

A Great Time to be a Middle School Student

Joel Bicknell

I've spent a lot of time this year talking about the value of a Holland Hall education, specifically a Holland Hall Middle School education. While we do point to the mission of the school and the practices that reinforce that mission as indicators of that value, you throw a spotlight on the value proposition when you consider the curricular and co-curricular activities our students engage in throughout the Middle School.

Recently, Mrs. Marian Dresser, Middle School Curriculum Coordinator and Librarian, and I sat down and marveled at the high quality of learning activities taking place in the building. The level of excellence being achieved by our faculty is a direct result of the confidence we place in our teachers to create and implement curriculum. Not mandated by district or state entities, faculty members collaborate freely through a mission-driven lens. Through the learning opportunities created, our students' learning accelerates.

I often feel incredibly jealous of our students and the opportunities available to them! Oh, to be back in Middle School! Below is an abbreviated list of those activities our students have recently or are currently engaged.

Fourth Grade

Students are currently involved in writing biographies while reading historical fiction in preparation for their Living Museum on February 9. Parents, mark that date as you are invited to the MS Library to witness this demonstration of learning.

In science, students are learning the ins and outs of electric circuits, where incredible hands-on experiments are taking place.

Fifth Grade

In social studies, students are engaged in a comprehensive study of South America. This past week, relief maps of the continent were created with everyday items including erasers, clay, Hershey Kisses and broccoli. This interdisciplinary unit draws on learning taking place in reading, writing, technology and library.

One of the highlights of the fifth grade year is the Engineering Fair that takes place on March 11. Students are currently involved in the simple machines unit that culminates in that demonstration of learning.

Sixth Grade

In English and history, students are delving into the Middle Ages. Essential skills are being over-learned in their reading of *Crispin* and associated writing assignments. This coming week, students will have the opportunity to visit a local mosque making critical cultural connections between the historical narrative and current events. Technology is integrated throughout the unit culminating in the students synthesizing their learning in the creation of iMovies.

Seventh Grade

Recently, students attended the fascinating Bodies Exhibit. This field trip fit perfectly with the science and wellness curriculums.

Over the next several weeks, students will engage in advisory-based book clubs led by all seventh-grade faculty members. Book choices included *True Grit*, *Hunger Games*, *The Hobbit* and *Book Thief*. Organized by Mr. Johnson, the goal of the book clubs is to promote the life-long joy of reading. We want our students to read more than what they are required to read for their classes. Strong readers are strong writers.

Eighth Grade

In history, students recently developed their own radio news broadcast over topics of the 1930's. There was a great deal of excitement in the hallways as they were able to dress appropriate to the time-period.

In English, students are digging deep into *To Kill A Mockingbird*. This work of literature provides opportunities for rich discussions about our countries often turbulent past in regards to racial tensions.

Middle School Fine Arts

Just a few weeks ago, our students presented a tremendously successful production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. The production highlighted the talents of our students and faculty and the value of the delayed gratification of four-months of disciplined creative work.

In music, Middle School students are developing excellent technique in our band, string and vocal ensembles. Additionally, we have many students across all middle school grades participating in the Honor Choir.

In art, the quality of work being produced by our students continues to be awe-inspiring. Whether it be in their ceramic work, photography, still-life drawings, or investigations of the styles of media art, our students benefit from the tutelage of our talented fine arts faculty.

Outside of the classroom, our students continue to experience success in their athletic and academic competitions. Whether it's on the court, the soccer field, in MathCounts or with the Academic Team, Middle School students are representing Holland Hall with pride and distinction.

Thank you for your continued trust you place in us to mentor and educate your children during their Middle School years. It is a vocation of ours to serve the social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs of our students. Please never hesitate to let us know if there's anything we can do to support your child's continued growth.

In service,

Joel R. Bicknell
Head of Middle School