

# Literacy Newsletter

Fall 2015



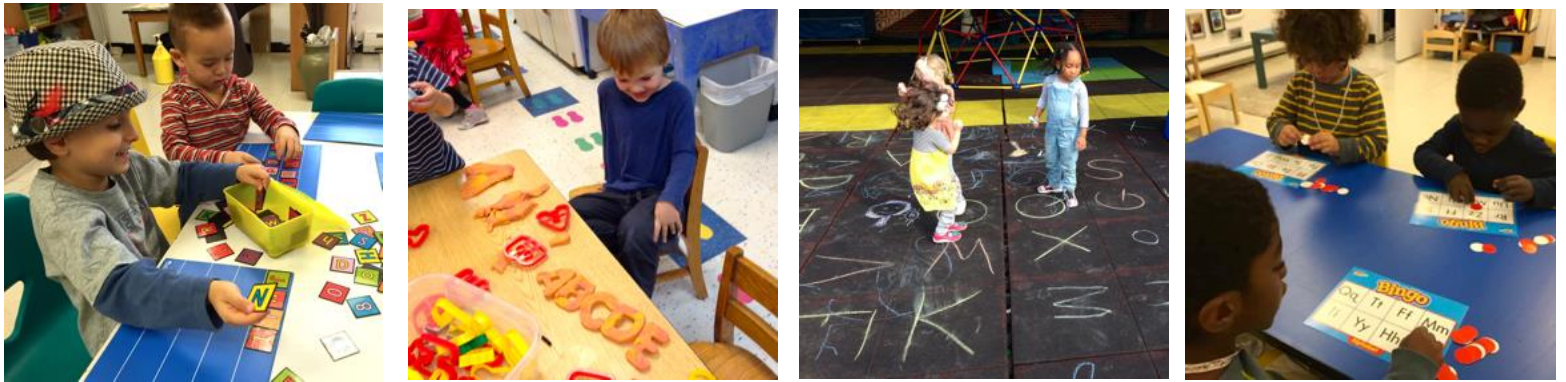
Literacy at The Co-op School: This newsletter describes the learning Pre-k through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students covered from September through November in reading, writing, and word study. It also highlights some of their plans for the remainder of the year.

*Created by the Literacy Committee, comprised of teachers Carmelle Arad, Crystal Elmore, Seth Levy, and Kevin Wood*

## Literacy in Pre-K

In Pre-K, literacy is fun above all else! Peek into the Bumblebee, Butterfly or Dragonfly classes and you are likely to catch children playing games, singing songs, listening to storybooks, and exploring materials that incorporate the components of early literacy - all while developing the skills and dispositions that will have them excited and ready to read and write in the coming years.

From student to student, familiarity with the alphabet varies greatly at the start of Pre-K. Children at all stages of letter recognition and letter writing are provided with opportunities to further their engagement with letters and words through games, interaction with text, and multi-sensory experiences.



*Magnetic letters; alphabet cookie cutters and play dough; playground letter game; BINGO*

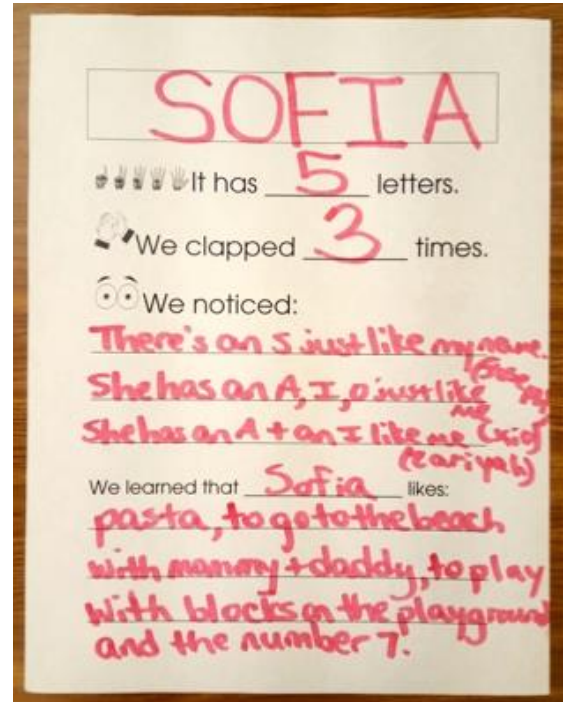
Fostering a love of books and stories is one of the primary goals in any Pre-K class, so read-alouds are essential. Repetitive and rhyming books, and very familiar books, empower children to read to one another and on their own. In Pre-K, children begin to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction literature. They may look to “true books” when researching classroom projects.



