

Letter to the Parents

Dear Parents,

You may have read in the news about the No Child Left Behind Act. The law sets standards for students and teachers and requires standardized tests to be given every year.

As teachers, we assess your child in writing throughout the school year. Good writing skills will help support your child in all academic subjects. Increasing your child's writing skills at this age helps to also increase his or her reading skills. Reading and writing are closely related, and increasing both will help your child in all academic areas.

By developing strong writing skills now, your child will be able to perform with experience and ease on state and district writing exams, and will be better prepared for the upper grades.

There are many ways you can support these goals in your own home. You might want to encourage your child to write in a journal or diary, send letters to grandparents or friends, and even write about a favorite TV show or video game. Not only does this provide a good opportunity for your child, but it sends an important message that you value these skills as well.

I look forward to working with you as a team to enhance the writing skills of your child.

Sincerely,

Technology Tips and Techniques

There are many resources available to add technology to your classroom writing lessons. Listed below are some technology resources to consider.

Computer and Printer

It goes without saying that most of the writing we do is done on the computer these days. Having a computer available in your classroom (or a computer lab) with a printer can be vital to a successful writing curriculum. Encourage students to use the computer as much as possible when they are completing their writing projects. Spend time teaching word-processing skills to make using the computer easier to use. Do not forget to teach your students how to use the spelling and grammar check on the computer as well. Keep in mind, of course, that most test taking is still done with paper and pencil, and computer use with all its special features may not be available in a testing scenario.

The Internet

The Internet opens up a whole new world of opportunities for writers, especially when writing essays. There are many resources available on the Internet that are not accessible in print. The Internet contains online dictionaries and thesauri to make researching topics easier. Two good websites include **www.dictionary.com** and **www.thesaurus.com**. Online encyclopedias can be a great resource as well. Be sure to get parental permission to allow your students to access the Internet. Most of your work at this level should be done as group instruction. Also, you must closely supervise any student who is online. To locate information on the World Wide Web, a search engine must be utilized.

CD-ROM Encyclopedia

Using CD-ROM encyclopedias such as *Microsoft Encarta* and *World Book* can also enrich your writing lessons. Once the program is loaded on your computer, it is easy to conduct a search by typing the name of the topic. Proper spelling is important. After pressing the ENTER key, a list of topics will appear. The student reads the list and decides which articles might be helpful. The student simply clicks on the correct topic and is taken directly to the point in the article where the information is located.

Lesson Ideas

There are many lessons you can use to help enhance the writing of your students. Use the following lesson suggestions as a supplement to your writing curriculum.

Generate a List

As a class or in small groups, generate a list of writing topics. This activity will enhance students' critical-thinking skills and prepare them for future writing topics. When the list is complete, have each student select one of the topics to write about.

Slips of Paper

Write at least 30 topics on slips of paper. Place all of the slips in a bowl. Have students work in small groups to write a paragraph on the topic selected. Allow time for discussion so that students can plan, prewrite, and prepare the paragraph appropriately.

Rubric Report

Distribute copies of a variety of essays along with the writing rubric on pages 19-20. Instruct students to work with a partner to critique the essays using the rubric. What score would the students give the essay? Discuss each essay's strengths and weaknesses.

Graphically Speaking

Distribute copies of graphic organizers. Provide students with an essay taken from a newspaper or magazine. Instruct students to use the graphic organizer to identify elements of the essay. Which graphic organizer is best suited for this writing selection?

Team Work

Divide your class into groups of four or five students. Assign each group an essay topic. Have each member of the group write a different part of the essay. Instruct the group to work together on the topic sentence before beginning the assigned essay segments.

Give Me Five!

The hand can be a visual representation of a traditional essay. The five digits on a hand represent the introduction/topic sentence, three supporting paragraphs, and conclusion. Have students read essays and hold up a finger as they locate and report on the five sections of the essays.

Sample Essay #3

Got a Lemon?

“If you have a lemon, make lemonade.”

