



## **Graduation Theses by High School Students**

### **—St. Margaret's Method (Summary)**

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Active learning methods, in contrast to traditional cramming, have been drawing attention in recent years. These new styles of learning encourage students to research and explore topics on their own initiative.

At St. Margaret's Junior & Senior High School, we employ a method called ARE (Ask, Research, and Express) learning, and we guide students in writing graduation theses as the final projects of their six-year learning program.

#### **ARE learning for junior high students**

Students in our junior high school study a broad range of arts and sciences to expand their scope of interest. From the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, our stepwise curricula are designed to develop their intellectual capabilities through repeated intensive discussions based on their researches and outcome presentations.

In the research process, students create plans, formulate hypotheses, conduct research, and analyze their findings. Not only do they collect data from the library, periodicals, and the Internet, but they also conduct field observations, visit museums and sites, interview experts and other relevant parties, and employ various other means.

#### **ARE learning for high school students**

In high school, students demonstrate the skills in planning, research and presentation that they acquired in junior high in the form of graduation theses, and they work intensively on the actual writing in their senior year.

Their senior year weekly curriculum offers a two-period elective course in ARE learning, which 100-120 students take annually. More than half of our students write theses longer than 100 pages of 400-character (200-word) manuscript paper.

#### **Importance of selecting topics**

In our ARE course, we focus strongly on students' ability to select appropriate topics, because

exploring the range of topics involves analyzing what interests and affects them. In this process, students often discover previously unknown sides of themselves that help them develop and expand their capabilities. (See page 3 of the full text for example topics in Japanese).

### **Collaborative skills**

Students discuss their topics at length with classmates because collaborative skills and the ability to learn from external perspectives are essential in expanding their capabilities. Outputs in two forms—written theses and PowerPoint presentations—not only train the student preparing them but also provide good opportunities to others who want to improve their ability to understand presentations and offer comments. Students can enhance their knowledge and insights, stimulate their intellectual curiosity, and experience a mutual learning process. Students who discover that their topics have unsuspected elements come to understand that others' topics may also contain untold stories. Such awareness helps them open the door to larger worlds.

### **Learning through the thesis-writing program**

At the final stage of writing, every student is excited about learning. The completion of their theses gives them a sense of achievement and self-confidence. The following are some students' comments:

“Since elementary school, studying had always been something forced on me, memorizing information given to me and answering questions that were asked. Writing my thesis was a great experience of actively solving my long-standing question about why we study.”

“My thesis required information about earthquakes and nuclear plants. The series of lectures given on these topics in our Saturday meetings after the Great East Japan Earthquake was very useful. I used to think the meetings were bothersome, but my effort was rewarded when my thesis was completed. I am also pleased that I could make use of what I learned in my Japanese history and civics classes.”

“The experience of fully focusing on completing my thesis has given me a great sense of confidence. Now I don't hesitate to face challenges and adversity. I sometimes even choose a hard way.”

A collection of selected theses is printed and distributed to all high school students at the end of the school year.

### **Potential of education through thesis-writing**

Experiences acquired through thesis-writing contribute to students' self-confidence and self-esteem, which help them uphold a firm sense of purpose in college and in their adult lives. One student wrote at the end of her thesis, “Our generation will have to live with two fundamentals: the expanding global society and the depopulating Japanese society. I expect what I have learned in this thesis-writing process will be my foundation when I confront these challenges as a woman.”

This thesis-writing project helps lay the groundwork for the students as individuals, extending their roots before growing branches and leaves. It is a foundation for creating and developing

unimagined outcomes built through learning with classmates and thinking through subjects in depth. It is a highly potent method of education.

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### Author Profile

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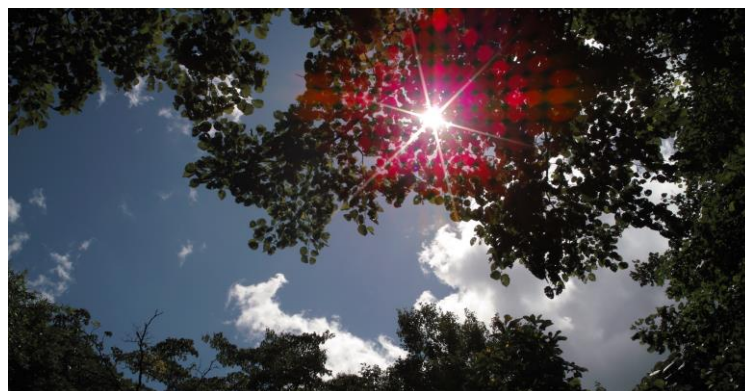
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