SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS

2026/2027



Middle School

Community & Connection

What a start to the year!

Although we have only been back at school for 6 weeks, there is already so much to share with you in this September edition of 'the Compass'; designed to lead you all through our Tessie MS Programme! From shaping our belief systems to Dinner theatre preparations, to traditional nature writings, to how we are teaching machines to solve problems efficiently, our subject specialist teachers have a lot to share with you this month!

The Compass shows you where we've been and where we are going! Enjoy!

Bec

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

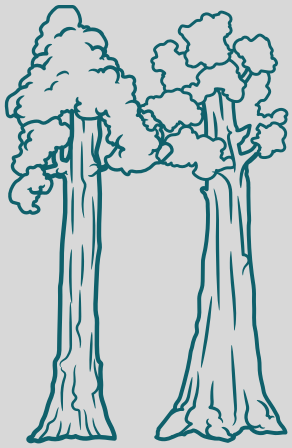
The MS Arc





Grade 7

Who am I in relation to the World and systems around me?
What are my beliefs?



Grade 6

Who am I?
Where do I fit in?

Grade 8

What kind of leader am I?
How can I impact the World?



The year began with the launch of our Human Development Framework, which supports our students to ask developmentally appropriate key questions and explore every facet of growing up in preparation for their Grade 8 "solo." The Middle School Team engaged in rich discussions with our families at August Orientation sessions as we began our partnership to support our young people through this journey. Teachers are the Guides that will help navigate this developmental rite of passage through attuned practice, advisory and their subject specialisms. We provide the backpack of tools, and our young people learn how to use them to make connections and navigate their own way in readiness for the next adventure!

Bec

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

English updates

Grade 6



How do people use words to shape their identities, beliefs, and choices?

Our current unit in Worlds Made of Words, explores the powerful ways writing, storytelling, and self-expression have been used throughout history to preserve identity, defend dignity, process hardship, and pursue freedom.

We recently finished reading Karen Cushman's historical novel, *Catherine, Called Birdy*, a story told through the diary entries of a young girl living in medieval England. Through Catherine's voice, students explored what life and expectations were like for girls during the Middle Ages while also examining how authors use symbolism, historical allusions, double standards, and explicit and implicit bias to communicate larger ideas.

Along the way, students have been strengthening their analytical writing skills. They are learning to select meaningful textual evidence, blend quotations into their writing, and explain how that evidence supports an interpretation. Students also recently completed an end-of-book reading quiz, giving them another opportunity to practice finding and explaining evidence while strengthening their accuracy and critical-thinking skills.

We have now begun reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*. As we read, students are learning about Anne's experiences during the Holocaust, including the ways othering and antisemitism can shape the lives of individuals and communities.

Reading these two works side by side gives us a fascinating opportunity to consider two young people who recorded their lives during very different moments in history.

Although their circumstances are dramatically different, both young writers leave behind something remarkably valuable: their voices.

Inspired by Catherine and Anne's powerful firsthand accounts, students are creating their own time capsule of writing and artifacts that captures who they are, what matters to them, and how they see the world right now. Their time capsule (a large envelope) will be stored and returned to them at the end of 8th grade. The hope is that, when they open it two years from now, they will rediscover their own voice, ideas, experiences, and perspective at this moment in their lives.





Mikki

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

English updates

Grade 7



Why do we believe what we believe?

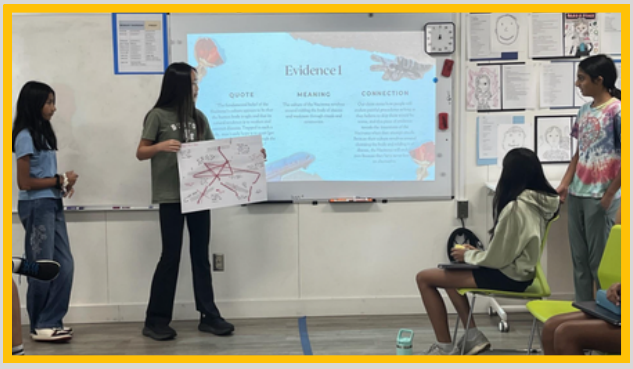
The unit is anchored by Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and enriched by Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Wife's Story*, Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*, and Horace Miner's *Body Ritual Among the Nacirema*. Together, these texts invite students to examine how fear, perception, conformity, and social influence can shape what individuals and communities accept as true.

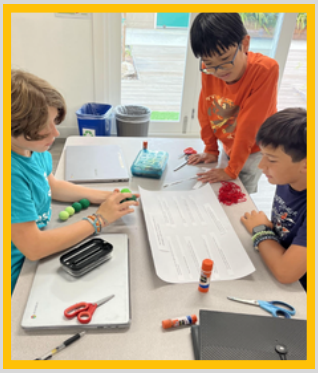
Students have been exploring the "Biology of Beliefs," examining how our experiences, instincts, perspectives, and belief influencers can affect the way we interpret the world around us. This work has provided important context for our study of *The Crucible* when students will explore Puritan history, Arthur Miller's life and influences, and the political climate of McCarthyism, considering how fear and suspicion can spread through a community.

Recently, students wrote literary analysis paragraphs responding to the question: *How does perception shape what we believe is true?* They practiced selecting meaningful evidence from a text, blending evidence with their own analysis, and explaining how experiences, instincts, or point of view can influence belief.

Students also completed a mini-research writing assignment investigating a cultural or psychological "monster" from Bigfoot and werewolves to anxiety and artificial intelligence. Through their research, they explored where these beliefs originate, why people may hold onto them, and what emotions, experiences, or perceptions can make something feel true.

Finally, students put their evidence-evaluation skills into action by creating conspiracy boards. This engaging activity challenged them to gather, evaluate, and select evidence while considering how easily information can be connected to create a compelling story or belief.







Mikki

As we continue into The Crucible, students will use these ideas to think critically about how fear, evidence, influence, and perception can shape what happens when a community decides what or whom to believe.

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

English updates



Grade 8

Why do we believe what we believe?

