



Middle School Course Offerings

Academic Year 2020-21

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CONTENTS

OVERVIEW.....	3
MISSION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES	4
GRADING AND ASSESSMENT	5
SUMMARY OF COURSE OFFERINGS.....	6
ENGLISH	7
MATHEMATICS.....	8
HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES.....	10
SCIENCE.....	11
WORLD LANGUAGES.....	12
VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS	13
SIGNATURE PROGRAMS.....	15
WELLNESS AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION.....	17

OVERVIEW

At Thaden School, we approach the middle school years as a time to nurture agile minds and hearts through discovery, learning, and play. Early adolescents have unique intellectual, social, and emotional needs as they navigate the critically important years between elementary and high school.

Designed with a deep understanding of these needs, Thaden’s middle school curriculum ignites students’ curiosity and passion for discovery while building the skills and habits they will need to thrive in our upper school program. Giving equal emphasis to the sciences and humanities, the middle school curriculum is designed to ensure that students build a strong and balanced foundation across all major disciplines. While our curriculum respects the boundaries of the core academic disciplines so that students understand how scientists, artists, mathematicians, historians, and others create knowledge and understand the world, the course of study within a given discipline will often intersect with other disciplines in ways that help students discover larger patterns and explore broad topics and questions from multiple angles.

Our commitment to interdisciplinary problem solving also finds rich expression within the context of our three signature programs — Meals, Reels, and Wheels — where students combine multiple fields of study and engage with community partners in ways that foster a strong sense of civic responsibility. Intensives as well as grade-level Community-Based Learning (CBL) projects provide further opportunities for students to form and investigate their own questions from many perspectives.

While our curriculum committee and academic leadership oversee the development of our academic program to ensure consistency and coherence, we leverage the special interests and expertise of our nationally recruited faculty by giving them considerable discretion in the design of their courses. Our faculty use a wide range of pedagogical methods – from seminar-style discussions to community-engaged projects – that collectively enhance students’ versatility as problem solvers who can work independently and collaboratively in a rapidly changing world.

By virtue of our indexed tuition program and small class sizes, we also offer a classroom experience in which students of many interests, aspirations, and backgrounds share and explore different points of view under the guidance of nurturing, even-handed educators. As our students discover their common ground and learn from their differences, they grow better prepared for life and citizenship in a nation founded upon a shared commitment to the value of civil debate and diversity of thought.

Our approach to the assessment of academic work is designed to foster a “growth mindset” and resilience in the face of challenge. In particular, our standards-based grading practices illuminate the path to self-improvement by helping students focus on the skills and habits essential to their success at Thaden and beyond. Given our small class sizes, we also expect faculty to provide their students with detailed written feedback and personal encouragement that will build their self-confidence and ignite a lifelong passion for learning and discovery.

MISSION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our mission is to provide a balanced and challenging education that ignites in our students a passion for discovery and learning, prepares them to succeed in college, and inspires them to lead lives of integrity, purpose, and responsible global citizenship.

In pursuing our mission, we are guided by these principles:

- The diversity of a school is essential to the quality of education that it provides.
- In a small school students are better able to form close relationships with teachers that will give them a stronger sense of belonging, self-confidence, and responsibility.
- There is an art in masterful teaching, which requires resources, mentorship, and recognition.
- A well-balanced curriculum empowers students:
 - To think ethically, critically, and creatively about global issues and their local manifestations;
 - To see connections among the humanities, sciences, and mathematics as integrative disciplines in the search for knowledge, meaning, and beauty;
 - To build coherent, compelling, and innovative arguments;
 - To establish their voice in the world by writing and speaking well and expressing themselves creatively;
 - To work independently and collaboratively.
- Activities outside of the classroom (such as acting in a play, competing on a team, or working on a sustainability project) give students essential opportunities to develop as leaders, volunteers, and contributors to the life and spirit of the greater community.
- A school must create a safe and healthy environment where students have time and space for reflection, freedom to make important decisions, and opportunities to learn from mistakes.
- The harmony of a school community depends on a shared commitment to honesty, compassion, and fair play.

