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## **First Grade Classroom Web Site Featuring Components of a Balanced Literacy Program**

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## ABSTRACT

### FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM WEB SITE FEATURING COMPONENETS OF A BALANCED LITERACY PROGRAM

by

Jennifer Renee Kummer

July 2003

A classroom web site for first grade families and community members of the Ridgefield School District was designed for the World Wide Web. It was created as a resource to explain the components of balanced reading and writing programs in a first grade classroom. These components include reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, guided writing, and independent writing. Included on the web site are photographs documenting monthly events in the first grade classroom, as well as, literacy internet resources for parents and children. Featured is research regarding balanced literacy programs, parent involvement, and effective web site design.

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## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

#### Introduction

“Home and school connections are critical to learning to read” (Braunger & Lewis, 1998). It is this communication between schools and families that is necessary for fostering parent support for schools, classrooms, teachers, and children. When parents are kept informed of what is happening in the classroom, they are more likely to identify with and support the teacher’s/school’s curriculum. Without this support, children are less likely to make positive academic gains (Bruneau, Raskinski, & Shehan, 1991).

Studies have shown that parents have a highly positive impact on the achievement of their children and that involving parents when their children are young has beneficial effects that persist throughout a child’s academic career. It is necessary for educators to use a variety of ways to communicate grade level expectations, curriculum, school events, and student progress to parents. This communication can come in the form of group presentations, personal conferences, frequent newsletters, informal chats, and technology (Bloom, 1985; Bruneau, Raskinski, & Shehan, 1991; Henderson, 1988).

Because a home page on the World Wide Web can reach many families quickly, technology is becoming a popular means for schools to communicate with parents. As people become more sophisticated with home computers and other new technology, they will look to these sources of information as much as they have relied on traditional communication methods in the past. As a result, these and other technologies should be as much a part of a school’s communication repertoire as newsletters, newspapers, radio, and television (Burbules, 1993; Diez, 1997; Ramirez, 2001).

### Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to create a classroom web site for first grade families and community members of the Ridgefield School District. The site was designed for the World Wide Web and explains the components of balanced reading and writing programs in a first grade classroom. These components include reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, guided writing, and independent writing. Included on the web site are photographs documenting monthly events in the first grade classroom, as well as, literacy internet resources for parents and children. Featured is research regarding balanced literacy programs, parent involvement, and effective web site design.

### Significance of this Project

Ridgefield, Washington is a developing suburban residential community outside of Vancouver, Washington. The school district is comprised of two elementary schools (K-6), one junior high (7-8), and one high school (9-12). It is a district that is proud of the high standards it sets and maintains for student learning. Scores from the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (2001) show that Ridgefield fourth graders scored 11.8 points higher in math, 8.9 points higher in reading, 7.4 points higher in writing, and 7.1 points higher in listening, compared to statewide scores. It is a district where families value education and are actively involved with educating children.

Because of the active involvement of parents and their desire for quality education, many parents in the Ridgefield School District come to first grade with questions of what the future holds for their child in a first grade classroom. They question how the teacher is going to meet the academic needs of their child.

Because the transition from home to school can be overwhelming for both parents and children, teachers need to be good at communicating school experiences and expectations with parents. Considering these anxieties, questions, and concerns of parents, it was the intent of this project to provide first grade families and community members of Ridgefield, Washington with insight into a first grade classroom and balanced literacy program. It was to be a means to inform, educate, and prepare first grade families with the expectations and standards of the first grade year. In addition to many other forms of communication that occur between the classroom and first grade families, the web site served as yet another way of connecting school and home (Walmsley & Walmsley, 1996).

#### Limitations of the Project

The limitations of the project include the following:

1. The web site has been designed as a resource for families who have access to the internet.
2. The web site is primarily intended for the needs of families entering Jennifer Kummer's first grade classroom at South Ridge Elementary School in the Ridgefield School District.

#### Definition of Terms

Assessment: gathering data from students in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of student learning. Assessment can occur through observation, testing, interviews, performance, etc. (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Balanced Literacy: a literacy program that is built on research, using a wide variety of teaching methods in order to meet student learning needs. A balanced literacy program takes into consideration the important aspects of literacy learning such as, a student's knowledge of phonological awareness skills needed in order to decode, reading strategies good readers use, as well as, having a positive attitude about literature (Spiegel, 1997).

Big Book: an oversized picture storybook that measures from 14x20 inches up to 24x30 inches usually used in large group situations. The book is used to teach aspects of print such as phonological awareness, rhyming, blending, etc. (Morrow, 1997).



Comprehension: the ability to use a variety of reading strategies in order to construct meaning from a piece of text (Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993).

Conventions: one of the areas of writing assessed using the six traits of writing. Conventions include the spelling, punctuation, grammar and usage, paragraphing, and capitalization portions of a piece of writing (Spandel, 1996).

Drop Everything And Read (D.E.A.R.): in-class time when the teacher and students read quietly and independently (Routman, 1991).

Frustration Level: the reading level at which a child's reading skills start to break down. At the frustration level reading fluency disappears, word-recognition errors are numerous, comprehension is faulty, recall is sketchy, and signs of emotional tension, and discomfort become evident (Harris & Sipay, 1990).

Graphophonics: an aspect of reading that incorporates the sound and the visual representation of letters of the alphabet (Goodman, 1993).

Guided Reading: reading instruction with a small group of children. The literature used in the group meets the individual developmental reading needs of the students. It is a time when the teacher is able to guide students to use effective reading strategies, and a time to enjoy and discuss literature (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Guided Writing: usually a time when a teacher and child meet one-on-one to discuss the student's writing. The teacher guides the process and provides instruction through mini-lessons and conferences (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Ideas: one of the six traits of writing that includes the sentences that create the content and theme of a piece of writing. Several written ideas are composed to create the story (Spandel, 1996).

Independent Reading: when children read on their own or with partners. Books, chosen by the student, are usually picked from a wide range of reading materials. Some reading is from a special collection at their reading level (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Independent Reading Level: the highest level at which a child can read easily and fluently, without assistance, with few word-recognition errors, and with good comprehension and recall (Harris & Sipay, 1990).

Instructional Level: the highest level at which the child can do satisfactory reading provided that he or she receives preparation and supervision from a teacher: Word recognition errors are not frequent, and comprehension and recall are satisfactory (Harris & Sipay, 1990).

Independent Writing: when children write their own pieces. Forms of independent writing can include: lists, logs, notes, drawings with captions, journals, stories (patterned, realistic, fantasy, traditional), messages, and personal recounts (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Invented Spelling: the name given to children's misspellings before they have learned the rules of spelling. It is the process when students write words, first by writing down letters that represent different sounds using their phonemic awareness skills (Vacca, Vacca & Gove, 1987)

Organization: one of the six traits of writing that is the internal structure of writing. It is the way that the sentences are formatted to create a beginning, middle, and end to a piece of writing (Spandel, 1996).

Reading Aloud: when the teacher reads a book or piece of text out loud to the whole class or to small groups. A carefully selected body of children's literature is used; the collection contains a variety of genres and represents our diverse society. Favorite texts, selected for special features, are reread many times (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996)

Rubric: benchmarks or criteria used to assess student performance (Alvermann & Phelps, 2002).

Sentence Fluency: one of the six traits of writing that is the rhythm and flow of the language, and the sound of word patterns. It is how the sentences are constructed so that the piece of writing can be read smoothly (Spandel, 1996).

Shared Reading: an early childhood instructional strategy in which the teacher involves a group of young children in the reading of a particular big book in order to help them learn aspects of beginning literacy, such as print conventions, the concept of a word, reading strategies, decoding skills, and prediction skills (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Shared Writing: when the teacher and children work together to compose messages. The teacher works as a scribe to record the thoughts and ideas of the students (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Six Traits of Writing: a model used for assessing writing based on the six traits which include ideas, organization, voice, word choice, fluency, conventions (Spandel, 1996).

Voice: one of the six traits of writing when the writer's personality or speech patterns come through in a piece of writing. Voice can be heard through text by using different kinds of words, phrases, or styles (Spandel, 1996).

Word Choice: one of the six traits of writing that includes the use of rich, colorful, precise language that is able to communicate messages in a way that moves and enlightens the reader (Spandel, 1996).

## Overview of the Remainder of the Project

Chapter Two provides a review of related literature regarding balanced literacy and its components, which include reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, guided writing, and independent writing. It will also incorporate research regarding the connection between reading and writing, parent involvement, the benefits and importance of school-to-home communication using web site technology, and conditions for effective web site design. In Chapter Three, the author will describe the procedures followed to create the web site. Chapter Four consists of the layout and design of the web site. Chapter Five summarizes the project, presents conclusions, and makes recommendations for the use of the web site and further areas of study.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Learning to read is critical to a child's overall well-being. If a youngster does not learn to read in our literacy-driven society, hope for a fulfilling, productive life diminishes. In short, difficulties in learning to read are not only an educational problem, they constitute a serious public concern. As society continues to redefine what it means to be literate, the need to move toward a more critical literacy becomes overwhelmingly necessary. Thus, an educator's job of teaching students to be able to read, analyze, use complex texts and become technologically savvy, becomes increasingly essential in order to meet the increasing demands placed on school districts to meet standards and succeed (Lyon, 1998; Routman, 1996).

