

# Delaware Township School District Language Arts Literacy Curriculum Guide

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# Language Arts Literacy Curriculum Committee Members

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# **Delaware Township School**

## **Language Arts Literacy Curriculum**

### **Statement of Philosophy**

#### **April, 2007**

The Delaware Township School District is committed to the development of a literacy curriculum that builds meaning through the connection and expansion of concepts using purposeful, authentic and integrated experiences. The curriculum is founded on the use of best practices, striking a balance between whole class, small group, and student or teacher led approaches to learning. Our curriculum allows students to engage in developmentally appropriate reading, writing, listening, viewing, speaking and media literacy opportunities within individual and social contexts. The goal of literacy instruction is to maximize student potential, develop a confidence in one's own abilities to communicate effectively, and to foster a lifelong appreciation of literacy.

## **A Balanced Literacy Program**

Delaware Township School has developed a program of literacy study which incorporates research based best practices in a balanced literacy environment. By “balanced” the term refers to a program of literacy instruction and a classroom environment within which is utilized multiple and varied opportunities for an enriched literacy experience. The following instructional strategies will be included in each literacy program at all grade levels in Delaware Township School to support a balanced literacy instructional program:

1. Read alouds
2. Shared reading
3. Guided reading
4. Independent reading
5. Shared writing
6. Interactive writing
7. Guided writing or writer’s workshop
8. Independent writing

### **Reading**

**Read Aloud** – During Read Alouds, students listen to big books, short stories, poetry or chapters from novels while the teacher models reading. Through this, they build an appreciation of the literature being read while developing or furthering a concept for reading fluency. They are also given the opportunity to discuss and reflect on what is read. Reading aloud is a worthwhile use of instructional time and is a regular practice at all grade levels in Delaware Township School. The SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) block of time may also be used for Read Aloud.

Students should have opportunities to read aloud, as well. When reading aloud, they should only read text at their independent level. Instructional activities that incorporate read alouds for students may include:

- **Reader’s Theater** – Students assume parts or roles and act out a story they have read.
- **Classroom discussion** (Book Talk) – Students read aloud selections from text in order to support their interpretation of the story. Constructive criticism techniques and appropriate feedback skills are important areas of focus when conducting book talks in order for them to be meaningful to the reader and the listener.

- **Choral Reading or Chanting** – In small groups, students read selected pieces of text aloud and in unison. This is a strong fluency building strategy.

Reading aloud is a strategy that can be used to assist in the understanding of difficult text. Students should learn that hearing the selection of text through their “outer ear” will often help them with their comprehension. This type of read aloud can be done with a “six inch voice” or a “voice no bigger than your nose” (audible only to one’s self) so that it can be included in classroom practice easily.

**Shared Reading** – In shared reading students read various types of text with teacher support and guidance. After, they have the opportunity to discuss their interpretations. This discussion often involves rereading of selected sections of the text to deepen understanding. Shared reading activities foster independent reading skills.

Shared Reading is a time for direct or explicit instruction and includes phonics, decoding and comprehension strategies. Instructional activities may include:

- **Literature Circles** – Students will meet in small groups on a regular basis to discuss books they have read in common. Often, students will be able to select the books they will read for the circles. Literature Circles foster reading comprehension and develop critical thinking. These groups encourage an in-depth analysis of text through intensive reading and discussion as compared to reading mainly for pleasure and enjoyment. This can be done through the choice of certain concepts or skills on which to focus. Choices can include but are not limited to genre, elements of a story (plot, characters, theme), literary devices (description, persuasion, humor), and vocabulary.
- **Genre Studies** – All students read one or more selections of the same genre. Groups of students who have read the same selection meet to discuss their interpretations of the selection. As a class, all students discuss the common elements of that genre and the variations in each individual selection.
- **Author Studies** – All students read one or more selections by the same author. Groups of students who have read the same selection meet to discuss their interpretations of the selection. As a class, all students discuss the similarities and differences of the types of literature by that author.
- **Theme Studies** – All students read one or more selections that focus on the same theme. The teacher incorporates various ways to respond to literature into the discussion of the text.
- **Big Book Sharing** – Using an enlarged text that all children can see, the teachers involves students in reading together, following a pointer. The process includes reading big books, poems, and songs; rereading and retelling; rereading alternative texts; and rereading the products of interactive writing.

- **Whole Class Text** - At times, the entire class reads the same short story, poem, or novel so all students in the class can experience and discuss the same piece together. Careful consideration for the type of text to select is needed. This strategy is only effective when all students are reading at their independent level. Students who are not able to read the text fluently will not be able to fully participate in the discussion. This strategy works best with brief selections of text such as short stories, poems and selections of expository text.

