SEVENTH GRADE CIRCULAR
New Territories


Petrarch

As the seventh-graders embark on their own personal journey to discover who they are as individuals during their pre-teen years, they have been investigating how the individual was celebrated during the Renaissance period in history class. The students have discussed the principles of the humanist movement in 14th-century Italy, including the philosophy of writers such as Petrarch, who was considered the father of humanism. Following the Middle Ages, he was among the first to articulate the idea that, rather than focusing solely on religious matters, the earthly pursuits of humankind should be the center of intellectual and artistic endeavor. Petrarch asserted that the individual mind was capable of great achievements through study and reasoning and that the ideal man, like the Roman citizen, balanced his time between academic activity and service to his community. Furthermore, the philosophy of education was evolving in Italy at this time as teachers attempted to educate the whole student, mind, body and spirit, through academics, athletics and instruction. This transformation in Renaissance schools parallels the experience of Westminster students as they attempt to achieve equilibrium between classes, sports, artistic pursuits, and service projects.

Moreover, the students have investigated how these humanist themes translated into the art of the time. In the works of artists patronized by wealthy Italian merchants and bankers, such as the Medici family, students have seen the secular themes that celebrate the human form, intellect and passion. Renaissance art explored the full range of human emotion and experience, from the simple trials and joys of daily life to the heroic exploits of great leaders. Unlike the flat, unrealistic images produced during medieval times, Renaissance artists used techniques such as linear perspective to portray subjects in all their lifelike, worldly glory. In addition to analyzing some of these works in class, the seventh-graders will take a trip to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC at the end of November. This will allow them to intimately observe some of these awe-inspiring pieces. Hopefully, just as the Renaissance artists were inspired by their counterparts in antiquity, so will the seventh-graders be inspired by the life force and amazing achievements of artists such as Brunelleschi, Michelangelo, and da Vinci.

Realizing that they already knew some Latin vocabulary from the days of fifth grade classical studies provided a boost to the beginning Latin learners of the seventh grade, and it underscored the fact that the Westminster curriculum is indeed an integrated program. In addition, mapping out the similarities to be found in Latin and English vocabulary, and learning specific sound changes that took place over the millennia, brought home the reality of the Latin / English connection. Once the students see the sound pattern gloria to glory, and necessitas to necessity, they begin to explore on their own to discover additional connections. Further in support of their English studies, they have received a thorough grounding in parts of speech, and sentence structure. Bit by bit, the phenomena of language become less of a mystery, and more of the sound building blocks of their command of language.

In the first quarter of English, the seventh-graders have been studying the great early works of Western literature and their continued relevance today. For the first part of the year, they have been immersed in Dante's *Inferno* and its implications about politics and justice. The English room has been transformed by their myriad reinterpretations of the Inferno's various circles; it is now a vision of color and creativity! Next, students will explore another great medieval work written in the vernacular, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Parallel to their literature studies are their continued grammar and vocabulary work, notably an intensive look at the basic parts of speech. With the help of sentence diagrams, students can visualize how each part of language functions within a sentence to create a cohesive whole. Moving forward, students will diagram more complex sentences while discussing the function of indirect and direct objects. These varied aspects of the English curriculum work together to help the students become erudite, accomplished readers and writers.

"The beautiful thing about learning is that nobody can take it away from you."~ B.B. King

The seventh grade has begun the new school year with an abundance of enthusiasm and energy in French class. They have studied a number of grammar and vocabulary concepts which have enabled them to hold basic conversations in French. If you happen to know of a French visitor in the area, these students are prepared and excited to introduce themselves and ask and answer basic questions in French. The students have been very diligent in mastering French pronunciation and are solidifying a foundation to carry them through the rest of their Westminster careers.

One of the most important aspects of the seventh-grade science course is the development of each student's ability to use laboratory equipment properly and safely. Practicing a simple skill, such as holding scissors and forceps with two hands while cutting animal tissue, can go a long way when the first dissection comes around. As students view microscopic plant and animal cells for the first time, the knowledge of how to create microscope slides of their own makes classes more productive, more enjoyable, and more hands-on. Students will study plant and animal cell biology for the first part of the year to provide the foundation for understanding genetics, the study of how traits are passed from parent to offspring. By mastering this topic, seventh grade science students will understand reasons for the diversity of life on planet Earth.

Gather around, everyone, it's story time! Wait, this is supposed to be a paragraph about math, isn't it? Well, yes, and it is; you see, every graph tells a story. Whether it be changes in the height of a launched object, video game sales, or lawn mowing revenue over time, information is presented for the reader to interpret and, therefore, tells a story. Seventh-grade students creatively did just that, often presenting humorous hypotheses that were justified by the behavior of a particular graph. Additionally, students familiarized themselves with several algebraic properties, which are the foundation of most of algebra, and answered the question, "Is it correct to do it this way?" Finally, students have been applying many of the concepts introduced to them in the lower school, such as proportions and order of operations, all while learning the basics of how to use their once-daunting graphic calculators.

Through the generosity of the Westminster School Parents Club, a gleaming new StarBoard has graced the Latin classroom since September. Magistra was delighted (if somewhat nervous) at this leap into the technological age, and she resolved to apply the Westminster InnerQuest approach of "He who hesitates is lost."

It became quickly apparent that there is almost no aspect of conducting Latin class for seventh graders that is not enhanced by the addition of the use of the StarBoard. Gone are the chalky, handwritten notes, forms, and examples and in their place, the students now have more clarity of presentation. Lessons can be developed ahead and projected in part or in whole as desired. Alternatively, students and teacher may work on challenges custom created on the spot, adjusting for the need, level, and pace of the class. Besides their language instruction, seventh-graders have observed the Tree of Indo-European languages, the correct folds of the toga, and a map depicting the location of ancient Roman place names. After-school Latin help has likewise gained a fresh dimension through the review opportunities posted by Latin teachers using the same *Ecce Romani* series in use in the Westminster classroom.

Seventh-grade students have officially been launched into the world of algebra! Real-world applications abound, as students interpret graphical representations of everything from swimming pool depths to snowfall to the trajectory of a skydiver. Perhaps the most recurrent theme of the new school year has been properties; these are the underlying principles that provide a foundation for all of algebra. With a solid grasp of properties, students understand why they should multiply that reciprocal or replace that variable, not just how. Of course, it never hurts to learn a little etiquette, mathematics-style. What does that mean, you say? Treat both sides equally! Both sides of an equation, that is. A band of four "properties of equality" enforce this matter, and violators are ruthlessly punished in the form of…a wrong answer.

Members of the Builders Club
packing sandwiches for Martha's Table.