Upper School Scholars Program
Courses

Grades 9 & 10 Decision Making: Inferences and Judgments

This course is an introduction to various scientific perspectives on the processes through which people make decisions; with two goals in mind. The first is to improve the quality of students’ decisions. Students will learn about common inferential errors and biases in decision-making, and look for easy to implement solutions. The second is to improve the ability of students to influence and motivate others. This is accomplished by applying insights in the field of behavioral decision-making and game theory.

Grades 9 & 10 Journalism in the Age of Fake News

The course addresses the role of journalism in our society. We will study why it is important to have a free press in a democracy. Examples will show how this theory has worked in practice. We will also explore the dangers of biased reporting and fake news. Finally, students will write a news article as a means of learning about objectivity and clarity in writing.
Grades 9 & 10 Black Speculative Fiction

Speculative Fiction is an umbrella genre that includes branches of fiction like alternate history, science fiction, fantasy, and dystopian fiction. What connects these genres is the freedom for authors to create new worlds and new realities; to envision what might have been, and what yet could be. This semester we will read short stories and fiction excerpts of authors such as Octavia Butler, Nnedi Okorafor, Nalo Hopkinson, Charles Chesnutt, W.E.B. DuBois and more. We will explore how black speculative fiction challenges the boundaries of genre to tell vital stories of humanity, and reimagine hierarchies of race, class and gender.

Grades 9 & 10 Venezuela in Crisis

You may have heard that Venezuela is currently experiencing an economic, social and political crisis. What does this actually mean? What caused the crisis? How should the world react? We will start with a bit of historical background before covering the 1998 election of Hugo Chavez, his presidency and the aftermath of his death in 2013. Students will be exposed to a variety of news and academic sources and will be expected to evaluate the reliability of what they are reading or viewing. A strong emphasis will be placed on how everyday Venezuelans have mitigated challenges in their daily lives. Logistics permitting, students will have the opportunity to meet a recent Venezuelan emigrant and ask questions about what it is like in Venezuela today. We will end the course by debating solutions—what actions should be taken by the United States, other countries or international organizations.
Grade 11 Cooked: Chemistry and Food

The course is all about the idea of the “chemistry around us”. By introducing the chemical principles, reactions and compounds that have a lot to do with our daily lives, students are encouraged to explore the daily phenomena with scientific approaches. In this course, you will explore the chemistry principles in cooking and food preparation.

Grade 11 Making Poems: Advanced Poetry Workshop

Emphasis will be on weekly writing prompts and weekly reading assignments on contemporary poetry. Each week’s reading will center on a specific poetic form, or inspirational topic. Students will workshop their own poems each week and give constructive criticism to their peers on their poems. Additionally, students will be expected to attend at least 2 poetry readings in and around NYC in the evening. [NOTE: Students who have previously taken this course can take it again, as syllabus will change.]

Grade 11 Gwendolyn Brooks’ novella, Maud Martha

This semester we will read Gwendolyn Brooks’ novella, Maud Martha (1953). Maud Martha is a coming of age story set in Chicago during the first half of the twentieth century. In her only novel, Pulitzer Prize winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks depicts the life of Maud Martha Brown through a series of brief vignettes. Each chapter reflects the universality of human existence, while also revealing the ways in which Maud must navigate insinuations of racism, classism and sexism. What is so extraordinary about this text is Brooks's ability to capture the quiet, ordinary, moments of life and render them beautiful.
**Grade 11 Educational Segregation in America: From Brown to Today**

This course will explore the history and sociology of educational segregation in the United States. We will begin by looking at Plessy v. Ferguson, and the half-century long campaign to overturn it, culminating in the landmark decision of the Supreme Court in Brown v. Board of Education. Then we will examine the southern campaign of “massive resistance” and evaluate its effectiveness. From there, we will turn our attention to questions of residential segregation in the north, and the efforts to integrate schools in the Boston area through busing, as well as the backlash to this practice. Finally, we will turn our attention to the public schools of New York City in the present day, and examine the degree to which they are segregated, and the effects of this segregation on students.

**Grade 12 Voting Theory: How to Run a Country**

Voting Theory is the study of how decisions are made amongst a group with differing opinions. Voting theory has both small-scale (you and your friend are deciding what movie to watch) and large-scale (presidential elections) implications in the real world. There are also many ways of tallying a vote beyond the familiar, “majority rules.” In this class, we will look at different styles of elections through a guiding question of “fairness.” We will see how elections and maps can be manipulated. We will analyze election systems and specific political moments, arguing about the extent that they reflect the preferences of the people involved as fair and accurately as possible.