**General Classroom Differentiation** – Many of the approaches above differentiate simply by their structure. However it is sometimes necessary to differentiate further. Some students will benefit from support while they are reading. This support includes books on tape, buddy reading, and individualized guided questions. Other students will be able to participate in shared reading activities while completing additional work at the same time. This might mean reading two or more selections of text, completing additional literature activities or working on an independent project.

Teachers at Delaware Township School will utilize these strategies for reading instruction which differentiate by structure and will incorporate those necessary differentiated experiences that will allow all students to succeed in the classroom.

**Guided Reading** – In guided reading, the teacher works with a small group of four to six students who have similar reading skills. The teacher selects and introduces new books and supports the children while reading the text. She/he makes teaching points before, during and after reading. During this strategy, the students are reading text on their instructional level.

In Guided Reading/Readers' Workshop, students learn:

- Phonics
- Language structure
- Meaning cues
- Comprehension skills/strategies
- New vocabulary for speaking, reading, writing, and spelling
- Reading strategies
- And problem solving while reading for meaning

Guided Reading includes the use of various assessments that help to determine the specific areas of instruction for students as well as which students will be grouped together. These assessments include:

- running records
- oral and written retellings

- benchmark books from a leveled library
- teacher observation
- book tests
- teacher/student conferences

Students will have the opportunity to practice these strategies during the reading of the carefully selected text. This is a critical part of the Guided Reading lesson. Instructional activities include but are not limited to:

- **Readers' Workshop** – The teacher works with a small group of students on a particular skill. During the workshop the students define the skills, identify its use as a reading strategy, and practice the skill while reading selected pieces of text. The students leave the workshop with a “reminder” (card, checklist, bookmark, etc.) so that they will remember to use the strategy as they read and encounter difficult word or section of text.
- **Learning Stations/Centers** – Students select or are guided to a specific learning station/center. Activities in the stations are designed to differentiate instruction.
- **Phonemic awareness, Phonics** and decoding are best taught in a Readers' Workshop setting; although Kindergarten and first grade teachers will also include explicit whole class instruction for these skills. Phonemic awareness, phonics and decoding instruction will be a component of each K-3 teachers' literacy program. All teachers in grades 4-8 will provide continued decoding instruction as needed.
- **Thinking Aloud** is a technique in which teachers orally demonstrate thinking about reading behavior. In order to show some students what a proficient reader does, teachers comment aloud about some aspect of their reading. Teachers verbalize the thinking used before, during and after reading.
- **Reading Conferences, Book Talks, Literature Circles** – These can provide an opportunity for students and teachers to discuss the ideas they encounter in reading and to construct meaning from an author's work. Students discuss what they read in small groups, with a partner, or with the teacher. Reading conferences can be conducted with a group of children who have read the same text or different ones. The purpose of the discussion will determine the composition of the group. Discussion groups often begin by discussing the same book, should grow to include books with similar elements such as theme, and finally incorporate books by the same author for higher level discussions on style, purpose and use of literary devices.

Guided Reading is one of the best examples of differentiating instruction. In grades K, 1 and 2 whole class and small group reading lessons should be conducted by the teacher daily (especially for weaker students) to explicitly teach reading skills. Guided reading can be extended beyond second grade, but emphasis on more complex reading skills is more appropriate for older students.

In Addition, intervention instruction does not replace regular classroom reading instruction. The classroom teacher is expected to provide regular reading skills instruction in class to all students. Intervention services are in addition to services provided by the classroom teacher.

**Independent Reading** – In independent reading, students read alone or with a partner. Reading can be from a collection of leveled texts, but it is important that the text be at the student’s independent level. Through this, they apply reading strategies independently.

***The ability to read independently is the ultimate goal of all reading instruction.***

Students will be given time daily for this at all grade levels in SSR. When reading for content, students should be reading at their independent level. It is important to select text in areas such as science and social studies which are at the students’ independent level if the goal of reading at that time is to absorb the content and not to teach the skills of reading itself.

*Independent reading implies choice.* The students should be able to select or be guided to select texts that they will be able to read fluently. The “Five Finger Rule” is a good strategy to use when selecting books to read. With this strategy a student selects a book of interest and opens it to a page in the middle of the book. The student begins to read the page silently, holding up a finger on one hand each time he or she encounters an unknown word. If the student has five fingers raised prior to completion of the page, the book is too difficult. While this is not reliable as a readability test, it is global indicator and a decision making tool used easily by students when self-selecting texts.

