

LOWER SCHOOL



**BLACK PINE  
CIRCLE SCHOOL**

A SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

# Where kids learn to ask better questions.





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...an amazing community of devoted teachers, dedicated staff, curious students, and engaged families. Students are treated with respect and encouraged to take risks, make mistakes, and discover. BPC offers a supportive environment, helps our kids find their own voices and turns each learning moment into a memorable experience.—BPC Parent



## We Nurture Innate Curiosity



Our most essential duty as educators is to protect, nurture, and inspire the curiosity that is inherent in young children.

We do this by encouraging them to make careful observations, to ask thoughtful questions, and to make connections to their world.

Differentiated learning and Responsive Classroom practices are elements of this environment where a child's natural drive to ask more and better questions is refined with the guidance of expert teachers who support and enhance each student's sense of wonder.



Curiosity and the willingness to try, fail, and learn from mistakes is viewed as an essential starting point for learning.



# Kids Thrive in Our Community



Enrolling in a K-8 school provides wonderful opportunities for students to expand their sense of family and feel connected to a variety of students of different ages, ethnicities, cultures, family structures, and personalities.

In the Black Pine Circle School community, students learn to engage with diverse viewpoints from a place of humility and self-reflection. Cultivating empathy and active listening supports academic as well as social and emotional growth.

All facets of school life reflect our understanding that we are one interconnected family, and we succeed together. In a community that sees and values each individual, students build connections that may last a lifetime.

Academic excellence comes naturally to students who feel a sense of belonging in a joyful, safe, and engaging learning community.



**Our faculty and staff are dedicated to fostering a warm and supportive environment in which children safely address challenges and grow in their understanding of themselves and others.**

Our faculty uses Responsive Classroom, an evidence-based approach to education that focuses on the strong relationship between academic success and social and emotional learning. Key elements include daily morning meetings, positive teacher language, and opportunities for students to make proactive choices in their learning.



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Words cannot express how much of a difference my son's teachers have made in his life. ...I have watched him bloom into a confident, outspoken, friendly boy who has learned how to speak to new people, and to look after those who are younger than him.  
—BPC Parent





## We Cultivate an Inquiring Mind



In the Socratic classroom, we begin with the premise that there is always more to learn. Through regular inquiry, our students develop deep understanding and exceptional critical-thinking skills.

The youngest children begin to learn about and practice the tenets of a Socratic classroom by learning how to focus on the speaker and listen with their whole body, to take turns, and to ask one another good questions.

Our relatively small population and our low student-to-teacher ratio allow us to nurture a relationship with each student that keeps them engaged and challenged.



Our faculty partners every day with students to help them find what Vygotsky called the “Zone of Proximal Development,” that vibrant state when the learner is at the exhilarating and sometimes uncomfortable edge of their abilities.



...[my daughter] has blossomed as a person and student under the guidance of great teachers. Her relationships with her teachers have motivated her, given her strength, and taught her how to learn. ...I have been so happy to see her confidence and ability to self-advocate grow by leaps and bounds, and those things have happened because she was cared for and nurtured along the way. —BPC Parent

Our goal is to create vibrant, independent thinkers who will never lose their passion for learning, their delight in research, and their involvement in cultural pursuits.



# Their Unique Voice Will Emerge



Whatever your child's passion, their interest will find a home at Black Pine Circle School!

Our program is designed to create a safe space in which students are encouraged to explore, create, and experiment while learning how to communicate and collaborate effectively.

There are many opportunities for self-expression. Our exceptional arts program is just one of the many paths our students follow to discover and explore their own creative strengths.



Our students develop individual passions  
and learn how to share that love with  
their communities.



Students are treated with respect and encouraged to take risks, make mistakes, and discover. BPC offers a supportive environment, helps our kids find their own voices and turns each learning moment into a memorable experience.

—BPC Parent



Every day, our teachers weave together arts, academics, and social & emotional learning.

Each of our lower school (K-5) classrooms has a head teacher and a teaching assistant. Lower school students also enjoy the coaching and mentoring of our specialist faculty who teach music, Spanish, art, science, instrumental and vocal music, gardening, and physical education.

Our teachers engage students in powerful, interdisciplinary learning opportunities, requiring students to apply and demonstrate their understanding. We believe teachers, parents, and students should be encouraged to understand the power in emotional and intellectual risk-taking.



## What is Socratic Learning?

As students analyze works together—such as books, paintings, songs, historical artifacts, or mathematical formulae—they improve their close reading, critical thinking, and oral communication skills. Because they are in a conversation, they practice civility and listen to diverse points of view. Even the youngest children can engage in a way that acknowledges the richness of questions instead of quickly answering them.

As a facilitator and co-learner, teachers model genuine curiosity, ask clarifying questions, keep the discussion focused on the text, and ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate. A learning environment like this, in which scholarly conversation is central to the culture, nurtures both the intellectual as well as the social and emotional life of the child.



