

Robert C. Parker School
Curriculum Summary
Grades 2-3

Morning Meeting and Student Share

Like all classrooms at Parker, the 2/3s are a place where conversation and the exchange of ideas are prized. In order for us to create a classroom where people can be heard, we practice our listening and speaking skills each day during Morning Meeting. We gather together on the rug in a circle and go into our silence, sitting with our eyes closed to collect our thoughts, relax and prepare for the day. We then share a greeting that goes around to each child and teacher, read the morning letter, and preview the day's schedule. In October, a share calendar is organized and in that month, our daily Student Share begins. At each Morning Meeting, one child has five minutes to share something special and to receive comments and questions from peers. These presentations offer practice in public speaking and in being a good audience. They also allow us all to get to know each other a little bit better!

Reading

The Robert C. Parker School creates a community of life-long readers. Consistent with educational theory, practical advice, and NYS Standards, the 2/3 Language Arts program engages Parker students in an active reading program. Our curriculum is flexible and individualized enough to spark independent pursuits in reading, as well as structured enough to ensure that each child makes developmentally appropriate jumps in literacy skills.

The 2/3s are given the space and opportunity to “fall into” books through Independent and Guided Reading. Clear expectations are set and time is carved out each day for our students to develop independence and stamina for reading.

With Independent Reading—called D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything and Read)—20 minutes or more is set aside for silent, focused reading. Sessions are kicked off by a quick, whole class lesson to introduce an important focus or strategy to try in their books, or to present book and genre recommendations from our classroom library. Students are active participants in these discussions, exchanging ideas and connections. Often, charts are composed on the spot to capture insights and learning. Students are then set off to read and work in their own books. Everyone is expected to be reading the whole time and to read books that are “just right” (at their independent reading level). Individual conferences with students are held during D.E.A.R., allowing for assessment, targeted support, private discussions and the exchange of book recommendations.

Guided Reading pulls together small groups of similar readers to share instruction with the teacher and a literary experience around great books. These small groups are called reading circles. Students are matched with trade books at their instructional level and every child reads his or her own copy of the text independently. Sessions with the teacher gather the group around particular teaching points (plot, sequencing, vocabulary, character development, discussion of genre conventions, observations of craft, author's purpose, etc.). In addition, over the course of reading a book, students are presented with "thinking questions" about characters' behaviors/choices and the big ideas in the text. The conversations around these questions inspire deeper thinking about plot points and dilemmas that characters face. Free wheeling discussions about our stories abound at our reading circle gatherings. These conversations are meant to resemble an adult book club, with opinions and insights shared openly.

Typically, reading circles meet with the teacher two times a week. In between, the group negotiates the pace of their reading to prepare for the next meeting. These small groups allow teachers to support, assess, and individualize the development of readers on an ongoing basis. The interests and enthusiasms, as well as needs, of our students guide the ebb and flow of the books we read each year. The classroom holds a wide variety of book sets for reading circles, and the collection is added to each year.

Homework: nightly 20 minutes of reading is expected.

Word Work

Students are encouraged to think of spelling as something we *use* every day in our writing and reading, rather than as a subject consisting of just memorization and testing. At the age where children are making the transition from invented spelling to conventional spelling, the goal is for children to take an interest in words and get into the habit of noticing and thinking hard about patterns in word spellings. Weekly Word Work lessons and weekly word sorts allow for students to discover both the rules of spelling and the inconsistencies in our spelling system. In addition, Guided Reading time for some students involves direct instruction in reviewing, reading and writing "sight words" and phrases to increase fluency. All students practice decoding skills in their reading circle meetings, reinforcing the week's focus in Word Work.

The word wall consists of high frequency words that students should read and spell correctly. Over the course of the year, the word wall expands as students and teacher add important words to it.

Writing Projects

In the 2/3s, students actively create personally meaningful writing projects while the art and craft of writing, as well as writing conventions, are taught, experimented with, and reinforced. Students are actively publishing works throughout the year, taking pieces from pre-writing to drafts, critique sessions with peers and a teacher, revision and editing, to final publication in a polished form.

Stages of focused writing and study will sync up with our integrated theme studies. These big studies engage students in several writing assignments with specific formats to follow. We open the year reviewing and learning about sentences and paragraphs, and then graduate to essay writing. Research projects engage students in gathering information in graphic organizers and transferring their notes to polished, written presentations. In addition, our studies also complete writing in a variety of forms, from poems and picture books, non-fiction texts, to tales and drama. In all cases, we study excellent examples of student writing and then work to model finished pieces after these examples.

Students are active participants in the writing process, often making decisions about topics and determining the final form of their pieces, with input and ongoing support from their writing community—the teacher and their peers. Fluency and creative expression are of primary importance in the writing process. Skills such as capitalization, punctuation and grammar are taught in context, and reinforced through self-/peer-/teacher-editing steps.

We have a tradition of celebrating finished works in our Shows of Work, which inspire students to set and meet goals and deadlines, and push themselves to do their finest work. After all, an audience awaits them at the end of a project!

