes an independent effort to learn.

Classroom behavior and performance of middle school students is assessed using a 4-point scale:

E=Exceeds standard
M=Meets expectations
P=Progressing
N= Needs improvement

**Promotion and Retention**
Advancement to the next grade level is subject to the student's readiness for advancement and the opinion of her GSA teachers that she can comfortably do satisfactory work at the higher level. Parents will be notified in writing when a student's academic performance is such that she is at risk of retention.

If a teacher feels that a student might not be able to proceed to the next grade, that information should be shared with the Head of School immediately. The Head of School, teachers, and parents will meet to seek possible remedies. GSA policy holds that a student is at risk for retention or dismissal if she has not demonstrated sufficient academic and social growth to capably meet the demands of the next grade OR has required an extraordinary and excessive amount of individual time and attention from the teachers. In all cases where promotion is in question, the Head of School will initiate contact with the parents.

**Academic Probation**
A student will be placed on Academic Probation if she receives one or more grades of D+ or lower in a core subject (language arts, math, science, social studies) at the end of a trimester. If the student remains on Academic Probation for two or more successive terms, one of the following actions will occur depending upon the severity of the situation:

- The student will not be offered a contract for the following school year or, if previously offered a contract for the following school year, it will be cancelled.

- The student may be offered a contract but will be required to perform additional summer work and will be tested at the end of the summer. In this case, the student must achieve at least a 70% on that test (or those tests) in order to return to The Girls' School. If permitted to return, the student remains on Academic Probation for the first trimester of the following school year.

## Testing

*Individual/Diagnostic*

On occasion, the school may request a professional diagnostic evaluation of a student whose performance is of concern. Because requests for testing are always initiated to enable teachers to better respond to the needs of GSA students, it is the expectation of the school that recommendations/requests for testing or counseling be honored by the student's parents. If, during the school year, a school request for testing or counseling for a student is ignored by the student's parents, the school reserves the right to dismiss a student from GSA.

Once the testing is completed, parents need to sign a release for the school to receive the recommendations and strategies to use with the student. Parents/guardians are responsible for covering the cost of testing.

*Standardized Achievement*

As part of the ongoing evaluation of the GSA academic program and in order to help advise parents and students, students at the school take standardized achievement tests. Students in grades K through 2 take the CPAA (Children's Progress Academic Assessment) test at intervals throughout the year. Students in grades 3 through 8 take the CTP-4 (Comprehensive Testing Program) achievement test each spring. Standardized test results are one indicator of a student's abilities and progress and are used as tools to help teachers identify skill areas requiring attention. At no time are such scores used in determining student grades in a course.

## Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is of critical importance at GSA. Any violation of the academic honesty code is considered academic misconduct and will be addressed accordingly. Academic honesty means:

- A student completes and submits only her own work.
- A student does not allow another student to copy her work.
- A student does not plagiarize—use another person's written work or ideas without giving credit to the author or creator.
- A student does not forge a parent's required signature.
- A student does not falsify information intended for parents or teachers.
- A student completes tests and quizzes without the use of any unauthorized notes.
- A student completes tests and quizzes in silence, without showing work to another person during the test.
- A student does not share information about a test with a student who has not yet taken it.
- A student does not program formulas, equations, or words into the memory of a calculator or handheld computer device.

- A student does not conceal academic dishonesty by others and reports such information to her teacher.

The determination that a student has engaged in academic dishonesty shall be based on the judgment of the classroom teacher or another supervising professional employee, taking into consideration written materials, observation, or information from students. Students found to have engaged in academic dishonesty will be referred to the Head of School and an appropriate penalty established, up to and including dismissal.

## LOWER SCHOOL OVERVIEW

The core academic program in lower school (kindergarten to fourth grade) is taught by a homeroom teacher in a dedicated classroom. This teacher has the responsibility for instruction in math, language arts, science, social studies and the SEL and service-learning program for that grade. Classes in music, art, drama, physical education and Spanish are led by specialist instructors. Instruction in the specials is held in a space designed for that subject or in the dedicated grade-level classroom. Field trips and projects enrich the classwork.

Teachers make use of a variety of pedagogical styles. Student project work—typically accomplished in class—is a common culminating experience. Public speaking is built into the curriculum, beginning in kindergarten, and parents and students (when possible) are invited to grade-level presentations. Teachers are familiar with national standards in core subjects as well as the Texas curriculum standards and consult those standards periodically. Although The GSA curriculum is unique, it is built upon commonly accepted grade level skills and content. Curriculum is developed by grade level teachers and aligned vertically so that skills are built and reinforced. Teachers maintain curriculum maps that are periodically updated so that teachers in upper grades will know what has been covered.

Students are encouraged to become independent learners and to take charge of their learning. For example, in language arts, one way this is done is with the Daily 5 program—while a teacher is pulling a student for an individual conference or to work with a small group, the other students engage in one of five activities: read to self, read to others, listen to reading, work on writing, and word work.

### Kindergarten

*Math*
Kindergarten math instruction includes whole group lessons, written practice, games and manipulatives and problem solving. The kindergarten curriculum introduces numbers to 100. Students learn these number through reading, writing, counting, comparing, ordering, adding and subtracting. They are also introduced to problem solving as well as early concepts in place value and measurement. They learn to gather and display simple data through surveys and graphs. Students also learn to identify two and three dimensional shapes, and to sort and classify and study patterns. The use of picture books helps the students relate mathematical concepts to the real world around them.

*Language Arts*
The kindergarten language arts program consists of phonics (ZooPhonics), guided reading, shared reading, read-a-louds and the Daily 5 program. The curriculum is designed for individual students to work independently towards their own personalized goals. The lessons include whole and small group instruction as well as one-on-one

conferencing. Some of the extra benefits of this program are building independence, stamina and accountability for materials.

