Burke 6th Grade Core

At Burke, 6th grade eases the transition from elementary to middle school and is safe, inclusive community for our youngest students.

6th Grade Classroom
The sixth grade class is split into two sections to create a small class experience for all students. Students take their Core class, Math class and Language classes in their primary room. They take their Science classes in the Science lab, their Music and Art Classes in those respective studios, and PE in the gym. This provides a combination of the transitions students will experience in the 7th grade with the Core classroom that they are used to from elementary school.

6th Grade Core Class
The class is a combination of the humanities: English, History, Cultural Studies, Geography, Health and Values, and works closely in tandem with the Science class.

The central question of the Core class is: “Who Am I?” We look at this through the lenses of Inquiry, Understanding and Innovation over three trimesters.

In the first trimester we ask “Who am I in my communities?”
We answer this question by involving ourselves in school life and reading books like The View From Saturday and Stepping on the Cracks about what it means to be new and how to create lasting friendships. We study the Chesapeake Bay ecology and local history, culminating in an overnight trip to the Tidewater area and Jamestown, VA. We also conduct an in-depth study of the people and history of Washington DC, exploring vibrant neighborhoods in all eight wards of the city. We work on generating questions in order to delve deeper into subjects. Finally, we introduce the individual, independent year-long 6th grade project where students choose and study a subject for the entire year and create a final culminating presentation.

In the second trimester we ask “Who am I in the universe?”
We continue our study of US History and identity by reading Countdown. This is a coming-of-age novel that takes place during the heady times of the Cold War and the Space Race.
We explore the role of adventure into space mixed with fear of the new and the transformation of a society. We look into American history to inform our conceptions of the universe and our place within it. We also examine the history and culture of ancient Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, Iceland and other civilizations while reading mythology. The myths show us how ancient people grappled with the questions “why are we here?” and “where did we come from?” We investigate the role of the hero in stories such as Star Wars, The Book of Three and The Epic of Gilgamesh. We end our study of myth by writing our own using techniques we learned during the trimester. We also read Nobody’s Princess, which shows how modern authors can retell ancient stories to reclaim female characters such as Helen of Troy who have no voice. We discuss the role of women in our society and do two projects, a biography and an interview. We focus on understanding societies and cultures that are foreign to us. We take field trips to the Air & Space Museum, the National Museum of the American Indian, the Smithsonian Museum of Women in the Arts and a local planetarium.

In the third trimester we ask “Who am I in the United States?”

We turn our eyes back to Earth, discovering the history and geography of the United States. We read Tangerine, Touching Spirit Bear, and Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, which address such serious topics as race relations, rage, responsibility and institutionalized racism, exploring how they have affected children in various times and places in the United States. We also watch How the States Got Their Shapes, which serves as an entertaining guide to the US and informs our US regions project. As a culminating project students create a 20-minute local news broadcast for their region, which they script, film and produce using iPads. We also work on our community service projects that encompass animals, animal rights, the impact of people on their environments, and how to create sustainable environments in American cities. During this last trimester, we go on field trips to the Spy Museum, the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History and the Newseum. We take a final overnight trip to a city (such as Pittsburgh,) where we can examine the local economy and look at innovations as a key to American culture.

By the end of the 6th grade, our students are ready to tackle the challenges of the of the 7th grade and are excited to continue their Burke experience as a close-knit community of active learners.