

The Vasquez Voice

August 27, 2009

HOMEWORK

Thank you for supporting your child in completing nightly homework. The class is rewarded each day when we have 100% homework completion. Please ask your child what the reward is.

Individual students are also rewarded for earning a “+” for their homework for each section on the front of the homework log. I will attach a “Homework Pass” to your child’s homework log at the end of the third week if your child has earned pluses for all three weeks. This pass may be used for an entire night’s worth of homework. When your child wants to redeem it, just attach it to the usual homework sheets.

By all means, if you have a scheduling conflict which makes getting homework done impossible, please let me know via E-mail, voice mail message or quick note—I understand! The work will still need to be completed. The class reward and individual award won’t be affected.

Curriculum Corner

Literacy

Here are the titles of the stories we will be reading for the next five weeks:

August 24-28: Papa Tells Chita a Story

August 31-September 4: Coyote Places the Stars

September 8-12: Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears
September 15-19: Lon Po Po
September 22-26: The Crowded House

In reading, we have been reviewing the strategies for decoding long words. Please read with your child every night and help him/her decode/pronounce unfamiliar words, and ask your child to tell you about what he/she read.

In the middle of the quarter, I will assess the students on their oral reading fluency (the number of words they read per minute). If your child is still reading fewer than 64 words per minute at a third grade level, I will begin sending home a weekly homework sheet that has a full page reading section on the front and questions on the back. Your child should read this out loud to you every night and answer the questions Thursday night. This extra support is intended to help your child become a more fluent reader. To determine progress yourself, you can use a timer to see if the words per minute that your child is reading is increasing.

We read the weekly selection (see titles above) three times throughout the week as a whole class, in partners, and individually. Ask your child about the “Say Something” partner reading activity. Try it at home—it is really fun and encourages your child to express his/her thinking as he/she reads.

First, we are focusing on writing "Five Finger Summaries." These are short summaries that identify the main character, problem, complications, climax, and resolution. We are also focusing on making connections as we read.

Reading focus skills are practiced and evaluated through quizzes, the reading workbook and/or creative projects. For the comprehension test, students will first learn how to answer literal comprehension questions in a multiple choice format. Eventually, students will be answering 18 multiple choice questions that cover vocabulary, literal comprehension, interpretive comprehension, and evaluative comprehension. There are two essay questions on these tests as well.

Our school is guiding the students in answering these essay questions with the “RACED” format. We will begin practicing this structure for written responses in class, soon. Ask your child what each letter of the RACED format stands for. Here is what your child should tell you:

- R = Restate the question
- A = Answer the question
- C = Cite the evidence
- E = Expand your answer
- D = Demonstrate good conventions (capitalization, punctuation, spelling)

Your child will be reading a short book in a group with me as well each week. These books contain the same vocabulary as the weekly reading selection and are written to

help children build connections to the weekly reading selection. During this time, we will practice the focus skills, fluency, reading with expression, and will discuss topics related to the story that come up as we interact with one another.

Writing

It seems as though in third grade, we write all day, every day! I have identified writing goals for my students based on my own experience and the many trainings I have attended, in conjunction with the “6 Traits of Writing” (voice, word choice, organization, ideas and content, sentence fluency, and conventions).

Currently, the students are working on these goals: see yourself as a writer; write with an audience in mind; include a creative title; include details that entertain the reader; use suggestions to revise your writing; and use proper conventions. We will first explore writing descriptive paragraphs to prepare for our first writing project, a story. Mini lessons will be given to help students incorporate all story elements and utilize the six traits of writing. The students will help each other revise their stories and edit for conventions and I will provide feedback as well. Final copies will be written and used for assessment purposes.

Spelling

Thank you for helping your child identify and practice the third grade "Core Words." I administered the first of three "Achievement Tests" that will track your child's progress in spelling these high frequency words in context throughout the year. The results will be sent home along with a letter explaining the Sitton Spelling program the week of August 31.

Unit 1: This unit's focus is on the spelling patterns for the long i sound, spelling patterns for the "ow" sound (spelled /ou/ and /ow/), and words with multiple meanings. We will also discuss how short vowel sounds are usually spelled with one vowel while long vowel sounds are usually spelled with two vowels.

If your child needs challenge words, I will add words from our curriculum to his/her “Words to Learn” list. Spelling dictation sentences will also become a part of the unit reviews for students who need enrichment.

Math: Unit 1; Routines, Review, and Assessment

Our current math unit is “Routines, Review, and Assessment.” All that really means is we are reviewing what was learned in second grade with the number grid, the name collection boxes, collecting and recording data, telling time, recognizing number patterns, and solving problems with dollars and cents.

For addition facts, we practice through the Everyday Math games, through our work in the journal pages, and with fact triangles. Please regularly practice the addition facts up to

18 with your child. Our goal is to transition from counting on our fingers to trusting our brains to provide instant recall of the addition facts by recalling each fact in less than three seconds. Subtraction facts will be the focus next quarter, with multiplication and division to follow in the third and fourth quarters, respectively.

I have administered a pretest for addition facts. This assessment will be sent home soon. A post test will be given at the end of the quarter and will be used for a grade on your child's report card.

This quarter, we are learning the addition algorithms. The partial sums algorithm is the algorithm your child will be expected to demonstrate proficiently. I will also teach the "Opposite Change" method and the traditional method (what we grew up learning) so the children have multiple methods for solving multi-digit addition problems. I have given the pretest for this algorithm and will administer a post test at the end of the quarter.

When we begin Unit 2, "Adding and Subtracting Whole Numbers," I will begin guiding the students in using a "T-Chart" to solve word problems and provide a written explanation. The new edition of Everyday Math has added an "Open Response" item to each unit test. The children must show how they answered the problem by drawing pictures, writing number models, and explaining in writing how they solved the problem. These problems are multi-step problems that have multiple solutions. We will complete a practice open response item in class, either independently, in partners, in cooperative groups, or as a whole class. I will provide feedback to students on this practice item to help them be successful when completing a similar problem for the test.

Since using reference skills is an emphasis in third grade, I am encouraging students to use their Student Reference Books (SRB's) first when they need assistance. Encourage your child to do the same by noting the "SRB" icon on the Home Links. When children learn to look up information themselves, they tend to remember it better than if they are simply told the information. Becoming independent learners is a goal for all third graders.

Science: Structure and Function

Our current science unit is called "Structure and Function." We learn primarily about animal adaptations in this unit. Although we have science textbooks now, they will be used as a supplementary resource. Our science kits provide hands-on learning experiences for the children which is very important to their learning. At the culmination of the unit, the student workbook will be clipped into your child's portfolio so you can see what your child learned in science.

Technology Project: Portfolio Covers

So far, we have learned to log on and off the computer, to navigate to find our class folder and individual folders, open a Word document, insert Word Art for a title, and save the document into our individual folders. Next, students will add clip art, shapes, and their photo, along with a decorative border, to create a cover for their portfolios that they

will color with markers/colored pencils/crayons (since printing in color is too expensive!).

The students will access pre-approved websites to enhance their learning in all subject areas. Later, they will learn how to create one slide in Power Point that will be compiled as a class presentation to represent the "ABC's of America."