

SEVENTH GRADE CIRCULAR

Marching Forward



Seventh-grade friends in *chic chapeaus*

The seventh-graders have been immersed in art this quarter—that of both the Italian High Renaissance and of Northern Europe. Not only have they come to know famous works, such as da Vinci's *Last Supper* and Michelangelo's *Sistine Chapel* ceiling, quite intimately, but they also developed an understanding of these great artists themselves, their life experiences, personalities, education, and professional achievements. For example, with da Vinci, the students spent several lessons exploring his early life and training, several of his best-known works, his scientific and inventive notebook sketches, and then watched a film about his female portraits. Following this investigation, seventh-graders had the opportunity to visit the National Gallery to see the amazing Renaissance collection, including one of those da Vinci portraits, *Ginevra de Benci*, the only da Vinci in the western hemisphere. The Northern Renaissance provided a glimpse of microscopic detail and compelling artistic symbolism with the work of Jan van Eyck, who truly impressed the seventh-graders with his skill, precision, and steady hand. Now that they have reached an historic moment—the completion of the first round of exams of their academic careers—the seventh-graders are ready to embark upon English Renaissance history in the third quarter, with an introduction to those incredibly entertaining Tudor monarchs.

Throughout the months, seventh-graders have found that wherever Latin is, English is not far behind, and vice versa. Expanding their ability to decode Latin sentences to incorporate complex sentences complete with expressions of time and place, the students have strengthened their understanding of every part of speech and of concepts of agreement and of dependent and independent clauses. The seventh-graders have also been working on answering Latin questions that begin with the words “who,” “what,” and “why.”

Recently, seventh-grade science students conducted a study of bacterial growth around the seemingly immaculate school. Bacteria cultures were collected and grown from many areas of the campus, including classroom computers, office telephones, locker rooms, bathroom floors, and student locker handles. Although Westminster is one of the cleanest schools around, this activity, in connection with the seventh-grade study of bacteria and virus reproduction, taught students that no area can be perfectly free of microbes that cause disease. It is no wonder that many students in our North American schools have been getting sick lately. What a great reminder to everyone, both young and old, to keep the environments where we learn, work, and play clean. Also, everyone should remember to exercise frequently and to maintain a healthy diet that if illness does strike, immune systems will then be strong enough to fight the infection quickly.

From Christmas to the Beatles to World Peace to Batman, the themes and decorations on the seventh-grade hats for “Hat Day” were very diverse and impressive. The students’ creativity carried over into December, as they were asked to describe their hats and the process of making them in French for the class. Seventh-graders also had the opportunity to learn a traditional French carol called “*Un Flambeau, Jeanette, Isabelle*” for the holiday cookie party. To their own surprise and their teachers’, students were humming the tune throughout the hallway before the big performance.

In the second quarter, the seventh-graders continued their exploration of Shakespeare’s life and works. By the end of the year, they should all be capable of working for the Folger Theatre! Not only have the students read two plays, *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*, studying their structure and thematic importance, but they have also learned about Elizabethan England. Students were equally intrigued and shocked by the vibrant world of Southwark, with its bear-baiting, epic plays, and raucous citizens. Shakespeare class will conclude with a discussion of history plays, parallel to a brief study of the current historical controversy surrounding the Bard of Avon, the authorship question. In English class, seventh-graders will tackle the first full-length class novel, Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*. Meanwhile, the students have advanced in their vocabulary and grammar study. They have focused this quarter on the basic parts of speech to include prepositional phrases and complements. Their understanding has been enhanced by in-depth sentence diagramming, designed to help them articulate the function of each word or phrase.

Math class is all about the practical application of lessons learned. For example, seventh-grade students are learning that when they go shopping, the sticker price of an item isn’t usually what they end up actually paying. There are sometimes discounts applied, and almost always taxes to tack on. Did you know that you can figure out the final cost of an item with discounts and taxes in just one step? Seventh-grade algebra students do, and they would be happy to show you.

Here’s a pattern; see if you can figure out the next term: 3,7,11,15,19...what’s next? If you said 23, you are correct; if that’s the sixth term of this pattern (“arithmetic sequence” in algebra-speak), what do you think the 500th term is? Maybe you are busy counting in your head “27 is the seventh term, 31 is the eighth term...” but you would be here until the next newsletter at that pace. Seventh-grade students have learned a formula that calculates the value of any term of any such sequence. Here’s a final one: two numbers have a sum of 321 and a difference of 50. What are they? Maybe you are guessing and checking, which can actually be a good method sometimes. However, did you know there is an algebraic solution involving something fancy called a system of equations? Some of the seventh-graders can show you exactly how it’s done. As you can see, students have been immersed in the heart of algebra. Math Brainteaser: Some people believe that January 1, 2000 is the first day of the 21st century. Other people believe that the honor belongs to January 1, 2001. But everyone should agree that January 1, 2002 is the first “sum-day” of the new century. When you write out that date in standard notation, it becomes 01/01/02, and $1+1=2$. More generally, a sum-day is a date in which the day and month add up.



All smiles at the cookie party

***“If you want children to keep their feet on the ground,
put some responsibility on their shoulders.” ~ Abigail Van Buren***