Kindergarten writing starts with Handwriting Without Tears. Once the students have learned the correct letter formation, they then move on to journal writing and creative writing projects. Students will be introduced to early descriptive writing and writing from a prompt. The students then engage in Writer's Workshop. This is a time where they create their own stories, build their sentence writing and expand their knowledge of the writing process.

*Social Studies*
The kindergarten social studies curriculum progresses from self, to family, school, community and the world. Through American History biographies, the girls learn about famous figures such as Johnny Appleseed, Christopher Columbus, the Pilgrims and Native Americans, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. The students also become familiar with their state and national symbols and what they stand for.

*Science*
The science program in kindergarten encourages the students' natural curiosity about the world around them. Through hands-on experiments and observation, the girls develop knowledge about scientific topics selected from life and physical sciences. As a culminating end-of-year project, the students participate in an age-appropriate research project on an assigned topic. Students put together a display board to showcase their researched facts and make an oral presentation to the community.

*Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)*
Throughout the year, students in kindergarten learn different SEL skills through the themes of awareness (rules and routines), friendship (solving problems appropriately), respect, self-advocacy (communicating feelings with words), gratitude (how to and when to apologize), managing emotions and responsibility. The kindergarten SEL curriculum also uses children's literature to introduce key concepts, facilitate discussions and lead into skill and knowledge activities. Through role-playing and other activities, the girls learn to apply these concepts to themselves and their community.

**First Grade**

*Math*
First grade math focuses on single and double-digit addition and subtraction in order to lay a strong foundation for students. The Everyday Math curriculum is used and supplemented with math read-a-louds, open-ended problem solving and additional applications to everyday life. Students learn numbers up to 1,000 and practice skip counting by 2s, 5s, and 10s. They learn patterns with shapes and numbers, measurement, place value, fractions and 2-D and 3-D geometry. Practical applications of time and money are demonstrated throughout the year as well. Students are encouraged to find multiple ways to solve problems, share the thinking that helped them arrive at an answer, and build on one another's ideas in whole-class "math talks."

*Language Arts*
Language arts in first grade is based on the Reading and Writing Workshop model from Teachers' College at Columbia University. For reading, this includes guided reading groups with individualized instruction, independent and partner reading at students' independent levels, shared reading and read-a-louds. A wide range of fiction and non-fiction books enriches each unit of study. In writing, students work on a variety of projects throughout the year, including letter-writing, fiction stories with plot and character development, poetry, non-fiction expert books and research projects.

The Handwriting Without Tears curriculum is utilized to practice proper letter and number formation, and the Sitton Spelling curriculum focuses on spelling patterns, word families, letter blends and sight words. Throughout the year, students practice oral language skills during discussions of literary texts and work toward a public presentation at the end of every project. The year culminates with a presentation of a multi-phase project that includes an author study, book report, and information poster on the Pioneers.

*Social Studies*
The first grade social studies curriculum begins with the students learning about their places in the school and their communities, in addition to learning about ways to foster kindness and create an inclusive space for one another. Seasons and holidays are studied throughout the year, as well as important figures in history such as U.S. presidents, famous female scientists, and influential African Americans. The year ends with a study of the Pioneers and a discussion of the history of our country through timelines, fiction and non-fiction texts, and a visit to a historical working-farm to spend a day walking in the Pioneers' shoes.

*Science*
First grade science units cover the life-cycle and migration patterns of both bats and butterflies. The city of Austin is the learning lab in which students record observations of these animals as they develop and move through the region. During second trimester, students study Arctic tundra animals, their habitat, the adaptations they develop to endure such harsh climates, and how humans have impacted that part of the world. Throughout

the year, the scientific method is used to make and test hypotheses. Weather and temperature conditions are routinely recorded and observed over time and season.

*Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)*

First grade social-emotional learning focuses on building a cohesive classroom community and explores themes of friendship, problem solving, empathy and self-awareness. Behavior is identified and discussed as students work toward and engage in community building to spread kindness and practice empathy. The curriculum uses books that deal with conflicts - students learn from characters and storylines. Plots are compared to real-life situations and students investigate how to solve the problems presented in the literature. Units of study include historical figures or characters who teach how to be true to oneself and to stand up for one's beliefs. There are structures in place to encourage and celebrate positive behavior such as a marble jar reward system, weekly celebrations, and class meetings to share positive news. Flexibility and independence are important skills that are honed in first grade. Additionally, social studies and service learning projects teach the importance of serving and being connected to the community and the environment.

## Second Grade

*Math*
The second grade math curriculum calls on students to master skills introduced in kindergarten and first grade. Students master one-digit addition and subtraction. They gain exposure to two and three-digit addition through traditional algorithms and the partial sums method. They explore place value, money, time, graphing, geometry, fractions, and beginning multiplication/division skills through hands-on investigations and logical reasoning activities. Students practice and extend basic measurement skills using scientific investigations of balance, length, weight and volume.

*Language Arts*
The second grade language arts curriculum improves reading skills through guided reading groups based on students' individual skill levels. A GSA second grader reads literature chosen from tall tales, fairytales, current novels, and the Junior Great Books series. Students develop and extend writing skills using writing prompts, letter writing, creative writing projects, reading comprehension activities, and a research paper about desert animals and habitats. In second grade, students learn and practice correct grammar, punctuation, and capitalization rules using the Writer's Workshop process. In addition, students practice writing for a specific purpose and audience. They work on spelling skills using games and daily writing activities that help students learn and apply spelling patterns in context. Second grade brings a final review of correct letter formation for print writing before cursive writing is introduced in third grade.

*Social Studies*
The second grade social studies and language arts curriculums work together to reinforce each other. For example, when studying Tall Tales in language arts, the girls study the geography of the United States, its regions and landforms, including major lakes and rivers. Students also learn how to read maps and understand important geographical features of a globe such as continents and major bodies of water. The use of timelines helps students understand concepts of time and chronology.

