



Balanced Literacy

A balanced approach to literacy instruction requires that balance exist among the various aspects of literacy instruction. Literacy instruction includes reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Our Balanced Literacy Program requires large blocks of time for students to read authentic texts, learn and practice word recognition and comprehension skills and strategies, build background knowledge and vocabulary, and express themselves through writing. Always, our emphasis is on helping students develop a lifelong love of reading and writing.

Balanced Literacy also requires a balance between the explicit teaching, demonstrating and modeling by the teacher and the independent application of skills and strategies by the students. This responsibility shifts gradually through the various components of Balanced Literacy.

The components of a Balanced Literacy Program include:

- * Interactive Read Aloud
- * Shared Reading
- * Guided Reading
- * Independent Reading
- * Phonics / Word Study/Spelling
- * Writing

During **Interactive Read Aloud**, the teacher has full responsibility for making the text accessible to the students. The text may be well above the level of difficulty that the students are able to read independently. The teacher models the reading process by reading a variety of texts to the whole class and the students listen, discuss, and respond to the text. This engaging activity allows students to observe a proficient reader as well as cultivate a love of reading.

Each student can see the text during **Shared Reading**. The teacher may use a Big Book, text on the overhead projector, a chart, or individual copies of the text. The text is interesting grade-level material. The level of text difficulty may be above the independent reading level of the students. The teacher continues to model strategies that good readers use but invites the students to share the task of reading. Shared Reading is done in whole group as well as small group settings.

Guided Reading is a time of small group instruction with the teacher that is tailored to the individual needs of the students. Text is at the students' "instructional" reading level; students are able to read the text with 90-94% accuracy and adequate comprehension. This means that for each 100 words a student reads, he/she can accurately decode approximately 90 to 94 of the

words and construct meaning from the text. This level of text offers an appropriate level of challenge without creating frustration for students when they are reading the whole text with the support of a teacher. During Guided Reading, the teacher monitors students' application of problem-solving strategies for word recognition, word analysis, and comprehension.

Independent Reading begins with a mini-lesson about some aspect of the reading process which students are then asked to apply to their reading. Texts are at the "independent" reading level; students are able to read the text with 95-100% accuracy and adequate comprehension. These "just right"* books are suitable for practicing strategies and developing fluency. Students read a variety of self-selected and teacher-recommended texts while the teacher confers with students or leads guided reading groups.

Phonics/Word Study/Spelling provides students with explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, word study, structural analysis and spelling. The ability to automatically recognize words used frequently in text as well as the ability to "attack" unknown words is essential to reading with fluency and comprehension. Written communication depends upon the ability to spell accurately in order to be understood.

Writing instruction follows the same gradual release of responsibility model. Teachers first model the writing process through whole class demonstrations and small group instruction. Students receive instruction and direct feedback through individual conferences and comments written by the teacher. Through this instruction, students learn to write a variety of texts, both fiction and nonfiction, for various purposes and audiences. Assignments are balanced between students' self-selected writing and focused assignments. Students write in all the subject areas.

Assessment is essential to the Balanced Literacy Program. The teacher is continuously assessing students and offering positive interaction and appropriate feedback. Instructional and grouping decisions are made based on the needs of students at that time. As student's progress and their learning needs change, the instruction and grouping practices change appropriately. The teacher uses assessment to guide future instruction. Some methods include: graphic organizers, journal entries, projects, rubrics, running records, conferencing, book talks, book reports, book logs, and checklists.

Suggestions for Choosing Books

- Author and series
- Favorite genre, hobbies, etc.
- Recommendations from teachers and friends
- Award winners
- Newspapers and magazines
- Try a type of book (genre) that you have never read before
- Reread a favorite!

**The "five finger" rule helps students find "just right" books. Students read a page of the text and hold up a finger for each word that they do not know. If they have five fingers up before they finish the page, that book is probably too hard for independent reading.*

Remember that reading should be fun and enjoyable. It is extremely important that we work together and encourage a love of reading and writing at home and at school.