



Teacher Jen
Worthington works
with students in
the Coast

The Writing Journey

Throughout all grades, students explore the value of learning to write. This creative expression—and, yes, even scientific writing is an art form—is woven into the critical learning and skill-building that happens at Charles River School. It also allows students the outlet they need to share a piece of themselves.

MANY PARENTS AND CARETAKERS HAVE A FILE OR BOX TUCKED AWAY IN THEIR HOME, filled with treasured memories from their child's school years. You know the one—it has pieces of artwork with paint-dipped handprints turned into tulips. Maybe you saved the first time your child wrote a complete sentence about their favorite season or the first research paper that explained the photosynthesis process. The collection lets you see your student's progress in visual and written expression: drawings of flowers lead to sentences about signs of spring that blossom into fully-researched science papers. It's hard not to smile looking at your child's earliest work and compare it to how far they've come over the years. Those papers map out a learning journey.

So, how does a student move from basic letter formation in PreK/K to constructing a supportable thesis statement in Grades 7 & 8? At CRS, there is a thoughtful progression in how we teach language arts and the principles of communication, which, in addition to writing, include reading, listening, and discussion. Just as you can see the improvement as you pull each paper out of that keepsake box, you can track skill building in writing by looking at examples at each grade and understanding how it correlates to the educational standards being taught in the classroom. And, while students learn how to write, they're also learning why they should write. From self-expression and the joy of creating something

new to problem-solving and strategizing, there is an aspect of writing for everyone.

Starting in PreK/K, students produce illustrations, stories, narratives, and teacher-supported dictations. Young students are encouraged to use inventive spelling, an important part of early literacy that helps students express ideas without the pressure of accurate spelling. “Inventive spelling is also an indicator of a student’s ability to decode or break down the sounds in a word, which is called phonological awareness,” explains PreK/K Co-Teacher Dorothy Gregoire. “As students’ phonological awareness increases, they are able to expand their writing, reading, and language development.”

First and second graders learn that recording their experiences makes lasting impressions. They are exposed to the steps of the writing process: writing rough drafts, conferencing with peers and teachers, and

revising their work. At this stage, students are building composition skills such as writing sentences of varying complexity, applying phonetic instruction to written work, and using developing vocabulary, all while discovering their creativity. Third graders continue to write from personal experience and create original, imaginative stories by developing topics, understanding story structure, and learning the importance of fluent writing. Students use a concrete and systematic approach to construct complete sentences and enhance those sentences. Skill development is more complex and includes using similes and metaphors, learning to use a dictionary effectively, and memorizing non-phonetic words, spelling rules, high-frequency words, and sight words.

While self-expression and writing about personal experiences continue in the upper elementary grades, students begin to write

more expository paragraphs and research reports in the fourth and fifth grades. “In the winter, fourth graders write a research paper for the Religion Project, which ties closely to our theme. By that point in the year, students know what to do,” says Grade 4 Co-Teacher Laura Mutch. “They read informational texts, take notes on certain aspects of their chosen religion, organize the notes, and turn them into multiple paragraphs that create a paper when put together. The growth points for our writers during this religion research paper are easy to identify. Students can do sophisticated things in their writing at this stage.” By fifth grade at CRS, students can demonstrate mastery in a number of areas, which is critical in creating a bridge to middle and high

From left, Ayda Zisfein-Shea '27, teacher Sarah Fishman, and Blair Peterson '27

