

# MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

## LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

Through the literature-based Language Arts curriculum we teach students to think logically and creatively, express ideas, understand and participate meaningfully in spoken, written, and nonverbal communications, formulate and answer questions, and search for, organize, evaluate, and apply information. These skills are developed through the use of reading, speaking, listening, and writing activities.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Students explore, recognize and identify a variety of structures and genres in literature. They learn to develop a critical appreciation of the literature, through assigned and independent readings. A vital part of the writing program is to develop the ability to proofread, assess, and edit one's own writing. Public speaking and active listening skills are developed through projects based on the literature students read and material they research. Students learn to communicate through different forms and styles of writing and speaking with an emphasis on clarity, use of a rich vocabulary, and application of grammatical rules. Vocabulary is developed through the use of the *Wordly Wise* and *Reading Street* series, as well as through the literature read. The goal of the Language Arts program is to develop students' love and appreciation of reading and confidence in their writing and speaking abilities.

### **EXPOSITORY WRITING I**

Students learn the format for an effective, convincing essay that can be used for any topic, in any situation, from academic subjects, to essay tests, to letters of application, complaint or recommendation. The focus is on learning to organize, develop and proofread an essay. Style is taught after mastery of these basics has been achieved.

### **EXPOSITORY WRITING II**

Students will build on the skills learned in Expository Writing I and practice such rhetorical approaches as definition, comparison/contrast, and process. They will also learn to utilize more sophisticated forms of argument, such as "the strawman" and "Nestorian order," to provide a more mature context in introductions and endings, and to develop a writing style appropriate to the subject and the audience.

## SPANISH I CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

### GRADE SIX, SEVEN AND EIGHT

The Spanish I curriculum has been designed for students who are studying the first level of the language over a three-year

period. The textbook, *Buen Viaje*, is divided into 14 chapters, allowing each age group to cover between four and five chapters a year. The New Jersey and National Standards for language learning are addressed, emphasized, and demonstrated daily.

Students **communicate** in the target language through written and oral activities, as well as read about the diverse **cultures** of the Spanish-speaking countries. A **connection** exists among other disciplines, including geography, history, music, and art. By means of **comparison**, pupils are aware of the differences and similarities among many nations, including their own.

As they improve their skills, the students adopt a Spanish country and complete a variety of tasks about their nation. By incorporating a project with a myriad of assessments, all types of learners have the opportunity to succeed. In addition to creating a map, flag, postcard, travel brochure, and poster, each student will gather information from newspapers, magazines, books, and the Internet. The pupils will learn about their nation's geography, history, ancient civilization, explorers, writers, artists, entertainers, athletes, food, clothing, myths, and customs. Everyone will share facts about his/her nation.

## **SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM OVERVIEW**

### **GRADES SIX AND SEVEN**

#### **U.S. HISTORY I (COLONIZATION TO CIVIL WAR)**

##### **Geography Focus:**

The Middle School Social Studies courses are designed with special emphasis on the role that geography plays in shaping our human history, as well as our present world. Within each unit of study, the geographical themes and essential questions that are necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the world will be emphasized and assessed.

The following **Goals and Essential Questions** will guide the teaching and learning of human and physical geography, not as a separate phenomenon, but as an integrated and enduring factor that has shaped human history in the past and will continue to have a significant impact in the future:

- Study the relationship between people and places
- Examine the influence of physical systems, such as climate, weather and seasons, and natural resources, such as land and water, on human populations
- Study the causes, patterns, and effects of human settlement and migration, learn the roles of different kinds of population centers in a society and investigate the impact of human activities on the environment
- Study the communications and transportation networks that link different population centers, the reasons for these networks and their impact
- Identify the key social, economic, and cultural characteristics of populations in different locations as they expand their knowledge of diverse peoples and places
- Develop an understanding of the growth of national and global regions as well as the technological advances that connect students to the world beyond their personal locations

## GRADE EIGHT

### WORLD HISTORY

(ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS: MESOPOTAMIA, EGYPT, INDIA, CHINA, GREECE, ROME)

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## SCIENCE CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

In the sciences, students study Earth, Life, and Physical and Chemical Science, and are introduced to the principles of scientific theory and the use of inductive and deductive reasoning. Science classes are laboratory-based, emphasizing the scientific method and the use of technology for data-gathering and analysis. Students study Earth Science in the sixth grade, Life Science in the seventh grade, and Chemistry and Physical Science in the eighth grade. In each course the New Jersey Science Standards are implemented for the development of scientific skills and knowledge.

## MATH CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

The Solomon Schechter Mathematics Curriculum is designed to ensure that all our students will move into the twenty-first century with the mathematical understanding and skills they will need to be successful in their careers and daily lives.

Diverse instructional techniques include the use of technology to enable students to manipulate, discover, and understand mathematical concepts. Our multi-faceted program and small class size is optimum for meeting individual needs and the varying aptitudes, interests, educational and professional plans, learning habits and styles of our students. **The Middle School Math sequence includes coursework in Pre-Algebra, Algebra 1 (Honors Level), or Geometry**

**(Honors Level). Placement in the appropriate level is determined by student ability and achievement.** The Mathematics Curriculum is designed to ensure that all students are challenged to reach their maximum potential.

### PRE-ALGEBRA

#### **Course Description:**

This 3-year course of study focuses on the study of the properties of operations and the use of variables and equations. Students develop logical thinking skills and strategies for problem solving. The use of mental math skills increases the accuracy of number sense and computation.

### ALGEBRA 1 – HONORS LEVEL

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course focuses on theory and algebraic structure, solution of equations, inequalities, and critical thinking. Students use appropriate technology, math manipulatives, and traditional tools to gain a deep understanding of the algebraic concepts and to develop the skills to apply those concepts to everyday mathematics.

