



ARRENDELL
e d u c a t i o n

Year 5 and 6

- English Program -

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Dear Parents of Year 5 & 6 students,

I'd like to share with you something about the work we cover at Arrendell and the rationale behind what we do.

My goal for every Arrendell student is that as a result of their work with me, they will –

- **Become 'highly literate' now and in the future. This means that they have advanced knowledge and skills about both comprehending and reconstructing written texts. This includes story writing, assignment writing including as writing reports and essays, poetry and other genres (writing styles) required at primary and secondary school.**
- **Have a positive, happy experience with the subject 'English'.**
- **Believe that when they put in the work, they will achieve their goals.**
- **Be proud of their success and value their superior skills and competence.**
- **Possess a lifelong love for books and reading, and learning.**

Encouraging more reading at home

I believe children perform academically in direct relation to the number of books they have read in their lives. This is based on observing the success of countless students over 30 years of teaching, and the research. The general professional thinking is that the number of books a child has read, in a period of time, when compared to others of the same age, indicates how they are performing in all areas of the curriculum at school (excluding Maths). Research also shows that childhood reading develops the neural pathways in the brain, and this relates to intellectual capacity. These pathways last a lifetime. Readers are winners in every area. They have the most success at school, become independent thinkers and are superior decision makers. Readers vicariously enter the world of others, and in doing so, gain empathy and understanding of people whose experiences differ to their own.

My students have access to probably the most comprehensive library in the region for 10 to 14 year old readers. Over 30 years, I have purchased nearly every book published for this age group written by Australian authors and the



most popular overseas writers. I have multiple copies of the most popular books. I purchase between 10-20 new books a week for the library, so the students have the latest and best books to choose from.

I encourage them to borrow as many as they think they can read during the week. Most of the children read all they take home. For others, they leave here with enthusiasm to read what they have chosen, but like all of us, their intentions may become waylaid by the everyday events of their lives. In the children's case, often the books may not be finished because of the time they spent in front of the TV, computer, X-box 360, Wii or Play Station 3. There is no easy answer to this situation, as we have a generation of children consumed with entertaining themselves through non reading pursuits, and they have extraordinary lives filled with many demands on their time.

I wonder if they might also need help to allocate a period of time that is not after watching TV at the end of the night, when they are already overtired. For experienced readers, the books from Arrendell take about one to three hours to read. For children who have read less, that same book may take three to six hours, so they may take five or six periods of 30 minutes or so, to get one book read. Ideally a book needs to be finished in one go, in one day or one week. In this way, they won't lose the thread or the enchantment of the story. My experience is that getting through the first 20 average sized books of 100-200 pages, doubles children's reading speed. Then they're 'away' as dedicated independent readers.

If they just can't get started into a book, perhaps you could support by reading the book with them or reading a page or two to each other. The focus in this time should be on the story and never on their accuracy or expression. When parents or teachers focus on their accuracy, children hate it and it kills their interest in reading.

For less competent and less experienced readers, I try to get them to borrow lots of the bridging books. These are shorter and have more pictures, so they are less threatening. Children really need to 'cut their teeth' on these books, otherwise they may try another book that is too hard and just not have the reading stamina. Of course, the exception to this is when they find an author or a series that they really love and they just take off through a longer book. The Harry Potter books and the Twilight series are both fine examples of this!

Children usually begin reading the more popular books, but as they develop a strong reading habit, they need to find books that are more challenging and sophisticated. These books are here for them and I encourage children to borrow them as they become more solid readers.

The Reading Focus at Arrendell

I often use a particular book in the lesson time to generate interest in that book or its author. This book also provides a model of good writing and the types of stylistic techniques that the author uses to make their writing work.

It is important that children actively engage with texts at their level in a social setting with another adult, where they see the response of their peers to the texts, and where they see how natural and easy it is to be 'inside' a book. Unfortunately at school, there is seldom the opportunity or the resources to do this. I purchase group sets of all the latest and best children's books, and these are used in the lessons supporting their growth as readers and writers.