*Independent and shared book time; A visiting family shares a favorite book with the Bumblebees*

During daily readings of a morning message and/or morning question, children engage actively with text and gain important exposure to concepts of print. Throughout the day, they look to print as a source of information when examining their daily schedules, searching a chart to find out what their weekly job will be, or selecting a choice time activity.

A major point of interest for Pre-K children is their own names and the names of their peers and teachers. As the year progresses, children become very familiar with the names of their peers in print.



*Clockwise from top left: Kids' names are incorporated into classroom games; Name Study; Dry erase markers, boards and name cards; Using name cards to make jewelry for friends*

Listening is another very important aspect of early literacy. A child's ability to hear the sounds that make up words is crucial to early reading and writing. Learning songs is one of the most fun and effective ways for kids to practice recognizing words that rhyme and share beginning sounds!

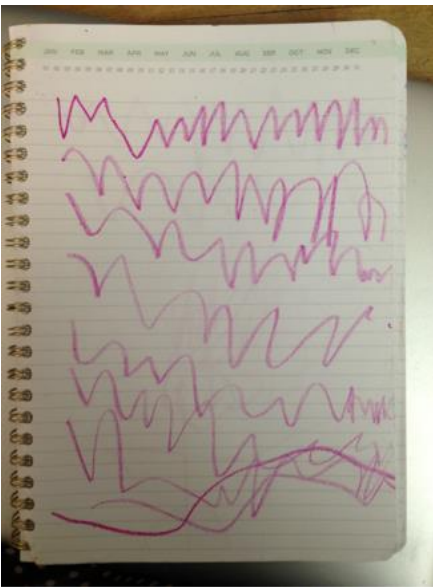


Throughout the Pre-K year, children will attempt to capture their thoughts, experiences and opinions onto paper through mark-making and drawing.



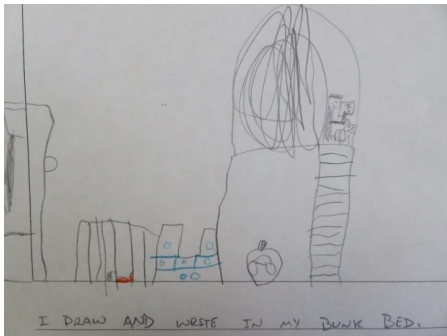
*Children making observational drawings at the local pet store; One child draws and dictates a memory: "I visited Granny and Grandpa Kite, and I gave Kiko a new bone. Kiko is their dog. Kiko is a small dog."*

Children may also experiment with physical forms of writing in Pre-K, making zigzag-like marks on a page or creating strings of letters that sometimes include parts of their name or other familiar words.

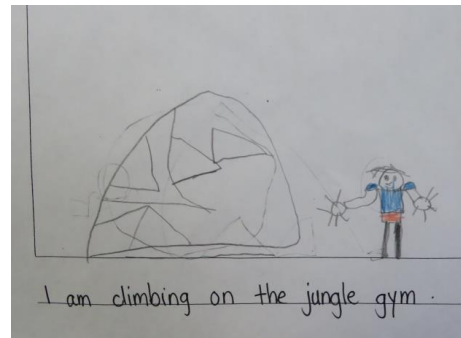


## Literacy in Kindergarten

Our kindergartners are exposed to language and books daily. They hear read alouds, the read the morning message together. They'll talk about letters and start to write their names. We use a balanced literacy approach, a researched and proven method which recognizes the need for both the explicit teaching of skills (sound-symbol correspondence, phonemic awareness, encoding and decoding, for example) as well as the opportunity for children to participate in activities that are designed to build comprehension and meaning. Balanced literacy instruction provides students with a differentiated instructional program in large groups and small groups as well as in individualized lessons that supports the reading and writing skill development of each individual child. Students learn to listen, speak, write and read for a variety of purposes and practice these skills in all curricular areas. Concurrently, they begin to formally learn their letters and letter sounds. They begin to grasp that their writing can communicate meaning to others. Teachers assist in this process with a variety of prompts and questions. Initially, answers are dictated.



