

Humanities Department Vision Statement

The Humanities Department takes an interdisciplinary, collaborative approach to developing students' reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing skills. Teachers guide students in building content knowledge and in thinking critically so that they can articulate and engage with ideas as thoughtful world citizens and agents of change in pursuit of social justice.

We are committed to closing skill achievement gaps by the end of middle school so high school students can reach the levels of performance on MCAS, SAT, and AP exams needed to be competitive candidates for college and for post-secondary success. Our middle school reviews foundational content -- geography, civics, grammar, study skills, and note-taking -- so that in high school our students can complete rigorous college prep work.

We are committed to developing our students as skilled, passionate, habitual readers and writers as well as speakers, listeners, and viewers. Through this our students are prepared for gatekeeper exams which we use as an external bar in measuring effectiveness. Test preparation should be embedded within meaningful, culturally relevant learning.

1. Reading¹

- Students read in our classrooms every day. In middle school, students should be spending at least one-third of total class time reading. This might look like:
 - reading books or articles in Reader's Workshop individually at their independent reading levels and conferencing with their teachers.
 - reading texts in Guided Reading groups at their instructional levels.
 - reading a grade-level, "stretch" text as part of Literature Study in pairs, small groups, or as a whole class.
- In high school, more of the reading happens outside of class, yet students still read daily in class as well. This might look like:
 - reading and taking notes on a textbook chapter for homework, then reading primary sources independently or with a partner in class.
 - reading and annotating a chapter of a novel for homework, then rereading parts of that chapter in class as part of a close-reading activity.
- Students read widely--diverse genres by diverse authors. Within the middle school, humanities students should be reading at least two-thirds nonfiction in preparation for college coursework.

2. Writing²

- Students write daily. At least monthly, they should work on more complex, multi-day writing assignments. We explicitly teach prompt breakdown, brainstorming, prewriting, drafting, revising and editing strategies.

¹ See the work of Nancy Atwell, Fountas and Pinnell, Richard Allington, Mike Schmoker, Anita Archer, Doug Lemov, and Paul Bambrick-Santoyo to learn more.

² See the work of Mike Schmoker, Kelly Gallagher, and Nancy Atwell to learn more.

- Teachers instruct students about how to effectively produce a variety of texts for a range of real-world audiences and purposes, teaching and utilizing the writing process: to communicate understanding, demonstrate acquired knowledge, share personal experience, defend claims, entertain, connect with others, and experience enjoyment and beauty.
- Teachers give students 1-on-1 formative feedback in class during Writer's Workshop, providing specific, concise feedback (what the student has done and identifying next steps) on student writing weekly. Students use feedback (teacher, peer, and self-assessment) to revise and improve work.

3. Vocabulary³

- Students learn approximately 5-8 new vocabulary words through mini-lessons each week--content terms, literary terminology, and Tier II words.
- Students engage in Word Work, studying the Academic Word List (AWL), word parts, and fundamental morphemes so that students are able to deconstruct more complex words as readers.
- Students practice not only defining these words but also using them fluidly in their writing.

4. Discussion

- Students participate in a variety of text-driven student-led discussions each week, with minimal teacher facilitation.

³ See *Bringing Words to Life* by Joan Beck, Linda Kucan, and M. G. McKeown to learn more.