

Readers Workshop

Frequently Asked Questions

How does Readers Workshop prepare my child for Satz?

The English teachers at Satz will become familiar with the district literacy curriculum through department meetings and discussion. The comprehension skills and strategies taught in grades K-6 are precisely those that Satz teachers will expect students to be well versed in. Learning how to comprehend text on a deeper level is the major cornerstone of Readers Workshop and a vital skill in middle, high school and beyond.

One example is the introduction of the Fantasy genre unit in grade 6. This genre has a much more complex plot structure, multiple characters, settings, and themes than narrative genres studied in earlier grades. By becoming more fluent in the language of this complexity and by improving comprehension skills, the students are being prepared for the types of complex narratives they will study in Satz, such as *The Outsiders* and *Stargirl*. They will also be familiar with the group discussion and thematic analysis practiced at Satz, through whole class novel studies using the book club format in the spring of grade 6.

How do you insure cohesiveness and uniformity among teachers?

All literacy teachers are in year 2 of Teachers College training. We have also brought on board a literacy coach who works with each grade level on planning and assessment. The coach also presents model lessons in the classrooms and works with teachers to implement the framework effectively.

Are teachers being effectively trained in Readers Workshop?

We have been discussing, training and piloting Readers Workshop for the last three years. In-house workshops and planning sessions have been held during that time. A number of teachers have also attended the Teachers College Summer Institutes. Furthermore, for the past two years, a Teachers College trainer has come to Indian Hill to model for and train the literacy staff. These sessions take place, on average, once per month and are approximately two hours in length. Our trainer models the lesson in a classroom while teachers observe and take notes. A

debriefing session follows during which time open discussion and Q & A help the teachers plan for their own future lessons as a team.

What are some additional concerns regarding Readers Workshop?

Change can be challenging. It can be difficult to stop using familiar methods and embrace a paradigm shift in thinking and instruction. However, since our district goal has been differentiation of instruction for almost six years, we worked hard to find a method of literacy instruction that, by its very nature, embodied differentiation. Readers Workshop fulfills that need on every level. Through it, we are able to focus our instruction, support and assistance on precisely what each student needs for success. This does require a new and different type of planning and delivery of lessons, but we feel confident that with the training, support, and time they are given, any reluctance will fade away.

Are there any other concerns?

It is possible that some students are unhappy with either the activities (such as sticky note posting and response journals) or with choosing a book from within a band of reading levels. We believe that with practice and regularity, this new way of becoming a better, more thoughtful reader will resonate with all students. Our goal is to provide the supports and instruction that every student needs, throughout the grade levels and within individual classrooms. We also encourage students to choose books that are of real interest to them, as well as to try other types of books in their leisure time.

How is my child being assessed in this program?

Assessment is a major component of Readers Workshop and takes many forms. The year begins with running records for each child. This helps the teacher establish the child's independent reading level. These records are done 2-3 times or more per year at the teacher's discretion. In order to guide students toward deeper and higher thinking about reading, the teacher needs to see evidence of the kind of thinking each student is doing. This is assessed through student written responses such as sticky note posting, reading logs, and response journals. In addition, traditional tests, quizzes and writing pieces are part of the assessment process.

What about those sticky notes?

Good readers use a wide variety of comprehension skills and strategies that are second nature to them. These occur automatically as a good reader moves through the text. In order to foster good readers, we must make that automatic thinking visible and audible. After the

teacher thinks aloud as she models these skills and strategies, the students are encouraged to either try that particular strategy or any other that has been previously taught. When the student has this “Aha” moment during individual reading time, we ask them to stop and jot on a sticky note so they will remember both the thinking they were doing and the part of the text which inspired that thinking. Students are free to stop and jot during or, at some point, after their reading so as not to interfere with their own pacing. These notes are used in partner sharing, in writing more deeply, and as an assessment tool.

When does direct instruction take place?

Direct instruction occurs throughout the literacy block. Each day begins with either a mini-lesson or a read-aloud that specifically targets a skill or strategy that the teacher models. Students also get to practice at this time, either independently or with a partner. During independent reading time the teacher provides direct and differentiated instruction by conferring with individual students or working with small strategy groups. It is at this time that the teacher works with student(s) in the areas that are in need of support, remediation or enrichment. The teacher is better able to meet the needs of all students in the class by targeting what each child needs to succeed.

Why is it important for my child to read books on a particular level?

It is important to separate decoding and fluency from comprehension. While a student may be able to read every word accurately and with fluency, he/she may only be able to summarize or retell part of the story on a basic or literal level. Because the book is written at a comprehension level higher than his/her independent reading level, the student is not able to do the higher level thinking, analyzing and synthesizing required to facilitate true comprehension. Through Readers Workshop and strategy instruction, our goal is to move students forward through reading levels as they gain the skills and practice they need.

But my child wants to read other books. What do I do about that?

Prior to Readers Workshop, students have always had books assigned by the teacher for the whole class to read. In Readers Workshop, we embrace choice for the students regarding interest level and the assignment is to choose from among the books at the independent reading level. For leisure time reading, not associated with literacy class or homework, a student is free to choose anything the parent deems appropriate. As a matter of fact, we

encourage students to read a variety of genres in many different forms such as magazines, newspapers and graphic novels.

Are children being asked to read books they already read in earlier grades?

Student interest and choice are hallmarks of Readers Workshop. It is one of the ways that we can insure that we are differentiating instruction for students. Students are also more apt to read with depth if they are reading a book they have chosen and whose subject interests them. That being said, when “shopping” for a book in the classroom library, a student might recognize some titles they are familiar with. In that case, they are under no obligation to choose a book they have already read, unless they are interested in re-reading. Because reading levels cross age and grade levels, there will always be some familiar titles within a classroom library, but students are not required to read them. We are constantly adding selections to the classroom libraries throughout the year as we hear from teachers about their students’ needs.

When do they learn grammar and vocabulary?

A vocabulary component is woven into Readers Workshop as well as taught through the study of roots, prefixes and suffixes. We have purchased a highly regarded series which will help our students gain the tools and background to independently break down words to recognize relationships and meaning. This tactic is also the recommended format for improving SAT vocabulary and word recognition.

Grammar instruction takes place during writing. Students learn best when they can apply the lessons to their own writing.

How do we know if this program is working?

Since we are at the early stages of implementation, we do not have standardized test scores to measure our success. We do, however, have running records which the teachers conduct several times a year to monitor student growth in reading levels. We have seen an overall growth in student reading levels from the beginning of grade 3 to June of that year (grade 3 is the only grade that has one year of Readers Workshop completed at this date). As time passes, we will collect and analyze as much data as we can, both from the classroom and from state tests, to help us determine our success and any modifications in the curriculum that might need to be made.

Just as we have already designed the Readers Workshop curriculum to meet Holmdel’s specific needs, we continue to monitor the program through discussion, teacher input, observation of classes and students, and assessments of student success. Curriculum is a living, breathing

thing, not a static and unchanging document. Every decision is based on what is best for our students' academic and developmental needs.

Please contact your child's teacher, Susan Alston, or Tali Axelrod if there are any further questions.