To make school districts accountable for this learning President George Bush signed a new law in 2002 entitled: *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (NCLB). This act represents his education reform plan and asks America's schools to describe their success in terms of what each student accomplishes (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Two of the four basic reform principles of this act include stronger accountability for results, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work. With these two components in place, states are to create their own standards for reading, math, and science, and must test every student's progress toward those standards by using tests that are aligned with the standards. If the district or school continually fails to make adequate progress towards the standards, they will be held accountable (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

The accountability factor that is involved with government legislation of *No Child Left Behind* makes it overwhelmingly necessary to use solid, researched-proven balanced literacy practices in the classroom to help ensure academic progress for every student. The information that follows includes current research that supports the use of balanced literacy instruction in the classroom, as well as effective ways to nurture a child's literacy knowledge and skill. The second area of research includes parent involvement, and the importance and benefits of school-to-home communication using web site technology. Effective web site design was the last of the topics researched.

### Components of Balanced Reading Instruction

#### Balanced Literacy

“Reading is essential to success in our society” (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). That is why it is important to begin a child's educational experience with a strong foundation of literacy knowledge. To do this, balanced literacy instruction can be utilized as an instructional way of teaching students the many facets of reading and writing necessary to become a literate person.

A balanced literacy program is characterized by meaningful literacy activities that provide children with the skills and desire to become proficient and lifelong literacy learners. It is comprised of the following components that will be explained later in the chapter: reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, guided writing, independent writing.

Its foundation is built on research that has shown to be effective and represents the best theories and learning strategies that match the learning styles of individual

children. It also acknowledges the importance of the form (phonics, mechanics, etc.), and function (comprehension, purpose, and meaning), of the reading and writing process (Morrow, 1997; Spiegel, 1998).

According to Fitzgerald (1999), in a balanced reading perspective, individuals tend to see three broad categories of children's knowledge about reading as equally important:

1. A student's local knowledge about reading, which means, a student's understanding of phonological awareness, sight words, sound/letter recognition, and word identification strategies.
2. A student's global knowledge about reading, which means, a student's understanding of strategies used to interpret the meaning of text and respond to reading.
3. A student's love of reading, which means, a student's feelings, positive attitude, motivation, and desire towards reading (p. 102).

These three areas are the foundational principles of balanced reading instruction that help students develop into lifelong readers. Balanced programs are not confined to one specific way that children learn. Balanced programs give both children and teachers the best opportunity for success because they incorporate a wide variety of strategies that help meet the different needs and learning styles of all students. Building a balanced reading program means using a variety of instructional tools and methods, that success is founded through researched findings. In order to provide successful ways for students to develop literacy, the following methods are utilized in the first grade program's balanced literacy instruction: reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, guided writing, and independent writing, which will be explained in the next sections (Spiegel, 1998).

## Decoding

Before children even learn to decode and read printed English, children must be aware that spoken words are composed of individual sound parts termed phonemes. This is what is meant by phoneme awareness. In the initial stages of reading development, learning phoneme awareness and phonics skills have positive affects on the ability to decode words. It is an essential skill needed in order to become a fluent reader (Blevins, 1998; Stanovich & West, 1989).

This skill of decoding letters to sounds is choice strategy for beginning readers, which is critical to reading proficiency and fluency. Those who are good decoders are able to read many more words and rely less on context clues than children who are poor decoders because their decoding skills are so strong. In contrast, poor readers, who often have weak decoding skills, overrely on context clues to try to make meaning from text. The more words a reader recognizes, the easier the reading task becomes (Adams, 1990; Blevins, 1998; Gough & Juel, 1991; Juel, 1988; Stanovich, 1986).

Research by Chall (1996) has also shown that systematic and early instruction in phonics leads to better reading. It results in better accuracy of word recognition, decoding, spelling, and oral and silent reading comprehension. In fact, students who receive phonics instruction achieve best in both decoding and comprehension if the text they read contains high percentages of decodable words.

Programmatic longitudinal research, including research supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000) indicates that deficits in the development of phoneme awareness skills not only predict difficulties learning to read, but they also have a negative effect on reading acquisition (Lyon, 1998). However, it is

impossible to get meaning from a word that you've never seen or heard before just by decoding it.

Students need a working listening-speaking vocabulary for decoding/phonics to make sense. Decoding words and "sounding out" are not reading. Reading is a meaning-construction process that requires connected relevant text. Reading does not develop naturally, and for many children, specific decoding, word-recognition, and reading comprehension skills must be taught directly and systematically. Adults can begin this learning process when children are infants through the process of reading books aloud (Lyon, 1998; Routman, 1996).

### Reading Aloud

"The most important activity for building the knowledge and skills eventually required of reading is that of reading aloud to children" (Chomsky, 1972). It is an instructional method that, when utilized daily, is a critical component of a solid reading and writing program, no matter what the grade level. Reading aloud is when a teacher selects and reads aloud a book or other text to the whole class or small groups. A carefully selected body of children's literature is used, and the collection contains a variety of genres that represents a diverse society. Favorite texts, selected for special features, are reread many times. Texts rich in meaning or language and class favorites are read again and again, and are used as a basis for other activities (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Routman, 1996).

Reading aloud helps children to develop background knowledge about a variety of topics, build his/her vocabulary, become familiar with rich language patterns, develop familiarity with story structure, acquire familiarity with the reading process, and identify



reading as a pleasurable activity. This has been shown in research collected by Hall & Moats (1999). The researchers surveyed families whose parents read to their children and discussed literature, and compared them to families whose parents did not read to their children. Studies found that children who are read to on a regular basis have a larger quantity of vocabulary awareness, a higher quality of vocabulary knowledge, and a better comprehension of text.

According to Snow, Burns, & Griffin (1998), comprehension is also gained by being read aloud to. It allows students the opportunity to build up a repertoire of text structures that will support them in their independent reading, and also makes rich content available so that students can use deeper comprehension to analyze and compare text. Reading aloud will not ensure early success in literacy learning but it will increase the chances that children will have high expectations of print and expand their language knowledge.

It is not just reading to children that makes the difference, it is enjoying the books with them and reflecting on their form and content. By being immersed in a variety of well-chosen texts, children not only learn to love stories and reading, but they also learn about written language. Reading aloud is about developing and supporting the children's curiosity about text and the meanings it conveys. It encourages the children to examine the print, which can also be done through the use of shared reading strategies (Adams, 1990; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; McCormick, 1999).

### Shared Reading

“Recommendations for developing solid reading programs include shared reading regularly, no matter what grade level” (Routman, 1996). In shared reading, students join

the teacher to read aloud in unison from an enlarged text - a big book, a poem, or any enlarged message or story. Big books offer the opportunity for sharing print with a group of children as visibly and interactively as one might share a normal-sized or 'little book' with just a few. The books also allow children to see the print as the story is being read to them at school in much the same way they do when being read to at home (Adams, 1990; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Strickland, 1990).

In shared reading, children participate in reading, learn critical concepts of how print works, and get the feel of reading. The advantage of such book sharing goes beyond print exploration. The participatory forum is ideal for engaging the children in discussions of character and plot. It is, moreover, ideal for thinking about the forms, uses, and messages of written text.

Usually, the teacher introduces and reads an enlarged text or a small text of which each child has a copy. During the reading, the teacher or another student guides the readers by pointing to each word of the text with a dowel rod or other long slender object. On refrains and in multiple readings, children join in, reading in unison (Adams, 1990; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

According to (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), shared reading provides the following benefits for children:

1. It builds on previous experiences with books.
2. Provides language models.
3. Expands vocabulary
4. Lays a foundation for guided and independent reading.
5. Supports children who are on the verge of reading so that they can enjoy participating in reading whole stories.

6. Provides an opportunity for the teacher to demonstrate phrased, fluent reading and to draw attention to critical concepts about print.
7. Provides a context for learning specific words and features of words.
8. Helps children become familiar with texts that they can use independently as resources for writing and reading (p. 29).

The goal in reading big books is to elicit the children's participation in unlocking all aspects of their message. Saying aloud the repeated refrains and rhymes with the reader helps give them a sense of what it means to be a reader, and is a great method for building community, supporting struggling readers, and enjoying poems, songs, raps, chants, and stories together. Shared reading also yields information on how students interact with directionality, graphophonic elements, frequently encountered words, strategies for dealing with new words, and elements of punctuation. When meeting with a smaller group of students, these skills can also be taught through the use of guided reading groups (Adams, 1990; Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993; Routman, 1996; Strickland, 1996).

### Guided Reading

“Guided reading is the heart of a balanced literacy program” (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, p. 1). It is considered an important ‘best practice’ associated with today’s balanced literacy instruction. The process usually involves the teacher meeting with a small group of children three to four times a week for approximately 20 minutes to read and discuss literature. The literature that is chosen for each group is matched with books that provide a level of challenge and are appropriate to the developmental reading needs of each child (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000; Mooney, 1995).

First, the teacher introduces a text to the small group and works briefly with individuals in the group as they read it. Typically, guided reading allows students the opportunity to read the text using strategies, but the teacher may select one or two teaching points to present to the group following the reading. The child is shown how and why and which reading strategies to use so that comprehension of the text is maintained. Most of the group teaching time is spent in discussion, in appreciating and enjoying language of literature, and in sharing personal and group insights (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Mooney, 1990; Routman, 1991).

Although guided reading groups also provide the teacher the opportunity to do direct and indirect teaching of vocabulary, phonics, word attack skills, and the chance to maximize the time students spend practicing fluency, the ultimate goal of guided reading is different. The ultimate goal of guided reading is to help children learn how to use independent reading strategies successfully, and guide them to become independent, fluent, silent readers who continue to read increasingly difficult texts independently (Alvermann & Phelps, 2002; Fawson & Reutzel, 2000; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Routman, 1991).