I use books by authors such as Andy Griffiths, Paul Jennings and Morris Gleitzman, Australia's three most popular children's authors, as well as Roald Dahl, J.K. Rowling, and more advanced authors including Brian Jacques, Tim Winton and John Marsden.



The children may write a 'reading response' to the book after reading a few chapters. This helps them connect with the texts in a more intense way and provides another way to develop their writing skills. They write about how they felt after reading the passage, what they thought would happen next, whether they had had any similar experiences, and what they thought the author was trying to say through the characters.

Narrative Writing

I also use books as a 'lead in' to demonstrate narrative writing features. Each student has a copy of the focus book and I read it to them, or we hear it read on a CD or tape. Then we concentrate on a particular aspect of the writer's craft eg. the use of descriptive writing, the amount of conversation versus what the characters do, the use of dialects and idioms, the references to the character's thoughts and feelings, word pictures, the plot (the complication or problem), details of places and people, interesting titles, lead sentences and character names, and finishing their stories with a surprise or twist at the end. This encourages them to imitate these aspects of good writing in their own writing.

Narrative writing is one of my special teaching interests and I am very keen to help them include the elements that make a piece of story writing successful.

Over the years many Arrendell children have become finalists and winners in regional and national writing competitions.

Narrative writing is part of the assessment for Merewether, the University of NSW exam and the scholarship and entrance exams for the private schools. One month into Year 7 and then again in Year 9, they are given the national English test which comprehensively assesses their writing and understanding of texts.

Narrative writing is usually worth 20% of the English mark from Year 7 through to Year 12. Narrative writing also provides more practice at getting thoughts and ideas down. They need to be writing more frequently and producing a greater amount of written work than they accomplish at school. One boy told me that they have only written one story in the last two terms in his class. In most lessons here the children write 150-400 words.

Retelling or improvising from a book is effective in encouraging them to write large quantities. They get straight in and write because the ideas and words are fresh in their minds.

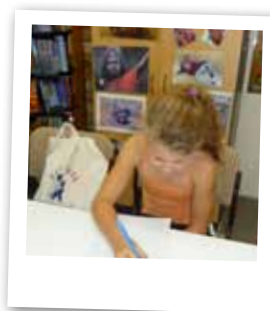
Children can't write in a vacuum. They need to read or hear written language in order to be able to compose it themselves. This is one reason why inexperienced readers write so little, while children who read prolifically pour words onto the page.

I want my students to feel very confident about their story writing. They often tell me that they've become the best story writer in their class.

Report Writing

In senior primary, students begin to develop research and report writing skills, to meet the demands of project and assignment writing in Year 5 and 6, secondary school and university.

These skills include highlighting key facts, making notes on the topic, using up to three sources of information on the topic and incorporating this information into the notes. We do this and write the first draft, without copying (plagiarism). If you look in their folders you will see we have studied a range of topic from particular people or animal to Aboriginal or environmental issues.



I give them two or three sources of material on a topic of interest to them or that may be useful in the future. This includes internet and encyclopaedia material, newspaper and magazine articles and reference books.

Librarians and teachers effectively teach children how to access information, particularly using the computer. However, report writing is poorly addressed and practised in primary school. Secondary teachers in every subject area premise their teaching on the assumption that Year 7 students know how to go inside dense non-factual material, select the most important facts or issues and are then able to rewrite that information in their own words in a coherent and appropriate way.

The children learn to research the life histories of famous people by using the dates in chronological order as a way to structure their notes and their report writing. In other topics they learn to group their notes and the report around key areas eg animals: species, breeding habits, food, habits, threats, issues etc. They write introductions and conclusions for their reports. The introduction gains the reader's interest in the topic and outlines the most important things about the person, place or phenomenon, and the conclusion contains the introduction rewritten in a condensed form.

The students write expository/discussion pieces on issues such as homework, school uniforms and healthy canteen food, where they discuss the issue in 'essay' format. We learn to edit and proofread their essays. I'm pedantic about insisting that they copy correct spelling of words from the photocopied text to their writing. Many children are careless around this. I sometimes even 'bribe' them (coupons as part of the lesson's reward system) for correct copying. In Term 3 and 4 they do more extensive editing to improve the way they've written, and I continue to reinforce their thorough word-by-word proofreading to check their punctuation, paragraphing and spelling.

