

Balanced Literacy
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At Swift Creek Elementary, we use a balanced literacy approach to teaching language. Balanced Literacy is a flexible and responsive approach to teaching language designed and implemented to have all children reading and writing to their full potential. Balanced literacy is based upon current research and best practice. Balanced literacy focuses on skills and strategy acquisition. Balanced literacy addresses varying student needs and learning styles and includes the following essential components: word study, writing, guided reading and comprehension strategy instruction.

Word study is phonemic and phonological awareness skills taught through systematic, explicit instruction. Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with individual sounds in spoken words. When a child understands that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds, they are more able to “crack the code” of reading. Research shows that strong phonological awareness skills are the number one predictor of future reading success.

Writing is taught in a Writer’s Workshop format. In Writer’s Workshop, students learn to write daily through varied activities that expose students to the organization, mechanics and thought required to create and write about a familiar topic, whether it be a personal narrative piece, an imaginative story or learning to write about non-fiction topics learned in science and social studies. Writer’s Workshop includes story-planning, revising, editing, student-conferencing, publishing and direct instruction in the mechanics of grammar. Since writing and reading are reciprocal, students have an opportunity to practice and use their knowledge of letters and sounds as they write and read their own writing in Writer’s Workshop.

In Guided Reading, we provide a high level of support to small groups of students and focus more on the individual reading needs of each child. During guided reading, we work with students at their instructional level to guide them in using the context, visual, and structure cues within stories to generate meaning. Swift Creek has a large leveled book room full of instructional resources, so we use level texts that gradually increase in difficulty and students can apply strategies in context and feel successful! The end goal, as with any literacy component, is for students to become confident, proficient readers who love to read!

Reading strategy instruction focuses on comprehension. Children learn Before, During and After reading strategies like Connecting, Visualizing, Predicting, Inferring and Summarizing and read daily to practice these strategies independently with a variety of self-selected text. They learn about story elements of character, setting and plot, and learn how to organize and compare information learned from narrative and expository

text. A variety of whole group, small group, paired reading and individual formats are used.

A balanced literacy approach to teaching reading and writing is not complete without fluency and vocabulary instruction. Fluency is the ability to read text accurately and quickly. Fluency is important because it frees students up so they can understand what they are reading. Vocabulary refers to words students must know to communicate effectively. Readers must know what words mean before they can understand what they are reading. Vocabulary is developed indirectly when students engage in daily oral language, listen to adults read to them, and read extensively on their own. Vocabulary is developed directly by explicitly teaching students both individual words and word learning strategies.

We monitor students' reading and writing progress on an on-going basis using a variety of measurements including running records, writing samples and teacher created common assessments. We meet the needs of all students by providing intervention when a child needs more time to learn the essential outcomes, provide enrichment when a child has learned the essential outcomes and do whatever it takes to achieve our vision: Every child will learn and succeed!