

This month I've invited our PrimarySchool literacy coach, Joann DuBiel York, to describe the reading and writingworkshop approach we use in the kindergarten through third grades.

Jo-AnVargo

Reading and Writing Workshop – An Overview

Holland Hall K through Grade 3 Classrooms

Workshop

Workshop usually begins with a very brief **mini-lesson**. This is followed by independent work time. If this is writing workshop, then it is independent writing time, and if it is reading workshop, then it is independent reading time. Students move to their independent stories to write or to their books to read. This is when students are trying the work taught during the mini-lesson, but it is also where students are applying strategies taught in previous workshops. Students may also be attending to a **small group lesson** with their teacher or meeting with the teacher one on one for a **conference**. Workshop often ends with a share time where students might meet back on the rug, or they may just give their attention to a big idea from their seat. Inside of a unit of study, the workshop hums as it does the work that allows readers and writers to do the most important work, read and write. The most important part of workshop is the independent time where readers and writers are practicing the application of the new skills by reading their own books and writing their own stories.

The Mini-Lesson

The mini-lesson is a large group lesson and is often done on the floor with the teacher pulling students into a small area to focus on the new thinking. This offers the opportunity for children to interact with the new strategy by turning to a neighbor to talk when prompted by the teacher or trying the work while the teacher can easily monitor most students. All faces are pointed one direction and the stimuli of the various desks, tables, windows, etc. are momentarily removed.

Different from the days where children sit still while their teacher imparts knowledge to them for the majority of the subject matter's allotted time, the mini-lesson is designed to capitalize on the very short window of time where students are really listening. The lesson is short and explicit, and students leave with a new strategy to use as a writer or reader. The mini-lessons usually teach one new thing, though there is often a strong connection to the work students have been studying. Lessons are connected and fluid because they fit together inside of a unit of study. If students are writing stories, this could send them off with a new way to add a detail. Students will leave the mini-lesson and go back to their independent writing area to try the new strategy. However, there are a lot of things the writer may try besides the new strategy. The mini-lesson just offers one new strategy. If this was a reading workshop lesson, the reader will move back to their seat or possibly another place in the room and read from their independent reading book, hoping to find a place where they can try the new strategy.

Conferences

This is the part of writing or reading workshop where the teacher individualizes instruction for the student. After the mini-lesson to the whole group, students go off to read or write independently in a way related to the lesson and/or their unit of study. The teacher then begins moving around the room holding one-on-one conferences with students to see where she can support them. One child may receive a conference on a topic that another child may not need. A child may get a conference in one subject area about 1-3 times a week. However, that child may get a conference in other subject areas 1-3 times a week as well.

Small Group Lessons or “Strategy Groups”

After the mini-lesson, the teacher can hold one-on-one conferences, but she may find that a small number of children need the same teaching. She would gather those students to meet and learn the one new thing together. This is different from the groups that were traditionally formed on a child's generalized performance level. Children who read books at different levels and write with different levels of independence may all need to learn the same strategy. The teacher would identify this need and collect the students for the small group lesson. In some workshop classrooms, the children become so engaged as learners they might approach the teacher to ask for a lesson.

Read Aloud

Read aloud is an essential part of the reading and writing classroom. Educators have learned that students find success consistently when they are read to and helped to understand the elements of that literature on a regular basis. Teachers read picture books often because they represent the length of writing that our students produce. In addition, picture books allow children to hold an entire story in their mind at once. Chapter books and sophisticated picture books are read aloud to model more complicated plot lines and the strategies to move through longer, more involved reading materials.