Teacher prompt: "Where do you write?"



Teacher prompt: "What do you like to do at recess?"

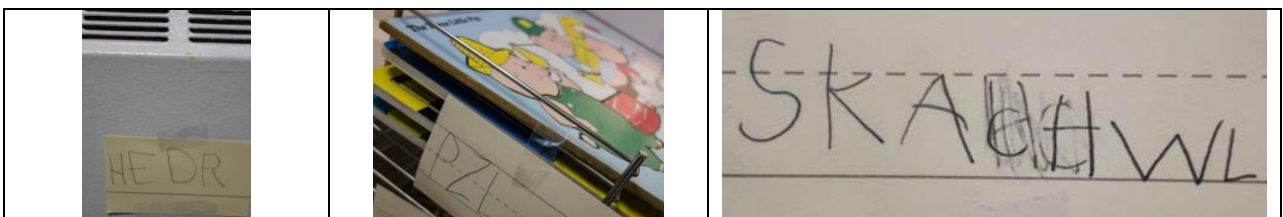
Students are introduced to letters and letter sounds through a kinesthetic phonemic awareness program called *Sounds in Motion*. The idea is that body movements help students to remember how to produce each sound, and what sound a letter makes. The body movement associated with each sound mirrors what we do with our mouths as we make the sound. For example, a sound like /k/ is produced in the back of your mouth, and the corresponding body movement is a backward pulling movement. The program begins by addressing auditory skills necessary for recognition and production of these sounds. The concept of *whole body listening* is introduced during this time as well, where you teach kids to "tune in" so that work can begin on auditory perception and discrimination of consonants and vowel sounds that often are misarticulated. Then speech sounds and corresponding movements are introduced in each session to help students to remember the sound. Children practice letter to sound correspondence, sound blending, and syllable/word decoding in each session through interactive rhymes and stories. It teaches students to hear the sounds in the words first, to discriminate between sounds, so they can then make the written association with letters.

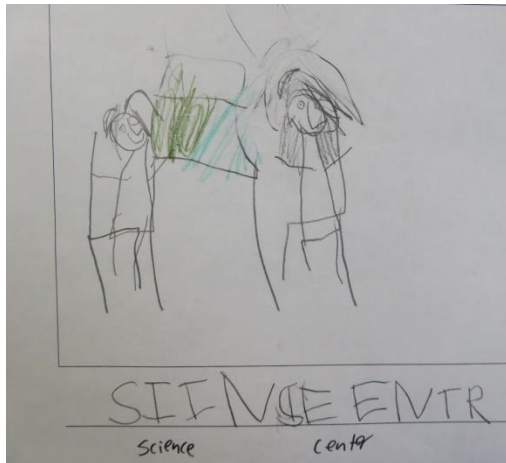
Children begin to write their own and task risks. Labeling the room helps children feel ownership of their classroom:

*Heater*

*Puzzle*

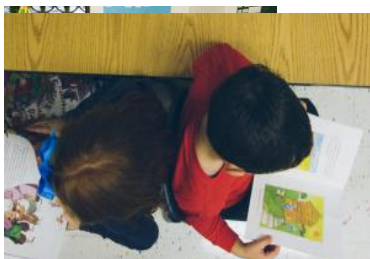
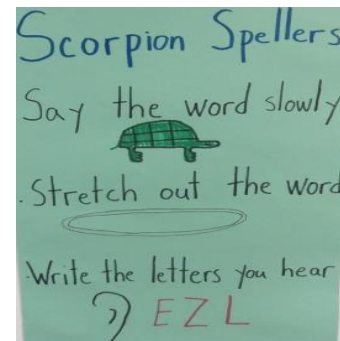
*Schedule*





Examples of student work from the beginning of the year.

