

EIGHTH GRADE POST

Putting It All Together

The eighth-grade students spent the second quarter delving into the psyche of a patriot as they studied the build-up to the American Revolution and then the war itself. They had the unique perspective of studying this subject using textbook and lectures, but also interpreting several associated primary sources. For example, following a discussion of the Boston Massacre, they looked at Paul Revere's engraving of the event, and compared and contrasted it with the textbook account. After learning about the Stamp Act and Boston Tea Party, they analyzed a political cartoon, "Bostonians Paying the Excise-man," from the Library of Congress. They also analyzed the lyrics of a colonial era propaganda song, "Revolutionary Tea," which tells the story of a "tea party" between a "mother" and "daughter" with a sea dividing them, literally and figuratively. They examined and translated the text of Benjamin Franklin's testimony before Parliament in 1766, and they read and understood excerpts from Thomas Paine's Common Sense. In this manner, the students are not only getting a firm foundation in U.S. history, but they are also engaging in sophisticated, high-level thinking and scrutiny. Finally, just before the mid-term exam, the eighth-graders were introduced to the glory of the Declaration of Independence and came to appreciate the true sacrifice the founders were making by signing their names to that document and pledging their "lives...fortunes and...sacred honor." Now they are ready for the splendor and brilliance of the Constitution in the third quarter. Mrs. Jacobson can't wait!



The *galette* king and other eighth-grade courtiers

Acquiring proficiency in Latin, very much like learning any skill, challenges both instructor and learner. A blending of entertainment and rigor provides for a more receptive response among students, and a more salutary outcome for all. The fall and winter seasons set the stage for readings of the "dark and gloomy night" variety, giving rise to chuckles and shivers. Reading about the strange goings-on at a Pompeian dinner party, "Fabula Mirabilis," and delving into "The Haunted House of Pliny" provided lots of ghoulish vocabulary, and clever syntactical constructions. The students were well prepared for their final chapter of the term, "Murder."

Eighth-grade science students have already completed a full year of biology in grade seven, have recently finished a semester-long study of chemistry, and now delve into physics for the first time. They now begin to notice how truly connected are these important branches of science. How can one understand what travels through the bloodstream without knowledge of ionic compounds? How can one grasp the effects of foods that we put into our bodies without an understanding of organic molecules such as proteins and carbohydrates? How can one think rationally about light energy, electricity, or the nervous system without comprehending electrons and other charged particles? As students continue to make these connections, their eyes are opened to why the Westminster science curriculum is designed the way that it is, designed to foster understanding of how our natural and physical worlds are intertwined. This enables science, and the Westminster graduates who study it, to influence society in positive ways, enabling mankind to find new cures for diseases, improve our nation's infrastructure, utilize technological advancements to the fullest extent, and continue exploration of Earth and beyond!



Time for creativity is an important aspect of Westminster life.

If any of the eighth-grade students find themselves in need of a haircut or a trip to the doctor's office in France, they will surely now be well prepared! In French class, the students have had an entertaining couple of months, as they've explored both the hair salon and the doctor's office in French. These topics have given students opportunities to act out scenarios, whether it's pretending to make a hair appointment or pretending to report an accident or injury. Students greatly enjoyed celebrating Three Kings French style, with *galettes des rois*. After eating cake and crowning a king/queen in each class, students discussed this tradition in class.

In the eighth grade, students began the second quarter with an in-depth study of *The Scarlet Letter* as an exemplar of the explosion of 19th-century American literature. While reading the novel in the context of a burgeoning sense of American identity, students studied themes of alienation and dark romanticism within the text. To conclude the unit, they wrote an analytical five-paragraph essay with a clear thesis statement on one of two possible topics, Hawthorne's vision of sin or his use of Romantic devices. Now, they are studying other major 19th-century writers, and reading short works by Transcendentalist authors Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Students will discuss the continuing relevance of Transcendentalism's focus on anti-materialism and appreciation of nature before transitioning into their second full-length novel, the classic Civil War text, *The Red Badge of Courage*.

Grammar work has become increasingly complex, mirroring the students' study of difficult prose novels. Learning the different types of verbal phrases has been challenging, particularly the all-powerful infinitive phrase, which can act as a noun, adjective, or adverb! However, the students have truly applied themselves, showing a remarkable grasp of sentence structure and the parts of speech. Their essays on *The Scarlet Letter* highlighted their ability to write exceptionally well, employing these more intricate grammatical structures.

What use do quadratic equations have in the real world? For one, they can be used to model the trajectory of a thrown object, such as a stone or a football. Eighth-grade algebra students have been dissecting all the ins and outs of such equations, learning

how to graph parabolas without the aid of a calculator. They have become very familiar with the world-famous Quadratic Formula method of solving quadratic equations as well. Eighth-grade algebra students have also been working with radicals! That is not to say people with extreme views, but the less controversial, yet still interesting, mathematical radicals and all their unique properties. Geometry students have spent the past several weeks getting re-acquainted with shapes such as triangles, rectangles, squares, and the like. Lest you think that sounds simple, I dare you to ask one of these students to tell you what more there is to know about these shapes that are recognizable to even the youngest of Westminster students. You will be surprised! Also, geometry students have been exercising their logic muscles via proofs. The bottom line: you must have a reason for everything you assert, and you can't make up that reason!

Parent chemistry question: Do you remember your high school chemistry course? Determine the products of the reaction between Sulfuric acid (H₂SO₄) and Sodium hydroxide (NaOH). Stumped? Ask an eighth-grader.

Answer: H₂SO₄ + 2NaOH 2H₂O + Na₂SO₄

"Tip for a parent trying to be the north star to a child desperate for sun: Sometimes it's enough just to shine." ~ Susan Noyes Anderson