Independent Reading

Readers at Holland Hall are encouraged to work inside of their independent level on a regular basis. This means that while children can often say the words of a text or understand the meaning of a few lines, we believe in the practice of having student readers read from books that allow them to understand the subtleties of the text. More than that, a text that is “just-right” for the reader allows them to practice high order reading strategies and skills. When a child has limited accuracy in word naming or the topic is conceptually challenging, the reader has difficulty applying the developmental reading work. We acknowledge that many readers can negotiate levels of books that are outside of their “just-right” level; however, we believe in this strategy to support our readers. If you are interested in more reading on this philosophy, you might read [What Really Matters For Struggling Readers](#) by Richard Allington. His body of research suggests that if children read from books that are “just-right” for them for about 2 hours a day, they will make progress naturally. Our work is to get students in the right books, which the teachers do by giving students reading assessments. These assessments identify the “just-right” reading level. Then it is the work of both teachers and parents to support, encourage, and provide readers with as much independent reading time as possible every day.

This can be tricky when a reader's accuracy (ability to call out words correctly) reaches levels of texts where the content is often more sophisticated than the reader's developmental level. This can create a habit in the reader of “tuning out” parts of a text. It's important for readers to work in texts as close to his or her independent reading level while in the class. In addition, readers are often asked to read for 5, 10, or 30 minutes at home in this same level. This is to build success and stamina in young readers.

The Writer's Notebook

The writer's notebook is a real life tool that writers use to collect their ideas and save the great stories that they don't really have time to finish or take to publication. In writer's workshop classrooms, teachers use the writer's notebook to imitate this real life practice by using it to symbolize the **gathering and developing** phases of the writing process. Students make lists of ideas to write about, jot down quick pieces of stories, try out stories and language, pick stories to work on longer and ultimately choose writing from the notebook to be **drafted** onto loose paper out of the notebook for **revision, editing** and **publication**. In the writer's notebook,

writers are expected to put their best foot forward toward general writing characteristics such as accuracy, clarity and neatness. In addition, there should be evidence that the writer is applying mini-lesson work in their notebook as well as a general feeling of progress. Writers' notebooks are reviewed by the teacher, and writers will begin reflecting on their own progress as part of owning their writing skills. For more information, A Writer's Notebook by Ralph Fletcher is a helpful read.

The Writing Process (this process is modified for grades 1-2)

The writing process is a generalized system of acts that writers engage in on a regular basis. This writing process is important in a 3rd grade classroom so that writers begin to move through the steps with increasing independence. Below you will find a quick and ordered list of the steps in the writing process and their basic definitions. This process is cyclical and is, therefore, meant to begin again upon publication. In 3rd grade classrooms, sometimes publication can signal the end of a unit. In other units, the writers publish more than once. We try to get writers to go through the entire process as often as possible.

The Writing Process – An Overview	
Gathering	<p>This is where the writer is collecting idea lists, writing down strong words and phrases, describing the world as they see it, collecting memories, etc. This work is done by helping students value the world around them and the reality of their lives. In school, this is done in the writer's notebook. During the gathering phase of the writing cycle, a writer is writing about different topics, possibly in different structures or on different topics daily.</p> <p>What can a parent do? <i>You can help your student capture the world by pointing out the writing possibilities in every day things. Help your writer notice the rainbow in a mirror's reflection. Help your writer remember the feeling of the first time he went under water.</i></p>
Developing	<p>This step is where a writer chooses a particular entry or topic from the writer's notebook and tries to write more about it than in the initial writing. In school, this work is done in the writer's notebook. During this step, the teacher is usually doing lessons to assist with idea development.</p> <p>What can a parent do? <i>Practice storytelling in the car or waiting rooms. You tell stories, and he tells stories. Encourage him to tell the parts other people would want to hear.</i></p>
Drafting	<p>Once a writer has chosen a topic and its structure, (the beach house is a topic, and poem is a structure), the writer writes from scratch on this topic on loose paper. The writer is making decisions about sequence of the writing, possible omissions or additions to the writing. At some point at the end of developing and the beginning of drafting, the writer is often asked to make a commitment to the writing piece by displaying their writing focus (topic or story idea) in the classroom.</p> <p>What can a parent do? <i>Think together about a story you have read. How else might the writer have told it? Could he have told it from the Grandpa's point of view? Could he have told more about the ice cream fight? Is there some part of the story that you wish you knew more about? This type of thought can help your writer close the writer's notebook and recreate their story across loose pages.</i></p>
Revision	<p>Revision is generalized as the time when the writer rethinks content and structure. In this step, the writer reflects on the story, poem, essay, etc. to consider ways to re-see the writing. Are there sentences to reorganize? Could the beginning be different? Is there an important part that should be elaborated more? Revision is where the writer takes steps to really try out a new way the writing could go, but ultimately, the writer learns to make decisions when reflecting on the piece.</p>

