

Writing Workshop at Ocean Avenue:

Writing workshop at Ocean Avenue is founded on the deep belief that children have a tremendous amount to say, and that they can express themselves through the written word. If you walk into any classroom in our school, you will see children writing in all discipline areas. Their words cascade from the walls of our corridors and classrooms. Throughout the year, children invite those they love to come into their classrooms and celebrate their writing. Our school truly is a community of writers.

Our teachers understand and believe in the power of the written word. They have learned best practices in the teaching of writing through our training with the *Teachers College Reading and Writing Project* at Columbia University. Our teachers have worked side by side with Project staff developers over the course of the years, attended professional development workshops and participated in weeklong summer institutes. We continue our studies using the Fountas and Pinell research as well as well as aligning our practice with host of best practices from other prominent researchers. The teachers plan together, support each other in the teaching of writing and share ideas and best practices. They have developed a comprehensive yearlong curricular calendar for kindergarten through Grade 5 which outlines units of study in the teaching of writing. These units of study build across the year and from one grade to the next, and are grounded in the Common Core Standards. The Principal also participated in on-going professional study through the Principal's Institute at Columbia University, workshops with Irene Fountas and other prominent researchers, learning and sharing ideas about how to support excellent teaching and learning.

At Ocean, we encourage children and delight in their ability. We use this as a starting point on our journey in writing as we help the children find their voices and grow as writers. Building on their strengths, providing meaningful, structured opportunities to write, reading beautiful literature to them, and actively teaching the skills and strategies that writers need, all help children achieve success.

During Writer's Workshop, children put their ideas on paper. For many children in kindergarten, this means a lot of drawing. Gradually, through teaching and lots of shared story telling, these drawings become labeled, and

more traditional forms of writing begin to emerge. It is important to remember that children develop at different rates, and through Writer's Workshop, each child's writing needs are addressed. Children select their own writing topics - those that are most meaningful to them. Sometimes, the unit of study is a whole class genre such as personal narrative, non-fiction, poetry or essay and the children learn skills specific to that genre. In the author study unit, children learn techniques or craft specific to that author and then learn how to incorporate these techniques into their own writing.

Writer's Workshop begins with a mini-lesson, 5-10 minutes of direct instruction where the teacher demonstrates a strategy. Next comes the heart of the workshop where children spend approximately 30 minutes writing. Students use folders and writer's notebooks as containers for collecting a variety of observations, experiences, memories, wonderings, reflections and ideas. Children are guided through a process of re-reading their notebooks as they choose a "seed" idea to expand upon during the drafting process. During revision, children revisit their drafts and find ways to improve the content, structure and style of the pieces. They may experiment with different endings, add more beautiful language, angle a story, or explore a host of other techniques. Finally, they learn editing skills such as re-reading their pieces to find errors and use appropriate punctuation to make their pieces the best they can be. Children are then ready to publish and celebrate their work!

In the early grades, children are initially encouraged to use "invented" spelling. This means that they put down sounds that they hear in words that they do not yet know how to spell. Early in kindergarten this often means writing one or more consonants to represent a word. This approximation of written language comes from research on how children learn to talk. Researchers have found that children learn to write in a way which is similar to how they learn to talk. If we encourage their approximations, they feel confident about their writing and want to take risks and use precise language. If they have to spell everything correctly, they will avoid words they cannot spell. Learning to spell correctly, however, is an integral part of writing. It makes what is written easier to read and understand. Therefore, children are given strategies for finding and applying the correct spelling of

frequently used words. Specific strategies are taught during Word Study and supported through Writer's Workshop.

At the end of the Workshop, the teacher brings the children together for a share. This is a whole class meeting and an opportunity for the teacher to re-emphasize the teaching point of the lesson. The teacher does this by having children talk about and show the work they did during their independent writing time. Many children develop a deeper understanding of the mini-lesson after hearing their peers talk about their writing.

Writer's Workshop is not the only time that children have an opportunity to develop and put their writing skills to use. Our children are encouraged to write across the day. They write in a variety of subject areas such as science, social studies and even math. Children write for many purposes - as they will throughout their lives - and this is honored and supported through our curriculum.

As parents, you play an essential role in helping your children lead writerly lives. Make writing supplies accessible at home. Encourage your children to write at home. Ask them to read their writing to you. Delight in your children's writing! Read aloud to them. Share a story. Let your children see you writing - from "to do" lists to notes and letters. Allow them to see that writing matters. We appreciate your support in helping to make Ocean Avenue a vibrant writing community.