

September 6, 2011

Dear Families,

It is my sincere pleasure to welcome all of you to the new school year at Da Vinci Arts Middle School. It is a privilege and an honor for me to work with your child as his or her Core teacher. Together with the team of caring, creative, and knowledgeable teachers here at daVinci, I intend to help make this a successful and enjoyable year for your student.

I have a part-time teaching assignment and will be at Da Vinci in the mornings. I have chosen to teach part-time to allow me to devote energy and time to my own two young children (a seven-year-old girl and a three-year-old boy). I enjoy family time, outdoor adventures, running, swimming, cycling, listening to public radio, and reading. Despite my morning-only schedule, I can usually meet with students and/or families on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday afternoons by prior arrangement.

This will be my sixth year at Da Vinci. I came here in 2005-06 as a temporary math and science teacher and made the transition to a permanent Core position the following year. I took a one-year leave of absence after my son was born in August 2008. Prior to working at Da Vinci, I taught upper elementary students in Portland and Sherwood public schools. I also student taught in Portland while earning my Master of Arts in Teaching from Lewis and Clark College. My Bachelor of Arts, also from Lewis and Clark, was in English. In addition to teaching, my professional experience includes working as an educational program coordinator who developed literacy-focused and literature-based curriculum, trained teachers, and evaluated programs. Most of my training since I earned my MAT has focused on teaching writing and history.

If you have any questions or concerns about your student's work in Core this year, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can do so by calling the school at (503) 916-5356 or by e-mailing me ([alanigan@pps.net](mailto:alanigan@pps.net) at school or [alanigan@wa-net.com](mailto:alanigan@wa-net.com) at home). I check and answer both email addresses frequently. If you provide your email when signing this packet, you will receive regular updates about class activities through email. If you prefer to receive these same updates in a print version, please let me know. I also maintain a webpage linked to Da Vinci's page.

Parents and guardians, please feel free to visit our classroom (Room 208) any time. If you are interested and have the time, I would love to put you to work as a volunteer. For example, it is especially helpful to have other adults on hand to help students during writing time and novel groups (when groups are reading different titles). I also greatly appreciate help preparing materials. I look forward to meeting you at Back to School Night on Wednesday, September 21, if not before.

Sincerely,

Alison Lanigan

# LANIGAN'S CORE CLASS: CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

## **Reading**

We will begin the year a whole-class study of Natalie Babbitt's classic, lyrical novel *Tuck Everlasting*. Early this quarter, we will also read several short stories and narrative essays to support the year's first writing assignment which will be narratives based on students' neighborhoods. The year will also include instruction and practice with reading content-rich text based on our social studies curriculum, as well as poetry, mythology, more short stories, plays, a wide variety of nonfiction selections, and other novels (often in the context of a student-directed novel group). We will use the district-adopted text EMC Paradigm for some reading selections and vocabulary development. Month-long small group novel studies occur four times during the year. Also as part of the reading program, we will spend about 15 minutes a day on a whole class read-aloud. Arts integration occurs in this subject (and the others) as it is meaningful and feasible. Last, but not least, students will read independently from their own choice of books at home (daily) and at school (twice weekly). Your student's regular Core homework will be independent reading.

## **Writing**

Our writing program begins with a poetry assignment based on students' influences and origins, followed by the neighborhood narrative mentioned above. We will use a Writers' Workshop format for writing time. The workshop will include formal lessons in the traits of good writing (ideas and content, organization, sentence fluency, word choice, conventions, and voice), plenty of work time for students to carry their work through the writing process, and opportunities for sharing. There will be near-daily practice with grammar, spelling, and vocabulary development through the Morning Openers. In addition, students will write in journals to build fluency in writing. Students also do three current events presentations per term, in which they summarize, respond to, and write questions about an event in the news. The writing program will also address Portland Public School's two common assignments/anchor assignments: a literary essay that compares two poems during the first quarter and a persuasive essay on an issue on social studies during third quarter. Finally, the writing curriculum includes a formal expository speech part about an art, art form, or art piece from one of the cultures we study this year. Most students word process all major writing assignment.

## **Social Studies**

The focus this year in social studies is ancient cultures. We will begin the year with the cultural universals and an archeological simulation called DIG. Then we investigate early humans (including Sumer and Mesopotamia), and the ancient cultures of Egypt and the Near East, India, China, Greece and Rome. There will be at least one research project in social studies, coordinated with the speech assignment and persuasive essay mentioned under above.