



**THADEN  
SCHOOL**

**MIDDLE SCHOOL COURSE OFFERINGS  
ACADEMIC YEAR 2019-20**

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Dear Thaden Families,

Our faculty members have worked creatively and collaboratively to improve upon existing courses and develop the course guide for students in 2019-20. We are excited to support students in developing their skills and establishing the strong and deep foundations that set will them up for success in advanced studies and lifelong pursuits across disciplines. We are eager, too, to support students in their socioemotional development throughout our academic program.

The guide is notable in several respects:

- **Grade 6 Program:** The addition of our grade 6 program affords students a year to acquire and develop study, thinking, and organizational skills earlier in their educational journey. Grade 6 students will develop foundational critical thinking, reading, historical thinking, and writing skills across disciplines. Note: Our Humanities course combines English and Social Studies, offering students historical lenses into literary works and literary lenses into history.
- **Campus as Classroom:** Our courses will activate the educational value of our new campus landscape and infrastructure. For example, the environmental science course may use our new water lab, geothermal system, greenhouse, rain gardens, and composting areas as platforms for a variety of projects. Our new teaching kitchen also adds a critical dimension to our Meals Program.
- **Choice:** Our curriculum will grow in the coming years, to include student choice in the arts and languages as early as grade 7 and to give students considerable freedom to explore and develop specific interests.

We look forward to supporting our students as they progress through their course of study and discover passions that will steer them in customizing their upper school course of study. While our program continues to grow and evolve, the value of a Thaden education ultimately resides in the exceptional quality of the faculty who ignite in our students a passion for discovery and learning, prepare them to succeed in college, and inspire them to lead lives of integrity, purpose, and responsible global citizenship.

Sincerely,

José Leonor  
Director of Middle School

## 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.

# Course Overview

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Arts	Arts Rotation (Music, Theater, and Visual Art)		
ENGLISH AND WORLD LANGUAGES			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
English	Introduction to Humanities	English A	English B
World Languages	World Languages Rotation (Latin, Mandarin, Spanish)	Latin A Mandarin A Spanish A	
HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
History	Introduction to Humanities		American Studies
Social Studies		Human Geography	
STEM (SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, MATHEMATICS)			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Science and Engineering	Scientific Foundations	Environmental Science	Physical Science and Engineering
Math and Computer Science	Patterns and Problem Solving	Pre-Algebra	Algebra I
SIGNATURE PROGRAMS			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Meals, Reels, and Wheels	Signature Experiences	Signature Programs Rotation 7 (Meals A, Reels A, Wheels A)	Signature Programs Rotation 8 (Meals B, Reels B, Wheels B)
PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND WELLNESS			
Program	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Physical Education	Physical Education Courses		
Wellness		MS Wellness	

## 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 this class by availing themselves of Thaden School's art studio and rehearsal spaces during free time, lunch clubs, and after-school enrichment.

Required for Grades 6-8

# ENGLISH

## Introduction to the Humanities

This year-long course prepares students for the humanities work that they will engage in at Thaden School and beyond. Students learn to engage critically with texts, use evidence in discussion and writing, and embrace complexity in their experiences. And, as they begin their journey at Thaden, they explore themes of community and place through topics in social studies and literary portraits. Students also reflect on the local and personal manifestations of large-scale global issues, learning to leverage their own voices to make an impact.

Required for Grade 6

## English A

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*, *Refugee*, *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 for Grade 7

## English B

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 investigate 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 for Grade 8

## WORLD LANGUAGES

### World Languages Rotation

In this rotation of three one-trimester courses, students undergo a trimester each of Latin, Mandarin, and Spanish before opting into full-year study of the language of their choice in future years. These courses emphasize the four core skills essential to developing proficiency and fluency in any language: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Listening and speaking are particularly paramount at this level. In accordance with evolving language-learning standards, Thaden School prioritizes self-expression and connection-making over rote study. 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. Students are expected to interact with each other using the target language whenever possible as they grow their vocabulary and deepen their grasp of basic grammar structures in preparation for more advanced language study.

Required for Grades 6 and 7

### Latin A

Using *Lingua Latina per se Illustrata* by Hans Ørberg, this year-long course focuses 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 also 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 Grade 8

### Mandarin A

This year-long course provides an introduction to spoken and written Chinese with an emphasis on cultural perspectives. While learning about the culture of China, students acquire and develop basic grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension through Chinese characters. They grow in their understanding of the language through conversation and writing exercises. Throughout the year, 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 Grade 8

### Spanish A

While advancing students' understanding of basic grammar, this year-long course enlarges their capacity to speak about themselves, ask questions and 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 Grade 8

\*Students who successfully complete Middle School language coursework at Thaden School will be placed in Level II courses upon entering the Upper School.

## HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES

### Introduction to Humanities

*(See English course listings)*

### 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 for 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 for Grade 8

# MATHEMATICS

## Patterns and Problem Solving

In this 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, where students are taught how to clearly communicate mathematical ideas.

Required in Grade 6

## Pre-Algebra

In this 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.

Required in Math Sequence (Grades 7 or 8)

## 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.

Required in Math Sequence (Grades 7 or 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 learning opportunities that engage other disciplines, including math, art, and 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 for 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. By taking electronic devices apart and putting them back together and wiring breadboards, they observe and come to understand the principles of electrical current. Students also 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, among other skills.

Required for Grade 8

## SIGNATURE PROGRAMS

### Signature Experiences

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

Required for 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 for 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 for 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 fine- and gross-motor 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 for Grades 6-8

### 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 for Grade 7