*Science*
The second grade science curriculum focuses on hands-on units to help students learn to ask and answer questions about the world that surrounds them. Second graders raise butterflies through the complete lifecycle, building upon the work they did in first grade on migration patterns. Students study states of matter and the changes among those states. They learn about desert habitats and desert animals. Second graders maintain a science journal and record observations using language and pictures.

*Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)*
There is a noticeable shift in second grade as students become increasing aware of the needs of others. Therefore, in second grade SEL, the perspective shifts from self to others. Students work on building confidence and choosing friends and maintaining friendships. Students also build skills to help them effectively communicate with adults.

**Third Grade**

*Math*
The third grade math curriculum takes the basic skills introduced in first and second grade and expands them to further develop the girls' mathematical understanding. Problem solving and higher-order thinking skills are strongly emphasized. Addition and subtraction skills are reviewed and extended to 4 and 5-digit problems, and multiplication and division skills are further strengthened. Mastery of multiplication tables zero-twelve is completed by the end of third grade through weekly timed quizzes. Students reinforce their growing bank of mathematical skills and concepts in the areas of place value, patterns, time and money, probability, geometry, graphing, fractions, decimals and measurement through hands-on activities involving daily math lessons utilizing the Everyday Math program and student journals 1 and 2.

In addition to the Everyday Math program, the girls participate in Math Pentathlon each year, a math competition involving five different math games in which they practice algebraic thinking, problem solving and grade level math concepts. Additionally, the girls' practice critical thinking and problem solving each week through weekly slip problems and monthly participation in Math Olympiad.

*Language Arts*
The third grade language arts curriculum integrates reading, writing, speaking and listening skills within a whole language approach. Students learn to read for different purposes and transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." Girls learn to express themselves clearly and coherently in both oral and written communication. Comprehension skills, fluency, and expression are developed through literacy circles, novels, and units in which they explore Communities of the Past, Habitats and Ecosystems, and "How To" stories. Students are exposed to fiction, nonfiction, historical fiction and biographies.

Using Writer's Workshop as our launching ground (which includes formal spelling, grammar, vocabulary building and punctuation), students develop an increased awareness of sentence construction, writing mechanics and clarity of thought. They gain a deeper understanding of the writing process through developing proofreading and editing skills of their written works. Using the Handwriting Without Tears cursive practice books, most girls master cursive writing by the end of the year X and begin to develop typing and word processing skills through Keyboarding Without Tears and TypingGirls.com. Additional resources used at the third grade level include Sitton Spelling Practice Book, Write Source Skillsbook and Daily Language Review.

*Social Studies*
The third grade social studies curriculum is an interdisciplinary program with connections to both language arts and science. The curriculum's interactive approach is intended to create 'social awareness' as the girls focus on geography, community diversity, economics, global trade and government. Students learn about the continents and oceans, develop mapping skills as they create a relief map of the United States and

do an in-depth study of Native Americans. Throughout the year, the girls develop a deeper understanding of how communities develop, grow and change, the interconnected relationship of different communities near and far, and an awareness of the unique cultures that differentiate communities around the world.

*Science*
Science in third grade covers topics from physical science (astronomy, "the way things work"—various topics in physics) and life science (habitats and ecosystems).

Students begin the year studying the universe at large and the Milky Way galaxy, stars and planets. Using beginning research and note-taking skills, students gather information about the planets in our solar system. Using deductive reasoning and problem solving skills, they compare planets' sizes, create a scaled-model of the solar system and research information about the planets. Through observation and investigation, students learn about objects in the night sky.

Girls explore magnets, electricity and chemical reactions as part of a "How To" Unit (i.e. "How to Create a Current" and "How to Cause a Chemical Reaction"). They further develop their scientific skills by making predictions, testing hypotheses and drawing conclusions.

Students continue to explore habitats and ecosystems in third grade. The girls participate in an in-depth study of a woodland habitat and use research and investigation to study the delicate balance of different ecosystems. As part of their aquatic study, the girls learn about fresh water habitats like rivers and lakes, and get up-close and personal with the Colorado River. Additionally, students learn about plant growth and development with an emphasis on the life cycle of plants, and explore the importance of indigenous trees and plants to an environment.

Third grade participates in numerous field trips throughout the year in connection with the different interdisciplinary units of study. Examples of trips taken are: Sweet Berry farm to practice mapping skills, Austin Duck Tour to learn about the history of Austin, City Hall to see local government in action and LCRA to deepen the girls' understanding of their most important water source.

*Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)*
Social-emotional learning is an integral component of the third grade curriculum. The key objectives of this aspect of the curriculum are to give the girls an opportunity to feel empowered, gain self-awareness, develop positive coping mechanisms, improve daily problem-solving skills, feel connected with their classmates and make healthy choices as they grow and change.

Through weekly class meetings and lessons, the girls are able to practice sharing their feelings, discussing struggles, learning to ask for help and finding common ground in areas of differences. They learn to support and encourage each other and recognize each

other's positive efforts. Some of the themes explored during class meetings are awareness of self, community, friendship, respect, integrity, and personal responsibility.

*Computer Literacy/Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET)*
Students begin to develop their technology skills in third grade. The third grade classroom is equipped with a laptop cart and third graders use their laptops to learn keyboarding skills (Keyboarding Without Tears and Typing Club). Students publish reports using Word, and use Google Safe Search as a research tool. File management (saving documents, printing) is introduced.

**Fourth Grade**

*Math*
In the fourth grade, students practice basic multiplication/division facts and solve multi-digit by multi-digit multiplication and division problems. They are introduced to real-life scenarios for applied math skills and problem-solving strategies through weekly 'slip problems.' Emphasis is placed on geometry, fractions, probability, place value, and decimals and practice takes place using a variety of manipulatives and mathematical tools such as compasses, calculators and protractors. Participation is encouraged in math contests such as the Math Olympiad and Math Pentathlon.

