Dear Families,

Thank you so much for sharing your children with our classroom this year! This is a letter explaining about Lucy Calkins’ Writing Workshop.

I thought I would post this letter here to give you a more detailed introduction to the methods we use and also a few tips you can try if you want to support your child at home.

First off, in our classroom we teach using the writing workshop model. This is a decades-old model that has years of research in the classrooms across the world. It is based on the authentic process writers go through when they write a piece for publication. This process develops and becomes more independent as children get older. If your child was in a writing workshop classroom when he or she was younger, you will see some things that are familiar and some things that are different.

Typically, we have students collect ideas, experiment, and develop ideas in their writer’s notebooks. (These are the notebooks the students decorated during the first week of school. ) You may see them coming to and from home and school from time to time. We encourage students to write in them every day, for a few minutes at least, in order to continually collect possible material for future pieces. You might notice that the work in the notebook can sometimes be a little disjointed, messy, sometimes unfinished; other times it reads like fully developed pieces. That’s okay. The notebook is a place where students generate ideas, and not all ideas will require the same kind of attention.

After students have chosen an idea, they will then move on to drafting their pieces onto paper outside of the notebook or on their computers. We try to go through that step in the process quickly so that students have plenty of time to revise. When students revise, they are working on big-ticket changes in order to make sure their meaning shines—refining structure, writing new beginnings, elaborating on key points. From there, students will work on editing, which means they will be doing final checks on spelling, punctuation, and other conventions. Although, to be fair, we do ask students to edit as they go through the entire process, many students need that final check in case they missed something.

When a piece has worked its way through the process, students might choose to publish it—that is, make it ready for readers. Sometimes this involves typing the piece up, sometimes this involves copying it over, other times it means crafting an attractive cover. We then take a bit of time to celebrate.

The thing we focus on most in writing workshop is improving the writer’s skills as a writer. While we value the final piece, it’s not the final product that we are most interested in, but rather how the writer grew and changed over the process.

Most of the direct teaching of writing workshop happens in school. But if you would like to support your young writer at home, here are a few possible ideas:

* Storytell whenever you can. While driving in the car or around the dinner table, share stories from your day or your past and encourage your child to do the same.
* Create a writing space for your child. This can be a desk, a cozy corner, or a hiding place under the table with a flashlight. You might want to set your child up with paper, a few pens, and other tools to complete the space.
* Read to your child every day. Read anything. Newspaper articles, emails from Grandma, novels. Sometimes as children get older and can read for themselves we pull back on reading aloud to them. But, children can gain a felt sense of various genres by being read to, as well as develop a love of language.
* Share your own writing process with your child. If you write anything, whether an email or an assignment for work or a project for the family, share how you went about creating that piece of writing—both the struggles and the successes.
* When your child is writing, try to only give quick bits of help. Asking questions or limiting yourself to just a sentence or two can help a student get the support they need while also fostering independence. Some questions or comments you might use include:
* What are you hoping your reading will get from this piece?
* What’s your favorite part?
* What strategies have you used? Show me where you used them.
* Your writing reminds me of\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (insert favorite author’s name) because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* Your worked very hard on this. I can tell that you \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Please let me know if you have any questions or comments you’d like to make about our class’s writing curriculum.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Min