

Middle School Mini Courses 2008

Block B

Biking

Weather permitting (we will bike if it's cold, but not if it's wet), we will bike the river drives, traveling on the River Walk to Martin Luther King Drive, across the Fall's Bridge, and returning by way of Kelly Drive. It will be a fun afternoon of biking. To participate you must have a bike in good working condition and know how to ride it. You don't need the skills to be in a competitive bike race, just feel comfortable on a long ride. Students must have and wear bike helmets.

Reality in Film

We're going to look at films that portray a different view of what is real: *The Truman Show*, *Stranger than Fiction*, and *Galaxy Quest*. (There are a number of additional films that portray strange realities; however, many of these are rated R and would not be appropriate to show to a range of middle school students.)

Chalk Talk

I LOVE CHALK TALKS! You all know how Chalk Talks work. Here's your chance to use this fun method to debate issues that YOU are interested in discussing. If you've got ideas of statements or questions you feel would be provocative or inspiring, bring them! We will have time to share ideas and discuss the issues.

Film Noir: Why We Love Drama

Drama? Mystery? Suspense? Before blockbuster action films, a movie buff could go to the local theatre and satisfy their "whodunit" desires at the price of a dime for a double feature. Before big-budget special effects, voyeuristic American spectators flocked in large numbers to see stylishly dark tales of "moral ambiguity," or what the French coined "Film Noir." In this class, we will take a critical look at a few of the most popular, innovative, and influential films in Hollywood history, as we enter the cinematic field of Film Noir.

The Philadelphia Harvest

Based on the concept of "Slow Food" we will explore the local produce and foods of Philadelphia. Slow Food envisions a future food system that is based on the principles of high quality and taste, environmental sustainability, and social justice –in essence, a food system that is good, clean and fair (information taken from the Slow Food USA website). (Limited to 10 students)

Week One: Local Produce (Fruits and Vegetables)

Week Two: Local Breads and Grains

Week Three: Desserts (Ice Cream & Chocolate - all local)

Week Four: Field trip to DiBrunos and Steep

Book-in-Hand Theatre

If you enjoy acting, sign up for this mini course, which will give you the opportunity to act out accessible versions of classic plays without the pressure of putting on a

polished final production. The Greeks and the Romans loved theater and wrote many, many plays, both comedies and tragedies, and we have plays that appeal to every taste. Our goal is to have fun and to be dramatic.

Shelly Ridge Compilation

Plan, design, and create a multimedia website about Shelly Ridge! In this course we will look at all the things that make Shelly Ridge special—the history, the quarry, the songs, the animals, etc.—and compile them into a website. Students may interview students and alumni, catalog and photograph artifacts, create a photo collage of their favorite Shelly Ridge photographs, and study historic maps of the region. This course is a chance to document a big part of TPS’s history!

Digital Video Editing

Students will work in pairs or groups of three to create their own short movie! They will write short scripts and then film the skits using the school as the set. Finally students will edit the clips using iMovie. At the end of this course, we will make available to all participants a copy of all the short movies.

Block C

Orishas and Other Mysteries: The Afro-Latin Connection

Students will investigate and explore the African influences on traditions, including music, food, religion, and clothing, in countries around the world. The class may include speakers, a visit to a museum and restaurant, music, and dance. The class will culminate in a students’ presentations about the country that they have been investigating. Presenters may use PowerPoint, iMovie, iPhoto, etc.
(Limited to 14 students)

Presidential Election 2008

Have an opportunity to grill College Democrats and College Republicans about their candidate(s)’ positions on such issues as Iraq, health care, and Darfur. Create video ads in support of a candidate. To prepare we will meet with a political consultant, experts on Iraq and Africa, and other guests involved in the issues of the day.
(Limited to 12 students)

Einstein and Modern Physics

Einstein started a revolution in physics that changed the world. We will look at his life and his theory of relativity in a simple way. We will also look at Einstein’s role in laying the foundation of quantum mechanics, and his later attempts to refute the theory.

