

Lit Bits

Cleveland Heights–University Heights
School District

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Student Led Conferences

Reading and writing conferences vary in form and structure. Incorporating them into the classroom can create high engagement levels for students and provide differentiated learning opportunities. Conferences can be student-led, teacher-facilitated or both. In student-led conferences, students lead the conversation and showcase their growth as a reader and/or writer with evidence that documents the journey. Strengths are celebrated with specific descriptive language. The conference concludes with the student establishing “next step” goals. Conferences that are facilitated by teachers follow the same procedure described above with varying levels of teacher support as needed. All conferences generate collaboratively negotiated objectives for future work.

Resources have been distributed to support student-led reading and writing conferences. The goal as we move “from knowing to doing” is to breathe life into our reading and writing protocols, and to encourage greater student ownership for their learning.

ELA 6-12 Core Program

In September, 2007, a new core program was adopted by the Cleveland Heights–University Heights Board of Education. The 2008 McDougal Littell Literature program is an excellent match for our District as many of the components are embedded in our balanced literacy initiatives.



Reading and writing workshops are presented as book-ends within each unit. To support the implementation of the writing workshops, a separate DVD entitled Write Smart© provides student samples of writing and graphic organizers that can be interactive. Also, rubrics can be generated based on 6-Traits©, an assessment system in place in our district. Additionally, audio of text is available.

Students each have an individual Class Zone account at <http://www.classzone.com/>. All grade level textbooks will be online in the summer with audio support. Seventh and ninth grade students can currently access their textbooks on line. All students can explore the website and find references for MLA formatting, SAT/ACT preparation, and graphic organizers to support writing in twenty different genres.

Essential questions front-load each unit and selection to promote discussions among students. For example, the question “What impact will you have on the world?” is presented to students prior to reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*. “Can you be alone and not lonely?” is a question posed to seventh graders prior to reading poetry on a related theme.



Resources for Student Conferences

*available for loan
from the literacy department*

The opportunity to celebrate each student’s greatest success and identify their best growth opportunity explains why conferencing is “the essential act” in workshop teaching according to Katie Wood Ray the author of *The Writing Workshop: Working Through the Hard Parts (And They’re All Hard Parts)*. The time during a conference allows both the teacher and the student to discover where a child is and where the child is going next providing a strategy to fulfill our district motto: “Every student, every day, some success, some way.” Ms. Ray supports the flexible opportunities a conference can generate. She speaks to the richness of student talk when conferences are launched with open-ended invitations such as, “Tell me about how your writing is going.” This responsive stance is what helps a teacher guide each student to the next level.

Beginning with a similarly open disposition, Debbie Miller shares her experiences with reading conferences in *The Joy of Conferencing*, a DVD published in 2005. While the books *Happy Reading* (2003) and *Reading with Meaning* (2002), also by Debbie Miller, provide the nuts and bolts of supporting young readers in their journey of comprehending text, the video allows you the opportunity to sit beside Ms. Miller as you hear her words, watch her facial expressions, and view her classroom in action.

Wondering if boys could use special support in particular ways? Two authors have presented perspectives on this topic. They include Ralph Fletcher and Max Brand. In his book, *Boy Writers: Reclaiming Their Voices* (2006), Ralph Fletcher records that by giving very specific feedback and increasing wait time, boys will feel especially heard. Max Brand echoes the need for supporting boys with wait time and suggests balancing talk time to encourage greater student ownership of goals. *Conferencing with Boys* (2006) is a video presentation showing Max Brand conducting conferences with boys and his reflective commentaries. Many suggestions are transportable to help all students.





Measuring What Matters

The Middle School Report Card Committee is working to recommend a standards-based report card to pilot for the 2008-2009 school year. This work is a logical evolution to grow the new report card launched by the elementary schools last year.

Leaders from the report card committee convened teachers from each of the core disciplines to identify essential understandings across content areas to provide better information to students and families. These meetings provided teachers with time to reflect on critical questions such as, “What is essential for every student to learn in my core area?” and “How is this information best communicated to parents and students?” As teachers dialogued, they came to shared understandings across grade level and across buildings. Consulting with other districts and expert sources such as NCTE, NCTM, and the SMART Consortium helped to support the conversation. Additionally, collaborations across schools and grade levels helps provide improved horizontal and vertical alignment of course content.

Technology support is being explored to help make the task of reporting easier.

