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## Universal School

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Assalamu-Alaikum,

Universal School is making a shift in the K-5 ELA curriculum following the Balanced Literacy approach for Reading and Writing. The Balanced Literacy model incorporates a balance of the instructional format, strategies, and content established by the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts spanning the four central strands of literacy: Reading, Writing, Language (Word Study), and Speaking/ Listening. The skills and strategies are practiced across the strands rather than independently within a workshop approach using Schoolwide Units of Study, Wilson's Fundations, and Words Their Way.

**What is the reading and writing workshop?** Students are involved in authentic reading, writing, and speaking and listening projects in readers workshop and writers workshop. They read and respond to self-selected books, write and publish books and other compositions, and they discuss and listen to each other's insights. The workshop approach involves three key characteristics: time, choice, and response.

**Time:** Students have extended periods of time and opportunities to read, write, and share. Instead of being something separate for when students finish schoolwork, reading and writing become the core of the literacy curriculum.

**Choice:** Students have ownership of their learning through self-selection of books they read and their topics for writing. Instead of reading books selected by the teacher or reading the same book together as a group or class, students select the books they want to read - books that are suitable to their interests and reading levels. Although students are selecting their own material (poetry, nonfiction, etc.), teachers set parameters.

**Response:** Students respond to books they are reading in reading logs they share and in conversations with classmates and the teacher. Similarly, in writers' workshop, students share with classmates, drafts of books and other pieces they are writing, and they share their completed and published pieces with genuine audiences.

### Components of the Reader's and Writer's Workshop:

- **Mini lesson:** The teacher teaches a whole class lesson on a strategy or skill based on the needs of the students and the national common core standards. Picture and chapter books are read as the teacher thinks aloud and demonstrates the skill and students
- **Independent work time:** Students are reading self-selected 'just right books' as they practice what they were just taught in the mini lesson. They are responding to what they read in a reader's notebook. They may participate in book clubs to read and talk about books with a group of students. The teacher is conferencing with students about what they are reading. He or she is providing instruction in small guided reading and strategy groups.
- **Guided Reading:** The goal of guided reading and strategy groups is to help students learn to use independent reading strategies successfully. This is small group instruction (4-6 students) facilitated by the teacher. In guided reading groups, students are selected who are reading at a comparable level and the teacher selects material at that instructional level (text that can be read at 90-94% accuracy). Strategy groups are brought together to practice a single strategy or skill and may include students reading at different levels. In both cases, the goal is to enable students to acquire, use, and develop reading strategies that translate to high levels of fluency and comprehension at increasingly complex levels of text.
- **Writing Conferences:** Conferring is a powerful way to provide individualized, purposeful, focused and specific instruction. Conferring teaches the writer, and not necessarily in reference to just a single piece of writing. The goal is to teach the writer in such a way that s/he uses the lesson for all pieces of writing to come.
- **Sharing time:** Students share what they read and write and how they applied the day's mini lesson. This may be done as a whole class or in small groups. Written responses and book recommendations are shared as well.

**How will my child be assessed?** Reading and writing workshop assessment is ongoing. The teacher will closely monitor your child's progress through notes and running records taken during conferencing and small group work. Rubrics will be used to assess your student's fluency, comprehension, written response, and participation in workshop. Expect to see fewer worksheets coming home as this model provides authentic reading and writing opportunities.

# **How can I help my child succeed?** READ. READ. READ. Be sure to read with your child as often as you can and have your child read every night. Also, keep lines of communication open with your child's teachers. Most importantly, be patient. Remember, both students and teachers are looking for progress. It's not always about the right answer, but the process to get to it.

Wasalaam,  
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