

ELA Overview

In the 21st century literacy is more than being able to read and write. At PS/IS 276 we believe that literacy involves a complex set of processes that we use to understand our world and to communicate our thinking across content areas through oral and written language and, at times, other media as well. Being literate also means being informed. Reading and writing well both require a strong base of knowledge and rich experiences with creating and processing texts. Our goal for our students is that they develop identities as readers, writers and critical thinkers so that they can become problem solvers and active participants in society. As our students participate in our curriculum from grades K-8, they engage with multiple types of texts including fiction and nonfiction books, poetry, magazines and newspapers, electronic documents, graphs and images, video and spoken word. They discuss ideas in literature and informational texts. They question authors' purposes and choices and how those decisions impact readers. They engage in writing a variety of texts of their own.

Teachers at the Battery Park City have created units of study in reading and writing based on the Common Core standards. These units are designed to be engaging to students and to challenge them to learn by honing skills and deepening knowledge of the world. Our ELA program incorporates reading and writing, speaking and listening, and practical skills such as word study, spelling, handwriting, and grammar. Teachers draw upon a variety of teaching strategies in their planning. Students engage with texts in whole class, small group, and independent settings. They write creatively as well as for more structured assignments.

Some goals for our Literacy Program:

- To nurture a love of and appreciation for the written word.
- To build a rich knowledge base of ideas, information and vocabulary.
- To build fluency in communicating -- both expressing ideas orally and in writing and in understanding ideas in print and spoken word.
- Exposure to and appreciation of a variety of genres.

About the Common Core Standards:

Our curriculum is aligned with the Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts. This set of standards was written by a consortium of educators and policymakers from across the United States in response to concerns about inconsistent expectations across the nation, an emphasis away from informational texts, and a concern that students are not reading as challenging texts as in earlier generations. These grade level content standards are organized by anchor standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language (grammar and vocabulary). Here is a link to a document that highlights expectations across the grades.

The standards incorporate some key shifts that have been identified through extensive cognitive research on how we learn to read and write. These shifts promote a balance between reading and writing fiction and nonfiction, the level of complexity of texts that students read, and the importance of making inferences while being able to cite evidence for reasoning in texts.

In the past, students have tended to read more fiction than non-fiction. The Common Core standards emphasize a greater balance between informational and literary texts. This allows students to build knowledge about the world along with academic vocabulary helping them be stronger readers.

The Common Core recommends that students be exposed to, and helped to read, texts of increasing complexity. This is in response to complaints about students reading texts that are too "easy." This more complex reading is supported in school by close and careful repeated readings of challenging texts. Our

practice builds student skills in navigating more complicated and sophisticated texts, helps them become familiar with the structures and syntax of these texts, and builds their stamina and confidence.

You will hear a lot about students needing to “find the evidence” for their thinking in the text. We begin to nurture this skill in kindergarten when students are asked to discuss read alouds and not only explore and share the big ideas in the books they are reading, but also cite their reasoning from the text for their ideas. We continue to build this skill across the grades as students continue to engage in discussions about books and author choices and to write their own informational reports and arguments using evidence from multiple sources and experiences.

FAQs

Now that my child is reading independently, I can stop reading to him, right? Continue reading to and with your child. (Some ways to share reading at home: alternate pages, read dialogue and narration as in a play, start a family book club!) As you read more challenging books together, remember to have conversations with your child about what is happening, how the author is crafting the message, how the character is growing and changing. Don't forget to make connections to other books you have read (“This character is a lot like that character in the book...”) and to experiences you or child may have had (“I had something like that happen to me once. It made me feel/think.... I wonder if this character is feeling/thinking the same way.”)

I know that other schools in the area tell parents the “level” of book the child is reading. Why don't you do that? We have discussed this policy with the creators of the book leveling system. We agreed with them that this information is most useful for teachers. Instead of sharing “levels”, teachers are encouraged to describe specific skills a student is acquiring. Book stores and libraries don't use the “leveling system.” We want our students to be able to select books that are a good match independently.