Instructional strategies for independent reading include:

- **SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) or DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) Time** – With this, time is provided daily for students to read quietly and independently. Afterwards, students may discuss or share their reading with each other. Research has shown that reading ability is positively correlated with the extent to which students read independently. In addition academic success in later school years is positively impacted when students engage in independent and self-choice reading activities throughout their schooling.
- **Responding to Literature** – The teacher prepares a variety of activities and each student selects one or more as a response to his or her selected book. Students need opportunities to respond to their reading using a variety of modalities including oral and written responses, as well as kinesthetic and creative ones.
- **Rereading** – Students have the opportunity to reread familiar text which has been introduced during guided and shared reading. Rereading is an effective comprehension strategy for more difficult text.

Independent Reading is a good example of differentiated reading instruction when students are allowed to choose from a wide range of materials. As a result, students are encouraged to select from all genres, all media forms and varied reading levels.

### **Word Study**

**Grammar** - Students learn the rules of grammar, usage, and mechanics (such as punctuation and capitalization) as they develop their writing abilities. They apply these skills while writing and during the editing and revision stages. Students learn this best through authentic writing experiences, using their own works and the works of other students. Students should be developing strategies for editing and revising their own work.

**Spelling** – The Delaware Township School is using the Rebecca Sitton spelling program in grades two through five. Students learn spelling rules and patterns through this word study program. They learn new vocabulary as well as conventional spelling. Informal spelling assessments will consist of written cloze activities and auditory dictations. Students generate individualized lists for study from which formal written assessments will be made. This research based program allows for whole class instruction, individualized instruction, and imbedded practice of spelling skills.

All students should understand that spelling counts and they need to develop strategies to identify and correct their own errors. By the end of sixth grade students should have strategies in place and be able to correct their own spelling mistakes.

**Handwriting** – Learning the correct way to form letters in manuscript begins in kindergarten and continues through the primary grades. Students should be able to produce efficient, legible manuscripts by the end of the primary grades. Formal instruction in cursive begins in grade three and continues in grade four. Students should be able to produce legible cursive writing by the end of grade four.

All teachers from grades three on should write in cursive as often as possible and whenever appropriate so that students become comfortable reading cursive as well as writing it.

### **Writing**

Students will engage in purposeful writing daily. Assessments may be formal or informal, and should enlighten teachers and students about the progress and instructional needs of each child. Frequent teacher modeling and the use of concrete examples are essential components of writing instruction. Each year, students will be exposed to a variety of writing genres, authors and literary devices. Teachers will use the same writing terminology to minimize confusion from grade level to grade level.

## Writing Process

Students need instruction at all stages of the writing process. However, not all steps need to be followed for every writing piece. The following list of terms and definitions will be used at Delaware Township School when discussing the writing process in class:

- **Pre-write** – In this first step of the writing process, the author devises ideas for writing from the general topic to the string of events or details which will be included in the piece. Pre-write may take many forms and can often happen well before a piece is formally written. Possibilities for pre-write include: lists, webs, pictures, outlines, note-taking, brainstorming, discussion, or any graphic organizer
- **Draft** – In this step of the process, the author begins writing. The objective is to get the written piece on paper holistically and not to over-concentrate on the mechanical aspects. This part of the process should focus on the development of content.
- **Revise** – In this part of the process, the author looks at content, organization, fluency and impact. The author will manipulate content and its organization to affect the holistic as well as specific impact and fluency of a piece.
- **Edit** – In the editing phase of the process, details such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and other mechanics and writing conventions are corrected.
- **Final Copy** – The final copy is the product of revision and editing . This is the point at which the teacher may want to assess the piece. There may still be errors in this level of the writing.
- **Published Copy** – The published copy is the completed piece presented to an audience in a specific format for that audience. This is an error free copy, having been edited by the teacher.
- **Conferencing** – Peer and teacher conferences may occur at any point in the writing process. Conferencing is encouraged because it is at this level that dialogue happens about the craft of writing and teaching can be individualized for each student. Ideally, as students grow with the writing process over the years, they will be able to determine when they need a conference to assist them in their own writing process.

## Writing Workshop

The use of conferencing and talking about one's own and others' writing throughout the writing process is known as the writing workshop format. This format allows for many opportunities for differentiation. Student choice in writing topics during workshop allows them to become more deeply involved in their writing and furthers this differentiation. Teachers can and should direct genre writing and the use of literary devices for the development of the craft of writing, but the topics should remain the choice of students. This allows for differentiation and also provides an authenticity to the writing process. Teacher conferencing with individual students further allows for individualization focused on student skills and needs.

