



The Island School

# **CURRICULUM GUIDE 2023-2024**





# Contents

**PROGRAM DESCRIPTION ..... 2**

**VISION & MISSION ..... 3**

**TEACHING PHILOSOPHY..... 4**

**ACADEMIC COURSES ..... 5**

    Elements of Ecology.....5

    English Literature.....6

    Environmental Art .....7

    Histories of the Bahama Islands.....8

    Mathematics.....9

    Scientific Research.....10

**SIGNATURE CURRICULUM..... 12**

**DEMONSTRATION OF LEARNING..... 15**



# The Island School Semester

The Island School Semester is an independent, academic program in The Bahamas for high school sophomores and juniors. The 100-day course of study includes classes in ecological science, field-based scientific research, history, mathematics, art, English literature, as well as physical and outdoor education, cultural immersion experiences, and service learning.

Our entire program is place-based and experiential, intentionally immersing students in both the natural and cultural landscape of South Eleuthera. Consequently, all courses have a field component to them. For example, in Scientific Research students conduct primary research for a wide spectrum of investigations, including fisheries, sustainable energy, food production systems, and cultural resources.

Similarly, coursework in the humanities classes stems from the many cultural immersion experiences throughout the semester. In addition to collaboration with students at our Deep Creek Middle School, Semester students spend considerable time learning from and with members of the local settlements in South Eleuthera as part of our Community Engagement program. Each member of the community provides a learning opportunity for our students. Engaging in thoughtful conversations with local schools, youth, families, community leaders, and local partners allows students to foster meaningful relationships focused on education, research and innovation, all to advocate living well in a place.

Not only do students spend five mornings each week training for either a half-marathon or four-mile open-ocean swim, they also participate in three and eight-day sea kayaking expeditions and earn their PADI Open Water Diver certification. These daily physical activities and expeditions take place around the 100-acre peninsula on which we live, and along the shores of South Eleuthera; as students further explore our central question of “How do we live well in a place?”.

The combination of our rigorous schedule and programming creates a transformative experience for our students, who gain deep understandings of leadership, sustainability, community, and sense of place. The unique educational model intentionally steps away from the traditional high school path to create a complex, thoughtful, and holistic experience for exceptional high school students.

# Mission & Vision

The Island School's vision is a mantra, not a statement; it is a powerful goal that resonates in the minds of every community member. Guiding both the vision and the mission is one central question.

## Central Question

*How do we live well in a place?*

## Mission

*Leadership effecting change.*

## Vision

The Island School serves as a catalyst in the global transition to a more livable future through:

*Developing an intimate **sense of place** in students through immersion experiences in the natural and cultural environment;*

*Modeling **sustainability** of individual lifestyles, larger communities, and the systems that support them;*

*Creating an intentional **community** whose members are cognizant of their abilities, limitations, and effect on others.*

# Teaching Philosophy

Teaching students about their environment, in their environment, is fundamental to The Island School experience. Students are asked to think for themselves, provide answers to their own questions, and practice the skills of primary research. They practice these skills in all disciplines, whether in history through ethnographic interviews, in science through ecological field studies, or in English Literature through expository writing employing critical perspectives.

## **Our teaching and learning is guided by the following principles:**

Less is more. We emphasize understanding and applying ideas and skills rather than covering content. By narrowing the focus we develop deeper understandings.

Students are active participants in the learning process. The classroom is a true seminar where everyone shares information. The teacher is a facilitator and guide.

Learning is accelerated when students are pushed outside of their comfort zones. Challenge begets positive growth.

All disciplines emphasize connection to place. Students must be immersed in the environment and challenged to articulate their understanding.

Academic work has real-world application. There is a real job to complete that raises the bar beyond the quest for a final grade.

# Academic Courses

The academic curriculum at The Island School Semester is intended to challenge students' traditional concepts of how, what, and why they learn while also pushing them to take primary responsibility for their learning journey. Through class discussions, authentic research, and experiential opportunities, students engage in academic classes six days per week. Built into the week is time for reflection, extra-help, consultation, and additional study. Evening study hours and occasional night classes provide ample time for student learning and review. Faculty continuously assess student work through written feedback and one-on-one conversations. Students are active participants in assessment as we believe that this feedback and the opportunity for assessment is a continuation of the learning process, rather than a reflection of it.