Five Finger Test

1. Choose a book that you think you will enjoy.
2. Read the first page. (You may need to read a bit of the second page if the first page is really short.)
3. Hold up a finger for each word you are not sure of, or do not know.
4. If there are five or more words you did not know, this book may be challenging. You should choose another book.

How can I help my child pick appropriate books? Students are taught how to select books that are appropriately challenging. Students are taught to browse the cover and blurbs on the book to determine if it is of interest. They are also coached to use the “five finger rule.” Using this method, students read the first page or so of text. If they find that they stumble over 5 or more words and/or cannot summarize what is happening, they should put the book aside for another time. We encourage students to read books that are “just right” in order to build stamina and fluency. We also want our students to read some more challenging texts on occasion. These books should be part of the curriculum and not necessarily something that they do independently at home.

How do you help my child who is reading above/below expectations? We challenge students at different levels of reading proficiency in two key ways. First, we plan for our curriculum to include a variety of books. We challenge students to read diverse genres and to read deeply on different topics. We select books for students that are written at a range of levels from more basic to more advanced. This approach allows our students to build content

knowledge by reading deeply on a given topic, introduces them to new genres and authors, and to explore a range of texts that allow them to read fluently to build stamina and that require them to read

more closely for deeper comprehension. Teachers also plan for inclusive instructional practices. These include teaching targeted skills based on assessments and book discussions in partnerships, small groups and in whole class settings. These strategies allow us to support kids who are reading at different levels of proficiency.

How are handwriting and keyboarding addressed in the literacy program? Research shows the importance of handwriting on the development of ideas and the ability to clearly communicate thinking and for school success. We want our students to feel confident that their readers will be able to read their writing as they are purposefully writing for an audience. To that end we use Handwriting without Tears to teach penmanship in grades K-4. Starting at the end of second grade, students will also begin to learn cursive and keyboarding.

How do we teach and practice public speaking speaking/listening and discussion in school? The Common Core Standards include speaking and listening. These standards address topics such as participation in discussions by asking and answering questions and building on the ideas of others. Students also learn to present information to an audience in a coherent manner and using visual aids as necessary. Talk amongst peers is integral to our teaching. Students work in partnerships and groups to discuss ideas in books, to share experiences, to solve problems in math and science, and to wrestle with concepts in social studies. We formally and informally teach these skills through morning meeting and circle time in lower grades, partnership and group work throughout the grades, and special programs. Our fourth and fifth graders work with [Kids Empowerment Academy](#) to learn public speaking skills. In middle school, our students all participate in our annual science fair. At the science fair, they are expected to speak publicly about their process and what they discovered. Students rehearse presentations for younger students, for peers, and for adults so that they learn to adjust their speech for different audiences.

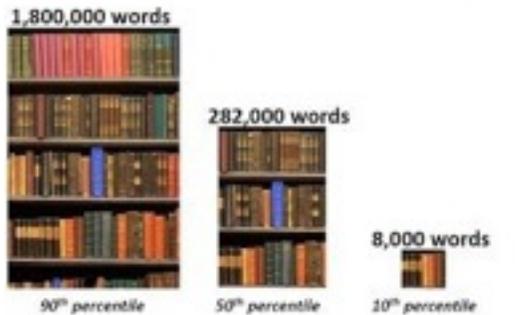
Inventive spelling: what is it, why do we do it? when will my kids finally be expected to spell correctly? Learning to spell and learning to read are closely linked processes. As children begin to understand how words work, we encourage them to spell words by “stretching out the sounds” and recording what they hear. This builds phonemic awareness and understanding of how letters record sounds -- key skills in early reading. Starting in kindergarten, we help children learn to spell and read frequently used words that do not follow conventional, phonetic patterns. As students progress through the grades, spelling becomes more and more automatic. Depending on the word and the task, we expect most spelling to be accurate starting in second grade. This guideline is not hard and fast. Many students will only use words they know how to spell, thus limiting their use and acquisition of more complex vocabulary. We strive for a balance between accurate spelling and communicating complex ideas.