### Independent Reading

Independent reading is when children read on their own or with partners using a wide range of materials. It allows students the opportunity to self-select their own books, do their own reading, and take the responsibility to work through challenges of the text. According to Snow, Burns & Griffin (1998), adequate initial reading instruction requires that children have frequent and intensive opportunities to read. Instruction should ensure

that children have exposure to daily independent reading of text selected by students that are both interesting and beneath a child's frustration level.

This opportunity for students to read self-selected books is an indispensable part of a balanced reading program. Setting aside fifteen to thirty minutes three to five times a week for looking at books allows the variety, free choice, social interaction, and flexibility children need if they are to be enticed into voluntary reading. Reading materials not only include books, but the written materials in the classroom as well (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Morrow, 1997).

### Components of a Balanced Writing Program

#### Shared Writing

Shared writing is when the teacher and children work together to compose messages and stories. The teacher serves as the scribe as he/she invites a child or group of children to compose aloud a written message. The message is usually related to some individual or group experience. The children talk and the teacher writes the students' thoughts. The children are able to turn their ideas into written language, as the teacher demonstrates the writing process (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

According to Routman (1991), shared writing has the following benefits for students:

1. Reinforces and supports the reading process.
2. Makes it possible for all students to participate.
3. Encourages close examination of texts, words, and options of authors.
4. Demonstrates the conventions of writing – spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

5. Provides reading texts that are relevant and interesting to the children.
6. Focuses on composing and leaves writing to the teacher.
7. Helps students see possibilities they might not see on their own.
8. Recognizes the child who may have a wealth of verbal story material but be unable to write it down.
9. Gives both teacher and students confidence in their writing ability.
10. Gives the reluctant-to-write teacher a supportive environment (p. 61).

When a body of students come together for a shared writing activity, the story ideas generated can be used as a springboard for others. Students who are reluctant writers view the brainstorming process, and in turn, those verbal ideas become written word through the modeled writing of the teacher. Reluctant writers also benefit from guided writing opportunities, when the teacher is able to conference one-on-one with students and assist them in becoming stronger writers.

### Guided Writing

“Guided writing is the heart of the writing program” (Routman, 1991, p. 66). In guided writing, teachers work with the whole class, in small groups, or one-on-one as students are constructing their individual pieces of writing with the guidance of the teacher. The teacher provides instruction through mini lessons, responds to student writing through individual conferences, and helps extend the writing skills of students.

The instruction and guidance that occurs in guided writing situations provides students with the tools necessary to become more proficient writers. It is the hope that these skills are utilized when students partake in independent writing opportunities (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Routman, 1991).

### Independent Writing

Once children learn letters, they should be encouraged to write them to create words or parts of words, and then continue on to write sentences. Independent writing provides students an outlet to gradually improve their writing. It includes messages and stories that are generated by children and require very little teacher support. The purpose of independent writing is to build fluency, establish the writing habit, make personal connections, explore meanings, promote critical thinking, and use writing as a natural, pleasurable, self-chosen activity. In order for children to become more comfortable with the outcomes of writing, independent writing should take place regularly and frequently (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Routman, 1991; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

Children will not become proficient spellers unless they are reading and writing daily in meaningful contexts. If students are not engaged in writing at least four days out of five, and for a period of thirty-five to forty minutes, beginning in the first grade, they will have little opportunity to learn to think through the medium of writing. In first grade, journal writing provides an outlet for each student to write at his/her individual developmental level, and write information that is meaningful. Not only is a journal a gold mine for generating ideas and a place to record thoughts and feelings, but it is also a non-threatening place to explore understandings, feelings, happenings, and language through writing (Graves, 1994; Routman, 1991, 1996; Vacca, Vacca & Gove, 1987).

According to Routman (1991), the following are benefits of personal journal writing:

1. Promotes fluency in writing.
2. Promotes fluency in reading.

3. Encourages risk taking.
4. Provides opportunities for reflection.
5. Validates personal experiences and feelings.
6. Provides a safe private place to write.
7. Promotes thinking and makes it visible.
8. Promotes development of written language conventions.
9. Provides a vehicle for evaluation.
10. Provides a record (p. 199-200).

Journals also provide opportunities to discover experiences and feelings teachers and students have in common. It can be a means of validating each child, of saying to each child that what goes on in his/her life is important, that what he/she thinks and feels is relevant (Routman, 1991).

Journals are a useful writing tool, but other forms of writing give children the opportunity to write in various genres for various purposes across the curriculum, as well. These genres, or forms, of writing for first grade are outlined in the Washington State Framework for Achieving the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (2001). They include lists, logs, notes, drawings with captions, journals, stories (patterned, realistic, fantasy, traditional), messages, and personal recounts. When frequent writing practice of these genres occur consistently throughout the school year, the six traits of writing are components that can be used to assess student writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Routman, 1991).

The six-trait writing framework is a powerful way to learn and use a common language to refer to characteristics of writing as well as create a common vision of what



'good' writing looks like. It is an instrument that provides accurate and reliable feedback that is used to help guide instruction. It is an analytic scoring system that is valid, honest, and practical. It's the model, or the source of the model, used to score student papers in numerous state assessments and district assessments in virtually every state (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002).

According to Spandel (1996) the six traits of writing include:

Ideas – the heart of the message, the content of the piece and the main theme.

Organization – the internal structure of writing.

Voice – the writer coming through the writing.

Word Choice – the use of rich, colorful, precise language that communicates in a way that moves and enlightens the reader.

Sentence Fluency – the rhythm and flow of the language, and the sound of word patterns.

Conventions – the textual traditions such as spelling, punctuation, grammar and usage, paragraphing, and capitalization (p. 10).

### The Writing Process

First grade students continue throughout the year to work on these writing traits through journal writing, nonfiction writing, whole class big books, and published stories. When students create a published story they work through a writing process that incorporates the steps of prewriting, drafting, conferencing, revising, editing, and publishing (Morrow, 1997).

Prewriting involves brainstorming related to the topic and helps generate ideas and organize thoughts prior to writing. Once ideas are brainstormed the author makes his/her first attempt at writing by getting the words down on paper and creating a draft.

After a draft is written, the conference is a time to reflect upon what has been written to see if changes need to be made and if so, just what they ought to be.

Writing conferences between a teacher and a child are times to discuss what the child has written, to encourage the child in writing, and to assess progress by observing and reviewing the writing products gathered in the child's folder. The purpose of the writing conference is to help children teach you about what they know, so that the teacher can help the student more effectively with writing (Graves, 1994; Morrow, 1997).

During the conference, suggestions arise that may demonstrate the need for change, and this is the time to make those changes. Once the revision has been made editing occurs. Editing usually requires minor changes to the piece, mostly attending to such things as punctuation, grammatical corrections, and spelling. After final editing has occurred, the book is published.

If a child's book is published, it might mean copying the story into a bound book or having it typed into a final draft. At South Ridge Elementary, the story is typed into a final draft and bound in the Publishing Center, a PTA sponsored service. After students have published books, they are encouraged to share his/her story by reading it to the entire class in the Author's Chair.

The Author's Chair involves having students present to peers their own writing and the writing of other classroom authors or professional authors. Sharing time is important because it validates and gives children an audience. It is the "show-off" stage. The goal of Author's Chair is to develop readers and writers who have a sense of authorship and readership that helps them in either composing process (Graves, 1983; Routman, 1991; Tierney, Readence, & Dishner, 1995).

## Spelling

During writing, students are encouraged to use invented spelling in conjunction with the use of individual spelling dictionaries. As children begin the writing process with invented spelling, students begin to understand the identity and segmentation of speech sounds and sound-spelling relationships, and become engaged in figuring out how to spell words they want to write in order to communicate. As children do this, they increase their knowledge of letter-sound relationships. Not only does this enhance children's spelling and decoding, but it also allows students the freedom to write freely (Clarke, 1988; Routman, 1991; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Spiegel, 1998).

Young writers cannot learn to write freely and productively if they're always confined to words they know they can spell conventionally. Invented spellings help children place ideas before notions of correctness, enabling them to obtain the primary purpose of invented spelling, which is to free children to write.

In school, children develop fluency and power in their writing when they have occasions to write freely about things that are important to them. This is why a positive attitude toward invented spelling contributes greatly to children's writing development. However, it is also important to keep in mind that while celebrating children's invented spelling, there must continue to be high expectations for students' knowledge and use of conventional spelling to improve (Goodman, 1993; Routman, 1996; Vacca, Vacca & Gove, 1987).

Instruction should be designed with the understanding that the use of invented spelling is not in conflict with teaching correct spelling. Beginning writing with invented spelling can be helpful for developing understanding of phoneme identity, phoneme

segmentation, and sound-spelling relationships. However, primary-grade children should be expected to spell previously studied words and spelling patterns correctly in their final writing products. This process of studying spelling patterns not only benefits a child's ability to write and spell, but it also has positive affects on a child's ability to read, as well (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

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### Reading and Writing Connection

“Children's writing is strongly influenced by their reading” (Adams, 1990, p. 404). The interplay between writing and reading are especially important for the beginner. During these writing and reading opportunities the students work through the building-up and breaking-down processes to create written and spoken words. When a child writes, the child uses the skill of constructing sounds and letters into words (a building-up process). But during reading, the child breaks words apart into individual sounds and letters (a breaking-down process). By combining reading and writing activities, it allows the child the opportunity to use both processes. As a result, the ability to manipulate sounds and letters in both processes positively affects students' ability to read and write effectively (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

According to Dickinson and DiGisi (1998), researchers found that students with higher reading achievement scores were in classrooms where teachers asked students to engage in narrative and informational writing. Both narrative writing and writing related to content studies were positively associated with reading, but content-related writing was an especially important predictor of reading level.