They begin to learn a variety of spelling strategies, such as saying the words slowly, stretching out the word like a rubber band and spelling all the letters they hear (the middle sounds are the hardest!):



Reading exposure occurs in the classroom daily with books, poems, the morning message, big books, recipes, song lyrics and beyond. During Reading Workshop, the children begin to “read” using two types of books. One kind is the “familiar” books or “star” books as the kids know them. These books are considered familiar because

students have heard them read several times before by the teachers (and maybe families) and are often classics, such as *Three Billy Goats Gruff*, *Corduroy* and *Caps for Sale*. Lessons that accompany these books are using detail to describe what is happening on each page, what they think the character is saying using expression, what they notice about where the character is on each page. The reading of familiar books is different from simply retelling a story, because the pictures on each page are what propel the child through the story, and the child turns each page as s/he reads. The children also read unfamiliar books. Using these books, the students study the pictures to figure what is happening. They are encouraged to look closely at the pictures to figure out what is happening and why. They connect the pages together and tell their version of the story. As students have more practice, imaginary dialogue might occur between characters or the child might begin to infer the characters’ feelings. Each time a child reads there is a chance to encourage him/her a small step forward as we honor the work being done.



Beginning in January, students are assessed and begin to read books on their reading level. Teachers observe, record observations, and confer with students. Guided reading groups also occur at this time, where teachers look at student assessments and create what act as small “book clubs.” Teachers model a specific targeted strategy. They work together to master this skill, whether it is word study, fluency, or comprehension related. The purpose of guided reading is to support and differentiate decoding, fluency and/or comprehension skill-building in an organized fashion.

## Literacy in 1<sup>st</sup> Grade

Both reading and writing are a big part of 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and they experience tremendous growth in ten short months.

Some students enter the year reading simple pattern books (“This is a plane.” “This is an orange.” Etc...) Many leave 1<sup>st</sup> grade reading short chapter books with complex plots and characters, lots of sight-word recognition, decoding unfamiliar words, and self-monitoring for comprehension.

Some student writers start the year producing 3-page “stories” with approximate sentences and limited encoding (spelling) strategies. Many leave writing 8-12 page books with many more lines, complete sentences and punctuation, better sight-word usage, sophisticated storytelling, revision, dialog, and lots of descriptive language.



Students start the year practicing storytelling skills, writing true stories from their lives. “Personal narratives” are an important way to start the year – even though students love fantasy and fiction – because using their own memories allows them to focus on the many ways they will learn to enhance their storytelling, without the additional challenge of making up a story and trying to keep details consistent.

Early on, students create “heart maps” to keep in their individual writing folders. These include sketches of important things in a student’s life, which can be used as a prompt to think about memories to turn into stories. They practicing routines that will help them write independently, finishing one story and starting a new one right away.

After coming up with story ideas, they followed a plan that goes: “We think, we draw, we write.” This helps to plan out the story before starting to write so it makes sense and has a clear story progression.

Students then start to think about choosing the most important part of a memory to focus on and describing what happened in rich detail. Instead of writing “I went to the park, I rollerskated, I went home” they’re encouraged to think about writing an entire story just about the experience of skating in the park, how skating felt, who was with them, etc. In addition, there is ongoing practice with writing conventions like using punctuation to define sentences, spacing words, writing in lower case letters, and handwriting.

A major focus in the beginning is the *process* of writing, in addition to product.

Students experience how writers often need quiet time to concentrate, just as readers do. For group writing times, they come up with a number of strategies to help them do their best writing.

The connection between writers and readers is multi-faceted. The writer is not always right next to the reader when they read, so the reader can't ask clarifying questions. This has implications for the written words. The students are reminded to stay aware of what a writer can do to make sure their work can be read by others – mechanics, clarity of story, sequence are all important for legibility.



The school year starts with Literacy Centers, which include five centers that rotate weekly and will include different learning opportunities throughout the year. The first five centers are:

Word Work – students construct and deconstruct words through puzzles and games

Listening Center – students listen with headphones to an audio version of a book, read by a teacher, and follow along in a copy of the book, then work on a comprehension activity

Poetry – students read a poem, searching for the five new spelling words studied each week

Spelling – students read words, build them with word tiles, and write them

Create Your Own Adventure – students practice writing imaginative stories (that don't necessarily need to be personal narratives)

Independent reading time also takes place – students read books they've “shopped” for from bins full of books at their “just right” level. This level changes for each student as the year progresses.

