

Introduction

Middle School Exploratories are semester-long non-graded classes designed to allow students to “explore” new subjects without the pressure of grades. They are “learning for the joy of learning” experiences. The probable Exploratory offerings are below but courses are often added or deleted based on student interest.

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Acting Introduction

Acting Introduction is a subject that aims at giving students the opportunity to explore the fundamentals of acting and understand what it means to portrait a character on stage. Students will be introduced to the notions of character and performance. They will work with scripts and improvised scenes to practice the usage of voice, facial expressions and body language/movement to convey meaning and emotion.

Expectations:

- Recognize the three instruments of the actor: voice, face and body.
- Demonstrate focus and concentration in rehearsal to make choices in a devised or scripted drama/theater work.
- Understand how to develop physical and vocal traits of a character.
- Participate in a variety of acting exercises and techniques.
- Collaborate with peers to practice and develop character traits and choices.
- Use self-reflection and peer feedback to analyze individual and ensemble performances.
- Demonstrate performance and audience etiquette.

Active Living

Active Living is a Middle School elective that focuses on encouraging students to be active through playing fun games and participating in low level physical pursuits.

Expectations:

- Identify reasons why it is important to have an active lifestyle.
- Identify the physical and emotional health benefits of an active lifestyle.
- Develop collaborative team skills to accomplish challenges.
- Encourage lifelong physical activity that can be continued outside of school individually or in small groups, for example Frisbee, ping-pong and short hikes.
- Participate in a broad variety of games from different cultural backgrounds including traditional Portuguese pastimes such as Jogo da Malha and Petanque.
- Experience new games and investigate their origins.
- Engage in fair play, enjoy activities irrelevant of the score.
- Reflect on individual performance and enjoyment of each activity to determine ones they are likely to continue.
- Nurture a positive attitude towards being active.

Coding

This is a Semester-course designed for 7th and 8th grade students with little or no prior experience with coding. The goal is to give them the opportunity to understand the role that programming can play to solve problems. Students will be given the opportunity to write simple programs using different development techniques.

Expectations:

- Design and write code for short programming tasks to demonstrate the use of operators for assignment, arithmetic, comparison, and Boolean combinations.
- Discuss and implement core features of structured programming languages, such as variables, operators, loops, decisions, assignment and modules.
- Debug and solve problems catching code errors and exceptions to output correct values.
- Develop algorithms to decision-making problems using branching control statements.
- Define bits and bytes and understand how computers store data.
- Describe the main components of a computer system (CPU, memory, main storage, I/O devices, buses).

Dance

This course is designed for everyone, because *“Anyone can and should dance...It’s good for the body and spirit.” (Isadora Duncan)*. It will develop an awareness of movement as a means of expression and communication as well as an understanding of some dance vocabulary and its elements. In this class, students will explore basic dance moves, mostly commercial and urban

street styles, as well as build creativity, balance, flexibility and coordination. Dancers will have a variety of experiences that include practicing choreography, improvising and performing.

Expectations:

- Arrive on time, prepared for dance class and follow the health and safety expectations.
- Stay focused and alert, be supportive and encouraging of classmates while avoid being a distraction to others.
- Explore basic warm-up techniques, stretch and flexibility exercises.
- Experience different rhythms, develop coordination and practice isolation.
- Extend understanding and use of space, time, dynamics and relationships, including performing in groups of various sizes.
- Use expressive skills to communicate meaning and feelings.
- Use combinations of movement and technical skills, develop creativity, body control and accuracy.

Digital Art

In Digital Art, students are introduced to the software and digital tools needed to create illustrations and paintings. Students learn the skills needed to render and edit digital two-dimensional images.

Expectations:

- Develop fundamental techniques needed to draw and edit digital images.
- Develop basic knowledge and understanding of selected digital art computer applications.
- Import two-dimensional print images or hand-drawn sketches into a digital format.
- Understand and apply basic design principles (symmetry, perspective, focal points, texture, composition etc.) in the production of original digital images.
- Engage in peer review of completed works.

Drawing

This course will explore drawing in depth through a variety of media, techniques and projects, including both drawing from direct observation, drawing from a photograph, and drawing from the imagination.

Expectations:

- Develop and refine their abilities to draw what they see from life.
- Learn to make a large-scale drawing through a series of preparatory stages from material drawn from the imagination.
- Develop original characters and create a series of narrative, sequential drawings.
- Create one *masterwork* drawing that communicates visual information about value, surface reflectivity and texture.

