



The Herald

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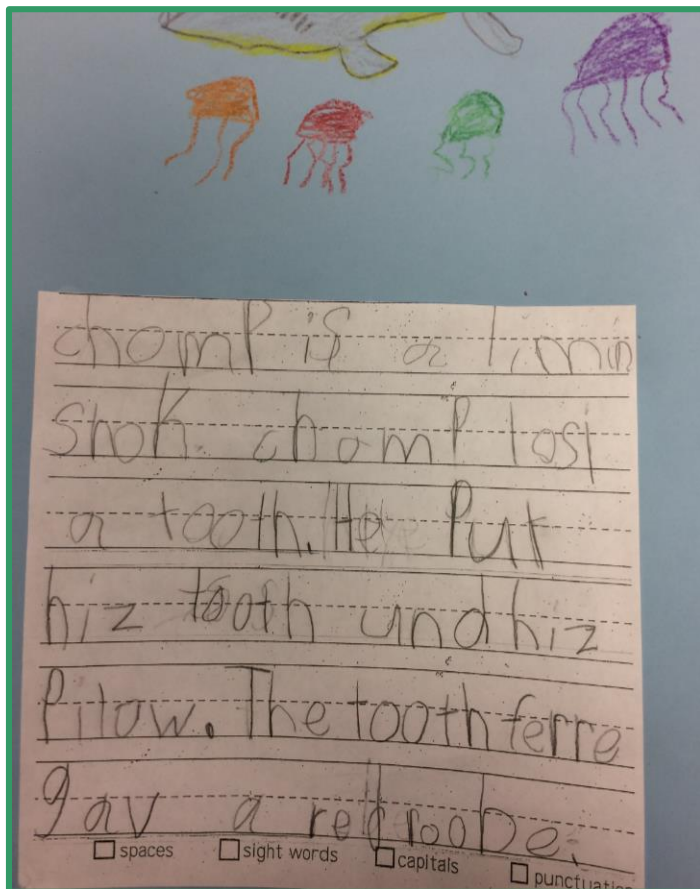
More About CKLA at MCA

More than just alphabet soup, MCA's new language arts curriculum, Core Knowledge Language Arts, or CKLA, is set to provide our students in grades kindergarten through five with a great foundation in literacy that not only teaches them how to decode words, but also to comprehend what they are reading. Not only is CKLA a reading and vocabulary building program, it is also a knowledge-building program. E.D. Hirsch, the founder of the Core Knowledge program, writes, "What we are trying to teach is not just knowledge of words, but knowledge of the world." This edition of *The Herald* explores how CKLA will make a difference for our students, as well as how it fits within our classical model of education.

All parents can relate to the fact that young children are like sponges: they tend to "soak up" whatever they see or hear, whether good or not so good! As a classical school, MCA strives to provide our lower school children with rich, meaningful knowledge of the world around them—to the big story of which they are a part. For years, our Core Knowledge curriculum has supported this model, and we are now able to do an ever better job because CKLA integrates a Skills strand and a Knowledge strand to simultaneously build mastery of reading and writing and provide a knowledge-base with which to create meaning.

For grades kindergarten through two, the Skills strand is a comprehensive and systematic phonics program designed to help students learn to decode written language, develop fluency and build writing and spelling skills. Students spend up to sixty minutes per day learning specific sets of letter-sound patterns and are given multiple opportunities to practice and use these skills in reading and writing. Various books and tools support students' skill development. For example, in kindergarten, students have a hard-back folder containing letters on small cards they can use to form words. Students learn that a C and H go together to form the sound "ch," and because they have previously learned their vowel sounds, they are able to form words like "chimp" and then switch out the vowel to make it "champ." This is a multi-sensory process; they see, touch, and move the letters, and they hear and say the sounds. With authentic books and materials provided including both fiction and nonfiction texts covering a range of topics, children practice literacy skills reading about topics in which they are interested, such as travel, cultural customs, friendships, family routines, and pets.

