

The Foundations of Literacy

*"The more you read, the more things you will know.
The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."*

Dr. Seuss, "I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!"

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Introduction

As a society, we are consumed by daily news and other media outlets regarding much debate on what is essential and irrelevant in the areas of education. Should children be taught phonics vs. whole language? Is the art of cursive writing even necessary in this technological day and age? Whole class instruction vs. differentiated instruction? Longer school days? Extend the school year? Regional Tests! State Tests! Tests! Tests! Tests! It can be very overwhelming even for a seasoned educator, let alone parents who seek what is best for their children. Even throughout my college education and teaching experiences I have seen trends come and go, but the one thing that has remained consistent is the importance and relevance of literacy. A solid literacy foundation is the backbone of every successful learning opportunity for any child. When a child has been given every possible opportunity to grow in the area of literacy he/she can flourish in every other subject and for that matter, every aspect of life.

For most people when they think of literacy the first and foremost thought is reading. But there is much more to literacy than simply learning how to read. Literacy is a bundle of these essential ingredients: reading, writing, phonics, handwriting, speaking, listening, grammar and study skills. So the goal of this article is to highlight the definition of each of these key components and to reveal what Holy Family School ensures for all of our students on a daily basis. This is the first article of a two part series. In this article focuses is on phonics/word study and reading.

Phonics

Phonics is the ability to distinguish a letter or a group of letters to a particular sound to formulate into words. The practice is to introduce letters, letter blends, and individual words in isolation to enhance decoding, fluency and phonemic awareness.

What's Happening At Holy Family...



- Daily practice of letter, letter sounds, sound-word relationship and sight word knowledge are applied in each class from Kindergarten through Grade 5.
- Daily poetry reading to guide sight-word base, strengthens sound-word relationship, rhyme and rhythm and word recognition skills. Students locate words based on a particular spelling pattern, sound pattern and/or etc.
- Songs which emphasis a certain vowel, consonant and/or consonant blend.
- Weekly spelling list and assessment that is differentiated to accommodate individual student needs. Daily practice includes unscramble words, ABC order, Fill in the blank sentences, missing letters, etc.
- ABC and Word Study centers to build new words from existing words and sound patterns.
- Classroom sight word, spelling pattern and content word wall. Words are posted on the wall for students to refer to as they read and write.





Reading

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The ability to interpret words or symbols to convey meaning. Students are given many opportunities to experience the written word through various literacy situations.

What's Happening At Holy Family ...

- Leveled libraries: libraries leveled according to the Fountas and Pinnell Text Level Gradient to accommodate to each student's reading level and interests.
- Each child has an individual reading bin to participate in independent reading time or D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything And Read).
- Students in Kindergarten through Grade 4 assessed based on the DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment). The DRA is a running record assessment where the teacher monitors an individual child while they read a particular story.
- The DRA is to determine each individual student's reading strategies, fluency, oral reading, and comprehension. From the student's individual results the student has the ability to choose books that are both meaningful and challenging for them to read for individual silent reading.
- Classroom teacher meets with each individual child to assess reading choice, fluency, and comprehension through note taking, observations and running records.
- In addition, the DRA helps group students according to reading level to work in small, guided groups 2-3 times a week.
- Small guided reading groups focus on a skill that a particular group needs emphasized or strengthened. In addition to working on reading strategies, small-guided group work also includes handwriting, word study and study skill strategies.
- A poem is introduced each week to promote oral reading and fluency. Identification of sight

words, certain word patterns, rhymes and etc. are emphasized throughout the school week. A visual representation (drawing) is celebrated at the end of the week for children to draw what they picture in their minds.

- Weekly monitoring of comprehension through various reader responses to literature, running records, comprehension notebooks, and assessments.
- Each group setting (individual, partner, small group and large group) reading time is to enhance and strengthen each individual student's reading proficiency.
- Starting last year, the second and eighth graders meet on a bi-weekly basis for reading. Our eighth graders are coached and guided as "reading tutors" for our second graders. Primary students love to read aloud to others so this opportunity gives them the chance to read to their buddy while working on fluency, word recognition, comprehension and expression. Our eighth graders have done a tremendous job!

Conclusion

As you can see we are truly blessed with the literacy program we have implemented at Holy Family School. These key points are just a snapshot of a highly effective, researched-based and student-centered literacy program to which we provide for all of our students.

I encourage you to use this article as an opportunity for conversation and feedback. If you have any questions and/or would like more information regarding our literacy curriculum, please do not hesitate in contacting me by email at mrsgabbard2ndgrade@gmail.com.

The next upcoming article will focus on writing, handwriting, grammar, speaking, listening and study skills. And to all our Holy Family students, KEEP READING! A great world awaits you!