*Language Arts*
Through reading circles, fourth graders explore a variety of literary genres such as fiction (e.g. *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norman Juster) and historical fiction (e. g. *I Remember the Alamo*, by D. Anne Love). In writing, focus will be placed on organization, voice, sentence fluency, idea development, conventions and presentation. Emphasis will be placed on editing and revision techniques and skills. Students develop creative and expository writing skills with assignments that include fiction writing, personal essays, informational texts and a final research paper on a period in Texas history. They will plan, design and create their own Texas history textbook. Emphasis is placed on correct letter formation in cursive handwriting through the Handwriting Without Tears program.

*Social Studies*
The fourth grade social studies curriculum focuses on Texas history and world geography. The timeline begins with the first Native Americans and progresses through the arrival of European settlers, the struggle for independence and statehood, the Civil War, and economic growth. Students study state and local government. They use reference materials, atlases, and maps to build geography skills and vocabulary, with particular emphasis on state climate, resources, culture, and geographic features. They make models of Spanish missions, galleons and chuck wagons. Numerous field trips throughout the year help to consolidate their Texas history studies. Students strengthen their knowledge of world geography and build their own globe.

*Science*
Fourth graders study rainforest ecosystems with special emphasis on animal adaptations, decomposition, transpiration and deforestation. Students investigate nutrients in common foods during a food chemistry unit. They are introduced to scientific procedures used to determine which nutrients are present in each food. They study diseases associated with vitamin deficiency. Fourth graders study buoyancy and density as they plan, design and create their own model boats.

*Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)*
The goals of the fourth grade SEL program are to promote students' self-awareness, social awareness, relationships, and responsible-decision-making skills and to improve student attitudes and beliefs about self and others. The fourth grade program is embedded in the core subject areas such as social studies, PE and language arts. Through the study

of current affairs, students examine issues such as women's rights, cultural and ethnic differences and global tensions. On a more personal level, students are involved in a year-long project working with students at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSVBI). They are trained in guiding etiquette and take physical education classes once a week alongside TSBVI students. Issues such as dealing with victory, disappointment and defeat are addressed during the Math Pentathlon tournament. Students play math board games in a public arena against students from across the state. Class meetings take place over the course of the year when friendship issues arise and involve role-play and modeling of appropriate conflict resolution techniques.

*Computer Literacy/Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET)*
The fourth grade technology program reinforces basic computer literacy. Each student is responsible for maintaining her assigned laptop. The program focuses on publishing reports using Microsoft Word, Publisher and PowerPoint. Fourth graders perform basic software application functions, including opening an application and creating, modifying, printing, and saving files. They use safe search engines (for example, Google) to complete research for projects such as research papers. They learn to use the basic functions of the Promethean classroom electronic whiteboard to make presentations in class. Students master basic keyboarding skills in both accuracy and speed using Keyboarding Without Tears and Typing Club. They use online resources such as xtramath to monitor their progress in basic math facts in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Beginning in fifth grade, students travel from class to class. Instruction takes place on "the second story" (the second floor of the main building is for middle school students only), the science room (on the first floor) and the specials rooms (art, music and multi-use building). An advisor—one of the teachers in that grade—works with the entire class and individual students and is the first point of contact for students and parents in that grade. The advisor also leads the advisory period on Fridays.

Also beginning in fifth grade, overnight trips supplement the program and are tied to the curriculum. For example, the sixth grade will travel to the McDonald Observatory and Davis Mountains as the culminating experience in their study of astronomy and geology.

Middle school students participate in a required after-school study hall (unless they are in another after-school activity that day). An extended study hall (an additional half hour) is available for students who require additional support. There is a math lab available during lunch for students who would like to work on their math homework or receive help with a topic covered in class that day. Seventh and eighth grade students also work with a writing coach once every other week.

### Fifth Grade

*Math*
Fifth grade math uses the Everyday Math curriculum and students learn how to manipulate fractions, decimals, and percentages. Students are taught how to convert among the three and place them in numerical order; compare fractions and mixed numbers; add, subtract, multiply, and divide with fractions; and use fractions, decimals, and percentages to show data. In addition, students learn how to make graphs, calculate area and volume, identify types of angles, and create geometrical figures. Students also participate in the Math Olympiad competition and have an opportunity to compete in the Math Pentathlon.

*Humanities (language arts and social studies)*
Fifth grade humanities uses an integrated approach to the study of US History that incorporates writing, reading, research and investigation, note-taking, computer skills, discussion, effective collaborative skills, and oral presentations. Language arts skills, including spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, capitalization, usage, sentence structure and variety, paragraph construction, parallel structure in writing and communicating, and the skills needed to write a formal research paper, are developed. Teacher conferencing and group collaboration are used throughout each unit of study and during the writing process. During each unit in US History, students study and analyze a time period, present their findings in collaborative groups, read a novel set in that period, write a research paper, and develop their skills in analyzing a text and writing in response to questions. Creative writing assignments are given weekly. Students enter their work in a short story competition, *The Betty Award*. Novels studied in class parallel our history

studies and have the theme of "survival." All novels are historical fiction set in periods ranging from Colonial Times to the Civil Rights era. In addition to novels, students read and research topics from numerous expository chapter books. They research their favorite time period or subject studied during the year, and write a final research paper and an illustrated historical fiction picture book. Students use *Grammar and Composition Handbook and Workbook* Gr. 6 (Glencoe/McGraw-Hill) to further their knowledge of grammatical conventions in writing. They use *Wordly Wise Book 6* to strengthen their vocabulary. They present a *13 Colonies* musical that is tied closely to their curriculum, and they use computers to present their findings to an audience of their peers. The goals of fifth grade humanities are to develop higher level reading and writing skills, to become more knowledgeable about the history of the United States, and to become confident public speakers.

