

MIDDLE SCHOOL
COURSE DESCRIPTION HANDBOOK
2008-2009

ENGLISH

The English program at Saint Thomas Academy provides students with the opportunity to develop increasing mastery of skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. Grades seven and eight emphasize language skills necessary for successful study in high school and at the college level. The underlying assumption of our program is that individuals who understand and can use language effectively will enjoy more fulfilling lives. Students will learn to:

- Read with understanding and critical insight.
- Express ideas clearly in a variety of written forms.
- Develop skills necessary for effective oral communication.
- Improve listening skills.
- Develop viewing abilities.

ENGLISH 7
Grade Level: 7

1 year
Weight: 1.0

This course stresses basic language skills. A systematic study of grammar, spelling, and vocabulary is integrated with a program of literature, composition, and speech. The writing assignments stress all aspects of correct grammar.

ENGLISH 8
Grade Level: 8

1 year
Weight: 1.0

This course builds upon the basic language skills developed in seventh grade English. It integrates a study of grammar and vocabulary with a program in composition, speech, and literature. Narrative and expository writing skills continue to be stressed.

MATHEMATICS

The mathematics program at Saint Thomas Academy is designed to challenge students with an enriched curriculum and to make appropriate courses available to all students.

It is our objective that the students:

- Become proficient at basic arithmetic and algebra skills.
- Develop the ability to solve both routine and non-routine problems using a variety of strategies.
- Become familiar with the use of mathematical tools, such as compasses, protractors, and calculators.

Grade level refers to the year(s) students typically take the course. Students with varying math backgrounds may take a course during different years.

TRANSITIONAL MATH

Grade Level: 7

1 year

Weight: 1.0

Transitional Math covers a wide range of topics including operations with whole numbers; fractions and decimals; percents; elementary number theory; ratios and proportions; introduction to geometric concepts; measurement; probability and data analysis; solving equations; and an introduction to integers.

PRE-ALGEBRA

Grade Level: 7-8

1 year

Weight: 1.0

Prerequisite:

Instructor approval; entrance exam score

Pre-algebra covers the following topics: operations involving integers and rational numbers; variables; exponents; solving and graphing first degree equations; inequalities; square roots and radical expressions; problem solving; and geometric figures and formulas.

ALGEBRA I

Grade Level: 7-8

1 year

Weight: 1.0

Prerequisite: Instructor approval; entrance exam score

Algebra I deals with the structure of the real number system, the use of algebraic symbols, a study of first and second degree equations and graphs, systems of first degree equations, as well as factoring, square roots, and the quadratic formula. Some uses of a graphing calculator are explored.

GEOMETRY

Grade Level: 8

1 year

Weight: 1.0

Prerequisite: Algebra I and Instructor approval

This course first establishes the tools of geometry: methods of reasoning, construction, the coordinate plane, and types of measurement. Subsequently, it focuses on properties and applications of lines, triangles, quadrilaterals, similarity, right triangle trigonometry, circles, and transformations.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The general objectives of the physical education department include instilling in the students:

- An appreciation and understanding of physical fitness.
- An appreciation and understanding of team sports.
- An appreciation and understanding of lifetime sports.
- An introduction to activities to which some students would not normally have exposure.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION 7 1 year (A/B day)
Grade Level: 7 Weight: N/A

Middle School physical education is a required, non-graded activity class. The physical education program consists of a curriculum that includes instruction and participation in team sports and individual sports.

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Grade Level: 8 Weight: N/A

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SCIENCE

The Middle School science program at Saint Thomas Academy is designed to develop the skills students will need for success in the high school science program. It is our intent that our students will:

- Be able to intelligently react to the role of science and technology in their lives and be able to make valid decisions in this area.
- Begin to value the potential they may possess as far as a career in science might be concerned.
- Understand the methods of science to enable them to become more effective learners.
- Be more sensitive to the global implications of our life-styles.

LIFE SCIENCE 7

Grade Level: 7

1 year

Weight: 1.0

Topics covered in this course are cellular structure, classification of living organisms, an overview of the five kingdoms, human anatomy, physiology, genetics, and ecology. All of this material is presented in an introductory manner, and emphasis is placed on developing learning, laboratory, and organizational skills.

