Grade 7 Curriculum Descriptions
Second Semester, 2014-2015

English
The focus of Grade 7 English was on building skills for reading critically and writing effective expository essays. The class challenged students to move beyond plot summary towards textual analysis and interpretation. During class discussions, students practiced skills of informed, shared, purposeful inquiry using academic language to express their ideas in preparation for writing analytical essays. Students have practiced formalist criticism, identifying those literary devices that authors use to convey meaning, and accounting for these structures in their written work. All students have worked to develop a thesis and organize their support evidence; some have written within the framework of the five-paragraph essay, while others have used different organization and structure according to their preference. They have also considered narrative point of view, writing about personal experiences in both the first and third person.

During the second semester, students complemented their growing knowledge of India and the African continent with themes and concepts raised by writers from these regions. Students examined characters whose ways of thinking challenged the existing social order. Students read “Keeping Corner” by Kashmira Sheth and “Things Fall Apart” by Chinua Achebe to enhance their understanding of these themes, while considering their own burgeoning sense of self and society.

Mathematics
This semester students applied what they learned about operations with integers to evaluate variable expressions. They applied these operations so that they could represent gains and losses, calculate differences in elevations, apply rates to solve problems and convert temperatures from Celsius to Fahrenheit. Performing operations on rational numbers was learned next to calculate points on a number line and on a coordinate plane, and also to evaluate variable expressions. These units of study set the foundation for more complex investigations in which students learned to simplify variable expressions and solve one and two-step equations using inverse operations to solve percent, ratio and proportion equations. Building on these skills, they graphed functions in a coordinate plane and used a table to graph linear functions. As the year ended, students studied perfect squares, solved radical expressions, and investigated properties of geometric shapes.

The curriculum was differentiated through the Enrichment Activity Center (EAC) and the Great Mathematician Project (GMP). The Great Mathematician Project (GMP) strengthened research and presentation skills. In addition to their research paper and final presentation, students worked with Don Buckley and Karen Blumberg to brainstorm online digital profiles of their selected mathematician, theorist, or inventor on our in-house social network. These profiles highlighted the education, interests and accomplishments of each historical figure researched and allowed students to recognize direct and indirect relationships across the pool of individuals that they researched for the GMP. In addition, students worked with the technology team to interpret and generate Infographics (the visual display of data, information, and knowledge) using Gapminder.

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**

Our integrated curriculum used in the study of Delhi has given the students the musical opportunity to study the Indian tabla drum. Students used the GarageBand software program on their computers to create sound designs with various musical forms: AB, ABA, Rondo, and Rondo-Sonata. The musical concepts of form, dynamics, timbre, and contrast, as well as, the recording studio techniques of panning the audio spectrum, working with faders, and mixing were employed to create a final digital musical file ready for release in iTunes. The final project of the year was the Grade 7 integrated study of Benin City. This study has given the students the opportunity to explore West African songs in two-part singing with melodic notation on the G clef from middle C up to the 4th-space C with both pentatonic and major scales. The playing of classroom instruments and the reading of a musical score has included both pitched and un-pitched instruments, with an emphasis on mallet technique with xylophones and metallophones, and hand technique on the congas, bongos, and djembes in three and four part arrangements.

**Science**

Spring semester ecology kicked off with two high-interest projects to foster deeper analysis of ecosystem interactions. In The Large Carnivores Museum Project, students curated museum exhibits to demonstrate how a diverse variety of top carnivores are crucial to ecosystem health and biodiversity. Students then created sealed biospheres, which served as a vehicle to apply and expand their understanding of important interactions among living organisms, especially the movement of energy through trophic levels, recycling of life's basic building blocks, and the causes and effects of limiting factors. With this solid foundation, students moved on to investigate species’ responses to environmental pressures, exploring variation, natural selection and adaptations. This led naturally into a study of basic genetics to reveal the mechanism of change in populations. Students learned how organisms inherit traits from their parents and how dominant and recessive alleles interact to produce variation in a population. By revisiting natural selection through the lens of genetics, students were then able to see how selective pressures affect the genetic makeup of a population and can result in the emergence of new species.

**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 7 SEL curriculum, implemented in conjunction with Life Skills, focuses on the high school placement process. Lessons include discussions of researching different choices the students have for high school, mock test taking for high school entrance exams, high school essay writing, practice completion of high school applications, and interview prep for high school admissions.

**Social Studies**

This past year students investigated, interpreted and analyzed recurring events, dilemmas and persistent issues throughout history. Students strove to understand history and current events using a variety of primary and secondary sources. They examined how point-of-view affects the telling of history. Beginning in January students studied India’s history starting with the achievements of the Indus Valley Civilization and ending with Partition. For the rest of the semester, students studied the ancient Kingdom of Benin and Benin City, including an investigation of the stolen art of Bini people. They began the unit by researching various African countries to develop an understanding of the diversity of the countries, peoples and geography that exists on
the continent. They explored interactions with and reactions to Europeans and how these have shaped Indian and West African societies.

Spanish Language/Literacy
Grade 7 students began the semester by studying the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and its connections to West Africa, exploring the history of the slave trade and the effect this had on the area. The students investigated and discussed the various syncretisms of Spanish and African culture that occurred in this area relating to religion, food, dance and music. Students also compared Spanish-speaking Caribbean flags, researched and communicated spontaneously on selected political and historical topics, compared Afro-Caribbean art to that of Benin and explored African influences in the literature of José Martí and Nicolás Guillén.

Visual Arts
Grade 7 students begin the semester with a project titled “Doorway Event.” For this project, students create a timeline of their lives in order to identify an experience that had profoundly affected them either positively or negatively. They write about their “doorway event” experience in preparation for expressing that experience visually in a multi-media artwork. In support of the grade level study of India, students learn about traditional textile motifs and wood block printing practiced in India. Each student then explores the process by designing relief plates and printing them multiple times to create a larger composition based on repetition and variation. Their printmaking compositions are inspired by Indian wood block printing tradition, and their own musical compositions created in their music class. The seventh graders rotate in small groups to receive concentrated instruction on the pottery wheel, and have the opportunity to hone their skills with clay: centering, throwing and trimming on the wheel. In connection with the seventh-grade study of Africa, seventh-graders view and respond verbally to Nigerian art works, and express their responses in hands-on studio explorations. Lastly, as a culminating experience, the seventh-graders visit the galleries of the Philadelphia Museum of Art to freely explore the collection.

Wellness
During the second semester, Grade 7 students focused on the skills, rules, and team teamwork involved in team sports. Specifically, the students were immersed in the study of Cricket and Soccer. While the students studied India in the classroom, they both work on the skills of the sport and read about the impact that the sport had on India’s people. Once the classroom focus turned to West Africa, the Wellness classes looked to South Africa and the effect that soccer had on the political prisoners who were jailed along with Nelson Mandela. They created their own soccer league and practiced, played, and conducted a tournament under their own rules and laws. Finally, the students revisited the Fitness unit to compare their fitness scores in the Spring to those of the Winter and Fall. They were encouraged to reflect on the changes in their scores to plan for improvement or maintenance in the future.