2nd Annual Poetry Gala

Remember the excitement in the air last May 31st at the district-wide *Poetry Gala*? Well, here are the details around this year’s event. The *2nd Annual Poetry Gala* will occur on Thursday, May 29th at Wiley Middle School from 7:00 p.m. until 8:30 p.m.

Each school will be represented by a student who will perform an original or published memorized poem. Individual schools will determine their own selection process. Many schools held mini try-outs to choose a single representative. The Cleveland Heights-University Heights Literacy Website has multiple resources to support you. For example, there is an advertisement starring high school students promoting participation in the event. The address for the link is: <http://resources.chuh.org/Literacy/video/main.lasso>. There are also a variety of poetry and performance rubrics to describe the qualities of excellent oral presentation posted at <http://resources.chuh.org/Literacy/main.lasso>. Additional supportive resources can be acquired by consulting with district literacy coaches. Lessons to prepare students for practiced performance poetry can be found at www.poetryteachers.com.

After the school has identified a participant, please send the student’s name, grade level, a copy of the poem, and a permission slip to Dulcie Devitt at Taylor by April 17th. The selected student from each school should be prepared to present a self-introduction, and briefly explain why he or she chose the published poem that will be performed, or what inspired them to create the poem.



Questioning to Increase Thinking

Asking questions that require higher order thinking skills can be the key to developing deeper understanding of any topic. There are many opportunities to ask questions during the course of a lesson. Each question presents an opportunity to push thinking beyond the literal level and into levels that include analyzing, synthesizing, inferring, and speculating.

Asking a variety of questions throughout the course of every lesson can keep engagement high and encourage discussion among all participants. Helping students formulate and ask their own questions before, during, and after reading can lead to improved comprehension.

Consider how the strategies below can stretch thinking to new levels.

Strategy	Description	Teachers ask questions	Students ask questions
Entrance Slip	A focus question is posed to students before the lesson. Teacher uses responses to informally assess prior knowledge.	X	
Exit Slip	A focus question is posed to students after the lesson to assess understanding.	X	
Question – Answer Relationship (QAR)	Grouping questions by the location of their answers. There are four categories: right there, think and search, author and you, on your own.	X	X
Question the Author (QtA)	Students are taught to pose queries of the author of the text.		X
Cornell Note-taking	After taking notes, questions that can be answered using the notes are recorded.	X	X
Essential Question	A curriculum-based question that that guides learning through problem solving and decision making.	X	

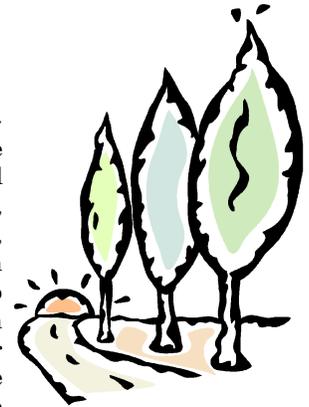
TITLE I GRADUATE— Celebrating Success

The goal of any intervention program is to reach a point where supplementary support is no longer necessary. Jerome, a second grader at Boulevard Elementary School, has reached that goal. After months of hard work, a proud Jerome was “glowing” at his graduation party according to his teacher, Ms. Kerzner.



The Journey to Becoming a Reader

Kindergarten children beginning their journey to independent reading are assisted by teachers who carefully analyze the data they have on each student. First of all, each examines the most recent running records for children. They ask questions such as, do they really understand one to one matching and where words start and end? In testing students on the M&M book, Pets, some children read the text, “This is is a dog.” instead of “This is a dog.” When questioned, the children explained that they were looking at the “is” part of the word “this”. The tester than asked, “Did that make sense?” The children admitted that it didn’t and they were encouraged to go back and fix their reading whenever it does not make sense. In these cases, more work on careful one to one matching may also be needed. In the same text, students read “rabbit” for “bunny” or said “bunny rabbit” for “bunny.” The first is a case of not crosschecking the picture and the beginning sound of the word. The second example is not monitoring using one to one matching. Looking at the errors our students make helps us to plan our next teaching points for each child. This helps us support that child with the necessary prompts to build his/her self-sufficiency.



Next the work focuses on accelerating progress. In small group, try introducing the book with a main idea statement and then help the children do a picture walk but don't supply them with every word or read the book to them. Use the first reading as detective work to practice with them how to figure out a new text, using think-alouds with the students as they work to read for the exact message. Assume a coaching role during this process.