EARTH and SPACE SCIENCE 8

Grade Level: 8

1 year

Weight: 1.0

Topics covered in this class involve the earth and its place in the universe. Students continue to develop the laboratory and study skills begun in Life Science, with further emphasis on analytical skills. Specific areas covered include basic chemistry, the solar system, stars and constellations, rocks and minerals, and the processes that cause change on the dynamic earth.

SOCIAL STUDIES

The Social Studies Department at Saint Thomas Academy designs its courses to provide a learning environment that promotes academic excellence and recognizes the uniqueness of each individual student. It is the objective of the Social Studies Department that the students will:

- Acquire geographical skills and be able to identify geographically major areas of the world.
- Acquire basic economic literacy of U.S. economic institutions in order to effectively pursue citizenship responsibilities and to enhance personal economic decision making.
- Acquire basic political literacy to enable students to effectively participate in the U.S. democratic process.
- Understand controversial issues and develop thinking skills through the use of position papers and position statement analysis on tests and in debates.
- Develop a multicultural awareness and sensitivity, recognizing that our judgments about people of different cultures are usually shaped and influenced by the standards and values of the culture in which we live.
- Develop the competency to acquire, organize, evaluate, and report information for the purposes of solving problems and clarifying issues.
- Emphasize study skills throughout the year in 7th and 8th grades.

GEOGRAPHY

Grade Level: 7

1 year

Weight: 1.0

Geography tries to make sense of the world around us. It helps us understand how people, places, and environments came to be and how they affect each other. In this class, we ask where is something? Why is it there? How did it get there? How does it affect the natural environment in this area? Every world region is examined, including Canada and the USA, Latin America, Europe and Russia, Africa, Southwest and Central Asia, South and East Asia, and Oceania. Each lesson seeks to answer an essential question that tackles a challenging social issue. There is a strong emphasis on working with maps and other related social studies skills. In December, all 7th and 8th graders participate in the National Geographic Bee.

UNITED STATES HISTORY 8

Grade Level: 8

1 year

Weight: 1.0

This course is designed to show the students the growth of the U.S. in economic, political, and social areas. The students analyze the great changes in American life since the birth of the nation, as well as elements that have endured to build American's heritage. Students also study political and military conflict and evaluate the role of America in the world. Students continue to build and use skills in geography and learn historical writing and data analysis skills. All 8th grade students participate in the History Day competition, using a U.S. History topic of their choice.

THEOLOGY

The mission of Saint Thomas Academy is to create Christian leaders. The Theology Department is an integral element in this educational process. As a department we stress the moral dimension of leadership. We strive to help young men be capable, just, compassionate, and forthright citizens. In assisting students in their faith formation, we seek to develop a spirituality that encourages young men to desire personal holiness as well as to become servant leaders who welcome and care for each other. It is our hope that each student will come to know the mystery of God's abiding presence and the depth of God's love for all. It is our goal as a department to develop educated and informed Catholics who seek to be knowledgeable in their faith, who are willing to embrace the challenges of Christianity in the new millennium, and who are ready to work for the Church's social mission of justice and peace.

The following is a list of general curriculum objectives which identify what will be covered within the Theology Department curriculum:

- Students will possess basic Biblical interpretation skills and demonstrate a reverence for and appreciation of God's word found in sacred Scripture.
- Students will understand the basic teachings of the Church as articulated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (i.e. sacraments, creed, Ten Commandments, beatitudes, spiritual/corporal works of mercy, virtues, precepts of Church).
- Students will understand their obligation to act morally and ethically as responsible Christians according to the dictates of a well informed and formed conscience.
- Students will know and understand the Church's teaching pertaining to sexual morality and respect for life in all forms.
- Students will have a basic understanding of the history and theology of the Church.
- Students will have a knowledge and appreciation of contemporary religious and spiritual leaders.
- Students will be able to understand the nature of liturgy and prayer and the movement from liturgy and prayer to service.
- Students will explore Christ's invitation to discipleship and the call to personal holiness by exploring those lifestyles that are compatible with this common Christian vocation.
- Students will know the key principles of Catholic social teaching and will be able to identify these as central and essential elements of their faith.
- Students will learn to respect the diversity of religious traditions.
- Students will develop reflective and critical thinking skills; moral and creative imaging skills; and prayer and dialogical skills, which allow them to research and identify, assess and evaluate, discern, judge, and determine action in light of Gospel values and Church teaching.