Teachers also meet with “guided reading” groups or small book clubs, which allow for small group work focusing on targeted strategies differentiated for the needs of each group

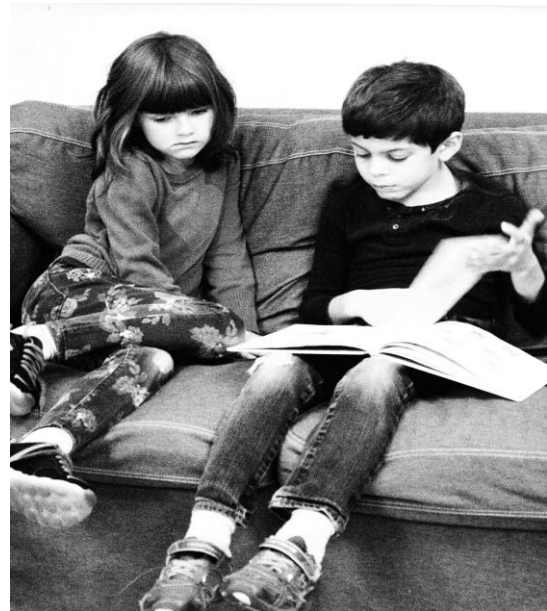


## READING AND WRITING THROUGHOUT THE YEAR:

- Choosing story ideas from life
- Choosing the important parts and describing with internal (feelings) and external (5 senses) details
- Stories have a clear progression and a beginning, middle, and end
- Writing conventions like ending punctuation, spacing words, lower case letters, dialog
- Idea of audience "Writing for Readers"
- Partners act as editors and help revise
- Re-reading to "edit on the go"
- Beginning and ending stories in strong and interesting ways
- Non-fiction: "How To" and "All About" books
- Forming opinions and writing letters: what we like, don't like, what should be changed in the "real" world
- Using mentor authors (Donald Crews, Ezra Jack Keats, for ex.)
- Poetry-writing: seeing the world in a new way, capturing details, simile and metaphor



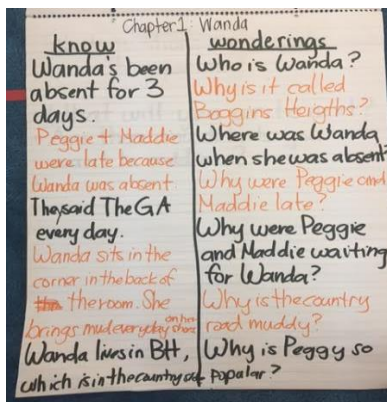
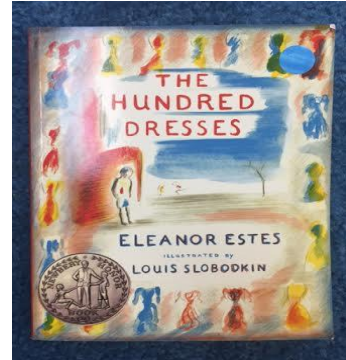
- Students have individual Books Bags that hold a student's "just right" reading level
- Reading strategies: picture walk, using the first letter sound, "running jump start", using context, and others
- Working with partners to have "book talks"
- Comprehension: thinking about setting, characters, and feelings
- Making predictions and re-telling
- "What makes sense" in context
- Note-taking while reading
- Non-fiction books
- "Reading to learn" information and not just "learning to read"
- Synthesizing from various sources
- Acting out parts of books
- Comparing the same character across a series of books



## Literacy in 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade

In the beginning of the year, second grade readers are working hard to find patterns, make inferences, identify story elements, and get to know the characters in their stories.

At the beginning of the year, they read 100 Dresses by Eleanor Estes. 100 Dresses tells the story of a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Polish-American child who is thoroughly bullied by her peers at school because of her differences. The book tells the story from the point of view of one of the children who bullies the main character. It is through this unique perspective that readers are able to see the complexity of each character, and their moral choices.

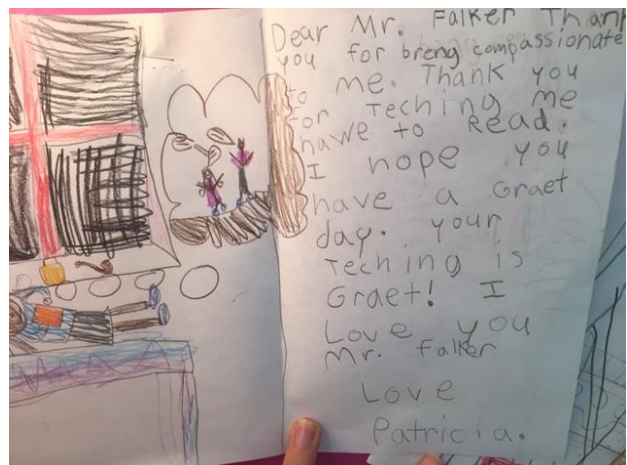


While reading, students are asked to think about what they know and what they are wondering. This allows students to realize what the author wants them to try to figure out by making an inference. The author isn't telling us exactly what they want us to know--we have to figure it out! Therefore, we need our brain to try to figure out what the author wants us to know.