GRADING AND ASSESSMENT

Consistent with the practices of many leading independent schools, Thaden School promotes a growth mindset among our younger learners in the Middle School by focusing their attention on the pursuit of our transdisciplinary learning goals. We refrain from assigning letter grades to their work because a single mark can have an anchoring effect and perpetuate a fixed mindset.

Instead, Middle School students receive ratings on their progress in meeting learning goals for each of their courses. These ratings appear on their progress reports, which are released at the middle and end of each trimester. Additionally, students receive narrative comments from their teachers twice a year and, at the end of the year, a personal letter written by their advisor or another member of the faculty. This letter is a reflection on their growth over the course of the entire year.

The specific learning goals on which students receive ratings are divided into two categories:

Skills

- Factual Knowledge: accurately recalls and uses factual information and vocabulary
- Conceptual Understanding: grasps fundamental ideas, constructs, frameworks, and theories
- Procedural Technique: understands and follows disciplinary methods and processes
- Critical Thinking: effectively analyzes complex problems using factual knowledge, conceptual understandings, and procedural techniques
- Communication: clearly and/or persuasively articulates ideas and arguments with appreciation for the audience and context
- Creativity and Originality: generates and advances novel ideas, products, or points of view

Habits

- Preparation: brings relevant materials to class and effectively manages time
- Initiative and Perseverance: actively engages in the learning process and demonstrates an eagerness to improve
- Collaboration: works well in diverse groups to achieve a common goal

While students may cultivate many, if not most, of these Skills and Habits in each of their courses, progress reports identify and rate only the goals that a teacher deems most important in the context of a given course. A student's progress with respect to each goal is rated numerically on a 4-point scale, indicating the degree to which the student has progressed in meeting grade-level expectations: (1) Beginning; (2) Approaching; (3) Meeting; (4) Exceeding.

SUMMARY OF COURSE OFFERINGS

ENGLISH			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
English	English 6	English 7	English 8
MATHEMATICS			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Mathematics	Patterns and Problem Solving	Pre-Algebra	Algebra I
		Pre-Algebra with Additional Problem Solving	Algebra I with Additional Problem Solving
HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
History	Ancient World History		American Studies
Social Sciences		Human Geography	
SCIENCE			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Science	Scientific Foundations	Environmental Science	Physical Science and Engineering
WORLD LANGUAGES			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
World Languages	World Languages Rotation (Latin, Mandarin, Spanish)	Latin A Mandarin A Spanish A	Latin B Mandarin B Spanish B
VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Visual and Performing Arts	Arts Rotations (Music, Theater, Visual)		Choral Ensemble Show Choir Instrumental Ensemble Theater Arts Visual Arts
SIGNATURE PROGRAMS			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Signature Programs	Signature Experiences	Signature Programs Rotations (Meals, Reels, and Wheels)	
PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND WELLNESS			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Physical Education	Physical Education Courses		
Wellness		Wellness 7	

ENGLISH

English 6

This year-long course helps students further discover themselves as readers and writers. They are encouraged to read independently, focusing on books of their choosing that represent a variety of genres and reading experiences. Collective and independent readings serve as a foundation for students to hone their analytical thinking through large- and small-group discussions, along with written reflections. Students write frequently and in a variety of modes, including longer essays and emulative creative and personal writing. In order to become deft writers and community-minded readers, students study English as a language system and present book talks to their peers. The English and Social Studies courses, as is the case throughout the Thaden School curriculum, are continually in thematic conversation.