The Knowledge strand develops comprehension skills through exposure to advanced vocabulary and knowledge-rich content. In this strand, the main instructional activity is read-aloud lessons that expose students to material that may be beyond their personal reading levels. These activities build knowledge in areas of history, science, literature, and

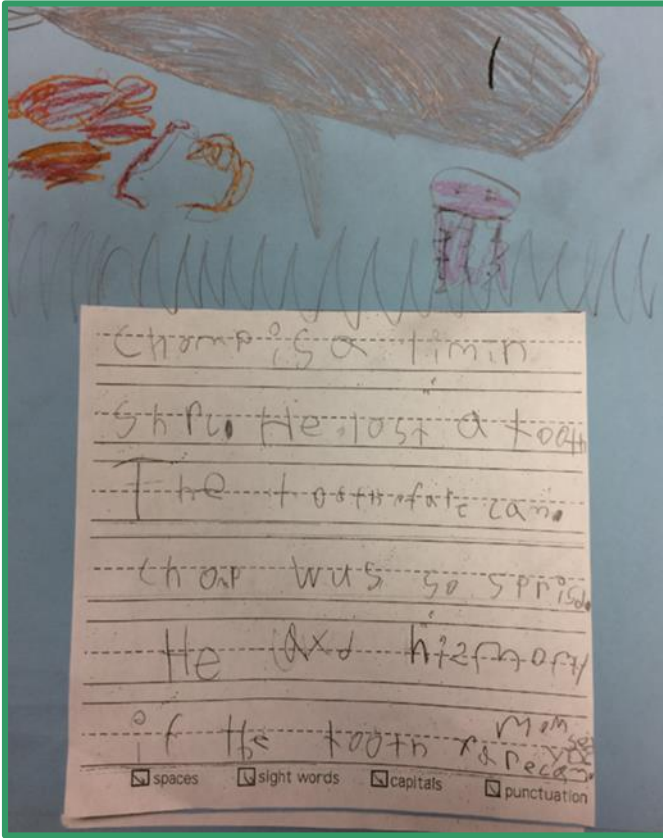


This is a kindergarten student writing sample from early March written after the student heard a story about "Chomp," a lemon shark who loses his first tooth and gets a visit from the tooth fairy. Although the student uses inventive spelling in this draft, it is obvious the student is properly using letter sounds and proper writing conventions to convey her version of the story.



geography, while simultaneously helping to develop vocabulary and comprehension skills. This strand often involves lively discussion between teachers and students as they learn new things and explore new worlds together. This portion of learning is also given up to sixty minutes during the school day. According to the Core Knowledge Foundation, "a recent study of twenty-seven third grade classrooms found that students received an average of two minutes a day of small group instruction in which teachers supported vocabulary and four minutes per day in support of comprehension-related instruction. In contrast, the CKLA program involves forty-five to sixty minutes of instruction daily in which there is a read-aloud, discussions emphasizing text recall and higher order thinking about text, writing activities to extend understanding of the text, and explicit vocabulary instruction." Kindergarten students hear read-alouds from nursery rhymes and fables, and about seasons and weather, plants and crops, farms and more. In first grade they hear about fairy tales, astronomy, colonial Biographies, animals and habitats, among others. Topics expand in later grades.

The two-strand model becomes a single strand in grades three through five as instruction moves to a single language arts block of instruction, based on the developmental ability of students this age. The focus is on reading fluently to increase comprehension, as well as producing richer and more complex writing compositions.



Here is a second student writing sample about the same story.

Although MCA is not, and hopefully will never be, a school that focuses primarily on test scores (since we believe our students are much more than one score on a standardized test), we do believe that the CKLA program will help our students face the state-mandated testing with more confidence and ease and will also help them to better perform on teacher-made tests. The main purpose for improving our curricular offerings with programs such as CKLA remains to support our vision, as always: to create intelligent, virtuous citizens that can lead in a constitutional republic who seek truth, goodness, and beauty in all that they do. It is our belief that CKLA will help lay the foundation to support our students in upper school, college, career, and life in general.

If you'd like more information on the CKLA program, please feel free to call your child's teacher, or better yet, call and schedule a tour to see it in action!