*Science*
Fifth grade science is an introduction to formal scientific inquiry with an emphasis on field studies. Students explore the different components of the scientific method, including observations, inferences, hypotheses, data, and conclusions. Students take on the role of investigators in the class, asking questions, gathering data, and reaching conclusions through hands-on labs and field activities. The main thematic units of the year are water, weather, and ecology, all from a place-based perspective. Field trips include the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment, McKinney Roughs Nature Park, and Mabel Davis Park.

*Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)*
Our weekly advisory meetings reinforce and expand on the SEL skills the students need to effectively cope with the academic and personal challenges they experience during their first year in middle school at the Girls' School. The fifth grade is a big transition and it often comes with new individual and collective responsibilities and emotions. We learn and practice "council," the practice of listening and speaking from the heart, to inspire an engaged, compassionate community. During our meetings, we address issues that are topical and discuss comments, questions, and concerns. We then focus on a question/topic for the council, where the students learn to share/listen actively to one another.

*Computer Literacy/Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET)*
Fifth grade SET begins with the technology they will be using in the classroom in middle school at the GSA. Each student has an account on the school's infrastructure (Office 365 portal). Once students know how to login to the Portal, they learn how to access their school email and their online version of Microsoft Office. This instruction is done in conjunction with Humanities class, where they have assignments sending emails and learning appropriate email etiquette. Papers and presentations are created in the online version of Microsoft Office.

Once students are familiar with the technologies used in the middle school, they move on to computer science, using the SCRATCH programming language as an introduction to the concepts and tools used in computer programming languages. They have weekly

assignments of increasing complexity that culminate in programming their own "chase" game, where one object moves and tries to catch an object moving randomly around the screen.

**Sixth Grade**

*Math*

Sixth grade math uses Everyday Math to broaden the students' understanding of math concepts, explore the many ways of solving complex math problems, and introduce the ideas basic to algebra. Students are encouraged to think about the many connections to be made while studying numbers and mathematical ideas. The goal of sixth grade math is to reinforce previously taught concepts and move the students into thinking algebraically. The major curriculum topics include the four basic operations with whole numbers, decimals, fractions, and mixed numbers; graphs; data and surveys; standard and metric measurement; rounding and estimation; scientific notation; variables, formulas, and expressions; changing numbers from fractions to decimals to percentages; geometric shapes and terms; symmetry and congruency; polygons; angles; geometric formulas; area, perimeter, and volume; integers; order of operations, equivalents and inequalities; probability; ratios and proportions; distributive property; and properties and laws in math. In addition to this program, the students participate in Math Olympiad, an upper level math competition whose focus is on math problem solving. Everyday Math possesses many open-ended questions in an effort to get students to think mathematically. It is through this method, and the spiraling skills built into the program, that students can easily switch topics, combine ideas, and have those aha moments!

*Humanities*

Sixth grade humanities uses an integrated approach to the study of world geography that incorporates writing, reading, research and investigation, note-taking, computer skills, discussion, effective collaborative skills, and oral presentations. Language arts skills, including spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, capitalization, usage, sentence structure and variety, paragraph construction, parallel structure in writing and communicating, and the skills needed to write a formal essay with a thesis statement and supporting details from text read, are practiced and developed throughout our year of study. Teacher conferencing and group collaboration are used consistently during each unit of study in geography and the writing process. In each unit of geography, we study and analyze a part of the world, present our findings in collaborative groups, read a novel set in this area, write an essay, develop our skills in analyzing text and writing in response to questions, experience a speaker's view who has lived or traveled in this geographic area, and write creative pieces that demonstrate the importance of voice, mood, and clarity to share with the class. To showcase our writing, we enter a 1,000 word short story competition, *The Betty Award*. Our novels parallel our geography studies that clarify map

skills and explore the seven continents of the world. In addition to our novel reading, we read and research topics from *Exploring Our World-People, Places, and Cultures* (Glencoe/McGraw-Hill); we research our favorite geographical location studied during the year, and write a research paper and an illustrated short story set in this location; we use *Grammar and Composition Handbook and Workbook* Gr. 7 (Glencoe/McGraw-Hill) to further our knowledge of correct conventions in writing; we present a play that is tied closely to our curriculum; and we use and explore the computer and personal skills needed to present our findings to an audience of our peers. The goal of sixth grade humanities is to develop higher level reading and writing skills, to become more knowledgeable about the world we live in, and to become confident presenters who have something of value to share with an audience.

*Science*

Sixth grade science is a blend of Earth and space science. Students start out the year by identifying famous astronomers and their contributions to science, as well as replicating some of their early instruments by making an astrolabe and a refracting telescope. Students then move to classifying stars by color, temperature, luminosity, and composition. They view an excited hydrogen tube with a spectroscope to see the hydrogen emission lines. We discuss the life cycles of stars and galaxies, how the sun creates energy through nuclear fusion, and how planets, including the Earth, were formed.

From the formation of the Earth, we begin exploring Earth science. Students build a model of Earth and differentiate between physical and chemical layers. Students learn how the three types of rock form and turn into one another. They identify samples of rocks and minerals in the lab. Students explore plate tectonics and continental drift with hands-on labs.

Field trips to the McDonald Observatory, Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, Longhorn Caverns, the Texas Memorial Museum, and the University of Texas Solar Observatory supplement the science program.

*Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)*

Sixth grade SEL is present in the classroom, during recess, and during Advisory period on Friday. The central question for sixth grade girls is, “Who am I?” Their social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth is in transition from childhood to adulthood, and our challenge is to support, guide, and listen to them during their journey. Advisory meetings are used to help the girls feel a sense of belonging, a sense of significance, and the opportunity to have fun. The girls’ basic needs for love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun are addressed during these meetings and during each school day. SEL means helping a child learn how to experience, regulate, and express emotions. It is the process of helping children develop these fundamental skills for life: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. In sixth grade we use games, activities, and problem solving to meet some of the following goals: to accept others’ opinions/ideas; to be less judgmental of others; to see other points of view; to be inclusive; to have fun and express joy; to practice/learn

resiliency and responsibility; to put work/school/goals in perspective; to be productive; to be "happy to be me" young women who can manage all the stressors associated with this age; to always do our best but know when it's time to say "enough;" to learn how to advocate politely and effectively for ourselves; and, of course, advisory is a time to make connections and help one another become the best we can be to ourselves and to others.

