

# Middle School

## *An Out-of-Building Experience*

Middle school typically takes place almost entirely indoors. Except for brief respites of “P.E.” (which may or may not be outdoors), most middle school students spend their time sitting at desks in classrooms. Their movement in the course of the school day is limited largely to migrating from classroom to classroom. In many schools, teachers use “building” and “school” interchangeably.

The middle school years can be difficult ones for parents and kids alike. Parents of young adolescents can understand the desire of schools - especially larger ones - to keep kids under tight control and close supervision. But the high-energy inquisitiveness and vivid imagination that can make the middle years a challenge can be channeled in directions that create exceptional learning opportunities. For this reason, some schools - particularly independent, private schools like Moorestown Friends - see great value in getting kids out of their classrooms.

MFS students of all ages experience a broad array of field trips and excursions. Particularly in the middle school, grades 5 through 8, MFS kids are on the go to locations as near as Philadelphia’s Chinatown and Camp Dark Waters in Medford and as far as overnight trips to places like Stokes Forest in northwestern New Jersey and Mystic Seaport in Connecticut, where 5th grade students spend two nights on a full-rigged Danish ship built in 1882. These trips provide middle school boys and girls with meaningful hands-on experiences that they will remember for a lifetime.

For example, the grade 7 trip to the New Jersey School of Conservation in Stokes Forest enables students to get away from TV, texting, and video games and actively participate in activities, instead of just hearing or reading about them. Physical action brings the activities to life as students learn about the outdoors and about human impact on the environment.

A half-day outdoor survival class becomes meaningful when seventh graders bundle up, head into the woods, and try to decide what steps are necessary to make shelter when the ground is covered with snow and the cold wind starts to blow. Students also get a chance to work in teams to solve problems in adventure/challenge activities, where they use critical thinking in problem-solving situations. Working cooperatively, seventh graders utilize leadership, listening, and communication skills, all of which will serve them not only in the woods for three days but also in the future.

Though we expect a great deal of middle schoolers in terms of how they prepare for their classes and what they do in class each day, many of their most memorable and meaningful learning experiences, like the Stokes Forest trip, take place out of the building. They enable young people to learn how to build community, get along with others, gain self-confidence and get out of their comfort zones ~ to try something new. During these years of great self-discovery, schools like MFS, which capitalize on student energy and inquisitiveness, offer kids so much more than a traditional indoor school experience.

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