

Fourth Grade Newsletter

September/October 2010

Greetings!

New fourth graders enter school with excitement and enthusiasm, but some anxiety and apprehension can linger. Therefore, the first goal of any teacher is to create a comfortable learning atmosphere as soon as possible, so that we can all move past the orientation phase. We are thrilled to announce that this fourth grade class has and continues to be thoroughly eager and intent upon adapting as quickly as possible. They seem to want to quickly get past the introductory “stuff” and get down to business. We couldn’t be more pleased!

MATH

It has been such a treat getting to know your daughters. They are adapting well to all the new procedures that accompany fourth grade math. It has been exciting to see that the girls have remembered quite a bit of math after the long summer vacation.

The girls seem motivated about the exercise of regularly taking their timed multiplication fact tests (the Math Minutes) at school. We are pleased that many are taking advantage of tackling their Math Minutes at home, either using the Burke’s online version or simply writing the answers on their sheets, using their dry erase markers on their plastic sleeves or saying the answers verbally while an adult keeps time. Without mastery of the times tables, their progress to higher-level math skills can be slowed, and so it is important to continue to practice the times tables at home. Toward that end, the emphasis in the first unit of *Investigations* has been to use arrays to represent multiplication situations; then to develop strategies for finding factors and multiples of 2 and 3 digit numbers and finally the girls will explore the idea that factors of a number are also factors of a multiple of that number.

SCIENCE

In our science classroom time this year we will focus on water topics such as the water cycle and water conservation. One of the first activities will involve reading a booklet, *Oceans of the World*, which is packed with facts about currents and tides, the coasts, exploring the greater depths, farming and harvesting the oceans and solid conservations practices. This winter, the girls will conduct experiments that support their study of the brain in Humanities.

HUMANITIES

We use the term ‘Humanities’ to cover the areas of language arts (reading, writing and word study) and History.

In our literature study groups, the girls are enjoying reading *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. To expand our thinking while reading, we are using reading prompts that correlate to the prompts used in the reading response letters. Some

examples of these are: making connections and predictions, discussing the author's writing craft, and talking about what we like or did not like about the book. In all of these areas, the girls are learning to support their ideas with evidence. In addition, we are doing several comprehension exercises inspired by this wonderful story, as well as practicing sequencing and inference skills as we focus on the evolution of the characters. We are also using the geographical clues in this literature as we begin to study our regions in the United States and in California. We read this literature in connection with our study of California geography, coastal California natives, setting, and identity.

In writing, we are about to explore our second trait, Word Choice. The students have enjoyed working with voice, and have especially developed their voice of Karana, a native girl from our class novel, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. We have attached a list of the traits and their definitions for you to understand and ask your daughter about at home.

In our guided reading groups, we have been reading short plays. We have practiced voice, expression, volume, reading accuracy, phrasing, pace and prosody. Finally, we have performed the plays for the other guided reading groups in the class. We will continue this genre for the rest of the first trimester.

We have started using the class Wiki to write our reading response letters. At first students will write their letters on the Wiki without commenting on each other's letters. Later, students will add short, structured comments to other students' letters. The Wiki gives students the opportunity to have an authentic audience and to participate in a writing community. In addition, students learn appropriate digital literacy skills. We realize that using the Wiki is a learned skill and we are guiding the students by modeling how to use the Wiki, giving explicit instructions, creating online tutorials, and answering questions as they arise.

DAILY MORNING MEETINGS

We use the Responsive Classroom model to guide our daily Morning Meetings. Each day the students read a message that gives them an idea of what their day will look like, then they greet one another and hold class meetings on a regular basis. The model is also used throughout the school day to give students feedback and to make the expectations of how to be a fourth grader clear.

FIELD TRIPS

At the time of this writing, we plan to go to Tennessee Valley Cove on Thursday, October 14 for a hike and to explore our literature study book, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. The cove is geographically similar to the setting in our book and the students will participate in activities that simulate life for the main character, Karana.