From the beginning of their school experience children must learn that the value of reading or writing lies in its uses as a tool for communicating, understanding, and

enjoying. The premise underlying this instructional path is that reading develops first, and writing ability follows. This can be fostered through the active involvement of parents in the educational development of a child (Vacca, Vacca & Gove, 1987).

### Parent Involvement

---

Parent involvement in education is directly related to significant increases in overall student achievement. Studies show that programs designed with a strong component of parent involvement produce students who perform better than those who have taken part in otherwise identical programs with less parent involvement. It is also true that children whose parents are in touch with the school also score higher than children of similar aptitude and family background whose parents are not involved (Bloom, 1985; Henderson, 1988).

Parents who help their children learn at home nurture attitudes that are crucial to achievement. Research findings underline the importance of family participation in the development and learning motivation of their children. In today's fast-paced, changing culture, it is absolutely vital to involve family and community members in raising and influencing children's motivation to learn (Henderson, 1988; McNabb, Valdez, Nowakowski & Hawks, 1999).

For more than 10 years, researchers have shown that parent involvement in school activities improves student attitudes and performance, enhances students' self-esteem, improves academic achievement, builds positive parent-child relationships, and helps parents to develop positive attitudes toward school and the educational process. Home

and family involvement enhances the work in the classroom and helps children to use their literacy learning in different contexts (Dietz, 1997; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

According to Epstein (2001), five major types of involvement are part of schools comprehensive programs to share responsibilities with families for the education of their children. They include the following:

1. Basic obligations of families include providing for children's health and safety, developing parenting skills and child-rearing approaches that prepare children for school.
2. Basic obligations of schools include communications with families about school programs and children's progress.
3. Involvement at school includes parent and other volunteers who assist teachers, administrators, and children in classrooms or in other areas of the school.
4. Involvement in learning activities at home include requests and guidance from teachers for parents to assist their own children at home on learning activities that are coordinated with the children's class work.
5. Involvement in decision making governance, and advocacy includes parents and others in the community in participatory roles in the parent-teacher association/organization (PTA/PTO), advisory councils, Title I programs, or other committees or groups at the district, or state level (p. 135-136).

Students and families need good information about the curriculum, tests and assessments, standards for success, report card marking systems, and other features and changes in school programs. Communicating activities help educators and families share information about school programs and student progress in varied, clear, and productive ways such as in notes, newsletters, report cards, conferences, and phone calls. Schools are also increasingly using voice mail and web sites to communicate with families. To reach more global audiences, such as parents or the community at large, it is more effective to use a home page on the World Wide Web (Diez, 1997; Epstein, 2001).

With good information and participation, families can assist educators in helping students adjust to new schools, new curricula, and other changes that affect their success in school. With good information and participation, students themselves can respond more successfully respond to changes that affect their work and progress.

According to Epstein (2001), for parents, communication between school and families results in support for the child's progress and responses to correct problems, ease of interactions and communication with school and teachers, and high rating of quality of the school. For teachers, the measurable results include the ability to communicate clearly with parents, and use of a network of parents to communicate with all families. Findings suggest that teacher practices of parent involvement maximize cooperation and minimize antagonism between teachers and parents and enhance the teachers' professional standing from the parents' perspective.

Although communications from school to home are important, they do not have as consistently strong links to parent reactions as practices of parent involvement in learning activities at home. Of all types of parent involvement, supervision of learning activities at home may be the most educationally significant. Direct involvement in children's learning and availability of learning resources at home all appear to influence academic success and cognitive growth. Literacy practice involves children learning the functional uses of literacy as they engage in a variety of purposeful literacy acts in the everyday life of the family. Key to this means of literacy learning is parents' modeling of literacy as useful in solving problems and establishment of social literacy practices in which children can participate as a functional and important part of their lives (Anderson, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

The family, not the school, provides the primary educational environment for children. According to Snow, Burns, & Griffin (1998) schools should promote independent reading outside school by such means as daily at-home reading. Research by Cunningham and Stanovich (1990) shows that 15 minutes of reading at home per day puts children at the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile on standardized reading tests.

Everyone benefits when parents are involved in their children's education. Not only do individual children and their families function more effectively, but there is an aggregate effect on the performance of students and teachers when schools collaborate with parents (Henderson, 1988).

#### Effective Web Site Design

Since parent involvement has positive outcomes on student learning, it is important for teachers to open lines of communication. To reach wider audiences, such as parents or the community at large, it is more effective to use a home page on the World Wide Web. The World Wide Web allows schools to post and update information that can be accessed from any computer with an Internet navigation program. These and other technologies should be as much a part of a school's communication repertoire as newsletter, newspapers, radio, and television. As people become more sophisticated with home computers and other new technology, they will look to these sources of information as much as they have relied on traditional communication methods in the past (Dietz, 1997; Shuster, 2000).

Web site consultant, Jakob Nielsen (1999), says that having a web site today is much like having a telephone or a business card, people just expect it. The home page of



any site is like the front office of a company. It creates an impression that will shape a visitor's view of the firm and determine whether he or she will want to know more ("Alert Box," 1999).

According to usability expert, Dorothy Kushner (2001), there are six design principles to consider when creating a web site: Be intuitive, have a clear organizational structure, be consistent, offer navigational choices, tailor visual design and interaction to fit your audience, and make it work. Nielsen recommends placing the company name and logo on every page, as well as, using link titles that will summarize what visitors will find on each hyperlinked page before they actually click on the link. The banner can be used on all the Web pages associated with a company. By keeping the banner size about 450 pixels wide by 100 pixels high, it will prevent browsers from cutting off important text. It is important to remember that the more effective web sites incorporate fewer mouse clicks, make information easy to find, have working links to other sites, and operate at a quick pace ("Alert Box," 1999; "Build a Site," 2001; "Designing Usable Sites," 2001; Ericksen, 1997).

Effectiveness of web site design is also an important consideration when designing. It helps bolster customers' online experiences. Web Criteria's Site Analysis service (2000) measures the effectiveness of web sites by focusing on three criteria:

1. Load Time: the length of time it takes for a page to load into a browser.
2. Accessibility: how long it takes an average user to navigate to pages.
3. Content: the graphics, text, and technology behind each page (p. 56).

A web site needs style, substance, and functions, but it also must be usable.

Usability expert, Dorothy Kushner (2001), states that caring about usability is critical

because internet sites are designed for people to use. Usability is the combination of fitness for purpose, ease of use, and ease of learning that makes a product effective. Usability relates to the user's interaction and experience with your site. Everything you do, selecting content to technical decisions to visual design, impacts usability. If visitors cannot find what they want quickly and easily, or if the links are not logical, they will quickly get frustrated and leave ("Designing Usable Sites," 2001; Shuster, 2000).

For high usability of a web site, only a few photos should be used and the page should be kept current. The portion of the content – projects, newsletters, and tips – must be updated regularly, preferably monthly, to keep it fresh. Another consideration when including images in your Web document is the time required for a user to display the image. It is recommended to keep the size of the images small, about a total of 30K for the entire page so that people will be willing to visit the site often. Once the page is designed, the next decision involves how to get onto the web. Using an internet service provider (ISP) to host the site is recommended (Dietz, 1997; Ericksen, 1997; Shuster, 2000).

### Summary

Due to the increasing demands for literacy in our nation, and the heightened need for literate individuals in society, it is necessary for students to receive the most effective literacy instruction possible in order to help guide students to become functional literate individuals.

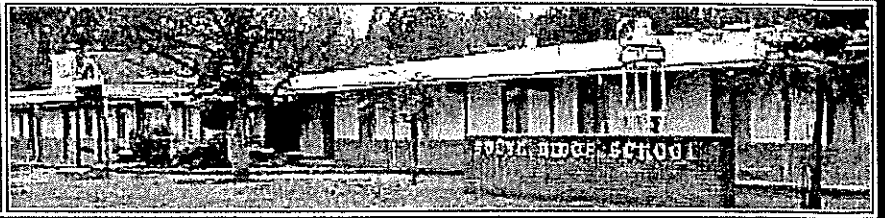
It is important to note that effective literacy instruction is comprised of several different components that develop a well-rounded balanced literacy program. These

components include: Reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, guided writing, and independent writing.

In addition to implementing a balanced literacy program, it is essential that parents are involved in a child's educational journey. Parent involvement in education is directly related to significant increases in overall achievement. This can come in the form of school-to-home communication. However, the most educationally significant is a parent's supervision of learning activities at home (Bloom, 1985).

Due to the increasing use of the World Wide Web and the ability to use technology as a means to communicate to a large audience, the first grade web site has been designed to serve as an additional school-to-home communication. With the unknowns that parents and students face entering the first grade, the web site not only educates parents about the kinds of literacy instruction that occurs within the classroom, but it also provides a visual glimpse into highlights of the first grade school year. The web site includes information that may assist with the literacy growth of children at home, and supplies links to other informational literacy sites on the World Wide Web.

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## First Grade Balanced Reading Program

### Balanced Literacy

A balanced literacy program is characterized by literacy activities that provide children with the skills and desire to become proficient and lifelong readers. It is comprised of the following components: Reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading. Its foundation is built on research that has shown to be effective and represents the best theories and strategies for helping children become literate individuals.

