Balanced Literacy Defined

**Balanced Literacy** is a framework designed to help all students learn to read and write effectively. The program stands firmly on the premise that all students can learn to read and write. This balance between reading and writing allows students to receive the individualized teaching appropriate to their strengths and needs in literacy.

**Balanced Literacy** is a model for teaching children in a student-centered classroom, based on the research of Marie Clay, Irene Fountas, and Gay Su Pinnell. Daily, children read and write independently and in a variety of group settings. Balanced Literacy classrooms focus on different types of reading experiences: read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, reading conferences, and independent reading.

Students also participate in shared and individual writing activities each day. The types of writing experiences include shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing, writing conferences and independent writing.

Additionally, during many daily reading and writing experiences, students are engaged in word study. Listening and speaking are also emphasized in this integrated language approach.

Teachers implementing a Balanced Literacy instructional framework use an integrated approach to teaching language arts. This framework for literacy lessons consists of a number of elements that provide substantial amounts of reading and writing on a daily basis. Each day the workshop ends with an opportunity for students to share and reflect upon their learning.

These authentic opportunities for reading and writing are arranged on a continuum based on the gradual release of responsibility. Some reading and writing tasks are modeled by the teachers and others are accomplished with the support of the teacher, leading to those that are done independently by the child.
Components of Balanced Literacy

**Read Aloud:** Teacher reads a selection aloud to students engaging in a series of activities, including: pre-viewing, predicting, questioning, story analysis, feature analysis, and responding.

**Shared Reading:** Teacher and students read text together promoting discussion, problem-solving and critical thinking. It is an interactive experience in which an enlarged text is used for all students to see. The use of big books, charts and projected texts is a common practice for shared reading. At the primary level, texts are usually read multiple times over a period of days or weeks. Intermediate and upper grades often divide a longer selection over a period of days.

**Guided Reading:** Teacher works with small groups of children who have similar reading needs. The teacher selects and introduces new books carefully chosen to match the instructional levels of students and supports whole text reading. Readers are carefully prepared when being introduced to a new text, and various strategies are explicitly taught. Ongoing observation and assessment help to inform instruction and grouping of students is flexible and may be changed often.
**Reading Conferences:** Teacher meets with an individual student, engaging in a dialogue about the student’s reading. In the conference the teacher may listen to the student read, noting the reader’s strengths, providing explicit instruction in terms of reading strategies, and setting reading goals. Conferences allow the teacher to identify instructional needs to be addressed in focus lessons and to evaluate a student’s progress in reading.

**Independent Reading:** Students self-select and independently read appropriate books based on reading level and interest. During this time, students practice reading strategies that were explicitly taught during read aloud, shared reading and guided reading.

**Word Study:** Students master the recognition, spelling, and meaning of words through a hands-on, inquiry based approach. They examine words to reveal consistencies within our written language system. It incorporates phonics, vocabulary and spelling instruction.

**Shared Writing:** Teacher and students work together to compose various forms of writing. Students provide the ideas and the teacher supports the process as a scribe. The teacher provides full support, modeling and demonstrating the process of writing.

**Interactive Writing:** The teacher and class compose together to create a variety of written text using a “shared pen” technique. The group agrees on what to write through discussion and negotiation. Together the teacher and students navigate through the writing process.

**Guided Writing:** Teacher works with small groups of children who have similar writing needs. The teacher selects and introduces new techniques and strategies carefully chosen to match the instructional levels of students. Writers are carefully prepared when being introduced to an element of the writer’s craft, and various strategies are explicitly taught. Ongoing observation and assessment help to inform instruction and grouping of students is flexible and may be changed often.

**Writing Conferences:** Teacher meets with an individual student, engaging in a dialogue about the student’s writing. In the conference the teacher may listen to the students read the writing aloud, reinforce the writer’s strengths, provide explicit instruction regarding some aspect of writing, and set writing goals. Conferences allow the teacher to identify instructional needs to be addressed in focus lessons and evaluate a student’s progress in writing.

**Independent Writing:** Students write independently a variety of genres. Writing topics are either directed by the teacher or often self-selected. During this time, students practice writing strategies and techniques that were explicitly taught during shared writing, interactive writing and guided writing.

**Sharing/Reflection:** Teacher and students come back together at the end of the reading and writing workshop to share their new thinking about the reading and writing process, reflect upon their own reading and writing and to explain how they have used the information learned from the read aloud, shared reading/writing, interactive writing, conferences and guided reading/writing.
Throughout the Reading and Writing Workshop
the teacher will provide explicit instruction through:
  . Think Alouds
  . Modeling
  . Focus Lessons

**READING WORKSHOP**

**Read Aloud**
- Teacher has access to the text
- Teacher shares his/her thinking regarding strategies
- Teacher models fluent reading

**Shared Reading**
- Teacher and students have access to the text
- Teacher and students share thinking about reading strategies

**Guided Reading**
- Small flexible groups with similar needs/interests
- Instructional level text
- Teacher led
- Book chats with teacher guidance

**Reading Conferences**
- Teacher and student meet to assess and/or discuss progress, strategy use and set reading goals

**Independent Daily Reading**
- Student selects text with teacher guidance based on interest and independent reading level

**Writing WORKSHOP**

**Shared Writing**
- Teacher uses the pen
- Teacher explicitly models the writing strategies and skills using Six Traits

**Interactive Writing**
- Teacher and students share the pen
- Teacher and students share their ideas about the writing process

**Guided Writing**
- Small flexible groups with similar needs/interests
- Focus on modes of writing using the Six Trait Model
- Teacher led

**Writing Conferences**
- Teacher and student meet to assess and/or discuss progress, skills and set writing goals

**Independent Daily Writing**
- Student and/or teacher chooses mode, purpose, audience

**Word study**
- Phonemic Awareness
- Phonics
- Vocabulary
- Roots and affixes
- Word origins

**Shared Learning**
- A few children share their learning/strategies from the day

**Shared Learning**
- A few children share their learning-writing pieces from the day
Sources/Further Reading: