

WRITING TARGETS – Winter 2011

This year at William Annin Middle School the Language Arts department once again has taken advantage of the NJASK student writings that the New Jersey Department of Education has returned to Bernards Township.

As in the past, the teachers use department meeting time to sort through the thousands of sheets of writing and to analyze both the strengths and weaknesses apparent in the *two, timed, on-demand essays* that your children produce. The next step involves devoting a number of lessons to returning the papers to our young authors and providing time for them to assess the writing they produced in the spring of 2010. With support and guidance from their teachers as well as peer editors, the sixth, seventh and eighth graders have a chance to plot and plan how to improve their writing. We encourage the pupils to bring the papers home and share them with their parents. Teachers will continue to target writing instruction throughout the remainder of the year.

The following information represents an overview of the instruction students received in relation to the NJASK writing tasks:

GRADE 6 READING:

The Grade 6 Reading classes used the second of the NJASK writings as a learning tool. Specifically, they returned the writings to the students and observed them as they read their responses. Many of them were not satisfied with last year's work. After reminding them that they were in 5th grade when they did the writing, the class noted the space they could have filled with ideas and details. Thus teachers emphasized the need to use all of the pages available for responses. Students then re-read, a number of times, for a list of elements including: paragraphing, sentence fragments and run-ons, capitalization, correct word choice. Teachers encouraged students to note opportunities for improvement. All will again look at the writings; this time evaluating organization, ideas, and details.

These resources are of very real value to the students, because they can safely and objectively evaluate what they are, or are not, achieving in their writing.

GRADE 6 ENGLISH

Grade 6 English is planning to explain Speculative writing and elements of the Holistic scoring rubric. Students will read varied examples, and then read their own writing, where they will analyze their writing and describe strengths and weaknesses. Students will practice writing a speculative writing piece.

Additionally as a 6th grade English team has developed lessons focusing on word choice, varied sentence structure, dialogue and other compositional risks. They have mini lessons planned. Each teacher has posted this information on websites.

GRADE 7 COMMUNICATION ARTS

The seventh grade Communication Arts I distributed the NJASK writing responses and reviewed the structures of both persuasive and speculative writing tasks. In addition, all reviewed how to use the NJ Holistic Scoring Rubric and asked students to evaluate their own responses. As a reflection, students wrote a letter to a parent/ guardian stating their strengths as writers, what needed to be improved, and what writing goals they would like to achieve for this year. These reflections will be revisited later in the year.

GRADE 7 ENGLISH

After completion of the research project, grade 7 will focus on NJASK. Students have reviewed and evaluated plenty of open-ended questions already, but they are related to the literature read in class. Last year's ASK papers

provide opportunities for practice writing, modeling and evaluating Speculative Writing. Teachers have prompts that the pupils will respond to. All will review the Holistic rubric and then will evaluate them. Teachers will also photocopy good and bad examples and give out anonymous samples for classes to evaluate and discuss using the rubric. In the past grade 7 has also done timed reading selections with multiple choice and an open-ended response. Classes then discuss strategies for multiple choice and using the text to answer the questions.

GRADE 8 COMMUNICATION ARTS

Students made a list of advice for a seventh grade student regarding superior success when writing persuasion. The students did a great job! The classes discussed the following concepts:

The importance of pre-writing and how to effectively pre-write (Determining what position will make the best argument)

Audience	Concise wording
Voice	Introductions (attention grabbers)
Persuasive wording	Evidence and fact to support a position
Thesis statements	Call to action in a conclusion
Focused purpose	Logical organization
Supporting a position	Varied sentence structure
Transition statements	

- risk-taking strategies
 - audience
 - methods of introduction
 - methods of conclusion
- prewriting
- patterns of organization
- individual strengths and needs

Activities and Procedures in Comm. Arts:

Students will read state responses of persuasive student samples

Students will "work for the state" and evaluate writing samples using the NJ Scoring Rubric

Evaluate his/ her own writing sample using the NJ Scoring Rubric

Reflect, prepare, and plan for the test in May.

Students have received their writing and reviewed writing skill categories assessed by the New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring rubric:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|
| • Content and Organization | • Usage |
| • Sentence Construction | • Mechanics |

Students will prepare for a prompt modeled on the NJASK, then write a persuasive essay. Afterwards, students will apply the NJASK rubric to their writing to determine strengths and remaining needs.

GRADE 8 LITERARY CONNECTIONS

On the first day, students will evaluate their own writing and create a list of strengths and weaknesses. As a class, students will create a list of ways to improve their scores and then hang them in the classroom. That night, the students will take their writing home and complete a writing conference with their parent or parents. Specifically, students should discuss the following with their parents: voice, audience, diction, focusing their writing and concise, yet descriptive wording. The conference should address the ways they can improve on these aspects and how both parents and the teachers can help the child improve.