

Dear Parents,

I hope you had a wonderful 3 day weekend with your family!

I would love to share a moment we had last week in class. I was asking a rather difficult question about thinking “under the ocean” while we are reading *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Finally, one student thought of the right answer. And the whole class cheered and clapped! It was a heartwarming moment!!! And that attitude of helping and encouraging each other happens all the time. If I could have, I would have hugged every single one of my students!

Now on to the “Need to Know” stuff for the week.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

The typical weekly schedule is settling in to something that is working. Hooray! However, just like normal school, things can happen on a weekly basis that makes changes just for a week. So, just FYI, I will not change the permanent schedule for something temporary. Instead, I will use the Remote Learning Schedule page to let you know what might be different that week. For example, things are different subject-wise because we are taking our first math test this week. More details next (and also on the website).

MATH THIS WEEK

So, your kids have been working hard and this week we will be taking the math test for chapter 1. This affects the schedule because we will not be doing daily math assignments. Also, a big change is that we will prepare for this test together in class. The math book has a practice chapter test at the back. We will be going through this carefully together in class. We take each problem one by one and I ask the students to work out the answers. Then, we go over all the problems and I show how to do it and we have time to discuss and ask questions. So they will do problem 1 and 2, then we will discuss it. And so forth until we’ve gone through all of it. So by Friday morning they should be ready to take the test.

They will take the test on Friday, right after PE. I will be sending a link via Google Classroom right before 10:00. The students will log on and open the test. They will take the test online with me. I will be available if they have questions. Since the test is a Google Doc, they cannot show their thinking on every problem. However, there are some problems that I am requiring them to show their thinking on. The way we will do it is that everyone should have a sheet of paper next to them. It should be labeled with their name and Chapter 1 Math Test. They will use this paper to write down how they worked out the problems. I will show them how to make a grid on the paper so it is clear what problem they are working. Once they submit the test, they need to take a picture of the paper and email it to me.

NAMING DOCUMENTS AND EMAILS

I am reiterating how important it is for your kids to label assignments correctly. I know you can imagine how crazy it can be following up on all assignments, grading all assignments, and filing them digitally so I can access them easily. I am literally doing this for hundreds of emails a day. Please continue to emphasize that there is a hard and fast rule for naming.

For emails: the SUBJECT LINE must say the exact assignment. For example, it can't say math, or homework, or "here you go," or "sorry this is late" etc. When students tell me they sent something and the subject line is vague I will do a search but am frequently unsuccessful.

THE SUBJECT LINE MUST SAY: math 1.7, physical map, writing event 2 etc.

For Google Docs: The save/title box on top left must also be specific.

THE DOCUMENT SAVE/TITLE MUST SAY: name specific assignment. For example, name writing event 2, or name arctic desert etc. The name must be first. Sadly, I have had to have students resend documents many times because I can't find them. Some documents are not titled, some documents have vague names, and some documents have no name in the save and no name on the actual document itself. In that situation I can't even figure out who submitted it.

I am drowning in assignments and can't express to you how important this is. Once the kids get in a habit of doing it correctly, it should just be automatic. Thank you so much for stressing this with your child. I actually recommend that you put up some post-it reminders where they can see the pattern for each.

TAKING PICTURES OF ASSIGNMENTS

Reading and grading an assignment sent digitally is a huge challenge. After teaching so many years I am very good at deciphering student handwriting. LOL! However, trying to read the work sent as pictures is particularly challenging.

One issue is that students are writing too lightly. Sometimes there is erasures and then something barely noticeable on top. Please emphasize how important it is to write neatly and press down hard, so the writing is dark. Because of this issue, it is okay for students to actually use a black pen. There are even pens that are erasable, which might be a good solution. Please make sure it is only black ink.

Another issue is how the pictures are being taken. Students are continuing to hold assignments, curve the paper, stand far away so the picture is super tiny. I do have the ability to zoom in but if the picture is too small/image is too far away, even zooming won't help. Please show your student how to lay the assignment flat on a table or desk. Then, get as close as possible when taking the picture. Finally, make sure that all of the paper is included. This will be greatly appreciated!

READING "UNDER THE OCEAN"

We are fully launched into reading *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. As we spoke about earlier, the emphasis when reading literature in fourth grade is learning to go past the plot and into deeper thinking. You can refer to the Think While Reading page on the website for more details and examples.

This is always new and challenging for 4th graders, especially at the beginning of the year. When we read together I model how to write a post-it that shows deep thinking. I also always give a focus area. So for example, this week I am asking the students to notice when something is important. We talked a lot about how to notice this. One main way is to think about how an event actually changes or doesn't change the story. One example we used was if Captain Orlov paid the tribe with blue beads or red cloth, the story is not affected. On the other hand, when Captain Orlov and the tribe go into battle and many of the men are killed, that drastically changes the story.

One important way you can help your child is to actually read the book also. You can read it together or separately; however, the important thing is for you to talk together about it. You can discuss opinions together and also help your child understand when something is important and why. Another benefit to reading the book is that you will better understand if I grade your child's work as a 1 or a 2. Without reading the book, you would not necessarily understand why what your child wrote was important, under the ocean, supported with evidence, or even if it was accurate.

Of course, this is not a requirement, but it is highly recommended.

YOUR CHILD'S GRADES

We've discussed this already quite a lot. I just want to touch base again about how to know what grades your child is receiving. When something is emailed, I always reply and say what grade I gave. When something is a Google Doc, I state the grade in a comment box. I know this is overwhelming for all of us. Instead of just looking through the papers coming home each week, it takes more time to check in via email or your child's Google Drive.

Depending on what works best for you, you might want to take note of grades. This is especially important if there is one subject area where the grades are 1s or 2s. That way you will be aware that the report card grade might be low. It also will be a trigger to arrange a meeting with me to discuss how to support your child and find out what specifically is proving to be hard for him/her. I welcome hearing from you, answering questions, and meeting together.

Thank you for reading through this, yet again, long email!

Your kids are trying hard and they are learning to check their email regularly. It is amazing how adaptable they can be!

I am available to meet and chat. Just send me an email.

Stay safe,

Ruth