

**PARENT GUIDE
TO THE READING AND WRITING WORKSHOP MODEL**

Overview: The goal of the Elementary Humanities program is to help students develop into independent readers, writers, and thinkers. Students will acquire the reading, writing, speaking, listening, and social studies skills, knowledge, and understandings that will enable them to be lifelong learners.

The Workshop model for reading and writing is designed to foster this independence.

How Reading Workshop Works: The teacher begins each workshop with a short lesson that introduces a new reading skill and/or helps students to know when to use previously taught skills. Students practice the skill briefly in the group. Then, students practice reading in their independent reading books, often tracking the skills they are using as they do so, sometimes using post-it notes or readers' notebooks to do so. The teacher meets with small groups of students or individuals to help tutor and coach them on the specific work that each individual needs to do at that time.

How Writing Workshop Works: Similar to Reading Workshop, Writing Workshop begins with a short lesson, often using a mentor text that models a writing technique or skill. Students spend a lot of the workshop time writing independently. Individual students confer with the teacher about their writing. Some of this writing is done for practice on one day only. Your child selects some pieces of writing to bring through all the steps of the writing process:

Prewrite: Plan ideas and get ready to write.

Draft: Write a draft.

Revise: Improve the draft through attention to organization, word choices, craft moves, etc.

Edit: Improve the draft through attention to spelling, grammar, and mechanics.

Publish: Prepare the piece to be shared with readers.

An important note on published pieces: A central tenet of our work with the children is "Teach the reader, not the book. Teach the writer, not the piece of writing." In other words, we are not aiming for a piece to be 100% error-free at publication. While we do hold children accountable for using skills we have taught them, we also recognize that learners cannot learn everything at once. It is a process. We encourage students to experiment with challenging vocabulary and concepts they may not yet have learned how to spell and edit. What they try, and any errors they make, helps their teacher to know what they are ready to learn next.

What's a Reading Level?: We match books to students so that students are reading a book that is challenging but not inaccessible. Students read books that are matched to their A-Z level. Sometimes, particularly in the older grades, students read books within a "text band," meaning that they may read books a level or two below or above their benchmarked reading level, since books within that band require similar types of thinking and work. We share levels with you on the report card so that it will be easier for you to find independent reading books for your child at a library or bookstore, but we ask you to join us in deemphasizing "level." Reading is not a competitive sport; reading is about enjoying and/or learning from what an author has written.

Goal Setting: Teachers and students plan individual learning goals and track their progress toward achieving these goals. Teachers College provides progressions and rubrics that can be a helpful tool for teachers and students in setting these learning goals.

Materials and Professional Development: Teachers receive professional development and materials from Teachers College to support them in their work with your children. They also are supported by their Literacy Coach in their building, their Principal, and the Director of Elementary Humanities.

Within and Beyond the Workshop:

- a. Literacy Across the Curriculum: Outside of the Reading and Writing Workshop times, students apply their literacy skills during Social Studies, Science, Math and other subjects.
- b. Phonics and Spelling: Students in Grades K-2 learn phonics and spelling through the research-based Wilson **Fundations** program. Students in Grades 3-5 learn spelling rules and patterns through the Pearson **Words Their Way** program (note: this program will begin 3-5 district-wide in mid-October of 2017).
- c. Grammar: Grammar is taught through the Writing Workshop. There are specific grammar expectations for each grade level. A separate grammar guide will be sent home to parents.
- d. Interactive Read-Aloud: Teachers read books and texts aloud to the students, and students discuss these. This practice allows students to lift their level of reading comprehension through exposure to and discussion of more challenging reading materials.
- e. Teachers also may reinforce reading, writing, vocabulary and other literacy skills through shared or interactive reading or writing activities.

At Home:

- a. **Reading Homework:** The most important homework your child can do is to read a little each night. Your child's teacher will provide guidance on how often to read and how to record the work.
- b. **Raz-Kids:** We encourage you to have your child work on the Raz-Kids program at home. You will receive a code from your child's teacher. Sometimes students find that working on a computer motivates them to read more.
- c. **Parent Read-Aloud:** Research has shown that one of the strongest factors in a child's reading success is having a parent read aloud to them almost every day. Read and discuss books you both enjoy. Your child's teacher will teach your child **how** to read, but you will be instrumental in making sure that your child is excited about books and reading. We all do something more often if we love it. Please help your child to love reading, as it becomes a special time of closeness between you and your child.

You are an important partner in your child's education, and you know your child best. We look to you to share your observations, questions, and concerns about your child. Please contact your child's teacher whenever you have something to ask or to share. We look forward to seeing you at Parent-Teacher Conferences and Parent University events.