Punctuation

I frequently give the children punctuation exercises which you will see in their folders. They need to know punctuation rules and apply them in class exercises, test situations and in their everyday writing. Unfortunately, many students don't either know all aspects of punctuation (including speech marks, commas and apostrophes) or are very casual or lazy about putting them in.

I ensure they learn the conventions and have almost total accuracy in applying them with me, and hope that in the future that they will do it automatically. When the quality of their work matters enough to them, they will apply what they have learnt. Punctuation is not something you can unlearn. Once you

have it, it is there for good. Writers, children or adults, can be working so quickly that they miss them in the rush to get the words or ideas down. That is understandable. However, if the writing is to be given to someone else, it has to be 'fixed up'. The punctuation has to be perfect.

Spelling and Dictionary

Standard spelling develops as children read and write increasingly. Certainly the time with me is two extra hours a week of 'heads in books' and getting words on the page. The core strategy of anyone working with children and their spelling, is to maximise their time with the real thing - reading and writing.

In the spelling research literature, an area in which I have researched and published academic papers, there is little support for the old spelling lists and spelling drills, because the words learnt in this way don't seem to survive in the learner's short term memory beyond a few weeks. Learning spelling rules has limited usefulness. Most learners with non-standard spelling have difficulty remembering the most common spelling rule - "i before e, except after c".

Children need a range of strategies to write unknown words, aside from using a dictionary. These include trying the word on another piece of paper a few times until it looks right. This is a common strategy that adults use to get an unfamiliar or difficult word. A spelling error is usually only 1 to 2 letters and is often the vowels.

All children become standard spellers at different times. It is very important that children do not develop a low expectation of themselves as spellers eg saying "I'm just a hopeless speller." They need to stay positive and make the effort.

When children finish any writing draft, encourage them to proofread, so all spelling words are fixed up. If writing on the computer, use the spell check facility. Otherwise, 1. Try the word on another piece of paper. 2. Use a dictionary. 3. Ask someone.

We undertake a number of dictionary and thesaurus exercises to develop their familiarity, and speed in locating the required word.

Comprehension

Students are given opportunities to practise comprehension strategies for both multiple choice and sentence/paragraph style comprehensions, which they will be given through to Year 12. They learn to read the questions before they read the passage, so they have the 'scaffolding' or a general idea about the passage,

before they commence a thorough read. For the sentence/paragraph answer type of test, they learn to give exact and thorough answers, utilising every nuance of information and including the relevant text into their answer.

Poetry

Poetry is usually a major part of their English assessment in Year 7-12. I want them to like (if not love) poetry, and to feel confident with a variety of poetry forms.

Every year a unit of work is undertaken on a particular poet such as Steven Herrick. He is an Australian performance poet and the children enjoy his non-rhyming narrative style and it gives them an easy model to imitate in their own poetry writing. I share rhyming poems of various poets like Doug McLeod who wrote "Sister Madge's Book of Nuns" as a vehicle for discussing rhyming couplets and rhyme schemes (ABBA / AABB etc).



I like to include a unit of work on early Australia poets such as Henry Lawson. We study his short stories such as 'The Loaded Dog' and 'The Drover's Wife', and write about his life and work.

We cover some of the poet's tools such as: simile, metaphor and personification. Later in Year 6 the students write about the language techniques used in the poem to convey the poet's meaning.

Merewether Preparation and the program until the end of the year

Many of my Year 5 students try out for Merewether in the first term of Year 6. The assessment is based on their marks at school in English and Maths during Year 5, and the actual exam results. In the first term of Year 6, before the exam day all aspects of the General Ability section and the English Comprehension (Language) are covered. Research shows that you can improve the results in these two areas by rehearsing parallel examples and by students becoming competent in the strategies and skills involved in assessment areas. For the written assessment, the students undertake writing exercises, using both narrative and expository styles to prepare for whatever they are asked to write about.

