Philosophy & Curriculum

What is the Adolescent Community?

The Greenspring Montessori community for students aged 12-14 years honors the cognitive and social needs of adolescence; it is an age of great social development, an age of critical thinking and reflection, and a period of self-concern and self-assessment.

Therefore, the goals of the Greenspring Adolescent Community (7-8th grades) are to:

- guide students towards self-discovery and how they best learn and collaborate with others,
- become active members of a wider community of critical thinkers and problem-solvers,
- and ignite the passionate individual voice of each adolescent as they seek their place in society.

Greenspring’s Adolescent Community provides a predictable yet flexible structure, consistent and high expectations for work and conduct, a clear and authentic system of accountability, opportunities for students to be agents of their own learning, and a focus on developing effective and ethical thinkers and problem-solvers. Conversations with their Guides and daily formative feedback on work complement the most important barometer of success: the student’s own knowledge that they have put forth their best effort.

At a quick glance, the Greenspring adolescent curriculum can be viewed as an experiential, project- and problem-based, writing intensive program that promotes independence, self-direction, metacognition, and critical thinking.

At its heart, though, the curriculum is simply a means to build community, to discover passions, deepen curiosity, and ignite the voice of each adolescent so that they advocate for themselves, their family and friends, and the greater community.
Language Arts

How do we effectively communicate our ideas?

A Montessori approach recognizes the multiple layers of language used in the human experience: the ability to clearly and effectively communicate ideas, opinions, emotions, and information; the power to access and express oneself in a poem, speech, or essay; and the capacity to read and understand great works that have been recorded throughout human history. These are the essential components to the curriculum that weave their way into every corner of every discipline. Greenspring students frequently write in order to develop essential communication skills, define opinions, and, ultimately, to discover one’s voice.

Forms:
Poetry
Short Stories
Research
Speeches
Journaling
Reflections

Book Reviews
Scripts
Word Studies
Letters
Topics:
• Personal
• Formal/Business

The Essay
• Expository
• Descriptive
• Persuasive
• Personal

Students are expected to:
• demonstrate a conscious capacity to write expressively, comprehensively, and coherently in a variety of academic and creative modes
• speak publicly and present ideas and information formally in a clear, organized, and articulate manner
• partake in literature seminar by engaging in the creation of shared meaning through questions and dialogue.
• consistently draft short and extended essays, research outlines and papers
• present individual and collaborative projects
• closely read and analyze sophisticated works of nonfiction, fiction, and poetry
• write and deliver a memorized graduation address

Selection of Novels Read:
- Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck
- Brown Girl Dreaming by Jaqueline Woodson
- The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho
- Siddhartha by Hermann Hesse
- To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee
- I Had Seen Castles by Cynthia Rylant
- All-American Boys by Jason Reynolds & Brendan Kiely
- Ishmael by David Quinn
- A Midsummer Night’s Dream by William Shakespeare
Mathematics
How can we define the language of the universe?

The curriculum balances state/national standards with the guiding principles of a Montessori classroom by focusing on logical thinking, communication, problem solving, confidence, an ordered mind, numeracy, wonder and amazement, and fearless learning. The materials, activities, projects and guide provide aids for the development of the mathematical mind. Weekly math seminars provide authentic problem-based challenges in which students have to communicate while building upon each other’s strategies to reach a solution. Students have the freedom to choose the strategy and materials that will help them develop a conceptual understanding of formulas. At the same time, the guide provides structure for work, meaningful activities, projects, assessments, and lessons on key concepts and skills, ensuring that students are working to their maximum potential.

Section of Studies & Projects:
- Pre-Algebra
- Algebra
- Geometry
- Math Seminar
- Math Projects

Students are expected to:
- complete daily follow-up work and prepare for weekly assessments
- come prepared for each lesson with an open mind and questions
- develop successful strategies and construct logical arguments for solutions
- independently engage in a self-guided fluency practice
- create and present an original math project at the end of each unit that represents their understanding
- challenge themselves and each other
- use notes and their own refined definitions, explanations, and example problems to create their own Language of Math resource text
Humanities
What is humanity’s role on our planet?

One cannot understand the current workings, dilemmas, and conflicts of today—and work together to create solutions—without an understanding and deep connection to the history of humanity. Therefore, the study of humanities at Greenspring directly and powerfully connects students to the human experience. The curriculum capitalizes on the adolescent’s sensitivity to injustice and creates opportunities for students to explore how systems and cultures evolved to their current states. The adolescent’s experience explores the past and present workings of society, its obligations and its structures, with a keen sense of responsibility toward a more peaceful and sustainable future for all humankind. Each study intentionally balances the historic and contemporary workings and dilemmas of society. For the identity-seeking adolescent, it is an access point into where one fits in the stream of history and a bridge to future contributions as a member of adult society.