Students also read Thank you, Mr. Falker by Patricia Polacco. By asking, "what was the author trying to tell us?" students figured out that Mr. Falker cared a lot about Patricia. They

realized this not because the book explicitly told them that he cared about her, but because they figured it out based on what he did for her.

To demonstrate their understanding, students wrote thank you letters to Mr. Falker as if they were Patricia. Students wrote about how Mr. Falker stood up for Patricia when she was being bullied, he taught her how to read, and he supported her as an artist.



Later in the year, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade readers will...

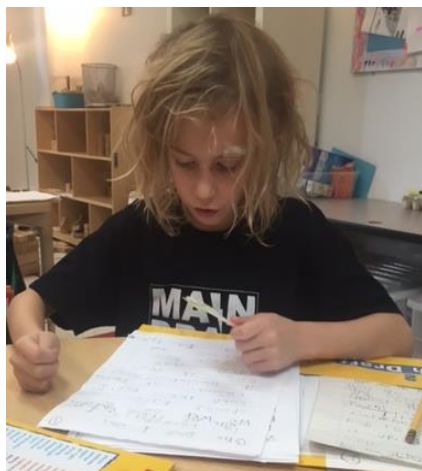
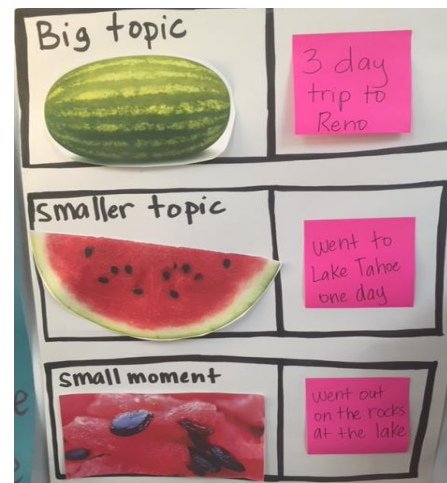
- look for patterns with the characters in their stories
- try to figure out characters' traits, feelings, and motivations through their action and dialogue
- look for patterns in non-fiction texts and make inferences about what the author of the book wants them to understand

In the beginning of the year, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade writers add on to what they learned in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and begin by writing personal narratives. First, they wrote stories about an event that happened in their own life. After that, they focused on a new story that zoomed in on a small moment from their life.

Before they began writing, students investigated mentor texts such as The Short Cut by Donald Crews and I Can't Take a Bath by Irene Smalls. They investigated the strategies these authors used to stretch their small moment story. Students looked at how the authors used a lot of details, had their characters take a lot of action, and made endings that told a lesson. Then, students used these strategies when writing their own small moment story.

Students thought about a small moment as the seed of a watermelon. The watermelon is the large story, a slice of watermelon is a smaller piece of a story, but the seed of the watermelon is a small moment.

Students thought about stories from their own life. After they thought about a story, they then thought about a small moment within that story. And then, just like chewing gum, these writers stretched their story out to go more in-depth about their characters' actions, feelings, dialogue, and story events. Students worked hard to show, not tell their reader about the characters and events in their story. For example, instead of saying "she was angry", a student showed the reader the character was angry by saying "she slowly stomped away".



In the beginning of the year, students also work to understand the writing cycle that they began to learn about in 1<sup>st</sup> grade: brainstorm, draft, revise, edit, and publish. Nathan is seen here with the eyes that he uses to revise. Students are encouraged to re-read their own writing with a "new pair of eyes" to check for clarity and understanding.

