English

In English class, we wrapped up our reading of “The Giver” during the first part of the second semester. We examined several aspects of society, including health care, leisure activities, judicial systems, family structure, education, selection of leaders, and careers. Students carefully selected their topics and explored how the topics were portrayed in “The Giver” as compared to aspects of American society, culminating in a formal compare-contrast essay. Then, we began our reading of “Home of the Brave,” a full-length novel written in verse form. Keeping with the themes of identity, assimilation, and culture, students traced character development and the effects of an author’s usage of figurative language. Some of the big questions centered on how individuals maintain their identities while assimilating into a new society. After “Home of the Brave” we began reading “Romeo and Juliet.” Through pre-reading activities and some footage from a recent film version, along with audio recordings, the students were introduced to Shakespeare’s language, key characters in the play, and the overall plot line. Students demonstrated their understanding of the text through writing, discussion, and acting. Students studied the power dynamics of the era, as expressed through sword-play and dance, through a collaboration with the Dance department. The unit culminated in student-directed reenactments of key scenes from “Romeo and Juliet.”

Mathematics

The second semester of Grade 6 math encompassed many different topics, connections and problem solving skills. In January, students learned about rates and ratios and applied skills to design a scaled blueprint model of an annex to the Alhambra. Students also investigated the natural human body proportions as proposed by Leonardo DaVinci’s Vitruvian Man, as well as the Golden Ratio. After a review of percents and their representations, students discovered the difference between compound and simple interest and investigated various real life examples of tax and tip. We experimented with probability, looking at applications such as dice games and diagnosing patients with false positives. Students also calculated outcomes by deciphering between situations where order does and doesn’t matter. Before the March break, students embarked on the 4-triangle project where characteristics of polygons and sum of interior angles were reviewed. This began our geometry unit that covered two-dimensional geometry, including angles, triangles, quadrilaterals, circles, ellipses, area, and perimeter (circumference). The students were also introduced to graph theory, and learned how to use it as a problem solving strategy. Using Google Sketchup, students examined polyhedra and other three-dimensional shapes such as variations of cylinders and spheres. Students were then able to elicit formulas for surface area and volume, building upon previous knowledge learned in two-dimensional geometry. The year ended with a project on reconstructing Lego Bricks using Tinkercad, and preparing for the Math Colloquium in June.

Performing Arts: Elective

Students continue to participate in their yearlong Performing Arts Elective. The following courses are offered: Concert Band, Concert Choir, Drama, Instrument Ensemble, Jazz Ensemble, and Dance Ensemble. Groups are comprised of students from the entire middle division and each group performed at two evening concerts during the school year. Students are expected to participate actively with a positive and respectful attitude, be prepared with instruments or other necessary materials, willingly take risks, and demonstrate that they’ve made personal progress with regard to relevant skills.
Performing Arts: Music
Grade 6 students began the second semester with a comparative study of Renaissance and modern instruments. They discovered that the ancestors of the modern orchestra have similar sounds and can often be grouped in today’s orchestral families. Continuing with compare and contrast, students heard several versions of music based on Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet.” In preparation for a curriculum share students also learned pieces from the Arab world. We focused on improvisation on barred instruments and drums. During the final months of school, students worked on a square dance unit, learning relevant vocabulary, and brought their new dance moves to a year-end buddy share with Grade 2.

Science
The second half of the Grade 6 science curriculum began with a study of Astronomy. We spent several classes thinking about scale in the solar system and universe. Next students researched the planets in our solar system and made presentations. We then studied the history of astronomical ideas, from the pre-Socratics, through Aristotle and Ptolemy, to Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo. We looked at these models of the solar system as examples of competing scientific theories and discussed how one theory eventually triumphs. We connected this learning to the sixth grade social studies debate on Galileo’s trial. Next, we moved further afield, studying the life cycles of stars, the formation of galaxies and the Big Bang. We collaborated with Columbia Astronomy Community Outreach program and visited the observatory. We finished the year off with a unit on the human body, focusing on anatomy (structure) and physiology (function). Students explored various body systems in small groups becoming experts in one particular system. Students used their knowledge of the system to present to their peers.

Social Emotional Learning
The Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum presents students with opportunities to participate in dialogues regarding issues affecting positive social interactions. Working in groups with grade-level teachers and The School’s psychologists, students progress toward SEL objectives in areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, decision-making, and responsibility. The Grade 6 Life Skills curriculum provides opportunities for students to participate in discussions regarding issues impacting positive social interactions. Students progress toward objectives in areas of self-awareness, self-management, social skills, relationship management, decision-making, and responsibility. During Grade 6 Life Skills classes, students learn, discuss, and practice strategies related to a range of topics including: street smarts, nutrition, hygiene, conflict resolution, puberty, sexuality, relationships, media literacy and cyber safety.

Social Studies
In the second half of the year, students continued to study the concept of identity in the context of medieval Spain. They developed research and note-taking skills when presenting about different religions and writing about the history of Cordoba in the Islamic Empire. Students thought about how tensions between religions might develop and ultimately bring down the intellectual prosperity of a nation. They examined the Spanish Inquisition, the struggles that many Jews and Muslims had to face when forced to convert to Christianity, and the way their descendants are currently redefining themselves based on this history. After studying the Inquisition and the Dark Ages, students turned their focus to the European Renaissance in Italy. With a focus on the Scientific Revolution, students studied primary and secondary sources, looked at new technologies such as the printing press, and analyzed art and architecture to come to an understanding of how ideas developed during this time period have affected our contemporary world view. Again, religion was a major influence. Students staged a mock trial of Galileo, demonstrating their understanding of his ideas and inventions, and what it took for an individual to depart from common beliefs and expectations.
Spanish Language/Literacy
This semester Grade 6 students finish their study about Al-Andalus and the Alhambra. In connection with our study of Florence, students explore and analyze the Spanish Renaissance. This includes a study of the biography and work of the renowned Spanish painter Diego Velázquez. Sixth-graders study Velázquez’s life and describe his art using varied vocabulary and grammatical structures. Students learn to analyze Renaissance paintings using prepositions, regular and irregular verbs in the present tense such as gustar, querer, tener, ir, ser and estar. They learn the expression hay (there is) as well. Sixth-graders move on to a study of the geography, art and culture of Mexico during pre-Columbian times. They also learn how to use definite and indefinite articles and practice noun-adjective agreement while using home-related vocabulary. We incorporate different activities that allow students to use and practice their oral and written communication skills. Through these activities students are encouraged to take risks to enhance their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Visual Arts
Grade 6 students continue to develop creative and critical thinking skills while reinforcing learning to work in the shared art studio. Recognizing that religious and social beliefs often influenced artistic expression, the students study principles of Islamic art by taking a trip to The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Following the trip, the students begin creating geometric reduction printmaking designs. Reduction printing allows the artists to print using a series of colors while slowly reducing the contents of the plate. During the study of the Italian Renaissance, students use Photoshop to digitally incorporate themselves into famous works of art. Through this lesson we have a rich discussion about ownership of art, copyright, licensing, fair use, and the public domain. The 6th graders are also introduced to wheel working, creating many pots using this new technique. This is a unique experience, enjoyed by all students.

Wellness
This semester the students continued to work on their communication strategies in a team setting as part of a larger community. Grade 6 students transitioned to a lacrosse unit emphasizing healthy competition and tournament play. The students expanded an understanding of how men’s and women’s lacrosse is vastly different based on gender and were able to construct a written essay changing a lacrosse game. The students expanded an understanding of their bodies through integrated learning on the skeletal system, muscle pairs and body functions, in conjunction with their study of the Renaissance.