Balanced programs give both children and teachers the best opportunity for success because they incorporate a wide variety of strategies that help meet the different needs of students. Building a balanced reading program means using a variety of instructional tools and methods, that success is founded through researched findings. Click on each one for more information.

### Components of a Balanced Reading Program

- Reading Aloud
- Shared Reading
- Guided Reading
- Independent Reading
- Back to Home Page

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## Reading Aloud



### Reading Aloud

"The most important activity for building the knowledge and skills eventually required of reading is that of reading aloud to children" (Chomsky, 1972). Reading aloud is when a teacher selects and reads aloud a book or other text to the whole class or small groups.

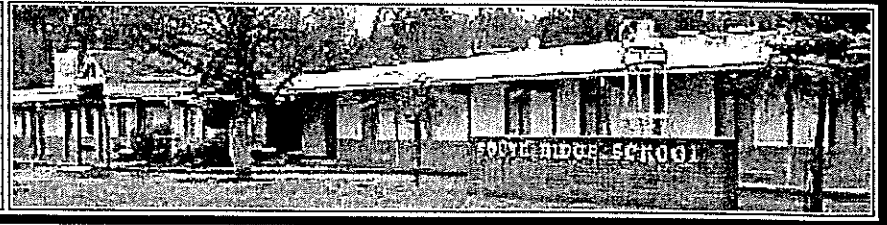
Reading aloud helps children to develop background knowledge about a variety of topics, build his/her vocabulary, become familiar with rich language patterns, develop familiarity with story structure, acquire familiarity with the reading process, and identify reading as a pleasurable activity (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Reviews of research say children who are read to on a regular basis have a larger quantity of vocabulary awareness, a higher quality of vocabulary knowledge, and a better comprehension of text (McCormick, 1999).

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## Shared Reading

### Shared Reading

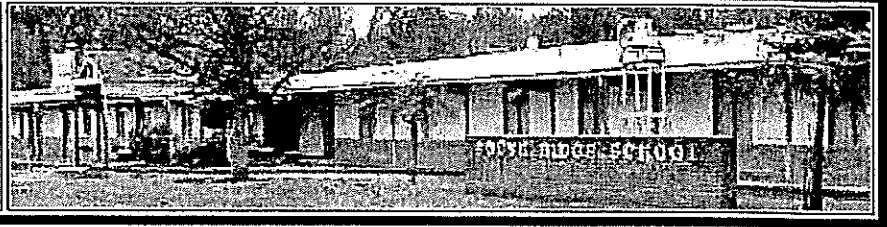
In shared reading, students join the teacher to read aloud in unison from an enlarged text - a big book, a poem, or any enlarged message or story. Saying aloud the repeated refrains and rhymes with the reader helps give them a sense of what it means to be a reader (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Strickland, 1998).

During shared reading, the group talks about reading strategies, spelling, punctuation, rhymes, and many other concepts of print. Shared reading is great for building community, supporting struggling readers, and enjoying poems, songs, raps, chants, and stories together (Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993; Routman, 1996).

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## Guided Reading

### Guided Reading

"Guided reading is the heart of a balanced literacy program" (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). It is considered an important 'best practice' associated with today's balanced literacy instruction. Small groups of students meet with the teacher three to four times a week for approximately 20 minutes to read and discuss literature. The literature that is chosen for each group is matched with books that provide a level of challenge and are appropriate to the developmental reading needs of the children (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000; Mooney, 1995).

During guided reading the children are shown how and why and which reading strategies to use so that comprehension of the text is maintained. Most of the group time is spent in discussion, in appreciating and enjoying literature, and sharing personal and group insights (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Routman, 1991).

The goal of guided reading is to assist children in becoming independent, fluent, silent readers through assisting students in selecting and applying a variety of effective reading strategies (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000).

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## Independent Reading

### Independent Reading

Independent reading is when children read on their own using a wide range of materials (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Students are in charge of their own reading by choosing their own books, by doing their own reading, and by taking responsibility to work through the challenges of the text (Routman, 1991).

At South Ridge Elementary, students begin the school day by reading independently for fifteen minutes. This independent reading time is called "Drop Everthing and Read" (D.E.A.R.). As the school year continues, the time is extended to thirty minutes.

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## First Grade Balanced Writing Program

### Balanced Literacy

A balanced literacy program is characterized by literacy activities that provide children with the skills and desire to become proficient and lifelong writers. It is comprised of the following components: Shared writing, Guided writing, and independent writing. Its foundation is built on research that has shown to be effective and represents the best theories and strategies for helping children become literate individuals.

Balanced programs give both children and teachers the best opportunity for success because they incorporate a wide variety of strategies that help meet the different needs of students. Building a balanced writing program means using a variety of instructional tools and methods, that success is founded through researched findings. Click on each one for more information.

### Components of a Balanced Writing Program

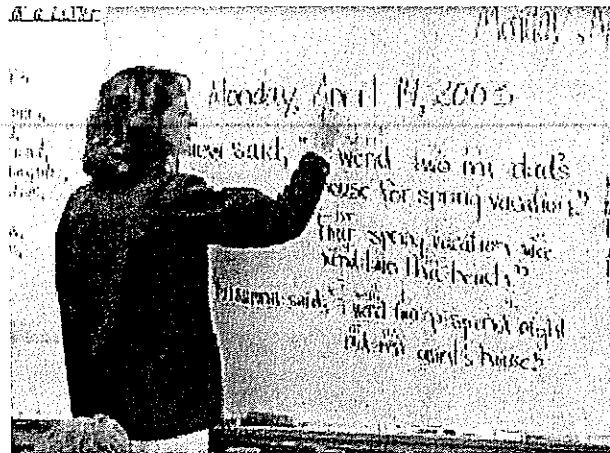
- [Shared Writing](#)
- [Guided Writing](#)
- [Independent Writing](#)
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## Shared Writing



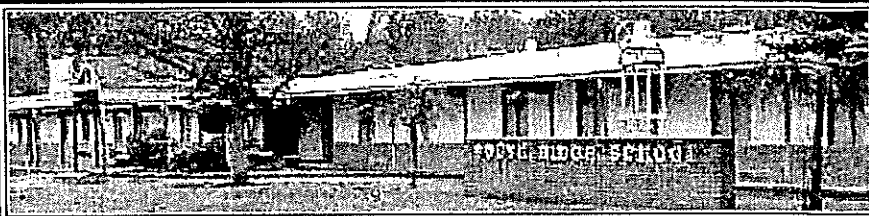
### Shared Writing

Shared writing is when the teacher and children work together to compose messages and stories. The teacher serves as the scribe as he/she invites the children to compose aloud a written message. Through this process the teacher is able to model writing and discuss different aspects of the writing process with students (Fountas & Dornell, 1996).

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## Guided Writing

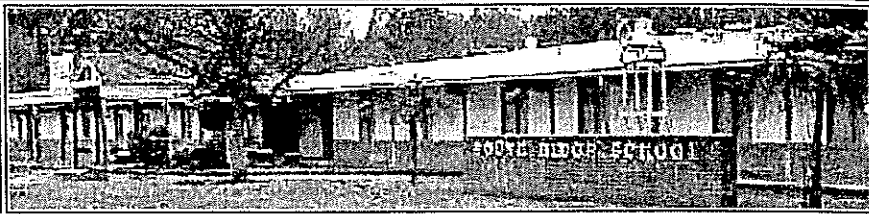
### Guided Writing

During guided writing, teachers work with the whole class, in small groups, or one-on-one as students are constructing their individual pieces of writing. The teacher provides instruction through minilessons, responds to student writing through individual conferences, and helps extend the writing skills of students. The instruction and guidance that occurs during guided writing provides students with the tools necessary to become more proficient writers (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Routman, 1991).

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## Independent Writing

### Independent Writing

Independent writing includes messages and stories that are generated by children. The purpose of independent writing is for students to build fluency, establish the writing habit, make personal connections, promote critical thinking, and use writing as a natural, pleasurable, self-chosen activity. If students are not engaged in writing at least four days out of five, and for a period of thirty-five to forty minutes, beginning in the first grade, they will have little opportunity to learn to think through the medium of writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Routman, 1991; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

## The Publishing Center

### Publishing Center

<http://host34.ipowerweb.com/~primary1/3independentw.html>

7/8/03

At South Ridge Elementary, the PTA provides a book binding service that allows students the opportunity to publish independent writing. Once the student's work is edited, the student visits the Publishing Center to pick out a book cover and be interviewed. Volunteers from the Publishing Center type and bind the stories. Published books include a "Title Page," "Dedication Page," an "All About the Author Page," and a "Comments Page."

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## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Purpose

The studies show that programs designed with a strong component of parent involvement produce students who perform better than those who have taken part in otherwise identical programs with less parent involvement. Communication between school and homes, and parent involvement in learning activities at home are two major components of parent involvement that yield lasting positive benefits for schools, families and students (Henderson, 1988).

The first grade web site has been created as a means to heighten communication between school and home, providing families with an inside look at the components of first grade literacy instruction, and a visual glimpse into highlights of the first grade school year. The web site includes information that may assist with the literacy growth of children at home, and supplies links to other informational literacy sites on the World Wide Web.

#### Procedures

To ensure that the web site features reliable information regarding best practices in balanced reading instruction, a variety of literature was reviewed and studied. Topics included balanced literacy, reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, guided writing, independent writing, decoding, spelling, and the connection between reading and writing. The second area researched was parent involvement, and the importance and benefits of school-to-home communication using web site technology. Effective web site design was the last of the topics researched.

