

## *The Writing Program at Thornhill*

Dear Thornhill Families,

On Friday January 27 we spent a good portion of the day getting a clear understanding of what a student at Thornhill experiences in the writing curriculum from kindergarten through the fifth grade. The teachers began by examining the writing of our 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students who had recently taken a writing test. That gave us a clear picture of the goal for which we should prepare our younger students. Then we discussed the components of a successful writing program. Finally I asked each grade level team to compose a paragraph describing the main curriculum points and the project highlights for their grade level. Below then is an assembly of all their writings, resulting in a short description of the scope and sequence of the writing program at Thornhill Elementary.

Writing in kindergarten focuses on laying the foundation for successful writing in the fifth Grade. This is guided by the State of California writing standards and is fleshed out by the activities in the classroom. The State Standards emphasize a mix of written and oral language development and expect that students in Kindergarten will be able to do the following:

- Write brief sentences using letters and phonetically spelled words.
- Be able to form letters correctly
- Speak in complete sentences
- Share information and ideas
- Follow oral directions

Classroom activities put flesh on the bones, so to speak. Students practice proper letter formation, the proper use of upper and lower case letters, and the beginning use of punctuation (period, question mark, and exclamation). Students also begin to learn the basic components of a sentence (nouns, verbs, and adjectives). Students are given a wide variety of writing experiences to develop these skills. These include ‘Sharing’ for oral language development, illustration and sentence prompts for use in Journal writing, picture labeling, guided writing, and let’s not forget just plain coloring and drawing for fun!

During first grade, the students work on a variety of writing skills. These skills include:

- well structured sentences
- punctuation: introduction of commas, quotations; mastering awareness of ending punctuation
- use of upper and lowercase letter
- beginning audience awareness
- investigate various idea building methods
- introduce subject-predicate agreement
- tense agreement
- developing the habit of writing regularly
- staying on topic, main idea and details
- introduce various graphic organizers and a basic outline format
- introduce letter writing, friendly letter and invitations
- penmanship skills

The students have some special experiences during this year to help them facilitate their learning of writing skills. The children do daily journal writing, various assigned writing topics, and simple reports. Some specific things they do are the rocky seashore creature report, the turkey book, step by step process writing, grandparent stories, whale report, and science notebooks. The main goal for the

teachers in the year is inspiring and motivating an interest in writing. And they lived happily ever after!

In second grade students will: Begin with a focus of writing on developing a complete sentence – what is a complete sentence- using appropriate parts of speech, (noun/verb) and correct tense. They work on vocabulary and word knowledge development to improve content of sentence. They learn to extend their sentences adding more details. This includes using correct punctuation, and spelling grade level words. Letter writing includes writing friendly letters, persuasive letters and thank you notes. They also learn how to write a paragraph about a process. Then they move into paragraph composition where sentences all relate to a topic and have a beginning, middle and end. Finally they end the year by completing an essay with 3 or more paragraphs on a topic. Second graders also have some unique writing projects. All 2<sup>nd</sup> graders do a whale report based on our story “The story of Three Whales” using skills of investigation and research, and making oral presentations.

RSP Writing Program for our Special Ed students: Individual goals focusing on writing are created when a student’s disability is impacting their development in writing. IEP goals are aligned to standards, yet appropriate in regards to the student’s current level, while still being rigorous enough to hold the student to high expectations in moving towards meeting grade level writing standards.

Activities for push-in support during writing activities may include modeling the process of writing moving from thoughts to the action of writing down on paper through think a louds. My role may also present as a small voice of reminder, helping students develop a metacognitive awareness that they need to continuously edit their work and monitor mistake. For example, a student who continuously reverses letters may hear me repeat quietly, “Have I checked to make sure my letters face the correct way?” I eventually scaffold down to simply saying, “What do you always do before turning in your work?” in the hopes that the inner voice will be their independently.

In pull-out time, activities will vary depending on the need of the student. To work on mechanics and conventions, we do “fix-it” sentences, where an incorrect sentence is displayed, and students need to identify the errors. To support spelling, students work on games via [spellingcity.com](http://spellingcity.com), practice syllabification exercises, and identify incorrect spelling through “fix-it” practice. Finally, through the RS program, students who have difficulty with organization and writing structure receive direct small group instruction, where they are provided with scaffolds and formulaic tools to support their development in this area. As the year progresses and students produce more writing, students within small grade level groups in the resource room will be asked to compare their writing samples, and evaluate their own growth, and develop next steps for improvement.

In third grade we focus on developing the paragraph. We focus on the topic sentence, supporting details and conclusion. We concentrate on working through the writing process. We use a variety of graphic organizers, and present students with different ways to approach a writing topic including picture writing, charts, and webbing. We do report writing and narrative writing like legends, persuasive writing, formal and informal letter writing, summaries, descriptive writing, and poetry. We also talk about using holistic rubrics for assessment, so they have a clear understanding how their writing and assessments are graded. One of our learning goals to support 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade writing is to develop paragraph organization and quality transitions to write a focused multi-paragraph essay. Students also write in response to literature.

Writing in fourth grade is a culmination of the writing skills students have accumulated and taking those skills to a new level of complexity. Students have been writing complete sentences and single paragraphs around a topic. In fourth grade, they inter-relate those sentences to create additional

paragraphs. They learn, through the use of various graphic organizers, to organize these paragraphs to form a unified essay. The essay includes several paragraphs around a main idea or topic. This main idea is supported through details and evidence. The essay begins with an introductory paragraph to introduce the main idea and it ends with a conclusion that ties it all together by summarizing the main points. All the while, the students are expected to consistently use the conventions and mechanics of writing through the use of the Writer's Express book or the Language Arts Handbook.

By the time students enter 5<sup>th</sup> grade, they will have achieved a proficient level of vocabulary development, sentence structure, and paragraph form. The main writing goals for 5<sup>th</sup> grade consist of writing focused, cohesive, and well-structured multi-paragraph compositions in narrative, persuasive, and expository form. Students establish main idea and provide evidence using supporting details. Students progress through the writing process (brainstorming, drafting, revising, and publishing), with a goal of developing a clear voice.

In addition, 5<sup>th</sup> grade students write thoughtful responses to literature, research reports, and compose daily journal entries. Students practice Standard English conventions as part of daily writing routines and editing and revising. At Thornhill, we diversify and extend writing throughout the curriculum using:

- reflective science journaling
- step-books analyzing story structure
- poetry
- song-writing
- journalism
- biographies
- personal history and lineage projects

Although it may take a few minutes to read through the description above, I think it gives a clear picture of what our teachers do at each grade level. They guide our children through the curriculum, adding special emphases and projects at each grade. If you haven't yet seen the writing produced by our upper grade kids, please do. You're in for a treat!

Mel Stenger, Principal