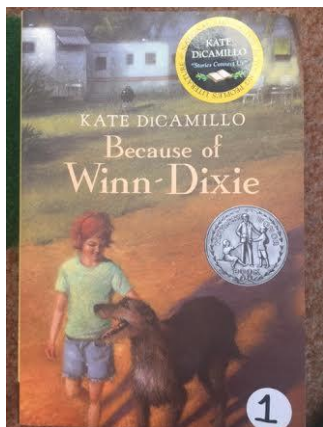
In word study, students look to the books they're reading to investigate the words and grammar they see based on noticing the class has made when reading. So far, they have looked for:

- capitalizations
- ea and ee vowel blends
- vowel blend irregularities (ex.: ea + r = er sound)

Later in the year, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade writers will write realistic fiction, non-fiction informational pieces, poetry, instructional information, and writing with a mentor author.

## Literacy in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

In 3rd grade students are looking for patterns in their text, finding textual evidence to prove the patterns to be true, thinking about what they know and what they're wondering while they're reading, to be able to understand the complexity of characters and events in the books they're reading.



As a class, the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade is reading Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo. This book tells the story of a young child who unfortunately loses her mother and comes to reside with the town preacher. The young child forms a unique companionship with a stray dog, Winn-Dixie as the story unfolds.

During a lesson they did in late October, students were asked to find evidence for a pattern they previously noticed in the book. The pattern they had identified was that the preacher was beginning to like Winn-Dixie. Students independently found evidence, the proof that their pattern is true, and wrote it in their notebook.

After each student independently found their evidence, the class came together to share their findings. One student said, "On page 18, It says he scratched Winn-Dixie behind his ear." The student expressed how the preacher scratching Winn-Dixie's ear proves that he likes him because Winn-Dixie loves when someone scratches his ear.



Patterns we notice	Evidence we found in the book
The Preacher is starting to like Winn Dixie more.	pg 28 "We'll have to keep an eye on him... he put his arm around Winn Dixie." pg 28 "we have to keep him safe" pg 18 he scratches Winn Dixie behind the ears pg 71 "you can go ahead and get up on there now."

Then students read along as the teacher read the book aloud. After the teacher finished reading, the class went back to their know/wondering chart. Students talked about what they know, based on what the text has told them. Then they thought about what they were wondering. Wonderings allow students to think about what the text has hinted at but hasn't quite fully exposed yet. These wonderings are a way for students to be able to think about what they are looking for is to make visible what is still invisible in the text.

Students have practice as a whole group, back with them when they are reading their independent books. Students practice using their reading notebook to jot down things they notice, what they're wondering, patterns that arise in the text, and evidence to prove their claims to be true.

In the beginning of the year, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade writers wrote about their own personal identities. They read the series, Meet the Author, which are biographical accounts of famous authors and their writing processes. For example, they learned that Patricia Polacco bases almost all of her books on her real life family and the experiences she had throughout her childhood. After that, students completed writing interviews about themselves to think about the kind of writer they are. Furthermore, students asked their family members about the ways they use writing.

After that, they continued to immerse themselves in different types of writing each day, and then analyzes their purposes. For example, they read Click, Clack, Moo by Doreen Cronin, talked about persuasive writing, and then wrote persuasively with a partner about a topic they felt strongly about. Another time, students made refrigerator pickles, in collaboration with Sophie, the garden teacher, and used cucumbers from a student's garden. The students took notes about the steps they took while preparing the pickles, such as heating the vinegar, adding  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup salt, etc. Later, the students were responsible for writing the recipe. This helped students understand that sometimes writers write to give directions.

As a class, they continued to add to their anchor chart all of the reasons why writers write.

After a while, the teachers felt students had been engaged in enough writing styles to be able to start a writing notebook to use throughout their lives. Once students were introduced to their notebook, they began using them in a variety of ways, such as:

- they took a trip to the community garden with Sophie to record their noticings, their feelings, and their inspirations. Students filled their graphic organizers with what they heard, smelled, saw, touched, etc. They then wrote poems inspired by the garden, and later a whole class poem titled, I am One with the Garden, which was then presented to the garden members.
- They took walks around school and jotted down overheard conversations, and random observations, bringing up the idea that even the smallest tidbit can turn into a writing entry or a published piece.
- They looked at different journals to highlight what immigration was like. They are currently studying immigration for their inquiry project and wanted to incorporate their writing with the project. After students saw images of immigrants during their experience of immigration, students wrote journal entries from the point of view of the immigrant.



The students were so excited about the immigrant journal entries that they pushed to use those pieces for their publishing party. Students held their first publish party to highlight their final pieces from the beginning of the year.