Mathematics

The 2nd and 3rd graders are split by grade level during mathematics, with a teacher leading each group. Parker has adopted the TERC curriculum, *Investigations in Numbers, Data, and Space*.

Our approach to math values problem solving skills, numerical reasoning and computation, since all are necessary for successful mathematical thinking. In addition, we stress the equal importance of the mathematical *process* and *product*. Time in class is spent solving problems and talking about the problems. Mathematical talk is encouraged so students can explain their thinking and computational processes as well as support each other's problem solving skills. *Investigations* guides students to find more than one way to solve a problem, promotes flexibility in thinking, helps to develop efficiency in problem solving, and strengthens mathematical reasoning.

Both 2nd and 3rd graders are guided through a series of investigations in the mathematics program, with a combination of activities, including independent paper/pencil tasks, work with manipulatives, and small group problem-solving with teachers. Games are also a fun and valuable part of the TERC program, teaching and reinforcing math skills.

The following is a sampling of units of study followed through the TERC curriculum:

2nd grade: Counting, Coins & Combinations (Addition and Subtraction); Shapes, Blocks & Symmetry (2-D and 3-D Geometry); How Many Floors? How Many Rooms? (Patterns, Functions, and Change); How Many Tens? How Many Ones?; Parts of a Whole, Parts of a Group (Fractions).

3rd grade: Trading Stickers, Combining Coins (Addition and Subtraction); Equal Groups (Multiplication and Division); Surveys and Line Plots; Perimeter, Angles and Area; Stories, Tables and Graphs (Patterns, Functions, and Change); Finding Fair Shares (Fractions and Decimals); How Many Hundreds? How Many Miles? (Three-Digit Addition and Subtraction).

Parents are encouraged to include their children in everyday math activities such as schedules (time), shopping (money and estimation), and other basic problem solving activities. Mastery of basic math facts, through regular practice, is expected as a routine at home each week. In addition, third graders receive a weekly homework packet.

Integrated Science, Social Studies and Fine Arts

As much as possible, Science and Fine Arts work is integrated with parallel studies in Social Studies. Care is taken to co-plan units of study that will be revisited and strengthened as the children move from one grade to the next. Through these studies, students engage in a process of noticing, wondering, investigating, and discovery. Each week, the 2/3s go to Art twice for 45-minute sessions. Our Science teacher leads two 1-hour science classes each week.

Our approach focuses on skills that will serve children well now and throughout their lives. Students observe, question, classify, predict, infer, gather information, identify problems, formulate solutions, experiment, refine, estimate, develop models, measure, and think hard. Students demonstrate their knowledge through active sketching, note-taking, composing, and presenting. They are encouraged to pursue their own ideas as well as the ideas of others.

Research skills are a regular part of our work in these studies. Students compose at least one 3-paragraph essay each year, in addition to creating additional written pieces to share their learning in our studies.

Each year begins with a unit of study that relates to students' questions about their lives here and now. The spring theme relates to a place far away. These spring cultural studies give students a foundation for global understanding. At the end of each unit of study, the 2/3s co-host a Show of Work with the K/1s, presenting their knowledge to family, friends and the Parker community in creative and dramatic ways!

Our studies rotate on a two-year cycle:

Year 1:

Big Questions:

- How does water become the wellspring of life?
- How and why do people live near water?
- How do people affect rivers? How do rivers affect people?

Social Studies Units: *The Hudson River, the Mohicans and Dutch Settlers - Fall*
India and the Ganges River- Spring

Science Explorations

- School wide Water study- Mapping out the Hudson River
- Erosion – How are rivers made?
- Water Cycle- How does the water get from one place to the next?
- Animal and Habitat Study: Tides & Estuary – What and how do animals live at the borders of fresh and salt water?
- Ecology: What effects have people had on the Hudson River?
- Powering the River- How did people move on the river? – Experimentation with buoyancy and a study of wind and steam power, electricity
- Ganges River: How do other cultures use and perceive their rivers? A comparison study of Geography, Environment, Animals and Ecology

Year 2:

Big Questions:

- What was life like on this planet before humans arrived? What life forms existed? How do we know?
- How did people in China live long ago and today? What innovations came from China? Why? How is China important in the world?

Social Studies Units: *Who Came Before Us? Fossils and Dinosaurs - Fall*
China, Then and Now - Spring

Year 2: Science Explorations

- Biota changing over time
- Fossils
- Extinct creatures
- Native/Non-native species
- Inventions (Ancient China)
- Environmental Issues (Current China): Energy; Air Pollution; Water Pollution; Yellow River Dam
- Agriculture: Chinese Garden
- Astronomy

Science in Health class:

- Anatomy/ Physiology
- Body Systems
- Human Life Cycle
- Body Comparisons
- Exercise Science
- Energy Systems: Aerobic/Anaerobic

In addition, science fieldwork happens in all seasons. We use our 77 acres of woods, wetlands, meadows, and waterways. Students are also involved in school wide composting and recycling efforts, as well as gardening projects.