## ELEMENTS OF ECOLOGY

Elements of Ecology is designed to reveal the truth that we do not inhabit planet Earth, but rather planet Ocean. Leveraging the abundant marine resources surrounding The Island School, students develop an awareness of, and appreciation for, tropical marine ecosystems. Using SCUBA diving and snorkeling as a means to promote inquiry, students are literally immersed in the complexities inherent to marine ecosystems. With a deeper understanding of the ecology, they are better equipped to address environmental changes that currently threaten the balance within our oceans. This course inspires students to take ownership of their role within this blue world and to consider the undeniable responsibility—individual and global—to conserve our oceans for future generations.

Throughout the course, students sharpen their naturalist skills through explorations of nearshore and offshore ecosystems. Once certified as PADI Open Water divers, students spend the first five academic weeks gaining an in-depth understanding of South Eleuthera's ecological landscape. Above and below water explorations help students paint a clearer picture of a species' role within, and relationship to, the larger ecosystem. Complementing their fieldwork, students complete weekly assignments that drive discussions, ensuring a keen sense of interdependence within marine ecosystems. This understanding evokes questions around the resilience of our ocean. Finally, students examine imbalances within these ecosystems, reflecting on possible solutions and the complexity behind implementation.

### Enduring Understandings:

- The limits of the ocean are being revealed
- No water, no life. No blue, no green.
- The human potential for change must be elicited to benefit our ocean

### Essential Questions:

- Why does the ocean matter?
- What encompasses a tropical marine ecosystem?
- How are global ocean threats manifested locally?
- Do I have a responsibility to our seas?

### Focus Skills:

- Recognizing the principles and importance of science
- Observing and identifying structures and functions of marine ecosystems
- Associating marine threats to marine ecology
- Critical self-reflection of one's role within and responsibility to the global ecosystem

- Utilizing scuba, snorkel and shallow freediving to promote ocean inquiry.

#### **Topics and Content:**

- Marine ecosystem structure, function and development
- Interdependent dynamics of marine ecosystems
- Biodiversity
- Local and global threats to marine ecosystems
- Ecological services
- Economic valuation
- Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

## **ENGLISH LITERATURE**

#### **Course Description:**

English Literature is centered around three beliefs about text 1; Anything can be read as a text; 2. Making meaning of a text is a personal exercise enriched by a collaborative setting; and 3. Specifically, the methodical study of challenging literature can develop deep understandings of people, language, and one's own interconnected identity in the world. The course will explore intersections of literature with history, culture, identity, and the natural environment and will allow for interdisciplinary collaboration between subjects.

Accordingly, classes are structured to encourage communal learning among the students and teacher. Seated around a Harkness Table with a teacher to facilitate their journey into a text, students are empowered to discuss their observations and thoughts, letting the conversation grow organically out of their personal discoveries. Students substantiate their ideas with textual evidence, additionally calling upon the “texts” of their own lives to reevaluate and reconsider their ideas. The Harkness style requires the students to drive the discussions, navigate complicated language, verbalize their ideas clearly, and ask thoughtful, probing questions of the text. As the course progresses, students engage deeply and personally in their coursework, reflecting upon their learning and demonstrating understanding through a variety of formal assessments, including reading quizzes, Harkness discussions, speeches, annotation checks, weekly essays, and projects, receiving frequent feedback from teachers and peers.

#### **Enduring Understandings:**

- Interpreting a work of literature is personal, involving my worldview, experience, and place.
- Multiple interpretations of a text help me to clarify—and complicate—its meaning.
- Writing is a tool for communication, learning, and self-discovery.
- The study and appreciation of literature deepens my understanding of the human experience.

#### **Essential Questions:**

- How do I meaningfully interpret and discuss difficult literature?
- How does collaboration change the reading of a work?
- How is history interpreted through literature?
- How does my experience, perspective, and place inform my understanding of literature?
- What does literature teach me about human experience?
- Why write?

#### **Focus Skills:**

- Critical Reading
- Textual analysis

- Expository and creative writing
- Public speaking
- Collaboration
- Self-awareness and personal reflection
- Literary inquiry
- Synthesis
- Drawing cross-curricular connections
- Use of literary vocabulary to talk about poetry
- Taking personal ownership of learnings.

### **Topics Covered**

- *Omeros* (excerpts) by Derek Walcott
- Selected works by Jamaica Kincaid
- Epic Poetry
- Hero's Journey
- Identity, home, and place
- Historical Perspective
- Slavery and dispossession
- Tourism and Development
- *Epic of the Dispossessed* by Robert Hamner
- Biographies and Autobiographies of Walcott
- Supplemental poetic readings

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ART**

Establishing a sense of place is the foundation of the Environmental Art course. The curriculum is designed to develop students' abilities to engage the environment and communicate through artistic language. The course is structured to help students become aware of the way they interact with their surroundings and to empower them to respond to their experiences through artistic means. In addition, art is a space where students can process and creatively express connections they make to other pieces of their Island School journey.