Mandalas

Mandala is the Sanskrit word for “circle” or “completion.” While the origins of the word come from South Asia, cultures from all over the world throughout time have used *mandalas* for a variety of purposes, including meditation. In this course, we will look at *mandala* designs from all over the world. After choosing designs we are particularly drawn to, we will color away! If you have particular color pencils, crayons, or pastels you like to use, bring them! Come color, relax, and reflect!

Debate

Students in this course will choose aspects of our culture, trends, or current events that they would like to debate. Working in teams of two or three, they will research and develop points of view based on their research. Two teams will then present and defend opposite sides of the topic researched. Panels of three students from the rest of the class will serve as judges of each debate. The competing teams will follow a set of rules defined and accepted by the entire class. (Limited to 12 students)

Track and Field

Tired of sitting still? Learn the basics of track and field events. Javelin throwing, long jumping, hurdling, discus throwing, shot putting, and relay and distancing running may all be learned. There will be an excursion to famous Franklin Field too. Perhaps this will be a first step to your Olympic career, or perhaps you'll just have fun, but in any case, you'll be in great shape for spring.

Poetry through the Ages

In this course, will read a selection of short poems and then use them as an inspiration to write poems of our own. No particular previous experience is needed, but people should be willing to try writing poetry. Ideally, we will make a collection of our best poems. We might even go outside to write if it seems appropriate.

Block D

Origami

It's all about folding paper. Make both 2-D and 3-D objects from a flat piece of paper. Students will complete some project as a group, but most of the time they will be able to self-select their models based on interest and skill level.

Music and the Media

This course is about exploring the role of music and media in your life and in greater society. We will explore various types of music and the messages they contain; students will bring in their own music for song analysis. We will also examine media involvement in the music industry. The goal is to become more savvy consumers of music and media by being able to critically read and interpret messages. The focus is on you.

Swing Dancing

Get some rhythm, listen to great big band music, and learn the basic moves of swing dance. This course is for dancers of all levels.

Bridge

Played in groups of four, bridge is a card game that has been enjoyed around the world for many generations. Come learn the basics of this social, strategic, and addictive game, and build a skill that will last your entire life. Learn bridge and you will be able to have fun with people wherever you go.

Dissection and Anatomical Drawing

In this course, we will be dissecting creatures and then creating a drawing that informs the viewer. Students should be interested in both dissecting and drawing.

A Passion for Mysteries

Mystery and crime stories are among the most popular forms of fiction today. The fascination with mystery and crime can be traced back to ancient Greece, where Sophocles and Euripides enthralled their audiences with their plays combining mystery and drama. In first-century BCE Rome, Cicero argued passionately in court in defense of accused criminals, captivating Romans with his speeches. In this course we will read excerpts from some classic authors (Poe, Holmes, Sayers, Christie, and Ellis Peters) as well as contemporary writers (Gillian Roberts, P.D. James, Peter Robinson, and Steven Saylor) and discuss what makes this genre so inviting to a range of readers. We will invite Sandy Dean to join our conversations, as she is a real mystery fan and is teaching a course in Utah about this very topic! There will also be opportunities to write responsively to what read and to see filmed adaptations of some of our stories.

Block E

Creative Writing

Never have time to write? Have ideas but haven't ever written anything down? This course is a chance for all you aspiring writers to work on the wonderful craft of creative writing! Work on poetry, short stories, or even a book! Work on something you've already started or start something new. This is a safe, open space to write and share your work. There will be time for writing each session and time for sharing each week. If you have a journal or notebook to write in, please bring it.

Solar Cars

Students will learn the basics of solar energy and how a solar car works, then build models that will be raced in a city-wide competition this spring.

Board Games

Come exercise your mind and learn some new games! This course will focus on learning, playing, and thinking about the strategy behind games you know and love and those you might come to love, such as Xactika, Blokus, The aMAZEing Labyrinth, and many more.