The next step of this project included contacting Ridgefield's District Curriculum Director, Dr. Patsy Boles, for district demographic information, and district web site design guidelines. The World Wide Web was then researched to find web site models that would give the author examples and ideas to assist in the pursuit of creating an appealing web site for parents and community members that was both informational and user friendly. During this search, educational literacy web sites for parents and students were found. These were recorded and served as links from the author's web site to additional literacy resources on the World Wide Web. A map was then created. It served as an outline for the web plan and demonstrated how pages within the web site would be connected.

Before web site construction began, Central Washington University Web Coordinator, Jesse Days, was contacted for information and guidance regarding the construction of the web site. The web site, "HTML: An Active Tutorial for Beginners" was located on the World Wide Web and served as a resource during the creation of web pages. The book, Projects for HTML (Ericksen, 1997) was purchased and used as an informational guide during web site construction. Tutorial directions were followed to design web site pages.

Before pictures were posted on the web site, a permission slip was signed by the parents of each first grade student. This granted the author permission to post student pictures on the web site. Throughout the fall and winter months, the author used a digital camera to take photographs during various school activities. Images for the web site were chosen according to the need of each page and picture quality. The goal was to have each student featured at least once on the web site.

When the web site was close to completion, Jesse Days assisted the author in posting the web site onto the World Wide Web. To do this, the author purchased a domain name, signed up with a web host, and then FTPed the web site to the World Wide Web. Once the web site could be viewed on the World Wide Web, the site was assessed to ensure that links worked properly and loading time was appropriate. When the web site was posted on the World Wide Web and in working condition, the author informed first grade parents that the web site available for viewing at <http://host34.ipowerweb.com/~primary1/> Suggestions and feedback were gathered via e-mail and verbal communication. Information was then used to update and improve the web site to better meet the needs of first grade parents and students.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE PROJECT

#### Introduction

Included in this chapter are the web pages that comprise the first grade web site, which were created by using Hypertext Markup Language (HTML). Pages provide information regarding the components of a first grade balanced literacy program and highlights of a first grade school year. Included is information that may assist with the literacy growth of children at home, and links to other informational literacy sites on the World Wide Web. The site can be located at <http://host34.ipowerweb.com/~primary1/>

The following definitions would be helpful to an individual creating their own web site.

#### Definitions

Banner: a graphic that extends the width of the screen, much like what is seen on a newsletter or newspaper. The banner identifies the company or organization (Ericksen, 1997).

Browser: an easy-to-use piece of software used to link documents on any computer on any network and enables you to display Web documents (Ericksen, 1997).

Client: a computer that displays a Web document (Ericksen, 1997).

File Transfer Protocol (FTP): a client-server protocol which allows a user on one computer to transfer files to and from another computer over a TCP/IP network (Foldoc, 2002).

Home Page: The document that appears on the client's screen, simply the top or first page in a Web Document (Ericksen, 1997).

Hostname: the unique name by which a computer is known on a network, used to identify it in electronic mail (Foldoc, 2002).

Hypertext Markup Language (HTML): the Web's universal programming language that places codes or tags in a Web document, providing information to browsers about the structure of the document. Used to provide information to browsers as to how to display pages and create links (Ericksen, 1997).

Hyperlink: a link from some point in one hypertext document to another document or another place in the same document (Foldoc, 2002).

Internet: a network of computer networks developed in the 1960's by the U.S. Department of Defense to link military, government, and university computer networks (Ericksen, 1997).

Internet Service Provider (ISP): a company which provides other companies or individuals with access to, or presence on, the internet (Foldoc, 2002).

Links: a link from some point in one hypertext document to another document or another place in the same document (Foldoc, 2002).

Protocol: a set of formal rules describing how to transmit data, especially across a network (Foldoc, 2002).

Server: a program which provides some service to other client programs. The connection between client and server is normally by means of message passing, often over a network, and uses some protocol to encode the client's requests and the server's responses (Foldoc, 2002).

Tags: Codes used to format text or connect one file with another (Ericksen, 1997).

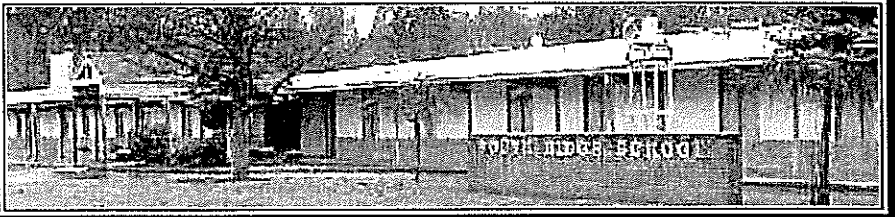
Uniform Resource Locator (URL): the address of a Web document (Ericksen, 1997).

Usability: the effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction with which users can achieve tasks in a particular environment of a product. High usability means a system is: easy to learn and remember, efficient, visually pleasing and fun to use (Foldoc, 2002).

Web Site: any computer on the internet running a World Wide Web server process (Foldoc, 2002).

World Wide Web: a web of documents linked together (Ericksen, 1997).

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Welcome to Miss Kummer's First Grade  
at  
South Ridge Elementary!

- **First Grade Balanced Reading Program**
- **First Grade Balanced Writing Program**
  - **Classroom Projects and Events**
  - **Literacy Web Site Links**
- **Frequently Asked Literacy Questions**
  - **Thank You Parent Helpers!**
  - **References Cited**

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## Classroom Projects and Events

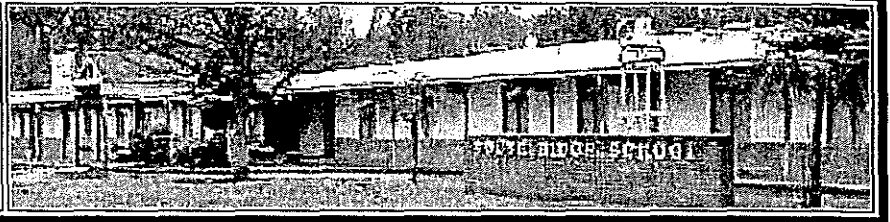
A student's year in first grade is full of learning! There are many themes that we study, special projects we complete, and events that occur throughout the year.  
Click below to view photographs of just a few of our highlighted events.

<u>January</u>	<u>February</u>	<u>March</u>	<u>April</u>
<u>May</u>	<u>June</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>August</u>
<u>September</u>	<u>October</u>	<u>November</u>	<u>December</u>

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## September Projects and Events

Welcome to the 2002-2003 School Year!

**When coming back to school in the fall we study the oceans of our world and the sea life that lives there. To conclude our study, we celebrate by having "Beach Day."**

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## October Projects and Events

### FOSS Science Kits: New Plants

#### October includes many fun planting projects!

- We experiment by using different methods to plant seeds.
- We learn about the basic needs that plants require in order to grow.
- We learn about the different parts of a plant and how plants are pollinated.
- We sharpen our observation skills by keeping scientific plant journals.
- We measure and compare the growth of our plants using centimeters.
  - We record our findings through writing and diagrams.

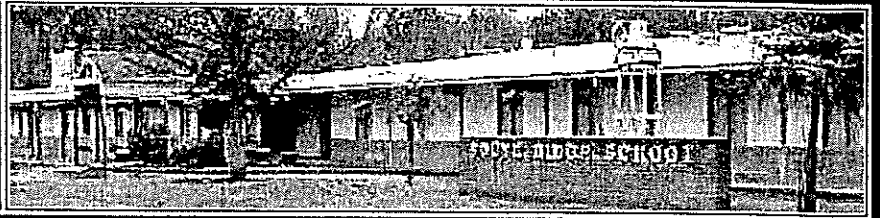
#### Photographs document the different kinds of seeds we have planted.

- Brassica seeds planted in soil.
- Garlic bulbs planted in cotton.
- Wheat seeds planted in straws.

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## October Projects and Events

### **PTA Art Adventure Presents**

Artist of the Month:

**Vincent Van Gogh!**

This month's featured artist was Vincent Van Gogh.  
Students learned that Van Gogh painted by candlelight and loved sunflowers.

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## November Projects and Events

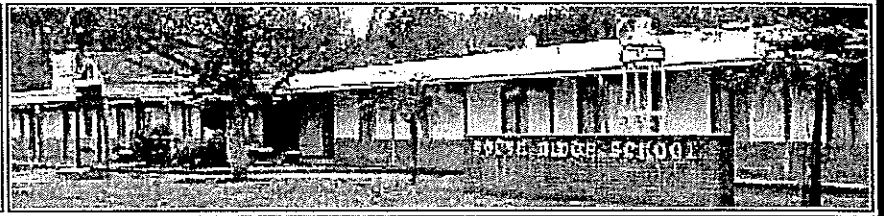
### Thanksgiving Centers

- Journey Cakes
- Pinecone Turkeys
- Drying Apples
- Shaking Butter into Cream
- Polishing Pennies
- Cornbread Muffins

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## November Projects and Events

### Thanksgiving Feast

In November,  
friends and family are invited  
to join the children for a  
Thanksgiving Feast.  
Thank you for joining us!