### GEOMETRY – HONORS LEVEL

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course focuses on exploring geometric situations. We develop conjectures and prove them using a variety of methods: inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, and standard two-column proofs as well as paragraph proofs, flow proofs, and coordinate proofs.

## **JUDAIC STUDIES & HEBREW LANGUAGE**

### PHILOSOPHY

Our school develops each student's Jewish identity by teaching Jewish values and traditions, teaching the Hebrew language, and immersing the students in history, Torah, and Bible. Family and community involvement will work in tandem to instill a lifelong commitment to Tzedakah, tikkum olam, and to the perpetuation of a Jewish family life rich with rituals and traditions.

Students leave SSDS secure in the knowledge that they have achieved or surpassed their potential and are poised to advance successfully to the next level of education. Our students graduate with a bond to Judaism, Jews around the world, and Israel.

### THE GOALS OF THE JEWISH STUDIES CURRICULUM IN

1. Hebrew language skills at grade level in:

- **Reading and reading comprehension**

- \* Emphasis on modern Hebrew as well as prayerbook Hebrew reading fluency
- \* Reading fluency and accuracy are assessed three times a year. Individual reading goals are established
- \* Daily required reading at home

- **Comprehension of printed, written and oral Hebrew**

- \* Expansion of reading, oral and written vocabulary comprehension
- \* Expanded use of expressive vocabulary - speaking and responding in Hebrew
- \* Continued development of Biblical Hebrew vocabulary
- \* The Tal Am program is an integrated language and literature program. This thematic program integrates the study of the Hebrew language with holidays, Israel, values and the student's **personal world**. **Details of the thematic content are attached.**

- **Expression in oral and written Hebrew**

Students continue to develop their expressive Hebrew writing skills in a variety of activities: structured responses, creative writing, essay-style responses, descriptive sentences.

- **Cursive writing**

2. An understanding and enjoyment of the events in the *Chumash* (Bible) text and the ability to study and decode from the original *Chumash* text, including Rashi commentary.

- **The study of the Torah includes:**

- \* Analysis of the text
- \* Discussion of the events, and concepts
- \* Emphasis on “*shorashim*,” root words, enables the students to expand their store of new Biblical vocabulary
- \* The commentary and questioning style of *Rashi* is studied to enrich the text

3. Knowledge of and joyous celebration of the traditions and customs of the Jewish holidays. In addition to the use of Tal Am, students learn about the Jewish holidays, their laws, the customs and traditions, from class discussions, projects and experiential celebrations.

4. Fluency and meaningful understanding and application of the *t'fillot* (prayers), and the *b'rachot* (blessings). Daily *t'fillot* in class include “*Shacharit*,” the morning service, blessings for the Torah reading, the Friday night and Shabbat service and the *t'fillot* of the “*Hallel*,” a special service for the first day of the Jewish month. Students join in the Thursday school *minyan*.

5. Familiarity and identification with the Land of Israel, its people, customs and history. The study of Israel is integrated through the Tal Am program, with the Jewish Social Studies unit taught by the General Studies teacher and through music, art and holiday programs.

6. An understanding of the *mitzvot* which relate to Jewish laws (holidays) and those which are interpersonal - *ben adam l'chavero*

7. A value system based on Jewish tradition and positive interpersonal relationships

8. The *mitzvah* of *Tzedakah* is at the core of Jewish values. Students study the concept of *Tzedakah* as part of their Judaic Studies curriculum. Each student has the opportunity to perform this *mitzvah* every day when *Tzedakah* (charitable donation) is collected. The amount of money donated is far less important than the regular act of giving. Students vote to determine the recipient(s) of their *Tzedakah* collection. Please encourage your child to make *Tzedakah* giving a regular habit.

## TEACHING APPROACHES

- The Jewish Studies curriculum is taught in large group, small group and individualized formats.
- The language of instruction is Hebrew. We aim to immerse our students in the Hebrew language to facilitate their study of the language and enhance the subjects taught.
- Emphasis is placed on giving students the opportunity to experience what they are learning through a variety of techniques: the use of arts & crafts, role-playing, projects, trips, learning games, music, stories and celebrations. Cooperative Learning techniques enable students to learn in teams and to learn from each other.
- Integration of the Jewish Studies curriculum and the General Studies curriculum occurs at many levels: joint projects, such as the Jewish Family Life unit described below, Jewish Values Vocabulary, used by both departments, holiday celebrations and units, such as the integration of the holiday of Sukkot with fall units and thematic language units, such as units on the environment and personal development.

### **JUDAIC STUDIES CURRICULUM OVERVIEW**

The Solomon Schechter Middle School Judaic Studies Curriculum offers our students the opportunity to grow as Jews in knowledge, values and identity.

- **Prayer** – *T'fillah*, Synagogue Skills, Bible, Rabbinic Literature, Jewish History, the study of Modern Israel, and the study of Hebrew Language and Literature are integrated with the practice of Jewish Values and Traditions.
- **Daily Prayer** is enhanced by weekly communal prayer during which students take leadership roles and conduct prayers and chanting from the weekly Torah portion. **Torah Reading** skills are taught in a special class once a week.
- **Hebrew** is offered in two tracks: Intermediate/Advanced and *Mechina* for beginners entering Solomon Schechter in Middle School.

Students discover the sources of the values that guide our lives in the texts they study and the experiences they share. Commitment to Jewish religious practice and values is instilled at Solomon Schechter through the observance of *mitzvot* and rituals in all areas of life, such as *t'fillah* (prayer), *kashrut*, holiday celebrations, interpersonal relations and an enriching Community Service program.