- Develop their individual art practice through the keeping of a regular sketchbook practice.

Gardening

Students will explore a variety of topics related to growing vegetables and garden plants. These topics include soil characteristics, growing techniques, companion planting, pollinators & pests, and sustainable food production.

Expectations:

- Maintain a journal with notes, pictures, diagrams etc. of their gardening experiences.
- Perform observations and experiments on soil characteristics and fertility.
- Visit an apiary and learn about the value of bees and pollination.
- Care for a garden bed by testing the soil, planting various plants, weeding, watering and harvesting produce.
- Learn about Food Systems - mainly where their food comes from, and how it is grown.
- Learn about and discuss food equity and sustainability and ways they can be conscientious consumers.

Global Issues

This course will introduce students to current events based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

Expectations:

- Research global events using a variety of reliable sources.
- Present their findings in a clear and concise manner.
- Recognize bias in news articles.
- Participate in discussions and debates.

Improvisation

The class will focus on improvisation and how to incorporate the rules of improvisation in acting exercises. Improvisation, also called immediate theater, helps students conquer fears by working collaboratively in an accepting environment. Improvisational skills help break down communication barriers and strengthen diversity.

Expectations:

- Explore silent film, focusing on body language and facial expression to better portray emotion and objective.
- Engage in physical comedy by exploring and performing various classical situations and well-known characters of Commedia Dell'arte.

- Understand how Commedia Dell'arte nurtured contemporary improvisational theater.
- Develop improvised scenes by respecting the rules of improvisation and by using tempo/pace, space, levels, and energy to create an improvised scene.
- Explore acting techniques and articulate the character's inner thoughts, objectives and motivations.

Robotics

This year-long course gives students the opportunity to design, build and program robots. During this course, students are exposed to LEGO Mindstorm NXT and EV3 kits as well as other related materials. By working hands-on in teams, they develop solutions to proposed projects. Designed robots will be programmed to participate at FIRST® LEGO League and MAIS Robotics.

Expectations:

- Collaborate in groups and teams.
- Design and build robots for specific activities and scenarios.
- Use remote connection to control the robot.
- Use gears, pulleys, torque, friction, timing, sensors.
- Use graphical, block-based programming language.
- Design, develop and complete robotic activities and challenges.

Script Writing

Exploratory Script Writing is a subject that aims at giving students the opportunity to give a voice to their imagination and creativity by supplying them with the basic tools to create a theatrical script. Students will get the chance to learn the conventions and structure appropriate to script writing, which will, in turn, allow them to build upon that to bring their own ideas, concepts, characters, and stories to life.

Expectations:

- Recognize fundamental script writing conventions.
- Recognize the appropriate structure for a theatrical script.
- Recognize and discuss different sources of artistic inspiration.
- Use different sources of artistic inspiration to imagine an original theatrical script.
- Recognize and identify different types of characters and what makes them work or not as relatable, believable and authentic characters.
- Understand the notion and purpose of the character arch.
- Understand the importance of creating relatable, believable and authentic characters.
- Use the appropriate structure for a theatrical script, script writing conventions, character development and character arch to write an original theatrical script.

Uncarved Block

Uncarved Block provides opportunities for students to discover ways to identify and develop practical skills to manage stress. The activities focus on mindfulness, self-awareness and self-reliance.

Expectations:

- Define what stress is and identify what stress indicators are.
- Identify factors that can cause stress in the life of a middle schooler.
- Explore ways how to manage stress levels through developing better organizational skills and time management.
- Engage in a variety of relaxation techniques geared towards reducing stress levels.
- Explore how practicing mindfulness can improve focus and clarity of thought.
- Cultivate a positive attitude through reflection using a Happiness Journal.

Web Development

Web Development is a Semester-course where students are introduced to plan, design and share web pages by writing HTML and CSS code. Students create multi-page websites enhanced with the use of page layout techniques. By doing this course, students will have a good foundation in web design and will be prepared to study more advanced web design topics.

Expectations:

- Understand HTML web page elements.
- Understand and apply effective web design principles.
- Enhance web pages using text formatting, color, graphics, images, and multimedia.
- Incorporate forms into web pages.
- Understand and apply CSS to format web page elements.
- Plan, design, and publish a multi-page website.