Required in Grade 6

English 7

This year-long course teaches students to read carefully, write powerfully, grapple with big ideas, and find joy in these processes. Together, students consider fundamental questions of identity. As they examine this theme across genre and context, students explore the ways in which their communities shape who they are. Students also acquire a set of strategies for effective reading, such as annotating, close reading, and other methods of engaging with classic and contemporary works. Representative texts include *The Outsiders*, *The Lions of Little Rock*, *Seedfolks*, and *The Little Prince*. The study of literature creates the context for students to creatively experiment with genre, developing confidence with journal entries, essays, poetry, short stories, and other forms. Students leave this course with a strong sense of the writing process, including brainstorming, drafting, exchanging feedback, and revising with purpose.

Required in Grade 7

English 8

This year-long course hones students' reading, writing, thinking, and discussion skills through careful reflection on novels, short stories, poetry, and drama. Students continue their explorations of the concept of community, this time delving into what happens to communities in crisis and investigating the many possible ways an individual can make change, negative or positive. Representative texts include *The House on Mango Street*, *March: Book One*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *Cannery Row*. Students also develop leadership skills within the classroom learning community, as they practice engaging respectfully with opposing viewpoints and exchanging detailed feedback on their work. Diving deeply into each step of the writing process, students draft descriptive, expository, persuasive, and reflective pieces in response to the texts they read. Revision remains an integral part of this process, and regular activities dedicated to the mechanics of the English language and the joy of words advance students' development as writers, speakers, and listeners.

Required in Grade 8

MATHEMATICS

Patterns and Problem Solving

In this year-long course, students develop their quantitative reasoning skills as they gain exposure to a range of mathematical branches including arithmetic, geometry, and algebra, and learn to use logic and trial and error to solve problems. Students explore how to manipulate whole numbers, decimals, and fractions, while also delving into ratios and proportions, percent, plane geometry, number theory, and other introductory aspects of algebra. In the day-to-day, they frequently investigate problems in small groups before deepening their understanding through facilitated whole-class discussions.

Required in Grade 6

Pre-Algebra

In this year-long course, students continue to develop their arithmetic and algebraic, problem solving, and mathematical communication skills. Particular emphasis is placed on teaching students to seek answers and understandings that encompass much more than the numerical result of an algorithmic process. Equally important, students learn to work individually and collaboratively and to communicate their thought processes and results clearly – verbally and in writing. Classwork and assignments are designed to help students see a broad spectrum of mathematical questions, from the abstract to the applied.

Pre-Algebra or Pre-Algebra with Additional Problem Solving required in Grade 7

Pre-Algebra with Additional Problem Solving

In this year-long course, students learn the same core content and skills as the Pre-Algebra course. The Pre-Algebra with Additional Problem Solving course offers students extra challenge by compressing the learning and practice of core course skills in order to allow students to spend a third of their time tackling deeper mathematical challenges.

Pre-Algebra or Pre-Algebra with Additional Problem Solving required in Grade 7

Algebra I

In this course, students learn the basic structure of algebra while further developing their problem-solving and critical thinking skills. With a focus on data analysis and visual representation, students explore the real-life implications and key properties of functions and their corresponding graphs. Using data sets collected from Thaden School's campus as well as big data sets from sources such as the United States Census Bureau, they analyze what data reveal and conceal about the past and the present. Beyond modeling, students also draw and create visuals with lines, quadratics, and exponentials. Through discussion, partner work, and written work, students continue to develop their mathematical voice and learn to describe their processes and conclusions with clarity and insight.

Algebra I or Algebra I with Additional Problem Solving required in Grade 8

Algebra I with Additional Problem Solving

In this year-long course, students learn the same core content and skills as the Algebra I course. The Algebra I with Additional Problem Solving course offers students extra challenge by compressing the learning and practice of core course skills in order to allow students to spend a third of their time tackling deeper mathematical challenges.

Algebra I or Algebra I with Additional Problem Solving required in Grade 8

HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES

Ancient World History

This year-long course takes students to and through early, ancient, and pre-modern history in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. By way of a close examination of early civilizations, students understand how geography and the trade of goods, ideas, and religion influenced the rise and fall of entire cultures and civilizations. Throughout the course, students learn to engage critically with texts, use evidence in discussion and writing, and embrace complexity.

