

## **Writing, Grades 2-3**

### **Workshop**

#### **About Workshop**

Workshop is the period of time each day in which the students work collaboratively or independently to practice and review material taught in the lessons or to complete inquiry and investigation projects of their own choosing. Students may work on a specific daily assignment, complete an ongoing project, work on unit investigation activities, focus on writing, or choose from among a wide range of possibilities.

There are two main goals of Workshop. The first is to get students to work independently. This is essential in order to meet the second goal, which is to give teachers time to provide differentiated instruction to meet the individual needs of the students. The teacher can work with individuals or groups of students to reinforce learning, provide extra help for those having difficulty, extend learning, or assess the progress of the class or of individuals. As the students learn to work independently and gradually take on more responsibility for their own work, they learn to set goals, make decisions about their use of time and materials, and collaborate with their peers.

#### **Procedure**

Initially, for many students, you need to structure Workshop carefully. Eventually, students will automatically go to the appropriate areas, take up ongoing projects, and get the materials they will need. Workshop should slowly evolve from a structured period to a time when students move freely from one activity to the next.

#### **Adhere firmly to Workshop guidelines**

By the time the students have completed the first few weeks of school, they should feel confident during Workshop. If not, continue to structure their time and limit options. For young students, the first few Workshops may run no more than five to eight minutes. The time can gradually increase to fifteen minutes or longer as the students gain independence. Older students may be able to work longer and independently from the very beginning of the school year.

#### **Introducing Workshop**

Introduce Workshop to students by telling them that every day there will be a time when they are expected to work on activities on their own or in small groups. In the beginning, you will assign the Workshop activities to young students. Many teachers spend the first few weeks introducing Workshop by assigning a whole class activity. When students complete the assigned activity, they can read a book or work on their writing. Point out the shelf or area of the classroom where Workshop materials are stored. Tell students that when they finish working with the materials for one activity, they are to choose something else from the Workshop shelf. New activity materials will be added to the shelf from time to time. Make sure that the students know that they may always read books during Workshop.

Tell older students that they have an opportunity each day to work on their unit investigation, their writing, and other projects. Students will be working independently and collaboratively during this time.

#### **Guidelines**

- Make sure each student knows what he or she needs to do during Workshop.
- Demonstrate for the whole group any activity assigned for Workshop; for example, teach the students a new game, introduce new materials or projects, or explain different areas.

- For young students, it is essential to introduce and demonstrate different activities before the students do them on their own. With games, you may want to have several students play while the others watch. Make sure that all students know exactly what is expected of them.
- In the beginning, plan to circulate among the students, providing encouragement and help as necessary.
- Once students are engaged in appropriate activities and can work independently, meet with those students who need your attention. This may include individual students or small groups.
- Let the students know that if they need to ask questions and clarify assignments, they should do it during Workshop introduction, so that you are free to work with small groups during Workshop.
- Be sure that students know what they are to do when they have finished an activity and where to put their completed work.

Establish and discuss rules for Workshop with the students. Keep them simple and straightforward. You may want to write the finalized rules on the board or on a poster. You may want to review these rules each day at the beginning of Workshop for the first few lessons or so. You may also wish to revisit the rules from time to time.

These are some suggested rules:

- Be polite.
- Share.
- Whisper.
- Take only the materials you need.
- Return materials.
- Don't interrupt the teacher.

### Setting up your classroom

Carefully setting up your classroom to accommodate different Workshop activities ensures that the Workshop period progresses smoothly and effectively. While setting up your classroom, keep the primary Workshop activities in mind. During Workshop the students do independent and collaborative activities. In kindergarten and first grade, these activities may include letter recognition, phonemic awareness activities, reading **Decodable Books** or **Decodable Stories**, writing or illustrating stories, or working on inquiry and investigation projects.

Many classrooms have Workshop areas that the students visit on a regular or rotating basis. Center time in kindergarten can be easily and efficiently incorporated into the Workshop concept. For example, the activities suggested during Workshop can be incorporated into reading and writing areas. Other typical classroom areas include an art center, math center, science table, play area, and so on.

The following are suggestions for space and materials for use during Workshop.

1. **Reading Area** supplied with books and magazines. The materials in the Reading Area should change with students' abilities and reflect unit themes they are reading. You may wish to add books suggested in unit bibliographies and books from the **Classroom Library** available with the program.
2. **Writing Area** stocked with various types and sizes of lined and unlined paper, pencils, erasers, markers, crayons, small slates, and chalk. The area should also have various **Letter Cards** and other handwriting models for those students who want to practice letter formation or handwriting. Students should know that this is where they come for writing supplies. In addition to the supplies described above, the Writing Area can include supplies to encourage the students to create and write on their own:

- Magazines and catalogs to cut up for pictures; stickers, paint, glue, glitter, and so on to decorate books and book covers; precut and stapled blank books for the students to write in (some can be plain and some cut in special shapes).
  - Cardboard, tag board, construction paper, and so on, for making book covers (provide some samples).
  - Tape, scissors, yarn, and hole punches for binding books.
  - Picture dictionaries, dictionaries, thesauri, word lists, and other materials that encourage independence.
3. **Listening Area** supplied with CD player, optional headphones, and CDs of stories, poems, and songs for the students to listen to. You may also want to make available the program *Listening Library CDs* .
  4. **Phonics Activity Area** supplied with *Alphabet Sound Cards* (Kindergarten), *Sound/Spelling Cards* (Grades 1-3), and/or *High-Frequency Word Flash Cards*.
  5. Other areas might include materials that enhance what the students are learning, including the **Science and Social Studies Connection** activities that come with the program. Commonly used classroom materials that enhance reading can be included (e.g., plastic letters, puzzles, and workbooks).