Early in the Semester, students experiment with observing, planning, photography, and sculpture to examine and record details of their landscapes—both external and internal. Through this process they develop a sense of place that reflects their new surroundings. In addition to exploring the natural world, students look towards organic and everyday resources as art materials. Students are continually encouraged to step away from traditional forms of representation and given authentic opportunities to explore the environment and their personal creativity. Throughout the semester, students lead and participate in peer-critiques and discussions. These forums are designed to foster a better understanding of the environmental art movement, art in The Bahamas, and the student's identity as an artist.

Through inquiry, observation, and reflection, students create an intimate relationship with the natural and cultural environment. These experiences culminate in the final exhibition, which is showcased during the Semester. Additionally, the final exhibition gives students the chance to reflect on their artistic experiences and work collaboratively to make connections they could not discover alone.

### **Enduring Understandings:**

- I can connect to the natural world in a personal and creative way.
- Art is a space for communicating ideas and opinions.



**Essential Questions:**

- What is my relationship to the natural world?
- What does it mean to really see something?
- What does it mean to know a place intimately?
- How can complex ideas and emotions be expressed through visual language?

**Focus Skills:**

- Using art as a tool for self-expression and discovery
- Exploring materials and media
- Artistic documentation through photography; Written reflections and art critiques

**Topics and Content:**

- Personal expression
- Environmental art and artists
- Elements of art
- Principles of design
- Gallery design and curation
- Working collaboratively

## HISTORIES OF THE BAHAMA ISLANDS

**Course Description:**

The study of history is rooted in the conviction that objectivity in the study of people and their history is not only unattainable, but also undesirable. To pretend that any source of historical or cultural information does not view the world through its own set of personal, cultural, and historical lens, is both shortsighted and irresponsible. Students grapple with the discontinuities presented by alternate perspectives and work to sort competing claims, determine importance, and recognize the problematic nature of interpretations and knowledge. This course guides students to critically evaluate their worldview and their ability to empathize with others. By exploring Bahamian history for themselves and reflecting on their experiences with the cultures of Eleuthera, students develop into locally engaged, globally aware citizens. Students learn from people with a past instead of studying people from the past.

History of the Bahama Islands serves as the hub of the cultural contact programs for the Semester, and the course requires students to discover the stories of The Bahamas and its people for themselves. Though historical essays and textual analysis create a context, this course demands that students learn from the people around them and gives students the opportunity to do so on fieldwork days. This approach to history engages students in meaningful cross-cultural dialogue, fosters understanding of the cultural environment in which they are immersed, and casts students as producers, rather than as consumers, of history.

**Enduring Understandings:**

- I have a worldview that shapes the way I receive and transmit information.
- A balanced account of history must consider a wide range of perspectives and sources.

**Essential Questions:**

- What is culture?
- How does worldview influence perception?
- How can I learn from people?
- How is history made?

- How does tourism impact a community?
- How will I travel in the future?

#### **Focus Skills:**

- Identifying lens, bias, and perspective
- Empathizing with a variety of perspectives
- Conducting oral interviews across cultural boundaries
- Synthesizing multiple sources to create coherent narratives

#### **Topics and Content:**

- Culture
- Lens and bias
- Oral history
- Historiography
- Tourism and development
- Critical self-reflection

## **MATHEMATICS**

#### **Course Description:**

Mathematics provides students with opportunities to investigate fundamental mathematical concepts through the exploration of their local environment, both natural and man-made. This course is based on the premise that math is everywhere and can be used as a tool to both better understand and live in the world. Additionally, students develop the knowledge and skills that deepen the inquiry of other academic courses at The Island School, particularly Scientific Research.

Interesting problems are all around us. The solutions to some are direct and exact; in most cases, however, mathematical concepts, tools, and modeling are needed to inform the solutions to these problems in quantifiable ways. This course primarily explores mathematical problems centered on the campus systems that support our community in a sustainable manner.

Student work is divided between collaborative, project-based settings and individual work. Homework questions are designed to reinforce the mathematical concepts covered in class and allow students to practice problem solving. Group projects often focus on creative problem solving and mathematical modeling and are typically completed at the end of each unit. Students are also continuously evaluated on their ability to share ideas and listen to their peers.