The essayist and author, Pico Iyer, whose writing sparks discovery of internal human landscapes and physical external geographies, explores travel the way writers engage with finding their voice. His words about travel are a metaphor for writing: "we inevitably travel to moods and states of mind and hidden inward passages that we'd otherwise seldom have cause to visit" (Pico Iyer, "Why We Travel"). What else is blank page, but an opportunity to express what you feel and to figure out what you think?

Our Eighth grade scholars began this semester reading mentor texts by Pico Iyer, Teju Cole, and Jamaica Kincaid in an effort to identify the qualities of voice, exploring curiosity, and expressing that tension between what author Jamaica Kincaid expresses, as "[t]he space between the idea of something and its reality is always wide and deep and dark" ("On Seeing England for the First Time"). What is a voice, but an idea of self? An echo from inside out.

If our voices are extensions of our individual self, then how might we demonstrate the inner-workings of what we value, how we think about the world, and ultimately express who we are as humans? Why now? Writing personal statements, in practicality, is preparation for the high school application essay. Though this genre of writing is more than application material, it's an opportunity for Eighth grade writers to compose a written artifact of a deeper quest that asks: *How do I articulate who I am, what I value, and how intend to engage with the world?*

With models, frequent journaling, and permission to explore angles of our individual voices, these Eighth grade writers are working out how to drop a reader into a singular moment that reveals the inner working of their mind, blind acceptance of socially constructed truths, perspective shifts, or unscripted wondering This is the kind of writing that challenges students to write beyond manufactured personal statements, and produce essays with paragraphs that unpack complexity or how the mind processes obsession, or how seeing the world matters as thinkers and community members.

This first unit of Eighth grade is about taking the momentum of learning and applying it to how they engage with the unknown. Call it leadership. Call it agency. Call it solo. Voices are calling!

Evan

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

History updates



Grade 6

All MS History courses started their academic semester off with **material organization (binder set up), historical thinking skills,** and practice with various **information and media literacy competencies** with help from Common Sense Media. Thematically, all grade levels then engaged with geographical thinking skills.

For sixth graders, this included activities that examined Afroeurasian waterways, plate tectonics, climates and biomes, population, shoreline changes over time, and moving along continental axes. After our mini-unit on Geography, we kicked off History 6 with East Asia.

This new unit began with a comparison between the Ancient Chinese philosophies of Confucianism, Legalism and Taoism in pursuit of an answer to how ought rulers approach their people? This allowed the students to become familiar with the Mandate of Heaven and Cycle of Dynasties, two notions that defined the study of the past by scholar-gentry in the Middle Kingdom (*Zhongguo*).

Currently, we are curating the actions and achievements of the Qin, Han, Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties while beginning to (i) open China up to foreign trade along the Silk Road and the burgeoning domestic sericulture, (ii) introduce Buddhism's influence from abroad, and (iii) discuss the changing relations with northern peoples along the border. The sixth graders' upcoming project - "Travelogue of a Chinese Emissary" - will launch after the camping trip, wherein pairs will explore other regions of East Asia, i.e. kingdoms on the Korean peninsula, Japan, Mongolia, and Southeast Asia on a sponsored expedition in service to the Emperor. How will travel reveal a version of the past? How might contemporary cultures have been influenced by China's stability and overwhelming prosperity? How are these other cultures unique unto themselves outside of the reach of neighboring China?

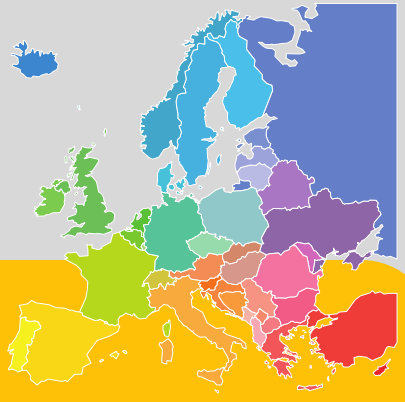
Between the lines and under the surface, the sixth graders are practicing their executive functioning skills: time and material management, prioritization and strategic reading, and note-taking in class or reading assignments. The sixth graders are rapidly finding their feet and growing in confidence daily as their familiarity with daily routines become second nature. Please encourage your student to sign-up for office hours in the future to meet with me so we might discuss progress, ask questions, and address continued development. We cannot wait to share more updates as Parent-Teacher conferences approach.

Nick

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

History updates



Grade 7

All History courses started their academic semester off with **material organization (binder set up), historical thinking skills**, and practice with various information and **media literacy competencies** with help from Common Sense Media. Thematically, all grade levels then engaged with geographical thinking skills.

For seventh graders, this included (a) orienting ourselves with North American rivers and their basins as well as geographical zones and (b) identifying all the US states and the nine census regional categories. Additionally, we located various First Peoples on the continent to recognize their original populations, diversity, and lifestyles (clothing, food, and homes). After our mini-unit on Geography, we transitioned into our unit entitled Contact and Colonialism.

This new unit began with a reading from our supplemental text *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* and light research in teams concerning regional groups of indigenous peoples. The Encounter of Europeans would change everything bringing about a new world of many cultures. The students explored several primary source documents from various European explorers sponsored by multiple kingdoms Spain, France, and England which uncovered motivations and behaviors that provoked student outcries and calls for justice. Our investigations deepened as we revealed contact often led to collision and conflict with limited extended cooperation, particularly as we researched the sixteenth century colonial settlement experiences of Spanish, French, Dutch, and English arrivals. In the background and outside of class, students worked on their very own Explorer Trading Cards featuring individuals of their choosing. Students were encouraged to consider the historical experiences and deeds of their individuals and offer an unfiltered assessment of their figures.

