



What is a writer's workshop?

September 2016

We are very excited to be able to share our new writing curriculum with K-6 Solon students, beginning in the 2016-17 school year. This new set of materials adheres to the Iowa Core State Standards, and is based on 35 years of research and development made by the Teachers College at Columbia University, and spearheaded by Lucy Calkins. Using the foundations of the curriculum, students will see that writing is a craft, and they will enjoy learning how to become better writers through hard work and practice. Writing will happen every day, and students will write in a variety of ways that touch on several different genres. Students will have flexibility to choose to write about what matters to them, within the guidelines of the specific genre of study.

What makes the materials and the workshop approach stand out?

1. The Writing Units of Study require students to go beyond the grade level standards.
2. The workshop is a model framework that best aligns with our reading framework.
3. The workshop model allows a lot of choice for students in selecting topics, which provides great motivation.
4. The Writing Units of Study foster high-level thinking, including regular chances to synthesize, analyze and critique.

What does Writing Workshop look like in the classroom?

Writing Workshop begins with a mini-lesson that teaches a new strategy. The teacher may begin with a sample of her own writing or a sample of someone else's writing, a specific to the unit or genre being studied or with a shared writing piece that the class is working on together. Helpful charts will be on display in the classroom. These charts are visual reminders that reinforce writing strategies; they may help with dialogue, structure, elaboration, or conventions.

Ideas are generated and students practice telling their story to a partner. Nurturing and growing the seed idea comes next through rehearsal: students are encouraged to re-read their entry and think about the big, important events in this moment, what they were thinking/feeling at each point, how did they change as the story unfolds. Students then learn to make and implement a writing plan.

What is some of the common language teachers and students may be using with this approach and these materials?

Storytelling: Writing in the air; it is important to teach the difference between storytelling and reporting.

Fancy it up: Adding details and elaborating.

Small Moment: Students learn to take the everyday events of their lives and stretch them into focused, well-structured stories.

Seed Idea: To create a really good story, it helps to think of a smaller subject, or seed, within the big watermelon topic.

Play a Movie in your Mind: Students can make a movie in their mind to support what is happening in the story they are reading or writing. This helps students visualize the events in the story, enhances comprehension while reading and

Show Don't Tell: Imagery is language that paints a vivid picture in the mind of the reader.

Long and Strong: Developing stamina increases student output on tests. There have been reports that high SAT scores are directly related to the length of the piece. Writing gibberish isn't going to make a good piece, but learning how to write long AND strong is important for kids to know how to do.

Heart of the Story: Students are taught to find the "heart of the story" and stretch it out to an event-by-event sequence.