The youngest children begin to learn about and practice the tenets of a Socratic classroom by learning how to focus on the speaker and listen with their whole body, to take turns, and ask one another good questions.



For example, first graders take an integrated, hands-on, and fun approach to learning about marine mammals. They study how these animals have adapted to and survive in their environment. In science class, they create layers of blubber and test how long they can immerse their hands in ice-cold water. During writers workshop, they create stories about a chosen marine mammal. Math games, measuring animals with Unifix cubes, shadow puppets, a mini-lecture from the head of school, who is a marine mammal scientist, and a field trip to a local environmental education program are all part of this exciting unit.





As a K-8 school, we have insight  
into each student that allows  
us to partner with families in a  
remarkably powerful manner.



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Join our learning community.

INFORMATION & APPLICATION

[blackpinecircle.org](https://blackpinecircle.org)

QUESTIONS?

[admissions@blackpinecircle.org](mailto:admissions@blackpinecircle.org), 510-529-2719

2027 7th Street, Berkeley, CA 94710

(between University & Addison)



UPPER SCHOOL



**BLACK PINE  
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Where students find  
their unique voices.





Inspired by Caine Munroe's Cardboard Arcade, teams of seventh graders use their creativity and emerging programming skills as they repurpose discarded materials in inventive ways. They develop an idea for an arcade game, write code, design electrical circuits, learn to solder, and realize their vision. The result is an arcade for the entire BPC community to enjoy.



## We Nurture Innate Curiosity



At Black Pine Circle School we value creative thinking, deep understanding, and problem solving.

A student's drive to ask more and better questions is refined with the guidance of expert teachers who support and enhance each student's intrinsic ability.

Our teachers create classroom environments where questions and strategies for understanding outweigh facts and answers.

We nurture our students' natural curiosity, encouraging them to make careful observations, to ask thoughtful questions, and to make connections in their world.

Students leverage their own developmental maturation with an intellectual and emotional growth that comes from being part of a safe, caring, and intelligent community of learners.





# Students Thrive in Our Community



What happens at the intersection of goodness and knowledge?

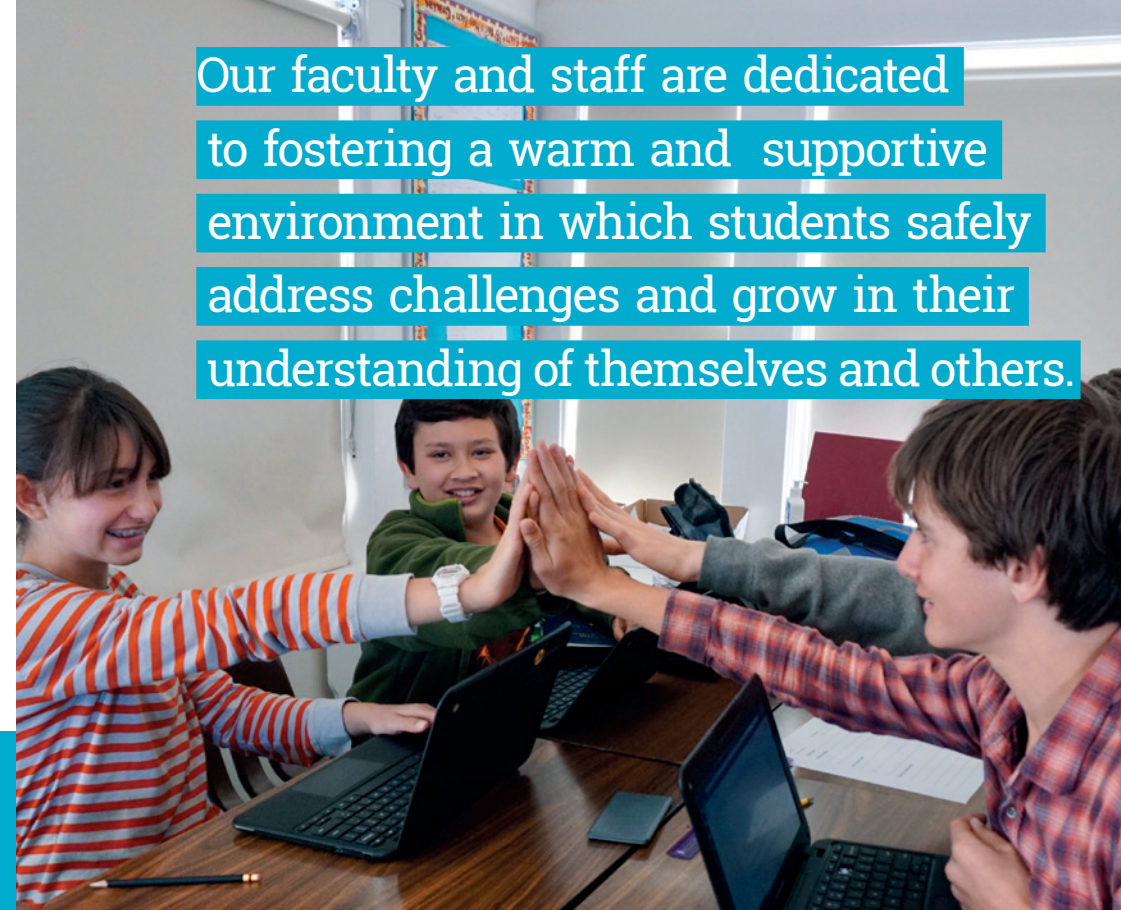
In the Black Pine Circle School community, students learn to engage with diverse viewpoints from a place of humility and self-reflection. Cultivating empathy and active listening supports academic as well as social and emotional growth.