A teacher can and should conduct mini-lessons as part of the writing workshop. These lessons can center on many aspects of writing. Teachers can teach isolated steps in the writing process or about the workshop format itself. Mini-lessons may include specifics on mechanics or literary devices or the study of others' works of writing. Regardless of the content of the mini-lesson, there are several structures that can be used to deliver such a lesson. They include shared, interactive, guided and independent writing. Shared, interactive, guided and independent writing run parallel to shared, interactive, guided, and independent reading and can be done alone, or in small and large groups.

**Shared writing** - In shared writing, the teacher does most of the work. She "holds the pen" in this case. She helps the students to determine what they want to say and then writes it for them either on a whiteboard, chart, or book. During shared writing, the teacher takes opportunities for teaching about the process and conventions of writing.

**Interactive writing** – Interactive writing is a cooperative event in which teacher and students jointly compose the text. The teacher and the students "share the pen" when engaged in interactive writing. The students will scribe some of the text. The teacher models reading and writing strategies as she composes the text. The teacher serves as the facilitator of the discussion that occurs about writing while the writing is taking place.

**Guided writing** - Here the students are doing a lot of the work and have far more control, the teacher being there to guide and help. In one to one situations the student is writing. In group situations the teacher can record for the students what they say or the teacher can dictate the text for them to write into their books while they are in a group. As above the teacher steps in where appropriate for teaching points and to help students solve problems.

**Independent writing** – In independent writing, students have the responsibility for writing completely. They write by themselves and the teacher acts as the editor to check their work.

Note that each of the approaches above represent an increasing amount of responsibility on the student as the author. This is the essence of all teaching practices which are considered "best practices."

### **Rubric Scoring**

Assessment criteria may be geared to the various ability levels and rubrics can be customized for specific assignments. However, the state holistic rubric will be used primarily as the scoring tool in grades three to eight for writing pieces. Students should be taught the use of the rubric and shown anchor papers depicting a typical paper at each of the scoring levels.

## **Genre Characteristics**

Students at Delaware Township School will be exposed to a variety of genres each school year in their writing. These genres include:

### **Descriptive writing**

Description is writing that creates a vivid picture for readers, draws readers into a scene, and makes readers feel as if they are meeting a character or experiencing an event firsthand. This writing evokes the five senses and words choice includes strong verbs and powerful adjective.

### **Expository writing**

Exposition to give information is writing that informs or explains. In this type of writing, factual information is included to clarify or explain a topic. "How-To" essays and summaries are good examples of this type of expository writing. Exposition can also make connections for readers by comparing and contrasting two subjects, by examining a problem and its solution, or by connecting information to an opinion. Persuasive essays and comparison-contrast essays are examples of this.

### **Narrative writing**

While there are many types of narratives, most narratives share certain elements – characters, a setting and a sequence of events (or plot, in fiction), and often a theme. Personal narratives and personal memoirs are examples of this type of writing.

### **Report writing**

A report is any writing based on outside research. Reports are written to present information and ideas, to share findings and research, and to explain subjects studied. Biographical reports and book reports are examples of this genre.

### **Expressive writing**

Expression is any writing that conveys one's personal thoughts, feelings, or experiences. Some expressive writing is private, such as journal entries. Some is written to be shared with an audience. Letter writing and journal writing are examples of this type of writing.

## Creative Writing

Creative writing blends imagination, experience, ideas and emotion. It allows the presentation of ones' own unique view of the world. Poems, plays, short stories and dramas are all examples of creative writing. Responding to a picture prompt can also be a form of creative writing.

## Portfolios

Portfolios demonstrate growth in writing and are valuable assessment tools for students and teachers. Writing portfolios will be shared with parents at conferences each year and will be sent home with students upon graduating in eighth grade.

- **Content of Portfolio**- Portfolios will consist of a September writing sample, a May writing sample, and a best works piece each year. Portfolios will be a simple pocket folder.
- **Structure of Sample** - Writing samples should be timed. Kindergarten through fourth grade will use a 20 minute length of time, and grade five through eight will use 40 minutes.
- **Topic of Samples** – The same topic will be used as a pre and post assessment in September and May. Teachers will determine the topic early in September each year. Teachers do not teach about the topic. They simply give it to the students who “do their best writing.”
- **Scoring** - Writing samples will be assessed holistically, using the state holistic rubric. Rubrics will be scored blindly, by number. Teachers must indicate the score given at the top of the piece.
- **Storage** - Portfolios will be stored in boxes provided. Portfolio boxes will be stored in classrooms and passed to the next grade on the first day of school.
- **Best Works Piece** - Each year students and teachers will select a best works piece for inclusion in the portfolio. Any paper generated as the piece went through the writing process should also be included. The original copy may be given to the student with a copy placed in the portfolio. Best works pieces should contain a date and grade level.