

Classroom 5 Notes

September 17, 2008

Falls of the Ohio

On an overcast and mild day in early September, classroom 5 visited the Devonian and Silurian fossil beds at the Falls of the Ohio. Our young scientists joined those paleontologists who have come to the Falls to research plant and animal life that existed in prehistoric shallow seas.

Asia studies

We have also begun to study the continent of Asia, looking first at land and water forms that explain the location, life, and culture of the continent's earliest people. We have dramatized Asian creation stories. Each story serves as a backdrop to what different civilizations experienced and believed.

“People tell creation stories to answer big questions about how the world was made.” *James*

“People tell [creation stories] because they wanted to preserve the story for their children” *Henry*

“People tell creation stories so they can learn how and why other groups told how things were made” *Grace*

Writers' Club

Each Wednesday, students begin brainstorming and preparing their initial version of a writing assignment. From youngest to oldest, all participate. First year students literally follow the adage, write what you know. They have begun working on “All About Me”, a series of exercises using pictures as a starting point for writing. Second and third year concentrate on the writing process – story development through the use of ‘mapping’, use of descriptive language, and proofreading.

MATH FACTS ‘HOMEWORK’

Students are continuing to work on math facts at school. We do a timed test (20 – 30 seconds per table).

Practicing math facts is done in numerical order. When we test, we ‘jumble’ the facts. We start with addition and subtraction, and then move to multiplication, and division.

Feel free to work on math facts at home.

A variety of memorization tactics may be employed, for example –

- Skip counting
- Combining memorization with a physical activity like ball bouncing or jump roping
- Computer games for math facts
- Practicing memorization during car rides or other ‘down’ times

Third Year Junior Great Books

The JUNIOR GREAT BOOKS program describes itself as “[t]he interpretive discussion program that moves students toward excellence in reading comprehension, critical thinking, and writing”.

The process leading to the “Shared Inquiry” discussion has several steps -

- a first reading where unfamiliar vocabulary is noted so that it can be looked up. Students are encouraged to collaborate in class on vocabulary.
- a second reading where the new vocabulary is integrated into the story and where students begin thinking about the why of the story. Questions students may have about the story should be noted at this stage.
- the Shared Inquiry discussion where the group works together to discover meaning by thinking and talking about an interpretive question.

We give the interpretive questions out ahead of time because many children like more time to ponder the question. The program suggests it could be given right before the discussion. Please do not consider it assigned homework. Students may choose to work on the question at home but it is not required. It is intended that new ideas and ways of interpreting the reading selection will come to light during our discussion of the interpretive question. There is not a right answer per se. Helping your child think about the story is beneficial but please don't feel they should come in with a correct answer – a well thought out idea is the desired result.

Families can best support their students by

1. reading the story together, or have your child read the story to you.
2. Asking your child to tell you about the story.

Questions for your child could include

- Tell me about the story. What happened next?
 - Who is your favorite character? Why?
 - What do you like about the story? What don't you like about it?
 - Does the story remind you of anything you have done or seen?
3. Listen to and enjoy what your child has to tell you.

Reader's Theatre

After the delightful performance (for parents) of “Life in the Paleozoic” and “Take Me Back to Gondwanaland” by last year's students, we are continuing with Reader's Theatre. It is an oral interpretive reading activity which builds student reading fluency by

- Providing repeated reading practice
- Allowing students to delve deeply into a story, poem, etc.
- Providing writing experiences for older students as they transform a story or poem into play form
- Making reading fun by focusing on acting and oral expression

Readers theatre does not require stage sets. Props and costumes may be used but the main focus is on oral expression. Students are able to independently choose among the various Readers Theatre scripts in our classroom and develop their own performance as well as adapt favorite poems/stories into their own play scripts.