Ultimately their exam performance reflects their personal speed, confidence and emotional state on the day, and carefulness in checking their answers. Their speed is directly tied to the volume of reading they have done, particularly during Year 5. Many students read 3-10 books a week during

this year, and are consequently highly literate. Students who read less have nowhere near the speed, skills or accuracy. Highly read students are also superior writers.

All the children who come to me to prepare for the Merewether exam are intelligent children. The preparation for the Merewether exam will extend their skills in various areas and this will support them to secure a place in top classes at whatever school they attend. These skills and their increased confidence will benefit them for the rest of their lives.

My background as a trained secondary English teacher and also primary trained, gives me a real passion for teaching at this level and my students do extremely well. Each year many of my students are accepted into Merewether. Often it is between 25-40 children, which is one sixth of the total Year 7 intake.

Some of my students sit the scholarship exams for the private schools such as Newcastle Grammar, St Phillips or Macquarie College, so the work is also preparation for these tests. Many schools also assess their new Year 7 intake to organise class placement.

When the Merewether assessment is over, I return to developing their English ability in the other areas that they need for future success in their schooling. I want them to have a solid basis for their schoolwork in Year 7, particularly with the increased writing demands of secondary school. Those of you who have older children will know how demanding the expectations are for Year 7 students, especially in their assignments.

The way English is taught is very also different from your own experience of the subject. The terminology in English is new to most parents and children. For example, from the beginning of Year 7, students are beginning to analyse texts and using the language of text, composer, audience, language techniques and creating meaning. A student's English ability determines their success in all subject areas in Years 7-12, except in their Maths, so their work with me will be very important to their ongoing success at school, and later at university.

Arrendell students develop their writing skills to a higher level in all genres and in content areas that they will need. They further increase their research, report and essay writing skills. Many children entering high school have not developed these skills, and absolutely flounder. I am convinced that my students will be independent and confident in coping with whatever is given to them.

I continue to develop students' narrative writing skills as this links in with their understanding of how texts work, and provide an increased range of authors and books that they can access for their personal enjoyment. The writing that comes from studying a piece of narrative is a vehicle for getting children to get the words and ideas down onto the page. Most children see narrative writing as being easier than report writing.

I also do a unit of work on study habits for high school and how to study for exams. It gets the students thinking about future expectations and enthused about setting in place effective strategies in these areas.

So there is much to be covered. I push to get in as much as possible of all the areas that I have mentioned and I put a significant time into my programming and planning. I prepare fresh work every week based on new books and materials that I find that I think the children will enjoy or find useful.

I love my work, and my own identity is very much caught up with being the finest teacher I can be. It is extremely important to me that I make a significant difference to the lives of each one of 'my' children. I inspire and encourage and support each child to believe in their own potential, as well as contributing to their school success.

Thank you for the privilege of working with your children. I love teaching them and recognise the uniqueness of each individual. This is my passion and life work. It is amazing to work with parents who are so committed to supporting their children.

I am also here for you. Please phone me if you have any concerns. I will phone you if ever there is a problem. I have a message bank for when I'm unable to take your call.

You are welcome to ring me on my mobile 0431 739 400.

With kind regards



Gwenda Sanderson
Director



Gwenda Sanderson - Director of Arrendell Education

BA. M Ed Stud, Dip Ed, Adv Dip BM, MACE

Gwenda has been a teacher for 35 years. She trained in primary and secondary English teaching, and for ten years was a lecturer in English, Literacy and Children's Literature at the University of Newcastle.

Over the years Gwenda has given presentations at conferences and workshops throughout Australia, New Zealand and in the United States. She has also published academically and professionally. Her special interests include encouraging boys to enjoy English, teaching narrative and assignment writing and getting readers hooked into books.

Within the community Gwenda has been an instigator of several environmental initiatives. For years she has supported and befriended many refugee families arriving in Newcastle. In her spare time Gwenda enjoys bush walking, especially in New Zealand, reading life stories, experimenting with photography and meeting up with family and friends for coffee or a pot of tea.

Arrendell was founded in 1977 and has supported thousands of Newcastle students to become highly successful learners.



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education

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