Required in Grade 6

Human Geography

This year-long course introduces students to tools and methods that will enable them to investigate how geography, culture, political and economic systems, and other factors shape the development of societies, locally and globally. Students enrich their inquiries of current events and culture with readings and video materials, such as *The New York Times' Upfront* magazine and TED Talks. Project-based and research-driven learning provide them with opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge as social scientists, while assigned readings provide opportunities to practice annotation, close reading, and critical analysis. Writing assignments focus on forming logical claims, integrating relevant sources, organizing well-structured paragraphs, and undertaking thoughtful reflection and analysis. Ultimately, this course challenges students to look at issues from multiple perspectives, to appreciate the complexity of the human experience, and to engage in respectful and evidence-based discussions before forming opinions and advancing solutions.

Required in Grade 7

American Studies

This year-long course introduces students to changing notions of what it means to be “American.” Together, students engage with America’s past and present through a wide range of sources that give voice to multiple perspectives. They dive deeply into a set of historical turning points and core concepts in American history, including civil liberties, equality, the rule of law, justice, and the common good. Along the way, students learn to read, think, and write like historians by using a mixture of primary and secondary sources. The study of the past and present helps students recognize and navigate the complexities inherent in writing history, explore how public figures use their voices to advance certain conceptions of national identity, and engage in personal reflections on what it means to be a citizen of the United States.

Required in Grade 8

SCIENCE

Scientific Foundations

In this year-long course, students explore the systems of the natural world and the life that it supports. Beginning with our universe and then gradually moving closer to home, students learn about our solar system and examine the processes that make Earth a living planet. This foundation allows students to learn more about the characteristics of life, from the structure of plant and animal cells to the systems within living organisms, to the ways living things depend on their natural surroundings. Learning includes lab investigations, experimental design, and opportunities that engage other disciplines, including math, art, and the humanities. In this course, students learn by doing, which combines collaborative discovery, wonder, and tinkering in a manner that deepens their sense of the world and prepares them to be the next generation of problem solvers.

Required in Grade 6

Environmental Science

This year-long course examines our planet's three domains – water, air, and earth. Students study the chemistry that acts upon each domain, the organisms that depend upon and dwell within ecosystems, and the environmental impacts of humans. In particular, they learn how living organisms operate at microscopic and macroscopic levels, giving particular emphasis to water as a vital material for all forms of life and the importance of freshwater sustainability. The course utilizes Thaden School's teaching gardens and other places in our community to explore the unity and diversity of living organisms and examine the characteristics of plants and animals.

Required in Grade 7

Physical Science and Engineering

In this year-long course, students investigate the fundamentals of physical science (motion and kinematics, dynamics, and chemistry), while learning about solar energy, computer hardware, circuitry, and the magic of electricity. Students design and undertake experiments, indoors and outdoors, that deepen their grasp of Newton's laws of motion. And given that math is the language of physics, students have abundant opportunities to develop their graphing and algebra skills in kinematics and dynamics.

Required in Grade 8

WORLD LANGUAGES

World Languages Rotation

In this rotation, students undergo a trimester each of Latin, Mandarin, and Spanish before opting into the full-year study of the language of their choice in Grade 7. These courses emphasize the four core skills essential to developing proficiency and fluency in any language: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. In accordance with evolving language-learning standards, Thaden School prioritizes self-expression and connection-making. Students deepen their enthusiasm, confidence, and skills through the use of dialogues, skits, games, and music, among other tools, and they explore culture through folklore, celebrations, current events, history, and art.

Required in Grade 6

Latin A and B

Using *Lingua Latina per se Illustrata* by Hans Ørberg, this two-year course sequence (Latin A in Grade 7, Latin B in Grade 8) prepares students to enroll in Latin II in the Upper School. Focusing on the life and events of a second century CE Roman family as a portal into Roman culture, customs, history, and religion, this course aims to instill a confidence in students, so they feel increasingly comfortable expressing themselves in Latin. Students may participate in nationally recognized exams sponsored by the American Classical League, namely the National Mythology Exam and the National Latin Exam. Trips to a Latin mass and rotating museum exhibits pertinent to Latin and the Classical world further enhance student learning.