Selection of Studies & Projects:
- The evolution of ethics and moral philosophy
- History of agriculture and food systems
- World religions and contemporary conflicts
- History of Civil Rights and bias awareness
- Understanding American democracy and government to make change
- History of United States immigration and Human Rights

Students are expected to:
- show effort and discernment in independent research
- connect with members of the greater community
- keep comprehensive notes
- integrate media to deliver oral presentations
- prepare questions and engage in frequent seminars
- closely read and analyze primary documents and historical texts
- write logical arguments based on evidence
- prepare for and engage in researched debates
- write and memorize public speeches
Science

What is humanity’s role on our planet?

Students continue to develop scientific literacy and engage with the scientific method by exploring current problems facing humanity and analyzing empirical data. Students are asked big questions, exposed to complex ideas, and given the opportunity to explore the answers to their own questions in order to ignite curiosity and expand the student’s sense of wonder. Students design their own experiments and discover scientific concepts through guided lessons, activities, gathering data, group inquiry, and weekly seminars examining primary documents. Ultimately, the adolescent uses science to make choices, disseminate information, and as a framework for viewing the natural world and the human impact upon it.

Selection of Studies & Projects:

Physics
- Engineering & Design
- Newtonian Mechanics
- Energy
- Electricity & Magnetism

Biology
- Human Genetics
- Evolution
- Cell Biology
- Human Anatomy

Chemistry
- Properties of Water
- Soil & Water Quality
- Organic Chemistry of Human Nutrition

Students are expected to:
- use the scientific method to develop and execute original experiments
- write a full analysis, including research, in a properly formatted scientific paper
- create clear data tables and graphs using digital media
- connect with members of the greater community
- clearly record all observations
- make mistakes and reflect on them
- use discernment in research and writing
Health, Wellness & Personal Expression
What does it mean to be human?

Students take part in a variety of weekly enrichment studies that cultivate their self-exploration, provide opportunities to discover passions, and build connections to concurrent studies in science, humanities, math, and language. During weekly enrichment, students meet with enrichment guides while daily integrated enrichment opportunities occur in the classroom.

Weekly Enrichment
- Spanish (three times a week)
- Visual Arts - students develop skills and techniques to integrate with humanities and science projects
- Physical Education
- Music (instrumental and vocal)
- Community Lunch - students plan and prepare a meal for the Adolescent Community
- Personal Projects - time for individual exploration of a topic
- Workshops - electives offered by staff to explore particular topics and learn new skills
- Personal Health - organized discussions about sexual health, mental health, and decisions about drug and alcohol use

Daily Integrated Enrichment
- Visual Arts - students are asked to express their understanding of particular topics in creative ways
- Performing Arts - students play roles and write skits to demonstrate understanding of historical events
- Mindfulness - daily journal writing, meditation, and team-building activities
- Digital media - students use computer programs to create and present research and projects
Micro-Economy

What is economic independence?

Students learn fundamental concepts of business operations as they work to develop the various ventures of the Adolescent Community’s business: B’More Greenspring. They examine topics such as marketing, sales management, customer service, accounting, human resource management, government regulations, legal issues and forms of business ownership.

Service Learning

What is community?

Effective service learning must be a part of the curriculum and sustained over a significant period of time. Furthermore, students must be involved in important decisions and take on valuable roles. As such, Greenspring’s adolescents serve the greater community in a variety of ways, depending on the decisions of the community. Past service include:

- Volunteering at a city garden
- Working with Healthcare for the Homeless
- Designing and creating a community garden at Greenspring
- Working with local council members to address problems in Baltimore City and County

Inspired by this work, students have chosen personal projects that serve local communities and have donated money raised through the student-run business to various organizations. In addition, the end-of-year Odyssey incorporates a service-learning component.

The Odyssey

What is my place in the world?

Like Homer’s Odysseus, Adolescent students are on an epic journey filled with uncertainty and life lessons at every turn. As such, on entering the passage between childhood and adulthood they need to develop a personal vision. To achieve this they need to come in direct contact with the workings of the world to build and maintain community, apply and test new knowledge, commune with adults, and to enter the stream of history and humanity. By design, two annual class trips are the primary experiential vehicle for such pursuits. These Odysseys nourish those budding visions by providing added context for both their studies and their young lives. Two week-long experiences occur in early September and late May. In the beginning of the year, we build community and set the tone for how we want to interact together throughout the year. We begin to have experiences that expose the variety of topics that will be explored during the year, as well as learn how to work together. The end of year Odyssey call forth the depth of learning that has transpired, socially and intellectually, serving as a barometer of individual and community progress. It is the culmination of all that has been contemplated throughout the academic year. The location and detailed itinerary is determined based on the most relevant curricular ties.
Igniting purpose and voice in a fully-engaged learning community.

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