On the horizon, the seventh graders will continue to read out of our supplemental source (mentioned above) along with Takaki's *A Different Mirror: A Multicultural History of the United States*, garnering additional voices from the past as we assemble both a picture and context as well as understanding and critical review of the era of settlement in the Thirteen Colonies. Students will establish a sense of change over time and causation through primary and secondary sources, too. Ahead, as a project, students will craft "Zines on Colonial Life and Rebellions," pulling from research and grappling with the stories of migrants, indentured servants, abducted and trafficked peoples, and indigenous groups and the intersections of class, religion, politics, and race. The students will be on their way toward Unit 2: Independence and Constitutionalism by the time Parent Conferences are over, so please encourage students to begin pondering what life, liberty and a pursuit of (public) happiness might look like in late eighteenth century America.

Nick

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

History updates



Grade 8

All History courses started their academic semester off with **material organization** (binder set up), **historical thinking skills**, and practice with various **information and media literacy competencies** with help from Common Sense Media. Thematically, all grade levels then engaged with geographical thinking skills.

For the eighth graders, this included reading a handful of thought-provoking chapters out of *How to Lie with Maps*. These chapters pertained to cartography's projection problems, the blunders and accidents of map-makers, and how maps have been used as propaganda in Modern World History. Coincidentally, on September 4, the UN announced its Correct the Map Resolution addressing the very topics we had considered together in class. After our mini-unit on Geography, we explored a unit prequel entitled "Calamities and Recoveries, 1300-1500." The students built Eurasian context after the fall of the Mongolian empire and utilized a variety of skills to examine the impact caused by a Little Ice Age, Black Death, and Whirlwind, a.k.a. Tamerlane. The skills of deduction, research, source and data analysis, and utilizing graphical visualization to establish conclusions were displayed and stretched as topics of Crusades, plague, migration, and population change were assessed. In this world of political voids and seemingly societal collapses, Asian Empires and Absolutism (our first unit of the year) emerge.

Subsequently, the eighth graders mapped the establishment of several regimes that became land-based empires. We read about the recovery in China under the Ming, located the rapidly expanding Ottoman empire, and incorporated the Delhi Sultanate into the constellation of authoritative regimes reorganizing massive societies across Eurasia.

Currently, the students are wrapping up our discussion on the domestic and foreign policies of the Ming and Qing in China, only to begin evaluating the practices and policies of Shoguns in the "Closed Country" of late Medieval and Early Modern Nippon (Japan), or "Land of the Rising Sun." After the camping trip, the students will assess the similarities and differences of Muslim regimes in South and Southwest Asia known as the Gunpowder Empires: Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal.

Our work with the Asian Empires of the Early Modern period (approximately 1450-1750) will culminate in a project entitled "An Imperial Council and Summit," wherein student teams will perform deep-dives into one of the five regimes above and navigate sets of primary source material, only to be summoned to a high-stakes gathering (and roleplay) to discuss and defend their empires' governance strategies, critique rivals, and prove that their sovereign holds the ultimate mandate to rule. Things should definitely heat up before Parent Conferences in October.

Nick

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

Maths updates

Level 6

Level 6 mathematicians kicked off the year with a Number Investigation, exploring the unique properties of numbers and discovering relationships between them. We also reviewed negative numbers and absolute value, with a focus on how these concepts appear in real-world situations. After camping, students will dive into a hands-on project applying fractions, decimals, percents, and discounts to real-world shopping—and we'll take our learning beyond the classroom with our first math field trip!

Level 7

Level 7 mathematicians have started the year by creating their own unique worlds while building fluency with positive and negative number operations. Students are using rational numbers to define features of their worlds, make calculations, and solve real-world-style problems. After camping, we'll continue building on these skills as we move into expressions, equations, and more complex problem solving.

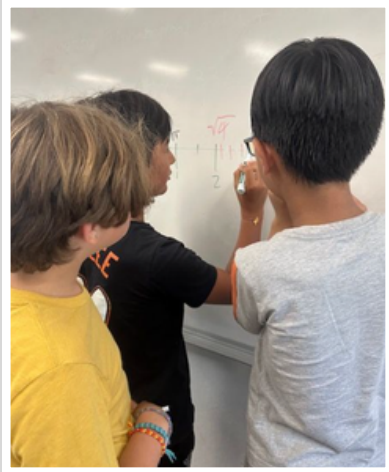
Alyssa

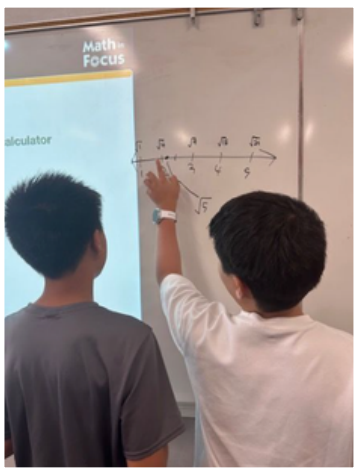


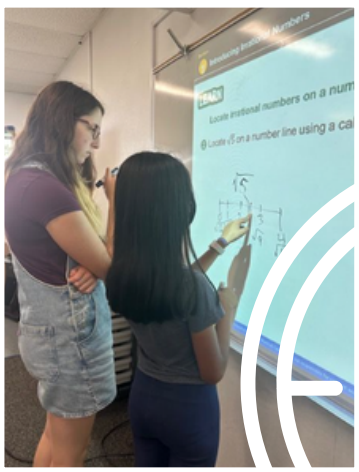
Pre-Algebra

In Pre-Algebra, students have been deepening their mathematical understanding through several important topics. They explored how rational numbers can be used to approximate irrational numbers, developed precision by working with significant figures, and strengthened their skills with exponents. After camping we will learn "Scientific Notations" and will dive into real world problem solving in scientific notations.

Tooba







SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS

2026/2027

Maths updates

Algebra I

This week we completed our first unit: linear equations and inequalities. In this unit, students learned to solve multi-step linear one-variable equations, including equations with the variable on both sides and equations involving fractions and decimals, and applied those same skills to solve inequalities and compound inequalities, with special attention to how the process changes when multiplying/dividing by a negative number. Throughout the unit, students also practiced translating real-world situations into equations and inequalities and using them to solve practical problems. The first exam was given last week, with results used to identify specific skills to reinforce before moving into the second unit. In addition, students were asked to solve some challenging word problems to assess their overall understanding of the general concepts.