Open to Grades 7 and 8

Mandarin A and B

This two-year course sequence (Mandarin A in Grade 7, Mandarin B in Grade 8) prepares students to enroll in Mandarin II in the Upper School. While learning about the culture of China, students acquire and develop basic grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension through Chinese characters. Pronunciation and the four tones are emphasized through the Pinyin system and relevant speaking and listening exercises. Students are introduced to the reading and writing of Chinese characters through short dialogues and elementary patterns of Chinese grammar.

Open to Grades 7 and 8

Spanish A and B

While advancing students' understanding of basic grammar, this two-year course sequence (Spanish A in Grade 7, Spanish B in Grade 8) prepares students to enroll in Spanish II in the Upper School. Students learn to speak about themselves, ask questions, provide information about people, objects, and places, and share their likes and dislikes. Students also learn to share feelings, opinions, and comparisons, discuss time and daily activities, and express present obligations and needs along with plans for the future. Students explore popular culture, customs, and traditions from the Spanish-speaking world.

Open to Grades 7 and 8

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Arts Rotation

In these rotations of three one-trimester courses, students are introduced to music, theater, and visual art as ways to interpret and make meaning out of our complex world. At Thaden, the arts help students explore, experiment, and take risks in expressing themselves both individually and in the context of ensembles. Each course provides them with opportunities to practice medium-specific activities, such as exploring rhythm through body percussion, rehearsing and staging short theatrical scenes, and developing and presenting drawing and paintings projects. Students regularly engage in dynamic hands-on learning exercises. They are encouraged to adopt a growth mindset as they practice new techniques, apply fundamental concepts, and engage in creative risk-taking.

Additionally, they learn to develop their critical artistic eye and acquire the language necessary to constructively communicate their critiques of their own work and that of others. Students can further hone their artistic skills outside of class by availing themselves of Thaden School's art studio and rehearsal spaces during free time, lunch clubs, and after-school enrichment.

Required in Grades 6 and 7

Choral Ensemble

In this year-long course, students prepare and perform choral music. They develop music fundamentals (rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, form, texture, and dynamics) and vocal techniques (sight-reading, breath support, and posture) with the goal of becoming independent musicians and strong musical leaders. Students also critique performances, reflect on connections to self and community, as well as other disciplines, and consider the role music plays as a form of expression, social change, and community building.

Open to Grade 8

Show Choir

Show Choir is a performance-based year-long course where students prepare popular music. Students learn how to add choreography to songs, and practice their text interpretation, facial and body expression, and many performance skills. In addition, they develop music fundamentals (rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, form, texture, and dynamics) and vocal techniques (sight-reading, breath support, and posture) with the goal of becoming independent musicians and strong musical leaders. This course provides opportunities for solo and small-group performances in our school and the greater community.

Open to Grade 8

Instrumental Ensemble

In this year-long course, instrumentalists of all backgrounds and interests (*i.e.*, band, orchestra, rock, jazz, etc.) come together to prepare and perform music while developing fundamental and instrument-specific techniques with the goal of becoming independent and collaborative musicians. Based on instrumentation and interest, students work on their repertoire as a full ensemble as well as in smaller groups, chamber ensembles, and as soloists.

Open to Grade 8

Theater Arts

Designed for students interested in learning more about theatre, this year-long course provides opportunities for students to dig deeper and have fun while strengthening their acting skills. Students explore many areas of performance including improvisation, acting games, and drama exercises. During the second trimester, they work on producing a play. This class is intended for many types of students: those who are simply curious about theatre, those who think theatre is fun and enjoyable, and those who truly love acting.