The Media: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

This course will explore how people get news and how that has changed over time. We'll first look at newspapers and the role they have played and continue to play in shaping public opinion. We'll then study the Internet and look specifically at how it evolved and how it is changing the way information is distributed. Our final project will be the publication of a Middle School newspaper with (we hope) the assistance of an Associate Editor from the *New York Times*.

***The Illustrated Man* by Ray Bradbury**

In these classic tales of adventure, wonderment, and the misgivings of mankind,

Ray Bradbury explores humanity from all angles and for all ages. We will read and compare these short stories in an attempt to understand the universal struggle of our everyday lives.

The Luxe by Anna Godberson

This book takes place in 1899 in Manhattan, set in a time period TPS students haven't already learned much about. The book is full of suspense and excitement. Students will need to read 3 or 4 chapters each night. From Kirkus Reviews: "A big, sumptuous tale of catty girls, dark secrets and windswept romance unfurls in this compulsively readable novel of late-19th-century New York City socialites... Readers will clamor for this sharp, smart drama of friends, lovers, lies and betrayal."

Digital Photography

In this mini course you will learn some basic elements of photography, such as lighting, arrangement, aperture, and shutter speed. You will also learn how to use a simple digital camera. In at least one class meeting each week, you will have time to experiment with a digital camera. There will be weekly a weekly critique with the whole class to share your ideas with peers about your and other people's pictures. A camera is not necessary to join—we will provide them, but if you have one feel free to bring it.

Book Group

Wings of Morning by Tom Childers

Part love story; part war story. This is the story of American World War II airmen and those who waited for and loved them. Howard Goodner was from a typical all-American small town of the 1940's. He had everything going for him. Sports, a steady girlfriend. But the war in Europe and Pearl Harbor interrupted that future. He stood on a train platform one morning, kissed his mother good-bye, and went off to the army to become an aviator. When will he come home? In addition to reading this book, we will look at the experiences of the Tuskegee airmen, America's first black military airmen. ****Author Tom Childers is expected to join us to talk about his book.**** (limited to 10 students)

The Great Gilly Hopkins by Katherine Paterson

This book is about a spunky girl who has bounced around various foster homes. If there is time, we may also read Sharon Creech's "Ruby Holler," which is also about children looking for a real home.

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Pride and Prejudice is a classic book that deals with issues of feeling trapped, a theme still relevant today. Set in a world in which women had few options, the sisters in this book face a dire fate if their reputations are ruined by inappropriate behavior on the part of their family. In this world, people make harsh judgments about each other based on their appearance and their ways of talking; it is easy to become labeled. In addition to reading the book, we will watch an excellent film adaptation.

***Who Loves You Like This* by Edith Bruck**

This book is a moving narrative of the author's childhood in Hungary, her experiences in German concentration camps, and her struggle to find a place for herself in the post-Holocaust world. This discussion-based book group is a great choice for mature readers who are interested in the Jewish experience, the issue of immigration, and the genre of autobiography.

***Summer of My German Soldier* by Bette Greene**

This book touches upon different experiences during World War II. While reading the story, students will research aspects of WWII and bring new and insightful information to class, culminating in an artistic comparison (illustration or collage) between what they researched and the book.

***To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee**

Harper Lee's only book, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a classic that addresses intense themes of family, prejudice, friendship, and integrity. We will supplement our reading with a look at racism in the 1930s, the movie version of the book, and other material. This is a good course for strong readers.

***Our Town* by Thornton Wilder**

Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town* is a classic American drama, full of comedy, romance, and poignant moments.

Earth Block

Food, You, and the Environment

We all eat food, but what impact do our food choices have on the world? We will look more closely at what we eat to understand the broader connections to the world around us. We will look at the issues raised by the following questions: What do we eat? What is involved in growing our food? What does it take for our food to get to us? What impact do policies and practices have on farmers and the environment? We will talk about seasonal and local foods, farming methods, genetically-modified and organically-grown foods, and more.