#### **Enduring Understandings:**

- Mathematics can be used to better understand the world in which we live.
- I see mathematics all around me.

#### **Essential Questions:**

- Excel: solar insolation routine (basic functions, graphing, data entry, analysis)
- Statistics (regression analysis, measures of central tendency)
- Fibonacci sequence (error calculations)
- Ocean acidification (chemistry and exponentials)
- Renewable energy systems (wind, hydro, tidal, biomass)
- Climate change (layer models of the atmosphere, dimensional analysis)

**Focus Skills:**

- Problem identification and solving
- Communicating mathematical ideas through models, writing, and speaking
- Interpersonal communication and coordination of individual efforts into a group activity.

**Topics and Content:**

- One-variable and two-variable Algebra
- Basic geometry and trigonometry
- Solving equations and inequalities
- Ratios
- Dimensional analysis
- Word problems
- Scientific notation
- Exponential and logarithmic functions.

## SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

**Course Description:**

Marine Biology Research is a unique opportunity for students to apply what they learn across disciplines to a field-based project of local and regional significance. By charging the students with developing, conducting, and communicating results from real scientific research initiatives, the research program epitomizes The Island School vision and mission of creating opportunities for students to produce work that has important consequences for the local, scientific, and global communities. This course sets students up to learn about the scientific method by conducting authentic scientific research alongside professionals in the field. The outcome of their fieldwork always raises more questions and students grapple with their findings to produce reasonable explanations for their observations and logical recommendations for future work.

Organized into three units: background rationale and study design, data collection and analysis, and communication of results. Students examine a specific topic, pose a testable question, implement a research plan, collect and analyze data, and present their findings. This course is an exercise in teamwork and effective collaboration, requiring special emphasis on interpersonal communication. Consequently, many of the important assessments depend on the contributions of the entire group. For instance, students must create and deliver a formal presentation to a sizable audience and present a scientific poster that illustrates their semester-long work during the culminating Research Symposium. With professors, government officials, and local community members in the audience, the symposium forces students to be prepared and to respond to inquiries from an invested audience.

**Enduring Understandings:**

- Scientific inquiry is a structured yet fluid process of questioning, observation, analysis, and interpretation.
- Well-crafted scientific questions are essential to successful research and should give rise to further questions.
- Internal (research design), external (peer review), and mathematical (statistics) mechanisms work in integration of one another to ensure integrity, confidence, and veracity of data.
- Scientific research must be communicated appropriately to wider audiences to be of maximum value.