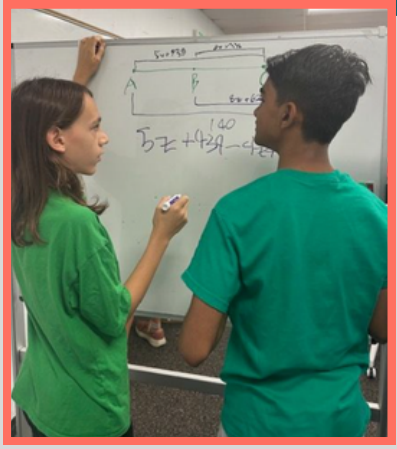
Eugene

Geometry

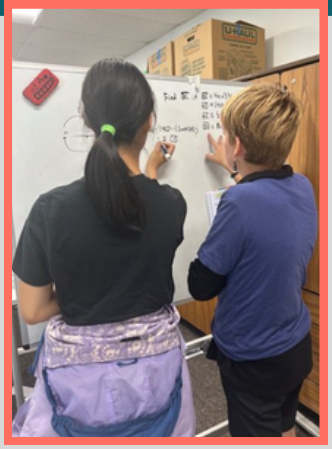
This month in Geometry, students explored the fundamentals that form the building blocks of Geometry. They developed a strong foundation by studying points, lines, planes, and angles, as well as applying concepts like the Segment Addition and Angle addition Postulate. Students also gained hands-on experience with classical geometric constructions, practicing precision and reasoning to construct perpendicular bisectors, angle bisectors, regular hexagon and octagon. They learned to identify and analyze the properties of various polygons, both regular and non-regular. By dissecting complex figures into simpler shapes, students discovered multiple strategies to calculate area and perimeter with accuracy and reasoning. In addition, they explored the relationships between interior and exterior angles, learning formulas and geometric reasoning that explain how these measures relate to the structure and classification of polygons.

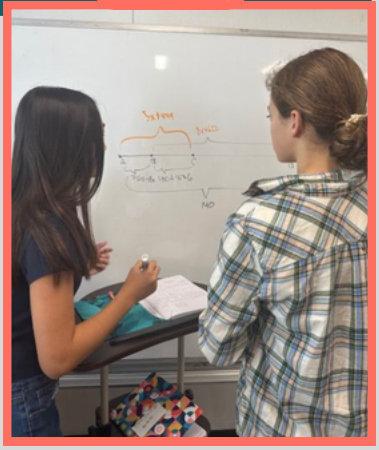
This unit connects directly to high school geometry standards, emphasizing students' ability to use geometric properties and relationships to solve real-world and mathematical problems. Students practiced perseverance as they decomposed irregular polygons into familiar shapes to determine area and perimeter. These skills prepare students for deeper study in topics such as geometric proof, similarity, trigonometry, and coordinate geometry, which they will encounter later in the course.

Tooba









SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

Maths updates

Algebra II

We started our year with a review of solving quadratic equations and graphing parabolas, then expanded into new territory! We discussed the process for solving quadratic inequalities, or rather different options for breaking down inequality problems into more manageable pieces. The Big Event of this unit was deriving the form of a parabolic function from its geometric definition: a locus (set) of points that are each equidistant from a point (the focus) and a line (the directrix). This derivation produced the vertex form we're used to, where (h,k) is the parabola's vertex, but with a twist: instead of coefficient a, we have coefficient 1/4p, in which p is the distance between the vertex and the focus (or the vertex and directrix). This new definition also allowed us to graph a new family of parabolas: those with a horizontal axis of symmetry. They may not be functions, but they follow all the same rules as our old friends.

Out with the old: $f(x) = a(x-h)^2 + k$ In with the new: $y = \frac{1}{4p}(x-h)^2 + k$ or $x = \frac{1}{4p}(y-k)^2 + h$

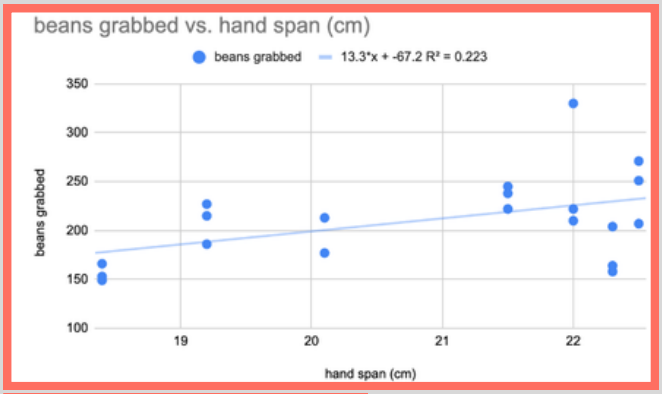
We followed our new geometric definition for parabolas with a quick unit on the simplest conic section: circles. (Sadly ellipses and hyperbolas no longer appear in algebra 2– students will have to wait until precalculus for that excitement!) Using the distance formula we derived the (much simpler) expression for the locus of points that are all equidistant from a center. We just finished up our first assessment, and next month we'll be increasing the temperature as we work with polynomials of higher degree!

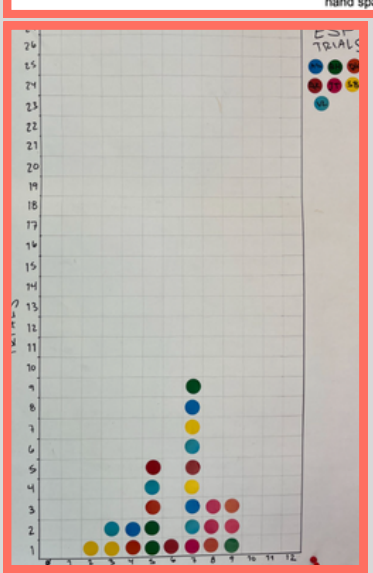
Statistics

Our first unit covered single-variable data. We first divided the world into categorical and quantitative variables, each with their own particular methods of description and graphical display. Categorical data can be discussed in terms of proportion of respondents in each category, and displayed on pie or bar charts. Quantitative variables, on the other hand, can have Math done to them! We discussed measures of center and spread (mean and standard deviation or median and IQR) and when it is appropriate to use each. If you really want to annoy your student, ask them how to describe the skew of a data distribution! While the definition of a right-skewed distribution makes mathematical sense– the mean is to the right of the median– most people initially make the incorrect opposite assumption because the *peak* of the data is to the left of symmetrical.