As students will be working on their inquiries/investigations during Workshop, make sure there are adequate supplies to help them with their research. These might include dictionaries, encyclopedias, magazines, newspapers, and computers (preferably with Internet capability).

Students thrive in an environment that provides structure, repetition, and routine. Within a structured setting and time frame, students gain confidence and independence. This setting allows you to differentiate instruction in order to provide opportunities for flexibility and individual choice that allow students to develop their strengths, abilities, and talents to the fullest.

### **Workshop management tips**

Use the following Workshop management tips to ensure that Workshop runs smoothly.

During the first few weeks of the school year:

- Introduce Workshop to students. Make sure they know where materials are located. Discuss and post the rules on the board or another prominent place in the classroom. During the first few weeks, keep Workshop time short (fewer than thirty minutes) and directed; you can give students more time and less direction as they show that they can work independently.
- Discuss using small groups for pre/reteaching purposes and how you will indicate who will be in the groups. Start by forming one small group randomly and having other students do something specific (e.g., a writing assignment). When you have finished with the small group, send them to do independent work. Call another small group of students to work with you. Continue this each day until students are accustomed to forming groups and working independently.
- For the first few weeks of the school year, make sure each student has a plan for using Workshop time.
- Review how students are using Workshop. Are they using their time well? Do they have the materials they need? Discuss suggestions for improving their use of this time. Take a few minutes at the beginning of each Workshop to check that students know what they will be doing.
- One purpose of Workshop is to help students learn independence and responsibility. Assign students to monitor Workshop materials. They should alert you whenever materials are running low or missing, and they can be responsible for checking on return dates of library books and making sure the books are either returned or renewed.
- Take time at the end of Workshop every day for a few students to share something new that they learned or a problem they solved.

- Encourage responsibility and independence by reminding students to show respect for each other and the materials provided.

As the year progresses:

- Form small extra-practice groups with the more advanced students from time to time, as they also need special attention.
- Discuss the use of Workshop time for doing inquiry and investigation projects.
- To keep the whole class informed about ongoing independent research, every other day or so invite a research group to discuss what it is doing, how the research is going, and any problems they are encountering.
- Allot time for final presentations and discussion of research activities. Use a whole Workshop day and have all groups present their findings, or split the presentations over several days, depending on the small-group needs of your class.
- Make sure small extra-practice groups are formed based on your observations of students' work on the different daily lessons. Small groups should be fluid and based on demonstrated need rather than becoming static and unchanging.
- By this time students should be accustomed to the routines, rules, expectations, and usage of Workshop time and be moving smoothly from small teacher-led groups to independent work. Monitor small groups occasionally to see that they are on task and making progress on their activities.
- Make a practice of reading aloud to students. All students enjoy being read to, no matter their age or grade. Encourage them to discuss the shared reading in Reading Roundtable groups or in collaborative conversations, and to bring books and read them aloud to their classmates (for a description of Reading Roundtable, see below).
- Encourage cooperation and collaboration by providing students with opportunities to interact in small groups.
- Spend a few minutes each day circulating around the room and monitoring what students are doing independently or in small groups. Students can then share any questions or problems they are having with you on a timely basis.
- Take note of different small groups. Make sure that quieter students are able to participate in the discussions. Often the stronger, more confident students dominate such discussions. Encourage them to give all participants a chance to share their ideas.
- If students are not productive during Workshop, keep them in the small group you are working with until they can successfully benefit from independent work. Discuss strategies they could use to become more independent.

The **Teacher's Editions** provide possible Workshop activities for students to do independently or in small groups. As you become used to Workshop, you will create activities for your students. Additional suggestions include:

- Read, read, and read—**Decodable Books** or **Decodable Stories**, **Classroom Library** books, trade books, and so on.
- Work on writing in progress.
- Games and puzzles that reinforce learning.
- Activities from the **Science/Social Studies Connection** in **Open Court Reading** ©2002/2005 and **SRA Imagine It!**
- Work on inquiry and investigation projects.
- Listen to the **Listening Library CDs**.
- Skills practice on computer software.

- Students often make great tutors for other students. They are uniquely qualified to understand problems that others might be having. Encourage students to pair up during Workshop to help each other with their daily lessons.
- Most of the authors of the ***Student Anthology*** or ***Student Reader*** selections are well-known and have written many pieces of fine literature. Encourage students who enjoy the selections to find other books by the same author. Encourage them to think about and discuss why that particular author's work attracts them.
- If the reading selection is an excerpt from a longer piece, encourage students to read the book from which the excerpt is taken and discuss how the excerpt fits into the larger work.

### Reading Roundtable

- Reading Roundtable is a student-formed and student-run book discussion. Encourage students participating in Reading Roundtable to choose a book that they will all read and discuss. Several different Reading Roundtable groups may form on the basis of the books students choose.
- Students sometimes have difficulty starting discussions in Reading Roundtable. Try some of these discussion starters with students, and print them on a poster for students to use:
  - I didn't know that . . . I liked the part where . . .
  - Does anyone know . . . I'm still confused by . . .
  - I figured out that . . . This made me think . . .
  - I agree/disagree with \_\_\_\_\_ because . . .
- From time to time, join a Reading Roundtable group, and take part in their discussion. Make sure students lead the discussion.
- During Reading Roundtable, be sure students discuss what they like or dislike about a book, why they wanted to read it, and how the book either lived up to their expectations or disappointed them. Discussions should not be about basic comprehension but should help students think more deeply about the ideas presented in a book.
- Share your impressions of books from the ***Classroom Library*** or other reading during Reading Roundtable. Note which students initiate sharing and which are reluctant to share.