FAITH IN JESUS

Grade Level: 7

1 year

Weight: 1.0

This course is designed for seventh graders and has as its primary focus the person, history, and message of Jesus Christ. Students are encouraged to not only study the life and times of Jesus, but to adapt His message to their daily lives. Students study the Gospels and take part in weekly discussions of the Scripture's doctrine and morality. All students take part in the planning and celebration of prayer through prayer services and liturgies. Students also have the opportunity to participate in community outreach programs such as Sharing and Caring Hands.

FAITH IN THE CHURCH

Grade Level: 8

1 year

Weight: 1.0

This course offered to eighth graders places its focus on the mystery of the Church. The course material is divided into several components: a survey of Church history from the Pentecost through the 20th Century, experiencing prayer, understanding the sacraments, faith expressed in art and music, and an introduction to critical social justice issues. Students discuss life as adolescent members of parish or faith communities. Students also participate in Middle School service projects, and an annual retreat.

WORLD LANGUAGE

The overall goals of world language study are effective communication and cultural understanding. The World Language Department at Saint Thomas Academy has adopted the following long-range goals:

- To provide the students with skills which will enable them to communicate orally and in writing with speakers of another language and with people of other nationalities who have also learned the language.
- To bring the students to a greater understanding of people across national boundaries by giving them insight into the ways of life and ways of thinking of the people who speak the language they are learning.
- To increase the students' understanding of how language functions and to bring them, through the study of world languages, to a greater awareness of the functioning of their own language.
- To develop the students' intellectual powers through world language study, training in memory, and the application of logical processes.
- To increase cultural awareness by the study of the literature and philosophy of the target culture.
- To encourage the students to read the world language with comprehension so that they may keep up with modern writing, research, and information.

FRENCH

INTRODUCTION TO FRENCH 1 year
Grade Level: 7 Weight: 0.5
Prerequisite: Instructor approval; entrance exam score

This course is an introduction of the French language and culture. The student becomes aware of the French sound system and rhythm and intonation of the language. Functional studies focus on simple vocabulary that acts as a base for future French study.

MIDDLE SCHOOL FRENCH I 1 year
Grade Level: 8 Weight: 1.0
Prerequisite: Instructor approval

The study of topics involving weather, time, and seasons; family and friends; the home and neighborhood; and items found in everyday life are the core of this year's curriculum. Through the use of the basic text and oral comprehension program, the student learns to express himself in the present tense. He also is introduced to the diversity of the French language and culture through carefully planned units that present the French-speaking countries around the world.

SPANISH

INTRODUCTION TO SPANISH 1 year
Grade Level: 7 Weight: 0.5
Prerequisite: Instructor approval; entrance exam score

This course introduces students to the alphabet, sound system, and intonation patterns in Spanish. In addition to developing communication skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, students also gain an appreciation and understanding of Spanish-speaking cultures.

MIDDLE SCHOOL SPANISH I 1 year
Grade Level: 8 Weight: 1.0
Prerequisite: Instructor approval

This course continues to introduce students to the Spanish language and culture. This course allows students to continue their communication skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in Spanish in order to complete their Level 1 requirement.

LATIN

LATIN I

1 year

Grade Level: 8

Weight: 1.0

Prerequisite: Instructor approval; 2.5 GPA and space availability

Students comprehend the Latin language through the study of vocabulary, syntax and practice in reading Latin. It is the intent of this course to give the student a facility in reading Latin, an appreciation of Roman history and Roman culture, and a better appreciation of the contribution Latin has made to English. The Latin readings introduce students to mythology and the everyday political and social history of Rome.