For our next unit we'll be skipping all the way ahead to the end of the book to talk about bivariate data (each observational unit is associated with two quantitative variables). We already collected some data about each student's hand-span and how many dry pinto beans they can hold at once and determined a weak but positive linear association.

Robin





We also started testing our students for extra-sensory perception (ESP). Periodically we will have them guess the suits of twelve cards (all diamonds or spades) and plot the outcomes on our dot plot. So far nobody seems to be psychic, but I believe we can find someone if we keep trying long enough!

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

World Language updates

Chinese I

Grade 6

Students began their Chinese-learning journey this month, focusing on developing a growth mindset by comparing the process of learning a sport to learning a language—embracing mistakes, learning from them, and continuing to improve.

We introduced the fundamental elements of Chinese, including pictographs, radicals, and the differences between Mandarin and Cantonese, as well as traditional and simplified characters. Foundational skills covered included greetings, introducing themselves, talking about family members, and the basics of writing Chinese characters. Our vocabulary list can be found here. This month, we focused on building strong language-learning routines, strategies, and practice habits.

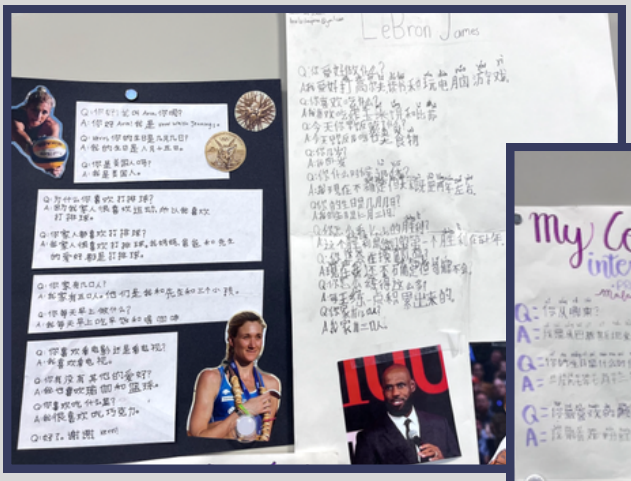
Students will also do their own research and present on what they've learned for the Mid-Autumn holiday at our Middle School Lunch time event early October! Photos to come!

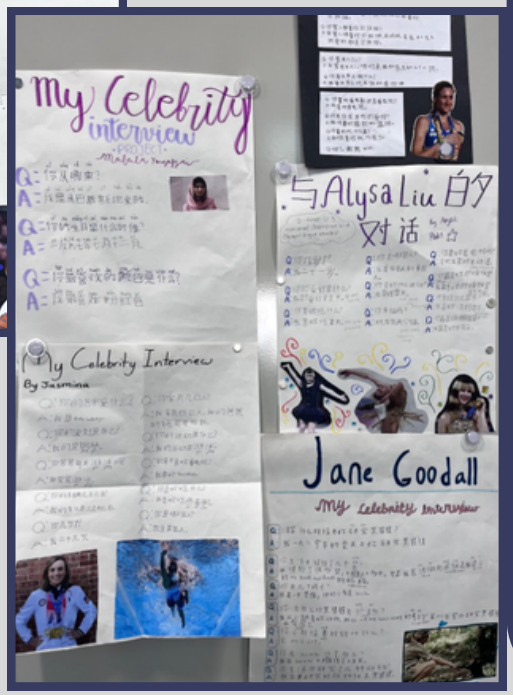
Chinese II

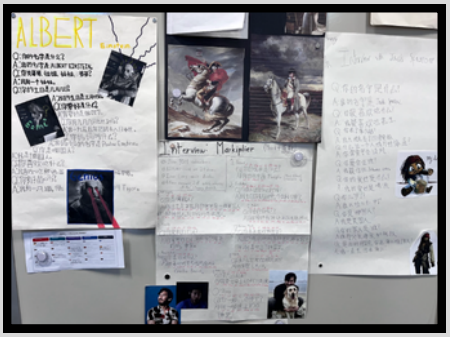
Grade 7 & 8

Chinese II students have been busy! They began a short research project on a person who has made a positive impact or contribution to society. This project is an opportunity for students to review and refresh materials they learned last year in Chinese I. Students researched, made a poster in the target language and gave an oral presentation practicing their presentational skills.

Lyn







We are currently learning how to describe and share our personal hobbies & interests and that of our immediate family. Students will soon move on to learn how to describe ailments, examine the difference between TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) in comparison with Western medical ways of identifying illness and treatment methods. Our culminating project for this unit will be "Teen Wellness Guide," where students present practical and culturally informed suggestions to help their peers develop balanced and healthy lifestyles. This project deepens students' ability to use language for real-world purposes while fostering greater self-awareness and intercultural understanding.

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

Science updates

Grade 7

You really have to start small sometimes to understand what you see with your own eyes! Our investigations in 7th grade tackle the smallest of all matters as we dive into a semester of chemistry explorations. Making sense of the periodic table requires grasping some fundamental concepts of subatomic particles such as electrons, neutrons, and protons. Simultaneously, we have engaged with experimental observation and design through many experiences with dry ice. The teamwork and professionalism of these young people has been inspiring to witness. This week, students will complete and present their data - meticulously collected after practice, peer review, and a final revision. In following the scientific process, there is always room for improvement! Math teacher Robin Trujillo has been helping our students grasp concepts of data collection and analysis pro tips and pitfalls.