Open to Grade 8

Visual Art

In this year-long course, students build their foundation in visual art techniques through lessons that emphasize observation and imagination, while developing their artistic voice. Projects involve drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture, and experimental media. This course exposes students to a variety of historical and contemporary artists and art styles and vocabulary that provide students with tools and contexts for reflecting on their own works of art and the complex role of visual art in society. The course culminates with an independent study project in student-selected media.

Open to Grade 8

SIGNATURE PROGRAMS

Signature Experiences

Students in grade 6 complete fun and challenging interdisciplinary projects designed within and across their core courses. These exercises are grounded in and supported by Thaden School's three signature programs in anticipation of their signature coursework in grades 7 and 8.

Required in Grade 6

Signature Rotation 7

- **Meals A:** This one-trimester course introduces students to the study of food through hands-on lessons in Thaden School's garden and kitchen with a focus on understanding where food comes from and the scientific and cultural processes essential to food production. Students are actively involved in tending the school's garden and flock of hens and supporting the composting system. In addition, students deepen their connection to Northwest Arkansas by growing, preparing, and tasting food with roots in the history and culture of the region.
- **Reels A:** This one-trimester course introduces students to the fundamental components of New Media, such as video production and editing, graphic and web design, and social media. Students also examine the aspects of storytelling and composition that are essential to effective and persuasive communication in any medium, old or new. Over the course of the trimester, students build online portfolios for their work that they can augment and refine throughout their years at Thaden.
- **Wheels A:** This one-trimester course introduces students to the dynamics, culture, and procedures of working in a shop. Through the assembly of a single-speed bicycle, students gain familiarity with the tools and techniques applicable to bicycle assembly, maintenance, and repair. Problem-solving and tinkering are integral to this course. Students also examine how the skills and knowledge developed in the shop translate to other disciplines and contexts. This course culminates with students producing and presenting educational tutorials that showcase the art and science of their craft.

Required in Grade 7

Signature Rotation 8

- **Meals B:** This one-trimester course builds upon the knowledge students acquire in Meals A through deeper inquiry into the connections between climate, soil, and seasonality of produce. Students also study the food culture of our local community as well as those of other regions of the world. Experiential lessons in the garden and the kitchen further enable students to examine the interconnectedness of food and culture as they learn and practice gardening and cooking techniques.
- **Reels B:** This one-trimester course takes students deeper into short-form video production. Through class lectures and workshops, students learn skills such as treatment writing, cast selection, directing, producing, lighting, camera work, and editing. While developing

technical skills as filmmakers, they grow stronger and more responsible as producers and consumers of stories (visual and otherwise) that address a variety of issues. Screenings of student-made film figure prominently in this course.

- **Wheels B:** This one-trimester course examines the interplay between the built environment and the bicycle as a mode of transportation. Students' examination proceeds by way of a project-based learning experience wherein students research and develop a basic tactical urbanism guide – for example, traffic-calming projects for implementation in the real world. Students then present this guide to an audience of planners, advocates, and city officials for feedback. If time allows, students may implement their ideas in Bentonville. On-bike fieldwork is also a crucial component of the research process. Several class meetings are devoted to expanding students' mechanical abilities.

Required in Grade 8

WELLNESS AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical Education

In physical education courses at Thaden, students learn a variety of sports at their own level. Physical education is a critical component of student development and the overall school curriculum. Through different games and sports, students develop their hand-eye coordination skills. Representative units in physical education classes include ultimate frisbee, flag football, basketball, kickball, and wiffleball. Classes may include rock climbing, mountain biking, tennis, dance, and yoga. The PE program is designed so that our students feel comfortable with physical activity and grow to see it as integral to a healthy lifestyle.

Required in Grades 6, 7, and 8

Wellness

In this course, students are encouraged to reflect on and practice healthy living. Units include identity development, nutrition, anatomy, and physiology. All units stress taking responsibility for one's actions through the practice of communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution.

Required in Grade 7