*Computer Literacy/Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET)*
Sixth grade SET focuses on physical engineering and building. We talk about the use of various materials and their properties and how to take the properties of building materials into account in one's design. The majority of the half year is spent building a Rube Goldberg machine, going through a number of complex steps to perform a relatively simple task (i.e. opening an umbrella). The complex steps (from falling dominoes to balls rolling) demonstrate the transfer of energy as well as the learning process of designing and building one's own machine.

**Seventh Grade**

*Pre-Algebra*
Pre-Algebra is the introduction of abstract and algebraic thought to the mathematical education. The focus moves from learning mathematical techniques (such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, distributive property, exponents, etc.) to learning how and when to apply the different techniques students have previously learned. This prepares them for the abstract nature of algebra and the rest of mathematics.

The class begins with solving equations and inequalities, predominantly with whole numbers. This allows students to grow comfortable with the rules and steps required to solve increasingly complex equations. Once they are comfortable with that, fractions are introduced, including ratios, proportions and percents, all while working within the framework of solving equations. After that, the focus moves to linear equations (with two variables), where they learn to work with two variable equations. The class concludes with an introduction to concepts in geometry and trigonometry.

*Language Arts*
Seventh grade language arts seeks to introduce students to the large questions with which humanity constantly grapples. Through the use of important novels such as *To Kill A Mockingbird, Animal Farm,* and *Of Mice and Men*, poetry from such writers as Robert Frost, William Shakespeare, and Emily Dickinson, and the first half of *Sophie's World*, a novel that is also a history of philosophy, students begin to understand some of the key concerns of various human cultures, both in the past and in the present. By rehearsing and producing a play, such as *The Crucible*, students gain the kind of intimate knowledge of a work of dramatic literature that is only possible when it is performed. Students are challenged to refine their insights in class discussion and in written essays, at least one of which is an extended research paper that is written in coordination with their social studies class. The social studies teacher looks closely at content, fluidity and historical accuracy while the language arts teacher is primarily concerned with the mechanics of a research paper.

*Social Studies: US History*
In seventh grade social studies, the teacher concentrates on themes in US history. Students evaluate a variety of sources including primary and secondary sources, literature, art, philosophy, current events and music. Students learn to use close-reading skills to examine primary sources including *The Declaration of Independence*, excerpts of *Manifest Destiny*, and the *Northwest Ordinance*. Readings also include first-hand accounts of events like the Oklahoma land rush and the slave trade. Topics and themes studied over the course of the year are rights and freedoms, civil rights, race, gender, westward migration, and war and diplomacy. Essential questions are used as a way to connect past events to present day topics and current events. Social studies and language arts teachers collaborate to provide connections between the two disciplines through literature, history, and writing. For instance, if seventh grade language arts reads George Orwell's *Animal Farm,* then students will examine how and why America fought for its

own independence in social studies. Students write a research paper that pertains to both social studies and language arts.

*Science: Physical Science*
Seventh grade science class focuses on the study of the physical sciences: physics and chemistry. Students will learn about the fundamental properties of the universe and how we apply this knowledge to study and manipulate our world. This is an introductory course designed to allow students to explore the physical world in a laboratory setting. Topics include: motion, Newton's laws, thermodynamics, gravity, waves, light and sound, magnetism, energy and matter, atoms, elements and the Periodic Table, chemical bonds, chemical reactions, solutions, and pH. Students will also continue their ongoing study of the scientific method, measurement and data collection, and critical evaluation of scientific arguments and claims.

*Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)*
Weekly advisory meetings reinforce and expand on SEL skills students are developing throughout their classes to help them effectively cope with academic and personal challenges. In seventh grade, we focus on organizational and study skills to help students meet the increasing academic standards of our seventh and eighth grade curriculum. Differences in learning styles and personality are discussed as students are encouraged to find the solutions that best fit their specific needs. Other topic covered during the year include: working effectively in groups, conflict resolution, stress management, healthy friendships, and citizenship.

*Computer Literacy/Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET)*
Seventh grade SET focuses on Computer Science, as the students are taught to program in PYTHON. This coincides with the abstract thought that is worked on in pre-algebra and algebra. Students learn about variables, logic structures and Loops, data storage and manipulation. The class culminates with each student planning and programming an application of their own design.

**Eighth Grade**

*Algebra 1*
Algebra 1 focuses on the development of algebraic skills and concepts necessary for students to be successful in higher-level mathematics courses. Students also learn how to apply these skills in a wide range of problem solving situations. The concepts of relations and functions are explored in detail throughout the course, as is the use of graphing (both by hand and using a graphing calculator) to find solution sets. In addition we participate in two national competitions: AMC-8 and Math Olympiad.

The class begins by reviewing and expanding on skills taught in pre-algebra skills needed to solve basic and complex equations and inequalities involving one variable. Ratios, proportions, and percents are also reviewed along with their corresponding applications. We then move on to cover linear equations and inequalities in depth, along with systems of equations and inequalities. Next we go into polynomials, factoring and quadratic functions. We finish the year with an introduction to rational functions.