MIDDLE SCHOOL ELECTIVES

MIDDLE SCHOOL ARTSTART

Grade Level: 7-8 1 semester

This course offers the Middle School student an opportunity to explore various art media including, but not limited to, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, painting, and paper making. Students learn about artists and cultural systems that use art forms for communication of ideas or decoration. They will then create a work of their own, learning the mechanics of art materials.

BEGINNING MIDDLE SCHOOL BAND

Grade Level: 7-8 1st semester only

Students without any previous band experience may register for beginning band to learn to play a wind or percussion instrument. Students will learn the basics of playing an instrument and learn to play in an ensemble. Students wishing to continue with band will have an opportunity to move into Intermediate Band 2nd semester.

INTERMEDIATE MIDDLE SCHOOL BAND

Grade Level: 7-8 1 year

Middle School Band at Saint Thomas Academy is open to any student with at least one year of experience playing a wind or percussion instrument. The band rehearses 2-3 times per week in preparation for concerts and other school and community functions. Band is a great way to become more proficient on a musical instrument and to enjoy the participation and teamwork of ensemble playing.

MIDDLE SCHOOL CHOIR

Grade Level: 7-8 1 semester

Middle School Choir is open to all Middle School students who have a desire to learn the basics of choral music. Choir members take instruction 2-3 times a week at Visitation School in preparation for performing at concerts and school and community events.

MIDDLE SCHOOL COMPUTER GRAPHICS

Grade Level: 7-8 1 semester

This course is an introduction to the computer as a graphic arts tool. The students learn the basics of painting, drawing, and writing programs on the computer. Students learn to manipulate digital images with Adobe Photoshop Elements. The class ends with a student created Powerpoint presentation for the class. Assignments are given to encourage the students to explore the creative potential of the computer.

MIDDLE SCHOOL MUSIC APPRECIATION

Grade Level: 7-8 2nd semester only

Students will sample music from a variety of cultures and historical backgrounds. Main units will include Classical Composers, Jazz, and World Music.

MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH STRATEGIES

Grade Level: 7-8 2nd semester only

Students will participate in many word and phrase games as a means toward developing spelling and vocabulary skills. Games will include: Scrabble, Upwords, Hangman, and Boggle.

MIDDLE SCHOOL JOURNALISM

Grade Level: 7-8 1 semester

In this course students learn the basics of creative writing. Topics include poetry, short stories, plays, and personal narratives. Students will also produce a Middle School paper in this elective.

MIDDLE SCHOOL QUIZ BOWL & KNOWLEDGE BOWL.

Grade Level: 7-8 1 semester

Quiz Bowl and Knowledge Bowl is a semester-long elective class offered on alternate days. Students learn the rules of both competition formats, form teams, and compete in matches. Optional opportunities for after-school competitions against other schools will be available. In addition, a two-week session will be devoted to debate. The high school debate coach will introduce the basics of competitive debate and students will practice using current national debate topics or topics of their own choice.

MIDDLE SCHOOL MATH OLYMPIAD

Grade Level: 7-8 1 semester

Math Olympiad is based on mathematical skills learned in the middle school. Activities include different types of card games, cribbage, games with counting and line design, with a final sewing project. Students use logic in solving both written and manipulative puzzles. This elective provides fun ways to apply new and challenging skills.

MIDDLE SCHOOL MATH TEAM

Grade Level: 7-8 1 semester

The course prepares the students to compete individually and on a team in the Minnesota Junior High Math League. A broad range of topics are explored and students experience competitive meets in cooperation with students from Visitation Middle School.

VISTA MIDDLE SCHOOL STRING ORCHESTRAGrade Level 7-8 1 Year
(Thursday mornings 7:30-8:05 am)

Prerequisite: at least one year of a string instrument

The Vista Middle School Orchestra includes string players in grades 7-8 from Visitation and Saint Thomas Academy. Musicians interested in this class must play the violin, viola, cello, or bass, and must have at least one year of playing experience. String Orchestra is an elective that meets weekly before school. The Middle School String Orchestra focuses on developing musical skills, and learning to be a member of an orchestra through rehearsals and performances of concert repertoire. The string orchestra participates in numerous concerts and special events throughout the school year.

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDY SKILLS: The Learning Specialist will notify you if your son is enrolled in this course.