**Essential Questions:**

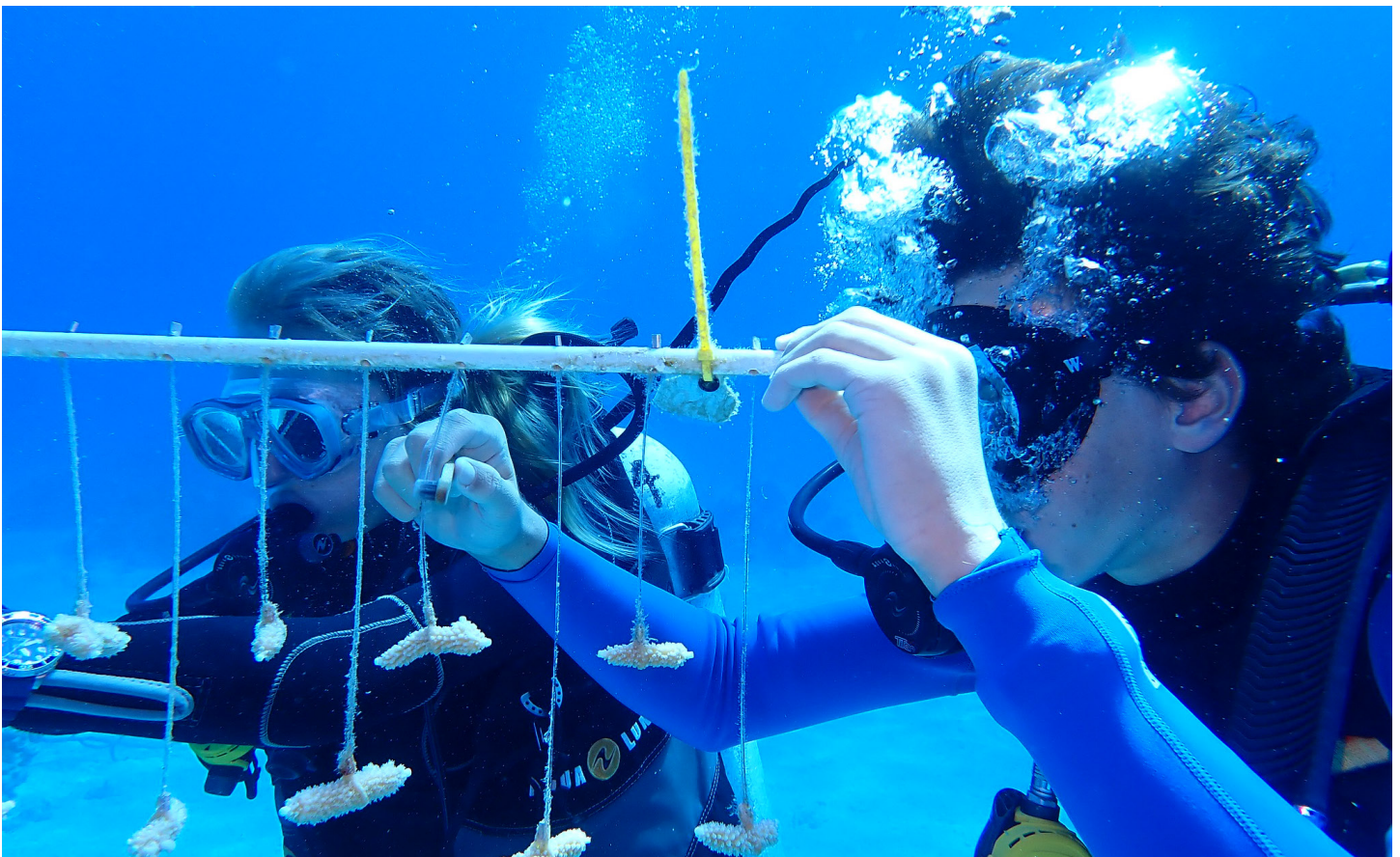
- How do I know what to do when I don't know what to do?
- What are the essential qualities of a well-designed research question?
- How do I know what I think I know?
- How do scientific data generate scientific knowledge?
- How do the environment, society, and scientific research impact one another?

**Focus Skills:**

- Application of knowledge to address real-world issues
- Writing scientific literature
- Presenting findings
- Interpersonal communication and coordination of individual efforts into a group activity
- Developing proposals for future research

**Topics and Content:**

- Topics and content vary by project. Historical and ongoing projects including queen conch studies, spiny lobster fishery, aquaponics, land crabs, turtle ecology, climate change and weather, coral restoration, marine mammals, permaculture and resource management.





# Signature Curriculum

No one program defines the Semester curriculum. The overlap and cross-curricular experiences work in conjunction to create the full Semester experience and enhance self-discovery, intellectual and physical growth. Each of the programs described below contribute to the holistic curriculum and transformative individual experiences.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement and service learning are critical components of the intercultural connection programs at The Island School Semester. Whereas the students spend some time in the history course developing a conceptual understanding of intercultural communication, the time spent with our Deep Creek Middle School students, as well as on Down Island Trips and collaboration across the organization with local and international staff, allows them to put those understandings into practice. Ultimately, students learn some of the most important skills necessary to being a leader—empathy and communication.

Community Engagement is structured to assure that students from the Semester, Deep Creek Middle School, and sometimes our Elementary Learning Center and Deep Creek Lab Schools are provided with ample and regular time to learn from each other throughout their time together. For Semester students, much of this time is dedicated to structured activities that encourage students to learn from and about one another. As the Semester progresses, however, that learning happens more naturally as the students work together on collaborative leadership projects.

## DOWN ISLAND TRIPS

Down Island Trips contribute to students' cultural and historical understanding of The Bahamas. Toward the end of the Semester, students travel in small groups northward traversing the 100-mile long island for several nights. Down Island Trips explore geological, historical, and cultural sites across the island, bringing to life many of the topics explored in academic courses.

## EXPEDITIONS & SOLO

Sea-kayaking expeditions are a key facet of our place-based education model, during which students interact with the coastal environment of South Eleuthera. Expeditions provide students the platform to learn essential hard skills involved in sea-kayaking and leave no trace camping while building the soft skills associated with leadership. Students take turns leading their pod through the day's route, selecting and setting up a campsite, cooking meals collaboratively, and learning about themselves and each other through various activities.