*Geometry (pre-requisite: Algebra I)*
Guided by the essential questions, "What is proof and what makes a good proof?" students explore geometry using inductive and deductive methods. This course includes a substantial amount of writing and is supplemented with problems from the Drexel Math Forum's Problem of the Week (POW). Students are expected to solve problems at the board in front of the class and develop confidence doing so. Students also participate in the annual Mathematical Association of America's AMC-8 math competition. The text used is *Discovering Geometry* by Michael Serra. Students maintain a portfolio of conjectures and POW reports. Roughly a month is dedicated to a review of topics from Algebra I, extending the treatment to a more advanced level. For that part of the course, students use the text *Intermediate Algebra* by Lial, Hornsby and McGinnis.

*Language Arts*
Eighth grade language arts continues the work begun in the seventh grade. Students read such novels as *Lord of the Flies*, and *Re Jane: A Novel*, short stories such as "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Hills Like White Elephants," contemporary poetry, and complete *Sophie's World*. They rehearse and perform plays such as "Trifles" and, when the occasion calls for it, transform a short story such as "Why I Live at the P.O." into a play and then produce it. As they did in the seventh grade, students write numerous short and long essays, and a research paper that spans language arts and social studies. In the end, students leave the eighth grade not only with writing and reading skills, but with a sense of awe at the staggering literary, philosophical, and dramatic accomplishments of the human species.

*Social Studies: World History*
In eighth grade social studies, the teacher concentrates on themes in world history. As in seventh grade, the students read a variety of sources including primary and secondary sources in literature, art, philosophy, current events, and music. Major themes and topics include religion, the environment, world governments, and human rights. Students use

close-reading skills again to annotate and summarize readings that include secondary texts and evaluate primary sources such as the teachings of Asoka and first-hand accounts of soldiers during World War I. Essential questions are used to connect past events to present day topics and current events. Social studies and language arts teachers collaborate to provide connections between the two disciplines through literature, history, and writing. For instance, if the eighth graders are reading William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies,* then students will examine the concepts of government and order and the consequences of governmental breakdown. Students write a research paper that applies to both social studies and language arts. In social studies, the teacher looks closely at content, fluidity and historical accuracy while in language arts, the teacher is primarily concerned with the mechanics of writing a research paper.

*Science: Life Science*
In eighth grade science, we focus on the study of life. This is an introductory course designed to allow student to explore basic biological concepts in a laboratory setting. Students begin the year by looking at the properties shared by all living things such as cellular structure, biochemical make-up, and inheritance of genetic information. Students also learn basic microscopy skills. They then dive into an intensive survey of the vast range and diversity of life on earth that touches on all the domains and kingdoms. Both classic taxonomy and modern phylogenetic methods are discussed. They finish the year with a study of the human body, investigating the structures and functions of all the major organ systems.

*Social Emotional Learning (SEL)*
Our weekly advisory meetings reinforce and expand on the SEL skills the students need to cope effectively with the academic and personal challenges they experience during their last year at the Girls' School. The eighth grade is a really exciting phase in their lives and it often comes with new individual and collective responsibilities, emotions, and transitions. During our meetings, we make sure to frame all these changes as positive experiences and opportunities for growth and self-discovery. Based on the students social-emotional, physical, and cognitive developmental stages, we focus on the following topics: Personal and Academic Goals, Emotional Well-Being, Health, Making Choices and Personal Power, Academic Stress/ Planning and Organizing, Social Justice/ Global Citizenship, and High School Transition.

*Computer Literacy/Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET)*
Eighth grade SET begins with looking at the adolescent mind, where students are in terms of neurological development and how that plays into their use of social media as well as their interaction with technology in general. Since this is an age where many of the students are beginning to interact with various social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat, etc.), it is important for them to understand what impact these technologies have on their brain development.

After the neurology segment, the students re-engage with engineering with a series of small projects designed to focus on various concepts (weight distribution, structural support, etc.) as well as look at the impact building material costs might have on a

project.

The course culminates with another look at computer programming, where the students find an existing program in either SCRATCH or in PYTHON and figure out how the program works, then make a significant programmatic change to the program to enhance its functionality. This not only reinforces the logic taught through computer programming, but also teaches the students that most programming is not done starting from nothing, and that all the technology we have and work on is built on top of previous technologies and/or programs.

## SPECIALS

### Fine Art

The GSA art curriculum is designed to develop each girl's individual creativity and self-expression through a well-rounded study of art including history/context, mechanics, and hands-on application. Students are exposed to a wide variety of art forms and mediums, which are introduced in an historical context and exemplified in the work of notable artists. Discussion and demonstration then focus on mechanics, and each unit culminates in a technique-oriented project in which students create original work in that medium or art form. Artistic mediums/processes covered during the year include pastels, drawing, grey scale, acrylic painting on canvas, printmaking, pen & ink, and clay. Technical instruction includes classical lessons in drawing the human head and body, uses of shadow and light, landscapes, and still life. Guest artists/lecturers provide real-world perspective by sharing their work and experiences. Throughout the course of the year, all grades experience a sense of personal accomplishment and recognition through their art by participating in international artwork exchange programs, formal gallery exhibits and informal school displays of their work, charitable events, and multicultural collaborative art-centered celebrations. Additionally, middle school students are also encouraged to enter their work in various local/regional/national competitions and work on their choice of multi-media independent study projects. Every year, each K-8 student creates her own self-portrait, and the annual Self-Portrait Show is a highlight for our GSA community. By exploring, learning about, and creating art, students engage in a process of personal growth and self-expression, and develop another perspective from which to appreciate their own culture and that of others.

### Music

GSA students are required to take music lessons - either strings or piano - starting in kindergarten. Music classes are three times a week in grades K-6 and twice a week in grades 7 and 8.

*Strings*

The lower school strings curriculum is based on several important early musical techniques. These include, but are not limited to, a correct set-up with the instrument and bow; creating a beautiful sound, unison songs and singing (both classical and popular genres) and beginning note and rhythm reading. After the initial two years on the violin, students may move to another string instrument including the viola, cello and double bass. Second and third grades focus on ensemble, note-reading and beginning improvisation.

