

## Literacy in ESD's Lower School

The ultimate goal of ESD's Lower School Language Arts Curriculum is for students to read, write, speak, and think critically. Simultaneously, we strive to promote the love of reading and to create a community of readers and writers with multiple skill levels. Our students experience the power of language as they communicate with others, express themselves, and engage in inquiry discussions with their peers. Reading and writing are the tools that help children find out what they want to know and are the platform upon which critical thinking skills are built. At ESD, literacy goes beyond basic skills and includes the higher-level abilities to think critically and creatively; to reason carefully; to inquire systematically into important matters; to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information; and to communicate effectively to a variety of audiences in a variety of forms.

### Reading

Even the youngest readers at ESD strive to construct meaning as they read. Early Childhood students use a wide variety of skills to decode words; however, as they do this, teachers urge them to think inferentially, examining characters' feelings and motivations and to predict what might happen next. Whatever the grade level, we ask and teach our students to think deeply as they read; to synthesize, evaluate, and analyze information; and to express these ideas in a clear, coherent manner. Books--from non-fiction, to fiction, to poetry--provide a shared experience for a classroom of learners, which offers the raw materials for inquiry discussion. As children share their opinions about a book, they must work to build a logical argument, using specific examples from the text and their environment. Learning to think analytically as one reads is crucial to ESD's literacy program.

### Writing

It is essential for students to become deeply involved in writing, to perceive themselves as authors, and to realize that writing allows them to construct deeper understanding. Writing is the concrete expression of a student's thought process, and as a child sees his or her ideas on paper, he or she is able to sharpen opinions and build a stronger argument. At ESD, we view writing as a problem-solving activity, during which budding authors must make numerous choices about how best to achieve their writing goals. Students use both reading and writing to explore and express their beliefs and to synthesize information. In order to use written communication effectively, students must learn to incorporate the conventions of writing, correct spelling, grammar, and usage, into their work.

As ESD students write, they must discover a topic, sense their audience, organize their ideas, and express these ideas in their own voices. Within the writing process, emphasis is placed on the natural and essential act of revision. A first draft enables children to see their ideas on paper. While revising, children find holes in their own reasoning, elaborate on ideas to make them more vibrant, and refine their paragraphs and sentences to make sure they are relevant. Furthermore, the revision process offers specific lessons in grammar usage and spelling, as children learn to recognize their own mistakes. ESD students explore a wide variety of genres including the research report, the expository essay, the personal narrative, literary analysis, fiction, journalistic articles, and poetry.

### Speaking and Listening

Essential to both the reading and writing curriculum at ESD are the indispensable skills of speaking and listening. Inquiry discussions based on shared reading require students to express their thoughts, opinions, and arguments in a coherent manner. Children actively listen to one another and genuinely respond to the comments made by their peers. Through numerous public speaking opportunities, Lower School students learn to comport themselves before an audience and to speak in a way that is accessible to others.