On expeditions, students participate in a 48-hour solo experience. Our solo experiences are not designed to be survival tests, they are, however, a time for students to engage in reflection and spend time alone with their thoughts. The ability to reflect on our thoughts and critically analyze our actions and decisions are fundamental aspects of experiential education. While each student will have a unique solo experience, all students undergo this journey, ultimately strengthening community bonds.

## LEADERSHIP

To develop leadership, the most important principle that guides our actions is trusting individuals with real responsibility and leaving room for failure. There are numerous times in any day when students have an opportunity to step into leadership roles.

The process of feedback is intentionally structured throughout the Semester through three phases of leadership development: teaching, feedback and transference. During the teaching phase, a primary focus is building trust through taking calculated risks and challenging students to explore realms outside of their comfort zone. A number of mechanisms—rubrics for class discussions, debriefs from expeditions, informal conversations—provide avenues for students to receive feedback on their progress. In the end, though, the development of leadership in an individual is a personal journey propelled by challenge. For this reason, the best assessor is the individual themselves.

## ENDURANCE TRAINING

The morning exercise program is a rigorous endurance training. The entire community—students and faculty alike—spends at least one hour participating in a variety of workouts five days of the week. Most exercises include a combination of swimming, running, and calisthenics; other offerings center on team sports such as water polo, volleyball, or ultimate Frisbee, while yoga and snorkeling opportunities develop mental fortitude and wellness. In addition, our regular morning exercise takes place across Cape Eleuthera where we live, and serves as an added way to connect with and explore our environment.

By the third week of the Semester, students decide on a specialized course of training in preparation for one of two pinnacle challenges: a half-marathon or four-mile “super swim.” Three workouts per week are dedicated to this effort, with one day set aside as a long exercise. Other notable workouts include a series of timed “run-swims” which allows students to track their personal progress throughout the semester. Regardless of the exercise, the focus of endurance training at The Island School is self challenge and individual improvement.

## SCUBA

The SCUBA program is instrumental to the Semester journey because it provides students with an opportunity to explore the beautiful underwater environment that surrounds Eleuthera. Treated the same as any class, students must complete book work and demonstrate proficiency in a number of underwater skills. The SCUBA program supports our marine ecology curriculum, where students use SCUBA as a tool to access and better understand our marine environment. By the end of the Semester, most students acquire PADI’s Open Water Diver certification and log upward of five dives.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Since its inception in 1999, The Island School has contributed to this movement through practical application and experimentation. During this time, we have learned that sustainability involves much more than recycling waste streams or reducing energy consumption. The environmental component is important, to be sure, but it cannot stand alone. True sustainability begins with individual lifestyles and requires a commitment from every member of the community to embrace the challenge of personal change. Students learn that sustainability is a collective endeavor that demands flexibility in thought, attitude, and behavior. More importantly, they learn the value of sacrifice—not for ascetic purposes, but out of humility, respect, and fairness for the rest of the living world and future generations.

Students must confront the realities of sustainable living in The Bahamas at every point in their day. In fact, we maintain healthy bodies by starting each day with an hour of exercise. The infrastructure of the school is another constant reminder of the value we place on sustainability. Following the cycle of just one of our resources is emblematic of the awareness that pervades our lives.



# Demonstration of Learning

The Demonstration of Learning is a forum, administered twice a semester, at which students are challenged to discuss and show what they have gained through their experience. This can focus on academic achievements, personal growth, specific learning opportunities, or challenges overcome and obstacles navigated. In preparation for their Demonstration of Learning, students are asked to pause, reflect and thoughtfully consider what, why, and how they have made steps toward growth. As a central tenet of our leadership curriculum, this process helps students to look inward and consider relationships with others, who they are, and who they want to be.

In their Demonstration of Learning, students speak to experiences they have had over the course of their journey—what was most significant to them, themes that have occurred, and how that knowledge connects with the student's life; at The Island School, at school, at home, and in the world at large. The presentations from our students are as varied and multidimensional as the students themselves.

Though given broad questions to guide them, the onus is on the students to reflect on their journey and decide what stands out. This is an opportunity for students to bring their work portfolio to life. Presentations can entail a focus on self and personal growth, energy systems and sustainability, leadership, historical realizations, or creativity; the possibilities are endless.

The Demonstration of Learning is an opportunity for students to appreciate the intrinsic worth of learning. This is intended to be a capstone experience for everyone—discussants and presenters alike.





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