Adventure Trip Philosophy

Experiential Learning and the Catlin Gabel Outdoor Program

Traditionally, experiential education is defined by “hands-on learning” or “learning by doing.” Under the guidance of the Catlin Gabel Outdoor Education Program, students are immersed—mind and body—in the natural world. This natural classroom provides unique opportunities for students to learn and grow as individuals and as members of a community. The program broadens education of both Middle and Upper School students by fostering their self awareness, exposing them to new environments and challenges, and providing important leadership opportunities.

At the core of our mission are our Outdoor Program adventure trips.

The focus of Middle School Outdoor Program trips is to introduce students to the opportunities of human-powered activities and wilderness travel. We offer a broad range of single- and multi-day trips. From the rapids of the White Salmon River to the summit of Mt. St. Helens, students are encouraged to learn new skills, explore areas outside their comfort zones, care for one another, and form meaningful working relationships with adults.

In the Upper School, our goal is to offer experiences outside of the classroom for personal challenges and interpersonal development. Upper School adventure trips also place a strong emphasis on providing leadership opportunities. Our activities are vehicles to help students learn about themselves as developing young adults. As students are challenged both physically and intellectually, they are faced with group living and cooperation challenges and are confronted with challenges as a team.

Concurrent with the multitude of Outdoor Program trips, we offer a number of special activities and curricula.

The Outdoor Leadership and Activities (OLA) after school program provides students from the Upper School with a chance to participate in outdoor challenge, adventure, and personal growth activities on a regular basis. Meeting twice per week during the autumn trimester, the OLA group experiences adventures both on and off campus, exploring Forest Park, kayaking on the Willamette, and exposing themselves to the greater outdoor opportunities close to our home.

The Upper School Rock Climbing PE Credit and Middle School Rock Climbing Club are groups that meet two or three times per week during the winter trimester. In a cross-divisional setting, presenting students with physical challenges and rewarding activities, the program is one of our most popular.
The Outdoor Program has developed a year-long curriculum for the students in the 6th grade. Our goals are to have fun outside by building positive associations with nature, helping the group bond as 6th graders, assisting in providing an introduction to the Middle School, recognizing the outdoors as an important component of the Middle School program, and building basic outdoor skills in preparation for future trips.