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## December Projects and Events

### Congratulations First Trimester Award Winners!

#### Back Row:

*James-Playground Award, Bryce-TLC Reading Award, Morganne-Music Award, Cory-Library Award.*

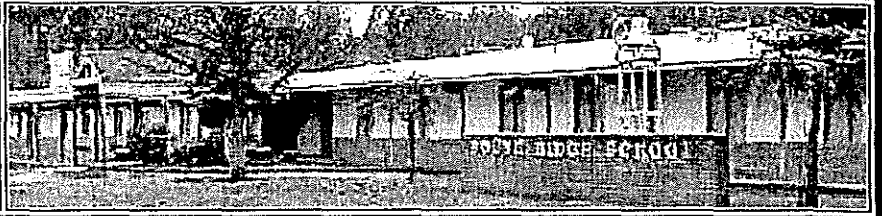
#### Front Row:

*Zachary-Music Award, Brenda-Playground Award, Lindsay-Library Award, Brandon-TLC Reading Award.*

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## January Projects and Events

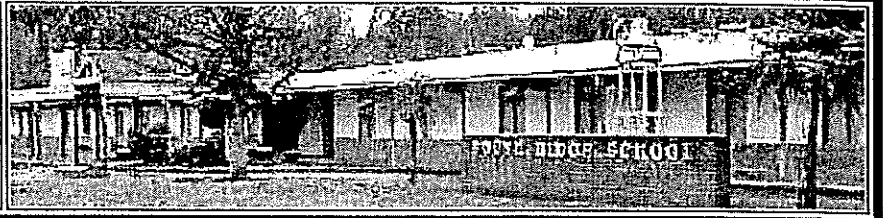
# FOSS Science Kits: Solids and Liquids

**We learn the differences between the three kinds of matter: Solids, liquids, and gases. We learn new vocabulary used to sort and classify different kinds of matter based on their properties. New vocabulary words include: translucent, transparent, viscous, bubbly, foamy, and opaque.**

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## February Projects and Events

### **The 100th Day of School!**

During "The 100th Day of School" we do math centers that incorporate the number 100. Measuring, weighing, and estimating, are just a few of the skills we practice during this time.

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## March Projects and Events

**Read Across America Day!**

and

**Dr. Seuss's Birthday!**

During "Read Across America Day" we celebrate Dr. Seuss's Birthday by working on literacy projects relating to books written by Theodore Geisel. Literature and activities include. . .

- **The Foot Book**

After reading The Foot Book, we graph the different kinds of shoes we wear and calculate the results.

- **Bartholomew and the Oobleck**

Since we have been studying solids and liquids in science, we read Bartholomew and the Oobleck. We make Oobleck, a creation made of water and cornstarch. After testing the consistency we decide whether or not it is a liquid or a solid.

- **The Cat in the Hat**

After reading The Cat in the Hat, we make Dr. Seuss hats.

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## March Projects and Events

### Congratulations Second Trimester Award Winners!

#### CJW 1:

*Cory-Speech Award, Hannah-Playground Award, Lindsay-Playground Award,  
Jackson-Library Award and Music Award.*

### More March Projects Back to Classroom Projects and Events Back to Home Page

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## March Projects and Events

PTA Art Adventure Presents

The Artist of the Month:

Michelangelo

During March, students created drawings by looking up to the paper taped to the bottom of their desks, just like Michelangelo did when painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

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## April Projects and Events

### Earth Day 2003!

**Earth Day is an opportunity for us to discuss recycling, pollution, and taking care of the home we call earth. Earth Day activities include:**

- **Ocean in a Bottle** - represents pollution that poisons our waterways.
- **Tree Seedlings** - to be planted at home.
- **Earth Pie** - a snack that represents the different layers underground.

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## May Projects and Events

### Spring Barbecue!

**Families joined us for an end-of-the-year  
"Western Days Barbecue Lunch"**

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## May Projects and Events

### PTA Art Adventure Presents

Artist of the Month:

Charles Russell

and

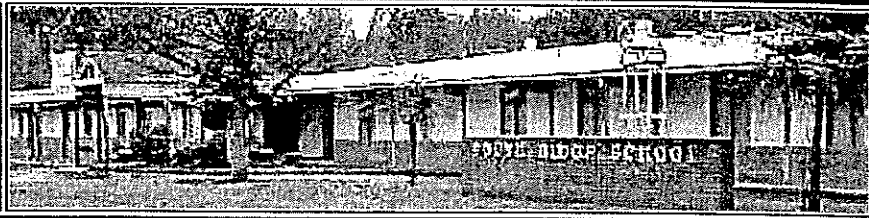
Frederick Remington

This month's featured artists were Charles Russell and Frederick Remington. Students learned about perspective and how objects in art can be made to appear very close or very far away.

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## June Projects and Events

### Field Trip to the Oregon Zoo!

**After our study about the comparison between animal homes and human homes around the world, we visited the Oregon Zoo in Portland, Oregon.**

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## June Projects and Events

### Field Trip to Downtown Ridgefield!

- We visit Union Ridge Elementary to meet the pen pals we've been writing to all year.
  - We visit Zebrun's Market to understand how a store is managed.
  - We visit the downtown post office to learn how mail is sent and processed.
  - We visit the downtown library to learn about their summer reading program.

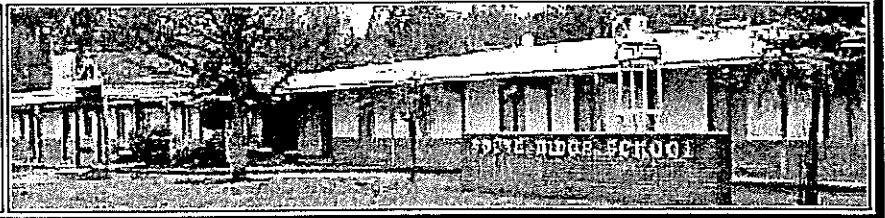
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## July Projects and Events

Have a Wonderful Summer  
and  
Keep Reading!

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## August Projects and Events

**Have a Wonderful Summer**  
and  
**Keep Reading!**

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## Literacy Web Site Links

### Parent Links

#### U.S. Department of Education-Reading and Language Arts

This government site provides information regarding federal programs, initiatives, and research about reading and language arts.

#### U.S. Department of Education-Parents and Families

This government site features information about preparing children for school and fostering school success, finding schools and aftercare, tips for helping a child to read, assisting children with special needs, preparing and paying for college, and more.

#### Family Education.com

This site features a wide range of informative articles for families with children ages 0 to 18.

#### Family Resource.com

This family resource includes information about adoption, behavior, child safety, learning disabilities, and much more.

#### Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA)

CIERA provides links to other sites featuring information about reading research.

#### Learning to Read

Learning to read includes informational articles about language arts and reading research.

#### Enchanted Learning.com

Enchanted Learning includes science themed poetry, crafts, and activities for children.

#### National Education Association (NEA)

The NEA provides informational articles about hot topics in education.

#### Questions to Ask Your Child

This site includes several different kinds of questions to ask your child during and after reading.

#### Reading Resources from Richmond Public Schools

This reading resource page includes information about authors, illustrators, book lists, and much more.

### Student Links

Fun Brain.com

Fun Brain features fun word and number games that are free for children to play on-line.

Giggle Poetry.com

Giggle Poetry includes opportunities for students to read, write, and score on-line poetry.

Grandpa Tucker's Rhymes and Tales

This site features free on-line themed songs, poetry, and stories for children.

Stories to Read On-Line

Included on this site are free illustrated stories for children to read on-line.

Yahooligans.com

Yahooligans.com features word and problem solving games, free for children to play on-line.

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## Frequently Asked Literacy Questions

### 1. My child refuses to sound-out many words while reading.

A refusal to attempt words probably stems from inadequate word-recognition skills. Children often omit words, saying they don't know the words, and wait for the teacher or parent to provide the word. This generally results from prolonged frustration with reading or characterizes a child who isn't a risk taker when reading. One solution is to stop providing words for the child as soon as he/she pauses. Allow the child time to analyze the word and then provide prompts such as, "What letter sounds do you know in the word?" or "Are there any word parts that you recognize in the word?" Also model how to blend the sounds in the word. These strategies will reassure your child that he can be successful while reading.

### 2. My child has difficulty remembering sound-spelling relationships.

A child having this difficulty needs a great deal of review and repetition. Emphasize wordplay. Provide letter cards and a pocket chart, magnetic letters and a pie tin, or foam letters for word building. In addition, have the child frequently read simple, decodable text. You may also need to provide other cues such as picture cards for each sound-spelling so the child associates a letter with an image and a key word. Or use a story that dramatizes a sound. For example, you might tell a story about a hissing snake to help the child remember the /s/ sound of the letter s.

### 3. My child still confuses certain letters and words.

Some children need much attention put on the visual differences between confusing letters and words. Spend time discussing these differences. Provide practice reading word lists containing the confusing letters or words. Use minimal variations to focus your child's attention.

### 4. My child has trouble with multisyllabic words.

Beginning in second grade children encounter greater numbers of multisyllabic words and begin having difficulties if their decoding skills are weak - especially if they are not beginning to recognize larger chunks (spellings) in words. These children need lots of practice in analyzing words into usable parts. For example, when they encounter the word "chalkboard," children should be able to see the two smaller words in the compound word, or readily recognize common spelling patterns such as "ch," "-alk," or "-oar." Have your child search words for common spelling patterns and circle or highlight the pattern.

### 5. My child seems to overanalyze words.

Some students develop an overreliance on one reading strategy. This might be a result of the instructional focus of the classroom teacher, the child compensating by using the one strategy that seemed to work best early on, or the child having a weak understanding of the many strategies that can be used to decode words. Children who overanalyze words often sound out words that they should be able to recognize by

sight, particularly the words taught as sight words such as "the" and "of." These children break these and other words into too many parts. To help your student, use flash cards and timed tests to develop quick sight word recognition of common words. Also help him/her focus on larger word parts while reading.