Horticulture

Perfect for those who like to get their hands dirty, this course will cover several basics of horticulture. We will learn how to start plants from seed, take live cuttings, and maintain our new bog gardens. Our efforts will go to TPS's Earth Day plant sale in April, as well as other greening projects in the school.

Green Architecture/Sustainable Design

In this course, students will don the hardhats of green architects and learn how to reduce the environmental impact of buildings. Some likely topics include "off-the-grid" energy sources for buildings, sustainable/recycled building materials, and watershed protection through green roofing. Activities include a presentation by a green architect, an excursion to a certified green building, and drafting a green design proposal for the new TPS building.

“Shelly Ridge is the Place to Be...”

Learn about and document other TPSers’ experiences at and memories associated with Shelly Ridge. This class will be interviewing students and teachers in other units about their experiences at Shelly Ridge. We will design interview questions, record interviews, and then select from them parts to be included as either voice clips or written quotations on the Shelly Ridge website being created in the Shelly Ridge Compilation mini course. We will also select photographs that relate to the stories and topics referred to in the interviews. If time permits, students may research other information relevant to Shelly Ridge and to the larger website project. *Note: This course is connected to the Shelly Ridge Compilation course being offered in Block B. Students interested in these two courses may choose to take one or both of them.*

Earth Day in the News

The media is flooded with articles about humans’ impact on the Earth. In this course, we will gather, read, and discuss the most current views on our changing climate. We will read articles from the *New York Times*, *Scientific America*, *Science News*, and other sources. At the end of the course, each student will write an editorial on an issue of her/his choice.

Painting Our Local Community Green

This course will be looking at green spaces in our greater neighborhood. We will look at plans for the community, then leave the school and investigate nearby areas where greening is possible. Students should be prepared to sketch and create proposals about how our community could become greener.

***The Call of the Wild and White Fang* by Jack London**

Jack London is a unique storyteller. His ability to commingle human nature and Mother Nature is unmatched. *The Call of the Wild* tells the survival story of a dog stolen from his comfortable home and thrown into the wild. *White Fang* illuminates the transformation of relationships between an animal–part dog, part wolf–and a man. These two tales are, to say the least, dog lover’s dreams!

***Pine Barrens* by John McPhee**

The New Jersey Pine Barrens covers more than 1,000 square miles with only a few thousand residents, the Pineys. McPhee's book is a fascinating look into the cultural, ecological, and historical characteristics of the area. This classic is ideal for nature lovers and good readers.

Math Electives

Note: Open to 6th and 7th graders only. During this block, 8th graders will be preparing for the trip to Spain.

Math All Around

Have you ever walked around you neighborhood and stopped suddenly to ponder a math problem in the sidewalk cracks or the angles of the tree branches? You might after taking this course. We’ll spend time at Schuylkill River Park exploring what math can be found among its grass, trees, and playground equipment. The goal of this course is to collectively create a book of math word problems inspired by the

park and the areas surrounding TPS. We will use digital photography to “capture” our problems and Microsoft Word to create our masterpiece.

Mathcounts Practice and Preparation

Mathcounts features great problems, friendly competition, collaboration, and learning about a gamut of middle school math topics, including combinatorics, geometry, algebra, rational numbers, irrational numbers, and graphing. This is a fun way to push yourself to tackle problems with an edge and prepare for next year’s school competition.

Logic Problems and Puzzles

Logic Problems and Puzzles will include kakuro, sudoku, and other logic exercises. If you like logic problems or just want to know how to do them, sign up.

Math, Society, and the Environment

How does where you live affect how you get around? How has the minimum wage change compared to the change in the value of the dollar? How does US military spending compare with that of other countries? We will learn the mathematical statistics behind these questions and use various types of graphs to understand a variety of social and environmental issues we face today.

Exploration in Mathematics Using Geometer’s Sketchpad

Geometer’s Sketchpad is a powerful program for learning not only geometry but other ideas in mathematics too by using its powerful graphing and visual tools. This course will explore several of these tools, including making tessellations and animations too.