Why don't we teach grammar anymore? Actually, we do. Mechanics and usage are literacy skills woven into our instruction. Students begin self-editing for correct usage of capitalization and punctuation as early as kindergarten. In third grade, we have a formal grammar curriculum that we use to make sure students do not have any gaps in knowledge. We follow Common Core standards for grade level expectations.

What can we expect in regards to feedback from teachers? Homework has an important role in communicating with families about what their children are learning and in building time management, organization, and study skills. Feedback should provide information to students on what they are doing well and how they can improve performance. Good feedback helps students understand where they are in their learning and can help motivate them to take control of their learning. This feedback often happens in school when teachers review student work and use that review to reteach/teach specific skills.

Why Can't I Skip My 20 Minutes of Reading Tonight?

Student "A"	Student "B"	Student "C"
reads 20 minutes each day	reads 5 minutes each day	reads 1 minute each day
3600 minutes in a school year	900 minutes in a school year	180 minutes in a school year



By the end of 6th grade Student "A" will have read the equivalent of 60 whole school days. Student "B" will have read only 12 school days. Which student would you expect to have a better vocabulary? Which student would you expect to be more successful in school...and in life?
(Nagy & Herman, 1987)

My child is supposed to read at home every day for homework. Why? Research shows that there is a strong correlation between the number of words that a student reads and his/her test scores. "If a child reads as much as one million words per year, they will be in top 2% of all children on standardized reading tests. If a child reads as little as 8000 words per year, they will be in bottom 2% of all children on standardized reading tests. Therefore, if you read 3,000 words every day you will be in the top 2%. If you read 20 words every day, you will be in the bottom 2%." Though it is not our reason for reading, we can see the correlation: the best way to help your child score well on standardized tests is to insure that he or she is reading daily.

PS/IS 276 students are required to and should read nightly to promote reading growth and support the reading skills taught in school. Our younger students may be read to, but once they develop independent reading skills, students should be reading books that are at an appropriate challenge level (not too hard and not too easy) every day. Students are also expected to talk about and write about the books that they are reading for homework beginning in third grade.

What is the parent's role in helping with writing and reading homework? There are several widely agreed upon things parents can do to help children with homework.

- Help your child to set homework schedules keeping in mind due dates, family and extracurricular obligations, and when your child is best able to do work.
- Arrange for a quiet, distraction free place to do homework.
- Make sure your child has the resources needed.
- Keep an eye on the clock. Is your child spending too long on a topic? If so, you should have a conversation with the teacher to understand what is going on.
- Do a quick check to see how your child is doing, but do not sit and do homework with your child.
- Follow the ABC's: All by myself, parents Back off, and impose a Cutoff time.

Resources

A [parent guide](#) to helping with homework.

An [overview of the Common Core ELA standards](#) for parents by the Council of Great City Schools.

[A link to the Common Core ELA standards.](#)

A link to our [school library website](#). Our library has numerous resources available to help parents help their children.

[Parent guide](#) to the Common Core Standards in NY State.

In the mid 1970s, Jim Trelease realized the importance of reading aloud to children. An avid family reader, he self-published a book on how and why to read aloud to your children. Now in its 7th edition, *The Read Aloud Handbook* is a classic.

[Common sense media link](#). Common Sense Media is a website that provides reviews and resources about a variety of media from books to movies and tv shows to social media accounts.

[New York Public Library book recommendations](#)

Visits to local independent book sellers who are deeply knowledgeable about books for young people can also be helpful in finding books for your children.

Magazines for Children (the link provided leads to the subscription page for these magazines)

[Cobblestone](#) magazine group publishes a variety of magazines for children ages 2-14.

[The National Wildlife Federation](#) publishes science magazines for children.

[Highlights](#) for children magazine.

[National Geographic for Kids](#) magazines.