That’s a quote by Howard Gossage that you may have heard. Do you have any idea what it means? Strangely enough, it doesn’t have anything to do with fruit! The “lemon” that the author refers to is anything that goes wrong in life. It could be losing a game, getting a poor grade on a test, or even just getting stuck in a traffic jam. The author says that we should take our bad experiences and try to “squeeze” something good out of them. Maybe by losing a game you might learn a new strategy from your opponent that makes you a better player. Maybe the poor grade on your test encourages you to study harder. And maybe getting stuck in traffic gives you time to talk to your mom or dad about something that’s been bothering you. It’s all a matter of taking something bad and making sure that something good comes out of it.

Question:

Can you think of a time when you took a “lemon” and turned it into “lemonade?”

Directions:

Think of some bad things that have happened to you. Were there any times when you took a bad experience and turned it into something good? If not, can you think of something you could have done that would have turned that bad experience into a good one? Do you think it’s a good idea to try to turn life’s “lemons” into “lemonade”?

Got a Lemon?

I think it is a good idea to turn life’s “lemons” into “lemonade” because any problem can be turned into a positive situation if you try hard enough. Right after school got out for the summer, I found out that my friend was moving to California. I was so sad, and I felt there would never be another good friend like Kevin for me.

For several days his house remained empty, and I was sure that there would never be another friend in the neighborhood for me. One morning I woke up to a loud truck in the front yard. The new neighbors were moving in. I wasn’t sure I even wanted to go out.

When I finally went next door, I saw another boy my age. He walked over and we began to talk. He had a baseball card collection like I did, and we both liked the Red Sox. Before the day was over, we were making big plans for the summer. It was sad that Kevin had moved, but over time J.R. and I became the best of friends. I had taken Kevin’s move as a “lemon” and made it into “lemonade” by meeting J.R. and making a new friend.

Dream On

Do you ever wonder what your dreams mean? If so, you are not alone. People have been trying to understand the truth about dreams for centuries. Dreams are basically pictures and stories our brains create when we're asleep. Most dreams happen when we are in a deep sleep. During this phase, our eyes move around quickly under our eyelids. It's called Rapid Eye Movement, or REM. Even though this may sound strange, it is perfectly normal. Experts say dreams can occur any time we are asleep. But the most memorable dreams probably occur during REM.

Researchers aren't sure why we dream. Some say dreams are a way for us to solve problems in our lives. Others say they are a way for us to process all the events and feelings of the day. Some believe dreams don't really serve any purpose and are just our brains "twitching."

Question:

What is the most memorable dream you have ever had?



Directions:

Write about the most memorable dream you have had. Describe everything you remember about it. Have you had that same dream more than once? What do you think it means?

Eating Healthy

Are you hungry? Experts say that over half of the advertising during kids' TV shows on Saturday morning are food commercials. Almost all of those ads are for sugary cereals, candy, cookies, and fast food. Many people think all of these ads are partly to blame for kids being overweight today. Some experts even want to see limits on TV commercials for unhealthy foods.

Many food companies are working to make their products better for us, and restaurants are adding healthier items to their menus. But there are still many unhealthy choices out there. It is up to each one of us to make smart decisions when we reach for something to eat.



Question:

How would you get kids to eat more fruits and vegetables?



Directions:

Write a television commercial to get kids to eat more fruits and vegetables. Who would you have talking? A kid? An adult? A cartoon? Write a script for the commercial to try to get kids to eat healthier foods.

Inventions

Invention and technology affect every part of our lives. Imagine not having the alarm clock that wakes you up in the morning or the microwave that heats your meals. Think about what life would be like if you didn't have a computer or video games. What if your parents didn't have a washing machine to keep your clothes clean? Without inventors, we wouldn't have cars, airplanes, telephones, or cameras. Things that many of us use every day, like cell phones and DVD players, did not even exist when your parents or grandparents were young. Inventors are always working on the next big thing. That's why we always know there is some exciting new invention around the corner!



Question:

What is one invention that has changed your life?



Directions:

Think about new gadgets or technology that has changed your life. Choose one and explain how it affects how you do things. Does it make your life easier? Or do you like things better the way they were before? Give reasons why you think this way.