	<p>What can a parent do? Use books that you read together and rewrite first and last lines (even if it you just orally rewrite them). Take simple sentences from books or even the spelling sentences and experiment with ways to say the same thing in a different way.</p>
Editing	<p>In this step, writers review the piece they have prepared and work hard to make sure that the writing follows the rules of the language they are using and the audience they are addressing. It is during the editing step that writers identify errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, etc. The hard work for young writers is not taking a page of sentences and putting the periods at the end. Instead, the hard work is identifying the need for a period in students' own writing. Writers are encouraged to learn the rule (a period goes at the end of every thought.) but they are also encouraged to learn how and when to use it (read your writing and put your finger down at the end of every finished thought. Did you have punctuation there?)</p> <p>What can a parent do? Point out punctuation, capitalization and mechanics in your world outside of the classroom. Help your writer reread their own writing to find places where they have used language rules correctly. Help your writer learn not only WHAT or HOW to do something but WHEN to do it. Hold your child accountable for what she has been taught to do, but one correction at a time. Your child wants to know that you aren't focusing only on the mistakes of her product.</p>
Publication	<p>This is where writers put on final touches and take their writing out in to the world. Writers write best when they have an audience, and we want to nurture that. Classrooms have several celebrations through the year when they publish the work of a unit of study. (Sometimes celebrations happen at other times as well). Writers take their writing to former teachers, have the Headmaster come in, send their writing to a magazine or invite parents for a community share. In some way, we say, "I did it. Look what I did!"</p> <p>Teachers work hard to make sure that the final piece represents what the child can do independently. This is hard for many of us to weather when we see children's finished pieces of writing with mistakes. However, if the teacher marks all errors and sends the child to fix them, the question is whether this is a good use of time for the writer or for the teacher. Wouldn't it make the most sense to teach them only what they can <u>own</u> independently on that piece of writing. So we teach them about which names to capitalize, but choose to leave the corrections that would simply be made because the teacher said so. Instead of students learning that the way to fix their writing is to do what the teacher tells them to, we want to empower our writers beyond the classroom teacher. We want published pieces of writing to represent what the child can do independently.</p> <p>What can a parent do? Take your writer to author talks, read the backs of books when they tell about the author. See if you can help your child's class with publication celebrations. You can also discuss the process that a book has gone through during your reading time at home.</p>

Word Wall

The word wall is usually arranged alphabetically in the primary grades to support the spelling chunks and high need / high frequency words for an individual class or grade level. Children are expected to use the word wall and have high accuracy with their spelling or use of these

words as they are “right there.” Many classes have individual word wall booklets for each student to offer the opportunity for children to personalize the word wall with their own needs. Though word walls may differ in appearance and organization from class to class, word walls generally represent the spelling / word study work of the large group classroom. Look for the word wall in your student's classroom.

Literacy or Workshop Resources That Have Added to My Own Journey As a Teacher:

Growing Readers by Kathy Collins

Guided Reading by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

Guiding Readers and Writers Grades 3-6 by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

How's It Going by Carl Anderson

The Art of Teaching Writing by Lucy Calkins

The Art of Teaching Reading by Lucy Calkins

The Writing Workshop by Katie Wood Ray and Lester Laminack

What Really Matters for Struggling Readers by Richard Allington

Writing Workshop by Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi

As the Literacy Coach for the Primary School, I am available to all of you. Please feel free to call upon me to clarify or elaborate upon any of these components.

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