

Workshop, Grades K-1

Introduction

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In this course, Laurel Stolfus introduces the concept of Workshop to her first grade students.

Workshop is the period of each day when students work collaboratively or independently to review material taught in the lessons or to complete their own projects. As students take more and more responsibility during Workshop, they learn to set learning goals, make decisions about their use of time and materials, and collaborate with peers.

Workshop is also a time to work with individuals and groups of students to reinforce learning, provide extra help for those having difficulties, or assess student progress.

Providing students with clearly defined parameters helps them make maximum use of Workshop time. The Workshop routine encourages students to work productively, alone or in small groups, to make choices within limits, to solve problems, and to work independently.

Teaching Example 1

Mrs. Stolfus introduces the students to the concept of Workshop in Teaching Example 1. Workshop will continue throughout the year and will play an important role in developing students' independence and providing time for individualized help and assessment. Mrs. Stolfus makes sure all students know what is expected of them. As the year progresses, students will be given more independence in their choices of Workshop activities. In addition, Workshop will become the primary time during which students work on their unit investigations and their writing.

Introducing Workshop

The introduction of Workshop needs to start very early in the year. Mrs. Stolfus begins by:

- Discussing the rules.
- Modeling desired behaviors with the students.
- Reviewing the rules.

With many activities going on at the same time, it is essential to establish Workshop rules. During this time, small groups of students will be working on projects of their own choice, and the teacher will be working with individuals or small groups. If there were confusion and discussion about how to proceed, neither the teacher nor the students would be able to accomplish their goals.

Teaching Example 2

Mrs. Stolfus introduces two activities for the students. As the year progresses, more opportunities for independent work will be added.

Mrs. Stolfus slowly adds alternatives. This allows students to gradually move toward independence without becoming overwhelmed. Giving the students time to work in the absence of direct guidance takes patience. Many students have never experienced the freedom of choice they will experience in Workshop.

Workshop Continues

Each day before Workshop, Mrs. Stolfus revisits the rules and makes sure the students know what is expected. At this point, they have only two activities to choose from, and Mrs. Stolfus assigns each student the activity she wants him or her to do. As the year progresses, the students will have more freedom to choose activities.

Mrs. Stolfus circulates around the room monitoring the students' efforts. This informal monitoring is an important part

of Workshop early on. It allows time for clarification and support. It also helps the teacher form clear ideas of each student's strengths, needs, and their readiness to work with a range of options.

Teaching Example 3

Mrs. Stolfus has been carefully and systematically introducing the students to Workshop and its options, and several weeks into the school year students have ten stations for independent work. The variety of stations depends on the teacher's ability to use activities suggested in the *Open Court Reading* or the *SRA Imagine It! Teacher's Editions*, on his or her ability to create unique activities, and on the students' needs.

Expanding Workshop

Mrs. Stolfus still starts each Workshop by reviewing rules and materials to make sure students know what is expected of them. In addition, Mrs. Stolfus actively works with individuals and small groups during Workshop. She:

- Reviews rules and previously introduced materials.
- Introduces new activities.
- Reminds students that they need to complete their "must do" assignments.
- Makes sure all students are working.
- Calls individuals and small groups to the back of the room to work with her.

Successful use of Workshop time in individualizing instruction depends on Mrs. Stolfus's ability to identify areas of weakness exhibited by the students during language arts classes. Small groups formed during Workshop are fluid and change continually, depending on each student's needs.

Teaching Example 4

Teaching Example 4 takes place about halfway through the school year, when the teacher knows her students and how to meet their needs. One of the most valuable aspects of Workshop is that it allows time for the teacher to meet the needs of each student. Mrs. Stolfus's students are used to Workshop by now, and they know what is expected of them. So, Mrs. Stolfus is free to work with individuals and small groups on the needs they exhibited earlier in their language arts lessons or to preteach in preparation of the next lesson.

Workshop Midyear

The students have numerous activities at ten different stations. Up to this point, Mrs. Stolfus has been assigning activities and stations. Now she feels that her students are ready to choose the station where they would like to work. Since this is a departure from what they have done in the past, extra time is taken to make sure the students know what is expected.

Since students move smoothly and quietly around the room to accomplish the assigned tasks as well as those they choose to do, Mrs. Stolfus is free to work with individuals and small groups at the back table. This is one of the primary goals of Workshop time—providing individual instruction.

Teaching Example 5

By this time in the year, Workshop is running smoothly. The students know the routine. They know what is expected of them, and they work efficiently.

Continuing Growth

Mrs. Stolfus takes about half an hour per day for Workshop. During this time she is able to work with several individual students or small groups. The configuration of groups changes daily based on student interest and perceived needs. Without clear organization, rules, and routines, this time would be far less productive. Organization and routines help Workshop become one of the most useful periods of the day. It allows students to learn independence within defined limits and ensures that students who need extra support and help from the teacher get it.

Please note: Mrs. Stolfus is a first grade teacher and, therefore, is using Level 1 of *Open Court Reading*. Although the content is different, the instructional methods learned in this course can be easily applied to Workshop in kindergarten.