The middle school strings classes promote a refined approach to the instrument while developing a deeper appreciation of music. Physical comfort while playing is emphasized and the building blocks of an advanced technique are introduced. Students become more critical in their practicing and work on making their playing more expressive, using vibrato and a wider bowing palette.

In the middle school, students tackle a wide variety of musical styles, including pop

songs, world music, and unedited classical pieces, and are introduced to jazz improvisation techniques. Units on musical analysis, theory, history, and counterpoint introduce musical concepts through playing and lay the foundation for a broader level of musicianship. Students also participate in the choice of repertoire; student-driven activities, both in orchestral and chamber music settings, emphasize teamwork and independence. Students have an opportunity to participate in advanced orchestra programs after school -- Junior or Chamber Orchestra. Students who participate in Chamber prepare and audition for All-Region Orchestra. School-wide performances take place twice a year.

*Piano*
The piano program is individualized and developed to build applied skills in notation reading/interpretation, physicality (posture, position, fingering, coordination), expression/musical shaping, analysis, self-critique, time management/strategic approaches/disciplined consistency, etc. to age/experience-appropriate degrees. The various supplementary elements (composition and multi-media research projects) are designed to improve 1st-8th grade students' ability to notate their original creative efforts, think more deeply about creative choices, increase comfort level with experimentation/discovery, explore music and sound in a contextualized and interdisciplinary way, and incorporate music and performance elements into public presentation of both original material and research.

**Drama**
Lower school drama classes are taught once a week by Just Imagine—a local theater company. The classes teach the basics of theater, improvisation, and storytelling.

In middle school, each class performs a play that is connected to themes covered in the language arts and social studies curriculum. In recent years, plays have included *13 Colonies, Murder on the Orient Express, and The Crucible.*

**Physical Education & Health**
The GSA embraces a holistic approach to health and wellness education, engaging the mind as well as the body. Wellness is not only taught in theory, it is applied to situations as they arise. By incorporating health lessons into daily routines, girls are more likely to understand them on a deeper level and continue to apply what they have learned as they mature and take responsibility for their bodies and their mental, social and emotional health.

Beginning in kindergarten, girls work on tossing, throwing, catching, dribbling rhythms, cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength and endurance, locomotor skills, and flexibility. These skills and capacities are developed through yoga, games, dance and team sports.

From fifth through eighth grade, students learn to maintain physical fitness and flexibility, as well as cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength and endurance; they also may participate in individual and team sports. They continue to practice dribbling,

volleying, throwing, catching, shooting, rhythms, dance and yoga. Throughout the program, sportsmanship and teamwork are emphasized.

Sex education called GET REAL Comprehensive Sex Education That Works is taught as a comprehensive program in sixth through eighth grades.

**Spanish**

In the lower school, our primary goal is to instill comfort with speaking Spanish. We will use a range of activities to ensure that each student is engaged with appropriate linguistic concepts and vocabulary in a relaxed and fun-filled environment. Students will begin to acquire the language naturally and easily using a variety of research-based methods. Our goal is to use Spanish at least 90% of the time when teaching. We will also use stories, songs, skits, movements and gestures, repetition, everyday objects, and illustration to give students comprehensible input in fun and practical contexts through songs, games, activities, literature, and art projects. We incorporate basic geography by looking at maps and globes. Finally, we begin to introduce the cultural context for the language at this age as well by covering holidays and foods of the Spanish-speaking world.

In sixth through eighth grade, our Spanish language program develops a solid foundation in Spanish and encourages an understanding and an appreciation of Spanish-speaking cultures. Each grade level strengthens the skills acquired in the lower school, while focusing on details of grammar, communication, and culture. Sixth graders begin learning the components of high school Spanish I, including the conjugation of all present tense regular verbs, the production of grammatically correct sentences and short paragraphs, the performance of skits, and the maintenance of a five-minute conversation. The seventh and eighth grade Spanish program finishes the Spanish I curriculum and continues into Spanish II. Students read, write, speak and play games on a daily basis. Each week, students have conversation and reading days. Covering the basic grammatical structures and vocabulary of Spanish I and II prepares students to continue with Spanish III when they enter high school.

**Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)**

An essential part of our educational approach at GSA is Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Social-emotional learning consists of teaching students to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors. It is the process through which students enhance their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving in order to achieve important life goals. Evidence shows that students exposed to SEL demonstrate significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, and academic performance. Teachers use a variety of techniques including literature—the students learn from the characters and storylines—and reward systems (such as a “marble jar”). Teachers model and students use conflict resolution techniques (such as “I” language). While there is a dedicated time each week for SEL work (the period after lunch on Fridays), SEL is incorporated into all aspects of the GSA curriculum.

In addition to our SEL-infused core curriculum, we have developed several school-wide programs to further promote and solidify the Social Emotional Intelligence skills of our students, faculty, and community members. These are Friday community meetings, weekly advisory, "sister group" activities, service learning, parent education, book clubs, and professional development for faculty members.

**Service Learning**

GSA's Service Learning Program provides relevant and meaningful service in the community. The partnerships created with various community organizations are relevant to each grade level's course content. The service experiences per grade meet a need identified by the community by utilizing students in ways befitting their levels of knowledge and experience. The program is meant to enhance our students' academic learning experience, as well as develop their understanding of civic responsibility. Its fundamental goals are to deepen our students' understanding of individual leadership, systemic change, and social responsibility in the context of a local, national and global multi-cultural society. Some of the partnerships established through the GSA Service Learning Program are: Goodwill Central Texas, Operation Blue Santa, The School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, BookSpring and Urban Roots.

**Computer Literacy/Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET)**

SET is a pass/fail course that each middle school grade takes for half the year. The point of the class is to introduce the students to various ideas and technologies in the STEM field that are not covered in their standard coursework. We introduce increasingly complex ideas at age-appropriate levels and try to integrate classroom learning with technologies they are using both in and out of the classroom.