During the following days, begin with rereading this book and one familiar book from a previous week. The students should gradually be able to read these books with less help and support from you and more fluency and confidence. Next in the lesson, introduce a new book at the same level from the leveled bookroom to do the same kind of reading detective work. This will foster in the children independence in mastering the beginning reading strategies of: one to one matching, monitoring known words, monitoring unknown words using initial sounds, and directionality on three lines or more of print. This will also reinforce for them the importance of crosschecking the picture and the letter sounds to confirm for themselves that they are correctly reading the exact message.

Another great activity for building strategies and accelerating reading progress is the cut-up sentence. In small group have the children create a main idea sentence based on the new book. Then cut up this sentence by phrases, words, or phonic chunks depending on what the children need. (Warning: Don't overdo the cutting of words into chunks!) Have them, as a group, work to put the sentence back together. The next day reproduce a copy of this sentence cut up for each child. This is great for seatwork, homework or a center activity.

Using Visualization to Learn

A group of kindergarten students were having a difficult time learning to identify their upper and lower case letters. They also had trouble remembering the sight words introduced.

The teachers and interventionists discussed the problem and decided these learners needed to concentrate on having just one key word and picture for each letter and they needed more frequent reinforcement. It seemed that having several words tied to a letter created confusion.

They began to daily review the alphabet chart given in the *Treasures* series with the children. This was done in large and small group. The students

also played games with the letters using the alphabet chart. The alphabet chart, alphabet book and games were also sent home for further reinforcement. In their Writer's Workshop folders, each student had a copy of the alphabet chart to help them with hearing sounds in words.

In learning new words, these students had to be taught to picture a word in their heads. Their teachers lead them through a visualization exercise. The children were shown three apples: red, green and yellow. They were then asked to close their eyes and picture their favorite apple. The students then reported what color of apple

they pictured. Next they were asked to close their eyes again and change the color of the apple. Again they reported what they saw.

The children were then shown a sight word using magnetic letters. They said the word and spelled it. The students were asked to close their eyes, picture the word, spell it and say it. Each student was then given the letters for that word to mix up, put back together, and then say and spell the word. After they successfully did this several times, they were asked to write the word from memory on a chalkboard or whiteboard. The students repeated this activity daily until they easily could read and write the word.

Cornell Notes at a Glance

Topic: _____	Name: _____	Date: _____
	Class: _____	Period: _____
QUESTIONS/ MAIN IDEAS Step 2: Reduce After class, reduce your notes to single words or short phrases. • Questions your notes answer • Vocabulary • Main Ideas • Connections • Reminders for Test	NOTES Step 1: Record During the class lecture or reading, write as many meaningful facts and ideas as you can in this space.	
SUMMARY: After completing notes, write a brief summary of the key facts and ideas.		
Step 3: Recite Cover the notes column with a sheet of paper. Recite your notes in your own words using the words and phrases in the left column as cues.		
Step 4: Reflect Reflect by asking yourself questions—Why is this important? How can I apply this? How does this fit in with what I already know?		
Step 5: Review Review your previous notes every week.		

Suggestions for class use:

- Provide students with a template that contains a partial outline of the information that will be presented. This helps students to focus on important information. Also, students can then conceptualize the organization of the lesson.
- Present content in increments of 10 minutes or less. After each 10 minute “chunk” of time, allow time for students to debrief and build on content presented previously.
- Post examples of completed Cornell Notes for student reference.
- Allow students to compare notes with a partner. Discuss and share commonalities and differences.
- Have students talk about what they wrote and why. Listen for what students understand. Also listen for misconceptions, gaps in their learning, and missed information so that clarifications can be made.
- Provide opportunities for students to add to notes following suggestions by teacher and other students.
- Use the students’ notes to informally assess understanding and plan future lessons accordingly.

Peer Tutoring a Powerful Intervention

The community of Gearity Elementary has worked together to create a new program for peer tutoring throughout the school. It has been very successful in providing the first graders with tutoring support provided by fourth and fifth graders.

The older students intently trained for two weeks, learning how to tutor the fundamental areas of phoneme segmentation, blending, and sight word recognition. After the two weeks of training, the older students were eager to work with the first graders and the first graders

were thrilled to be working with their older peers. The program is generating excitement and many positive bonds among all of the students and teachers who are involved.

The fourth and fifth graders meet twice a week with the first grade classes during the remaining fifteen minutes of their lunch time. As the program continues, we are seeing a great deal of improvement in the first graders. They eagerly anticipate their individual time with the older students. The fourth and fifth graders have learned a lot about the im-

portance of being positive role models and working with others throughout their school community. We are putting to practice the belief that we are responsible for one another.