In the lab today we explored an experimental proof of the size of an atom! We completed part one with atoms modeled as BBs - ask your student about it! Next week we take the same method and apply it to estimate the size of a single molecule, and atom! Look out for questions regarding electron orbitals and atomic bonds as we deepen our dive into chemistry.

Aaron



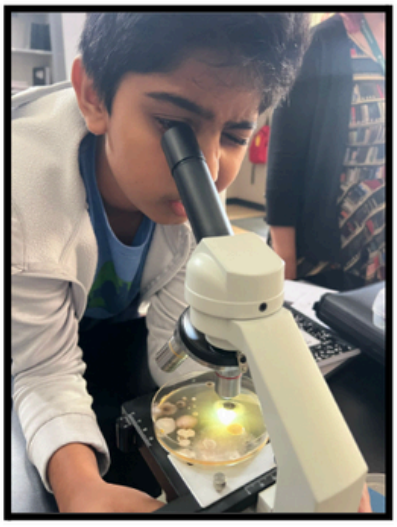
SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

Science updates

Grade 8








Our science journey thus far has covered literally billions of years of evolution, as we began with an exploration of biochemistry and evolution of microbial organisms. We have grown fungi in the classroom (and ate them too, of course); students sampled mold and bacteria from a creative range of school surfaces, and then watched (with some horror) what sprouted forth. We have examined the amazing metabolic pathways which chemosynthetic organisms use to help adapt to extreme environments with no sunlight - and compared those to eukaryotes such as ourselves. We wonder whether microbial life, and entire ecosystems, exist on other planets where there is no photosynthesis - evidence for such a case on Mars is getting stronger!

This foundation has provided a platform for us to explore what is essential for our own healthy operation - look for our class Essential Nutrient Project infographics to shed light on lipids, carbohydrates, proteins, and minerals.

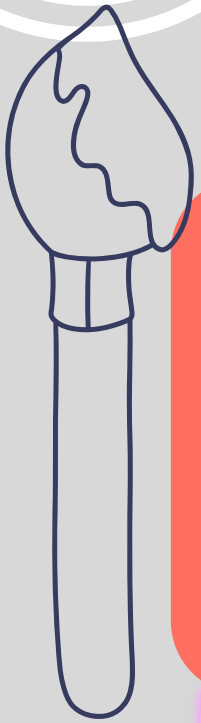
Aaron

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

Arts updates





In preparation for our first collaborative piece with the Drama department this year, we started the process of getting students confident and comfortable using the traditional tool of the paintbrush. So many students get put off from art due to an early adverse experience with this simple tool. So, by getting comfortable with it, and dispelling any negative preconceptions about it we expect to remove barriers that prevent a more free artistic expression. We painted rectangles of color that gradually changed tone from dark to light, where the focus was to get a very good edge definition, very consistent application of color, solid color mixing, and required from the students to control the pressure applied to the paintbrush.

The next step is to start developing the concept for the collaborative art piece which will consist of the backdrop sets for the coming Meet the Creeps production.

Gabriel & Adrienne



Drama Composition Grade 8



In 8th Grade Drama Composition, students are developing the foundational skills necessary to write an effective stage script. Students are examining character motivation as a key element of dramatic writing, focusing on the distinction between what a character **wants** and what the character **needs** as a starting point for developing conflict, relationships, and plot. Working collaboratively in small writing teams, students are creating original story concepts and developing them into structured scenes in multiple genres. They are learning to incorporate purposeful dialogue, stage directions, character clues, and descriptive details that communicate action, emotion, setting, and character development to both performers and audiences. Through this process, students are strengthening their skills in narrative structure, creative problem-solving, collaboration, revision, and audience awareness while learning how the choices made by a playwright influence how a story is understood and experienced on stage.

Adrienne

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

Electives updates

Dinner theatre: Gade 6-8











Our Dinner Theatre cast is hard at work bringing our show, *Meet the Creeps*, to life! The story follows the wonderfully unusual Creeps family, who live in a beautifully manicured, upscale neighborhood where fitting in is everything. When the neighbors set out to win the town's "Most Beautiful House" street contest, they quickly realize that the Creeps' eccentric mansion—and the family themselves—may stand in the way of their plans. This show gives every student the opportunity to stretch well beyond their comfort zone as they explore unique characters, challenging costumes, makeup, physicality, and character choices. Rehearsals are moving quickly, and the cast is working hard to memorize lines, build confidence, and experiment with different character styles. It has been exciting to watch these early ideas develop into increasingly detailed and fully realized character portrayals. We are so proud of the creativity, commitment, and enthusiasm the students are bringing to the process!

SAVE THE DATE FOR NOV. 18TH @6PM FOR THE DINNER THEATRE PERFORMANCE!

Adrienne

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

Electives updates



Drama Elective 6-8: Film

In Film Class, students are developing the foundational skills involved in visual storytelling and short-film production. We began by studying a variety of short films and analyzing the creative choices that made each film engaging and effective for an audience, including story structure, camera work, pacing, and visual composition. Students were introduced to **nine essential camera shots** and worked in production teams to create practice videos demonstrating how each shot can communicate information and enhance a story. Students are now moving into the production phase, writing original scripts, developing characters, selecting costumes and filming locations, and planning how they will translate their ideas from the page to the screen. Using our new video camera and iPad microphones, teams have begun filming their original concepts and experimenting with the production process. As they continue, students will edit, revise, and refine their footage to create cohesive final projects. The teamwork has been especially exciting to observe, with students sharing ideas, solving creative problems together, and finding imaginative ways to bring their stories to life through film.
Here is an example video from Neel and Keanu the assignment was to get the 9 different camera angles, plus one black and white effect, a video montage, use one special effect or filter, create a Foley sound effect, and an action shot. This was their final result and I loved it!

Rivials (Neel, keanu).mp4

Adrienne



Computer Science

In Computer Science, students work on the essential question: **How do we teach machines to solve problems efficiently?** We are using the programming language 'Python' to answer that question. Students spend much of class time planning and creating programs to solve problems, first with specific pre-written code, and eventually branching out to more free-form projects as they master more programming concepts. After the first few weeks, they have learned: how algorithms work, how to communicate instructions to a computer, and how to write and debug basic Python programs using variables and data types. They also learned how to work with input and output to create their own Mad Libs program. Our next unit will involve learning how to have programs make decisions based on user input, using *if* statements.