### 6. My child has extremely weak language skills, which seems to be affecting his reading.

Certainly language skills play a crucial role in reading. A child's vocabulary and sense of story structure are important. Engage your child in frequent conversations and in acting out stories. Also, writing exercises can begin as lengthier discussions. In addition, reading larger amounts of nonfiction to expand children's world knowledge is critical.

### 7. My child cannot blend or segment words.

The quick and automatic recognition of the most common words appearing in text is necessary for fluent reading. Review these words daily in context and in isolation. Use a strategy that includes saying, writing, and reading the word many times. For example, select the word from a set of words, write the word in the air, write the word on paper, discuss interesting features of the word, and look for the word in books and environmental print. In addition, make word cards with these and other words and build sentences using them. Remember, attention to the spelling patterns of both decodable and "irregular" words is essential. Wide reading and repeated readings are also necessary for developing high-frequency word knowledge.

### 8. My child frequently mispronounces words either at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end.

Some students have difficulties visually analyzing words or do not analyze words in their entirety. These children need work in learning left-to-right progression and focusing on the word parts frequently neglected.

### 9. My child frequently substitutes words.

Substitutions are the most common type of oral reading error. Frequent substitutions of words is often a sign of relying too much on context and not enough on the sound-spelling relationships in words. Sometimes children substitute an occasional word because their natural speech patterns and vocabulary differ from the language of the text. However, frequent substitutions are a cause for concern. Make sure the text your child is reading is at his/her instructional level. Reinforce word attack strategies by using prompts that focus on word parts.

### 10. My child frequently adds or leaves out words.

Your child may be making frequent additions to try and make the sentences fit his/her oral language patterns. Or he/she may be reading too rapidly to pay attention to each word. Ask him/her questions about the text that require your child to read entire sentences or passages in which addition occurred.

Omissions may indicate that the child is editing out words that he/she doesn't need to make meaning from the text or that don't fit his/her dialect. At other times, a child may omit words because he/she has weak decoding skills and can't figure those words out. The letters and syllables children omit most frequently are those at the end of words. They may be paying too little attention to that part of words, reading too quickly, experiencing dialect interference, or having difficulty decoding the phonic elements. Children sometimes

omit entire lines of print because they're having trouble keeping their place on the page or with the concept of return sweeps. Use a place markers as long as they need.

If the number of words your student omits decreases when he/she is reading an easier passage, he/she probably has decoding difficulties. If the number of omissions stays the same, he/she has fluency difficulties. When the child omits a word, point out the word and ask him/her to pronounce it. If your child can't, help him/her to blend the word. You might want to have him/her preread the passage silently before reading aloud. Also having the child point out each word as he/she reads it can be helpful.

## 11. My child often repeats words while he/she is reading.

Repetitions are sometimes caused by slow and labored word recognition. The child sounds out the word then repeats it at a more natural pace. Or the child may realize that the reading doesn't make sense and "retrace" his/her steps to try to figure out the text. This indicates that the child is self-monitoring his/her comprehension of text, but the text may be too difficult for independent or instructional reading. Call your child's attention to repetitions if they are a recurring problem. Note that some children repeat words during oral reading not because they have difficulties decoding, but rather because they're nervous or lack confidence in their abilities. Encouragement and praise are great remedies, as are opportunities for the child to rehearse the text before reading aloud.

## 12. My child reads word-by-word in a slow, labored manner.

To find out why your student is reading so slowly, ask him/her to read a passage from a book at a lower reading level. If he/she reads the passage slowly, the problem is probably a result of poor fluency. If he/she can read the text easily, the problem is probably due to decoding or comprehension difficulties. One way to determine whether the child is having decoding or comprehension difficulties is to have him/her read an on-level passage, then ask a series of questions. If he/she answers 75% or more of the questions accurately, the problem is one of weak decoding skills. If this is so, have him/her read from material at a lower level. And make time for repeated reading or echo readings, and use dictated stories for reading instruction and practice.

Another way to determine the child's problem is to give him/her a running list of the words they will encounter in the text. If he/she can't recognize 95% of the words, then decoding may be the problem. If the child does recognize 95% or more of the words, but has difficulty reading, then comprehension or fluency is the problem.

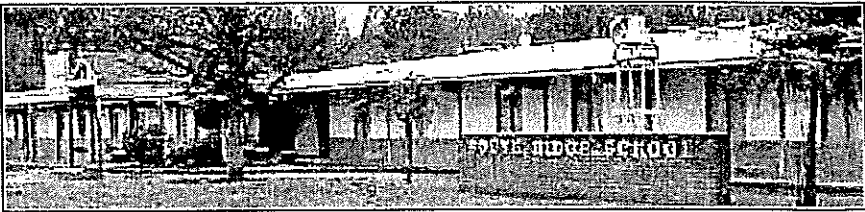
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Questions and responses from:

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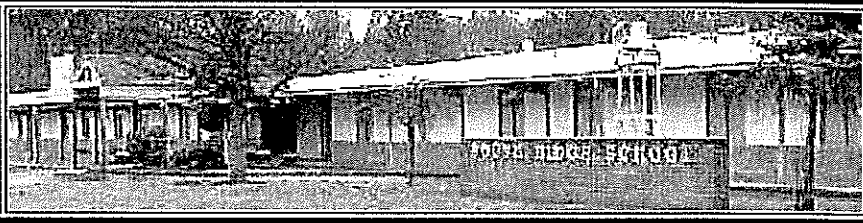
Thank You Parent Helpers!



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## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

As society continues to move toward a more critical literacy, the definition of what it means to be literate is in a constant state of being redefined. As a result, there is a need for students to become literate, high functioning individuals. To help guide students on their journey to becoming literate adults, balanced literacy instruction is necessary. Balanced programs give both children and teachers the best opportunity for success. By using a variety of different kinds of reading and writing instructional strategies, the academic needs of students are met. Balanced literacy is not constrained by or reactive to a particular philosophy. It includes careful selection of the best theory and learning strategies to match the learning styles of individual children (Morrow, 1997; Spiegel, 1998).

Reading and writing growth among children is not only nurtured through a balanced literacy program in the classroom, but through strong parent involvement. The component of positive communication between school and home, and the active role of parents modeling literacy practices and engaging in literacy activities with their children at home, dramatically affects the attitudes and academic success of children. Supervision of learning activities at home may be the most educationally significant types of parent involvement. Not only do individual children and their families function more effectively, but there is an aggregate effect on the performance of students and teachers when schools collaborate with parents (Epstein, 2001; Henderson, 1988).

With the infusion of technology into homes and the workplace, the World Wide Web can be used as an additional medium to communicate with parents. To reach more global audiences, such as parents or the community at large, it is more effective to use a home page on the World Wide Web. The intention is that the first grade web site will provide information about a first grade balanced literacy program for families, and provide insight into the first grade school year. It can be used as a resource for information that may assist with literacy development at home, and provide links to other education literacy web sites (Dietz, 1997).

### Conclusions

Based on current literacy research, the following conclusions have been reached:

1. A first grade balanced literacy program is necessary to provide students with the best possible instruction necessary for optimum literacy growth. Because a balanced literacy program incorporates a large variety of instructional strategies, balanced programs give both children and teachers the best opportunity for success (Spiegel, 1998).
2. Reading aloud, guided reading, shared reading, independent reading, guided writing, shared writing, and independent writing, provide students the opportunity to actively participate in various activities that increase literacy knowledge and skill development.
3. Systematic and early instruction in phonics leads to better reading: Better accuracy of word recognition, decoding, spelling, and oral and silent comprehension (Chall, 1996). Therefore, systematic phonics instruction is a valuable component of a balanced literacy program that must be incorporated.

4. Because reading and writing are so closely interwoven, the combination of reading and writing activities is necessary for allowing children to use both process of constructing words and taking words apart.
5. Parent involvement is directly related to significant increases in overall student achievement. Therefore, the need to incorporate and encourage parent involvement in and out of the classroom is essential for students to succeed (Bloom, 1985).
6. The Internet is a valuable tool for providing information and communicating with families. It is often accessible from home or from work and can be used to reach a large audience.

#### Recommendations

To ensure that the first grade web site is utilized and maintained as a helpful, informational, appealing, and user friendly tool for first grade families, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Continue education so that the web site can be replenished with the most recent and reliable literacy research.
2. Continue researching web sites on the World Wide Web for ways in which the design and integrity of the web site can be maintained and improved.
3. Update the web site regularly with new photographs, dates, research, and new pages so that the informational resources can be adjusted and expanded, as needed.
4. Interview, survey, and poll families for information and suggestions so that the web site can be adjusted to best meet the needs of first grade families.
5. Have the web site assessed by technology experts for ways that the web site can be improved.

6. Have the web site accessible to families during school events (i.e. Back-to-School Night, parent conferences, etc.).
7. E-mail web site photographs to families.
8. Using the weekly classroom newsletter, update families with new web site changes and additions, and encourage families to access the home page information and view photographs of their first grade children.

The first grade web site is intended to serve as an additional way to communicate with first grade families regarding the balanced literacy instruction that occurs in the first grade classroom, as well as give them insight into the first grade school year. It is with great hope that it will provide families with information that can assist in the literacy development of children at home, as well as provide them the opportunity to take an active role in their child's education.

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