Our low student-to-teacher ratio gives us insight into each student, allowing us to partner with families in a remarkably powerful way.

In a community that sees and values each individual, students build connections that last a lifetime.



Our faculty and staff are dedicated to fostering a warm and supportive environment in which students safely address challenges and grow in their understanding of themselves and others.



To strengthen their social bonds, our sixth grade class lives in the Marin Headlands for four days in October, combining team-building with natural science education in a dramatic setting. The sixth grade English teacher accompanies the class, guiding students to write about their memories of their time at the Headlands as an introduction to their study of memoir.





## We Cultivate an Inquiring Mind



Through regular inquiry, our students develop deep understanding and exceptional critical-thinking skills.

Through differentiation, we are able to understand the strengths and challenges of each student, discerning where and how they can grow both academically and emotionally. Through this partnership, students feel safe taking risks and practicing intellectual generosity.

As a “school of thought,” one of our guiding principles is teaching students to think deeply about their thinking, and to support all students to do their best possible learning at all times.



The capstone experience of the Upper School is the MasterWorks Project, a 40-hour interdisciplinary project undertaken under the supervision of a faculty advisor over many months. Students conceive, research, and develop a project proposal. Past MasterWorks Projects have included novels, musical compositions, photography exhibits, a tunic of chain mail, and hand-sewn couture. Students share their projects with peers and parents at our MasterWorks Project Presentation event.



Our goal is to create vibrant, independent thinkers who will never lose their passion for learning, their delight in research, and their involvement in cultural pursuits.



Our faculty partners every day with students to help them find what Vygotsky called the “Zone of Proximal Development,” that vibrant state when the learner is at the exhilarating and sometimes uncomfortable edge of their abilities.



# Their Unique Voices Emerge



Whatever your passion, your interest will find a home at Black Pine Circle School! We provide opportunities for students to discover and explore their own creative strengths through following many different paths of self-expression.

Our exceptional arts program is just one way that our students learn confidence, collaboration, and communication skills. By graduation, they have developed individual passions and learned how to share that love with their communities.

Students pursue mastery in the arts, in math, in our award-winning maker program, and in countless other areas that prepare them to enter high school with academic confidence and intellectual enthusiasm.



## Tools for Navigating an Evolving Sense of Self

In the Upper School, social and emotional learning is woven into everyday school life, since we know that the most valuable lessons occur both inside and outside of the classroom.

We also schedule an advisory meeting three times per week, where a teacher assumes the role of mentor, advisor, and advocate to small groups of students.

The faculty advisor oversees each child's academic, social, and emotional growth and encourages students to set goals and reflect on their progress.



Every day, our teachers weave together arts, academics, and social & emotional learning.

We are keenly aware of the need to create a student body that is literate and well-versed in the sciences, mathematics, philosophy, technology, world languages, and the arts.

We are a partnership of students, families, and faculty united around our vision of creating a community of passionate, lifelong learners.

We believe that literacy in the arts is not optional but an integral, critical element of our curriculum. Our students are enriched by music instruction, visual arts, and theater arts.

Creativity, kindness, entrepreneurial spirit, and achievement combine to equip and empower our students to make the most of today, and break trail for tomorrow.



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“

My parents, recognizing my early enthusiasm for and interest in the arts, chose Black Pine Circle not only for its outstanding academic instruction, but for its additional emphasis on creative expression. They couldn't have made a better decision! Throughout my elementary and middle school years, I was exposed to a plethora of creative disciplines—music, dance, theater, visual arts, poetry—that were all seamlessly integrated into the daily curriculum.

—Nick Rio, BPC Alum, Columbia University



A learning environment like this, in which scholarly conversation is central to the culture, nurtures both the intellectual as well as the social and emotional life of the student.





Our students emerge as citizens of the world,  
equipped academically and with a love for the arts.



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