Eugene

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

Electives updates

Habitat Restoration

In Habitat Restoration, the students had a wonderful time at the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History. At the museum the students got a chance to explore the native plant garden, do a plant survey, and assist in removing invasive species. The students did an excellent job using their tools properly and also did an excellent job surveying and collecting data for our museum docent. The students learned about the negative effects invasive plants have on a local ecosystem and why native plants are so important to a local ecosystem.

In class, the students are currently in the middle of our Tessie Garden Restoration Project, where the students have currently finished weeding the work area and are in the process of adding cardboard. Next steps for our garden project include: adding mulch, researching the right plants, and finally adding them to the garden.

Looking ahead, because of the camping retreat this week, we will resume our field trips to Yamagami's Nursery on October 7th and to Summer Winds Nursery on October 8th. These trips will take place during the school day, during their elective class time (2pm-3pm), normal pick up time. Our trip to the UCSC Arboretum is still taking place on October 1st. This trip will take place from 9am to 3pm, same pick up time as usual. For this trip please make sure your student brings lunch and if you have any questions feel free to reach out to me.

Jando





SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

Electives updates



Nature Writing

In Nature Writing, having finished their final creative nonfiction piece, students are currently wrapping up their study of fiction. In this unit, in addition to learning about how to write effective fiction by using realistic dialogue and immersive setting, students learned about traditional European and Middle Eastern writing trends that often show up in that respective culture's fiction. To examine these trends in action, together as a class, students read "The Huntsman" by Anton Chekhov, "Sad Heron" by Nazim Mizhir, and "The Trout" by Sean O'Faoláin. They will soon begin work on their final fiction piece, which for many students, might draw from the freewritings they completed on our field trip to Fern Grotto Beach in Wilder Ranch State Park.

Jaden









SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

Electives updates



The Design Thinking Process adopted in Mastery

Mastery

After completing their first design challenge, *The Ideal Pencil Case*, our 8th-grade Mastery students began with a deceptively simple question: **What am I curious about?** Mastery is about much more than choosing a fun project. It is about learning how to turn curiosity into purposeful action, and eventually, ideas into something real.

We began with The SPARK, inviting students to notice the questions, interests, experiences, problems, and possibilities that genuinely capture their attention. Students brainstormed their curiosities, looked for patterns and connections among their interests, and generated questions that could lead to deeper exploration. Along the way, they began to think about an important distinction: *What sounds interesting to me?* versus *What is meaningful enough that I want to spend time learning about it?* Students also worked on finding their "why", as Simon Sinek states when explaining The Golden Circle.

From there, students moved into the DIRECTION, where they are now making a purposeful choice about what they want to explore, learn, or create. They working on their driving questions, reflecting on what they already know and what they still need to learn, and are beginning to consider what their project might become. They are also going through a feasibility check, thinking about the time, resources, skills, and support they will need. One of our guiding ideas is: *I can choose a project that is both challenging and possible to complete.*

These first milestones are laying the foundation for the rest of the Mastery journey: SPARK → DIRECTION → BLUEPRINT → ITERATION → REFINEMENT → SHOWCASE. Each step asks students to take greater ownership of their learning while developing the habits needed to move an idea forward.

As we enter the next phase, students will begin turning their ideas into workable plans. They will encounter challenges, make adjustments, seek feedback, and learn that meaningful work rarely happens perfectly the first time. Ultimately, Mastery is about developing the persistence and follow-through to bring meaningful work to completion, and learning something important about themselves along the way.

AP

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

Electives *updates*

Painting & Mixed Media



In our Painting & Mixed Media Art elective, we began the semester by diving into the colorful and creative world of mixed-media art! Students explored how combining different materials—such as paint, collage, drawing, decoupage, texture paste, and a variety of textured and layered materials—can add depth, dimension, and meaning to their artwork.

We began by learning and experimenting with a range of mixed-media techniques, including decoupage, texture painting, paper embossing, print transfers using packaging tape, and staining papers with coffee water. After practicing these techniques, students began incorporating them into their own artwork. Through creative experimentation, brainstorming, and developing multiple rough sketches, students learned how to thoughtfully plan their compositions and combine different techniques to bring their ideas to life.

For their first mixed-media project, students created a focal point and theme for their artwork and then built layers of different materials around it to enhance their visual storytelling. Students chose to use hot glue to create a raised focal point and incorporated embroidery to add color, texture, and dimension. Students also practiced flexibility and problem-solving as they discovered that different materials can interact in unexpected and exciting ways.

It has been wonderful to see students experiment, take creative risks, and discover how combining unexpected materials can transform their ideas into unique and expressive works of art!

Each student's artwork reflects their unique voice and growing confidence as young artists. It's been inspiring to see them take creative risks, explore new tools and techniques, and express their ideas with imagination and care. We can't wait to see where their artistic journeys take them next month!

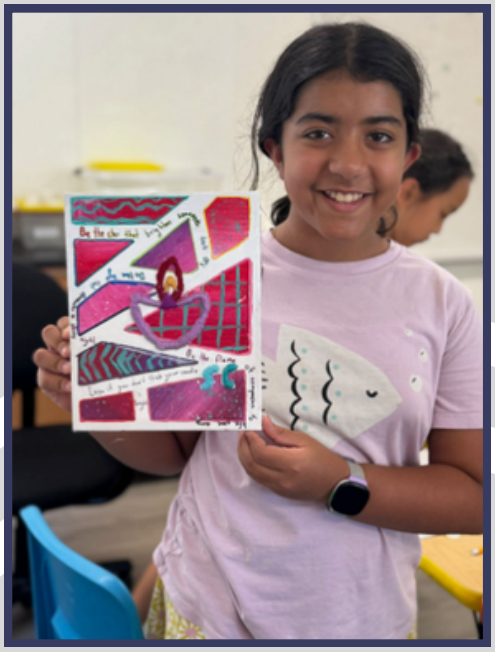
Shazia

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

Electives updates

Painting & Mixed Media











Shazia

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027





Electives updates

Mindfulness in Clay (Mind & Body)