On Tuesday, October 26th, 4B will be going to the Oceanside Water Pollution Control Plant and 4A will be going on Thursday, October 28th. Both classes will leave school at 9:15 and return by lunchtime.

On October 30 the entire 4th grade will be heading to Tennessee Valley Cove for a day of simulating life in the *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. We will be leaving Burke's around 9am and heading back to school around 1pm. The girls will have

free dress, but need to wear layers and comfortable hiking/walking shoes. They will need a snack, lunch and water bottle.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

LeaAnne Parlette Jim Lengel

Laurel Trent Whitney Livermore

Attachment: 6 + 1 Writing Traits Definitions

Copied from

<http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00001707.shtml>

Ideas The Ideas are the heart of the message, the content of the piece, the main theme, together with all the details that enrich and develop that theme. The ideas are strong when the message is clear, not garbled. The writer chooses details that are interesting, important, and informative—often the kinds of details the reader would not normally anticipate or predict. Successful writers do not tell readers things they already know; e.g., "It was a sunny day, and the sky was blue, the clouds were fluffy white ..." They notice what others overlook, seek out the extraordinary, the unusual, the bits and pieces of life that others might not see.

Organization Organization is the internal structure of a piece of writing, the thread of central meaning, the pattern, so long as it fits the central idea. Organizational structure can be based on comparison-contrast, deductive logic, point-by-point analysis, development of a central theme, chronological history of an event, or any of a dozen other identifiable patterns. When the organization is strong, the piece begins meaningfully and creates in the writer a sense of anticipation that is, ultimately, systematically fulfilled. Events proceed logically; information is given to the reader in the right doses at the right times so that the reader never loses interest. Connections are strong, which is another way of saying that bridges from one idea to the next hold up. The piece closes with a sense of resolution, tying up loose ends, bringing things to closure, answering important questions while still leaving the reader something to think about.

Voice The Voice is the writer coming through the words, the sense that a real person is speaking to us and cares about the message. It is the heart and soul of the writing, the magic, the wit, the feeling, the life and breath. When the writer is engaged personally with the topic, he/she imparts a personal tone and flavor to the piece that is unmistakably his/hers alone. And it is that individual something—different from the mark of all other writers—that we call voice.

Word Choice Word Choice is the use of rich, colorful, precise language that communicates not just in a functional way, but in a way that moves and enlightens the reader. In good descriptive writing, strong word choice clarifies and expands ideas. In persuasive writing, careful word choice moves the reader to a new vision of things. Strong word choice is characterized not so much by an exceptional vocabulary that impresses the reader, but more by the skill to use everyday words well.

Sentence Fluency Sentence Fluency is the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, the way in which the writing plays to the ear, not just to the eye. How does it sound when read aloud? That's the test. Fluent writing has cadence, power, rhythm, and movement. It is free of awkward word patterns that slow the reader's progress. Sentences vary in length and style, and are so well crafted that the writer moves through the piece with ease.

Conventions Conventions are the mechanical correctness of the piece—spelling, grammar and usage, paragraphing (indenting at the appropriate spots), use of capitals, and punctuation. Writing that is strong in conventions has been proofread and edited with care. Handwriting and neatness are not part of this trait. Since this trait has so many pieces to it, it's almost a holistic trait within an analytic system. As you assess a piece for convention, ask yourself: "How much work would a copy editor need to do to prepare the piece for publication?" This will keep all of the elements in conventions equally in play. Conventions is the only trait where we make specific grade level accommodations.

Presentation Presentation combines both visual and verbal elements. It is the way we "exhibit" our message on paper. Even if our ideas, words, and sentences are vivid, precise, and well constructed, the piece will not be inviting to read unless the guidelines of presentation are present. Think about examples of text and presentation in your environment. Which signs and billboards attract your attention? Why do you reach for one CD over another? All great writers are aware of the necessity of presentation, particularly technical writers who must include graphs, maps, and visual instructions along with their text.