

Robert C. Parker School
Social Studies Grades 6,7, 8

Social studies and language arts are carefully interwoven into a humanities curriculum. The curriculum emphasizes a personal, humanistic approach to literature and social studies, with the underlying intent that students will see clearly the relationship between their own lives and the material they are reading/discussing. Middle school students study literature and social studies as a forum for questioning, analyzing, and decision-making, building skills in discussion, writing, critical thinking, problem solving, vocabulary, and grammar. The students examine different sources of history as well as the art, architecture, literature, and music of the periods they are considering.

Grade 6

Through examining peoples, cultures, and societies students begin to lay the framework of research skills that are at the core of the middle school social studies continuum. From the start of the year the students are asked to disseminate resources and in turn use that information to begin to paint a picture of the nature of varied peoples. By asking students to empathize with their predecessors they begin to understand the challenges, joys, and general nature of whole cultures.

As the year progresses the students are asked to increasingly drive their own studies, so that they are able to decide for themselves when looking at a new topic what information they need to acquire in order to place this information into the context of their previous knowledge. Finally, the sixth graders look at the stories of peoples in various cultures and times and attempt to find both similarities and differences from the stories that exist in cultures. All of this leads the students to a personalized understanding and intimate relationship with the material covered.

Grade 7

Seventh grade social studies are based on building, refining, and mastering research skills. To this end, students study the ancient and modern world through the lenses of current events, geography, economics, human rights, and issues of equity. From the start of the year students drive their own learning. They must choose for themselves what information is necessary for achieving the level of understanding expected of them.

Students are asked to form opinions, draw connections, and challenge their previous points of view. Because this course is constructivist in philosophy, class meetings often take on the feel of a seminar, where students share their findings and methods with each other in order to create a consensus about what has been learned. By the end of the year students are making their own autonomous choices about what they need to accomplish, often resulting in their creating their own nightly homework assignments.

Grades 6 and 7

Essential Questions: How do our lives differ from those of peoples throughout history? How have innovations and ingenuity of cultures of the past influenced our lives today?

Themes over two years:

World Geography and Governments

Archeology as a Tool for Comparing Past and Present

Understanding Medieval Life Through Architecture

Renaissance Europe and its Influence on the Current Day

Modern European History

Modern Media

Issues of World Poverty: Africa and America, historical roots and current events

Grade 8

The eighth grade social studies curriculum is based on an exploration of American history. Students work at refining their research skills (note taking, problem solving, etc.) in order to create a piece of original research on any topic of their choosing that will take the final form of a written thesis. This process is the final step in preparing students to become life long learners. Throughout the year they are asked to clarify their own confusion, and to answer their own questions. This academic autonomy allows students to engage, extrapolate, and synthesize new information in a way that places it into their previously created intellectual constructs. All of this culminates in their completion of the 12-15-page research based thesis with a presentation to the school community. This acts as a culmination not only to the social studies curriculum, but also to their experience at Parker in general. A weeklong curricular trip to Philadelphia brings the year to a close.

Essential Questions: Why and how do people form societies? How do societies resolve conflict?

Themes:

The Salem Witch Trials

The Bill of Rights

Controversial Debates in Landmark Supreme Court Cases

Revolutions in America

World War One

The Great Depression

World War Two

A Bipolar World: The Cold War