In our calming and creative Mindfulness in Clay class, students have been exploring the art of pottery through a variety of hand-building techniques, including pinch pots, coil building, and slab construction. We began the semester by working with both air-dry and polymer clay, giving students the opportunity to explore the unique properties of each material while developing foundational hand-building skills. During our first few classes, students focused on learning and practicing pinch pot sculpting and coil-building techniques. They experimented with shaping, joining, carving, and adding texture to create a variety of unique and expressive pieces. As they worked, students discovered how different types of clay respond to their hands and tools, building both confidence and a deeper understanding of the materials. Each project is thoughtfully designed to encourage focus, patience, creativity, and self-expression, while helping students experience the tactile and meditative qualities of working with clay. Through our mindfulness approach, students are learning to slow down, stay present, embrace the process, and find joy in creating something with their own hands.

Once the air-dry clay pieces had fully cured and the polymer clay pieces were baked, students moved into the finishing stage. They brought their creations to life with acrylic paints and then applied a water-based topcoat to add durability and a smooth, polished, water-resistant finish. It has been wonderful to see students patiently develop their ideas, experiment with the clay, and take pride in their one-of-a-kind creations!

Shazia











SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS

2026/2027

MS Community Retreat

The MS Community Retreat was Tessellations' first full-division extended community experience, bringing all 6th, 7th and 8th grade students together in a combination of groupings to foster community and connection.

The trip included multiple guided and free-play opportunities for students to come together in nature from canoeing, low ropes courses, team-building games, campfire skits, a climbing wall, small-group reflection, and hiking to the infamous dustbowl gaga pit (now the unofficial Tessie sport it would seem!). It was a powerful experience for the mind and body in a truly beautiful setting.

The pictures are only a glimpse of the experience and we are sure you will hear many more detailed stories from your young people this weekend and beyond!



What a Team!

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS

2026/2027

MS Community Retreat







Art in Nature















SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS

2026/2027

MS Community Retreat

Canopy Collaboration





















SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

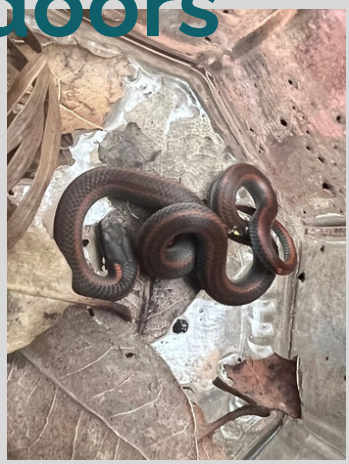
THE COMPASS

2026/2027

MS Community Retreat

The Great Outdoors

























SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS

2026/2027

MS Community Retreat





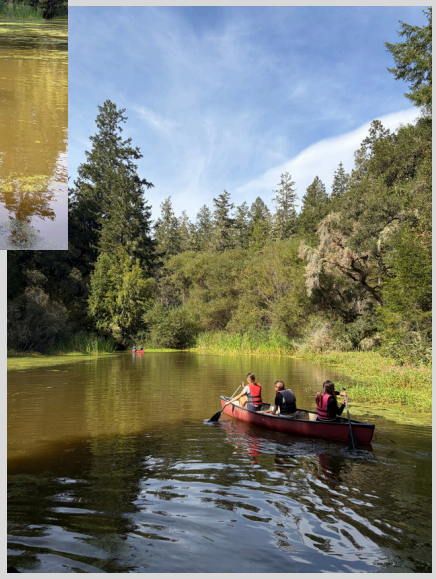


Canoeing













SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS

2026/2027

MS Community Retreat







Night Time Fun





SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS

2026/2027

MS Community Retreat











GAGA BALL

SEPTEMBER EDITION 2026

THE COMPASS 2026/2027

WHAT'S NEW IN MS?

AP Test Centre & AP Statistics

Tessellations is now a **certified Test Centre for AP** (Advanced Placement Exams) with the College Board. We applied for this status so that our current Statistics students can complete the AP Stats exam on campus in May 27 should they so wish - it is entirely optional. Statistics develops analytical thinking, interpretation of data, and problem-solving skills that are increasingly valuable across disciplines.

Please know that this news does not mean we are an AP school; what it does mean is that we now have the option for our students to earn credit and complete testing at Tessie when completely aligned with our programme as in the case with Statistics taught by Robin.

APs are college-level examinations that are usually taken by HS students for Hight School credit.

This is not the first time AP Statistics has been taken by Tessie students and the previous Statistics cohort enthusiastically embraced this opportunity a few years ago!

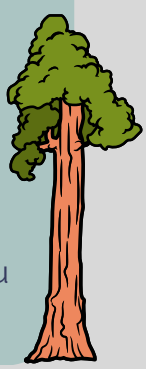


Enhancing the De Anza

Following on from our High School partnership with **De Anza College** last year where we piloted a Tessie/ De Anza combined programme for a Grade 9 student, we are in talks to further partner this academic year.

We are looking to pilot a partnership programme for our Middle School students in Semester 2 to enhance the Elective offering for Grade 8 students.

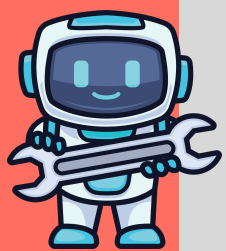
We are excited to be finalising a few courses from the fields of Science and Humanities that will be shared with you very soon!



Elective Offering Robotics

We are also exploring the possibility of **offering Robotics in the electives slot for Semester 2**.

We are currently working to finalise the details so please **watch this space**!



If you have any ideas, wonderings or comments about the programme, please don't hesitate to contact Bec or Luthern on their school email.

We hope you enjoyed the journey through September! Until the October Edition!