

**2016-2017
Welcome Letter**

Greetings To All,

The purpose of this letter is to briefly introduce (or in many cases, reintroduce) you to me as well as acquaint you with my classroom schedule for language arts (writing & reading/literature) this year. Whether you're a returning student or new to my classroom, I want to welcome everyone back. I anticipate a creative and productive year ahead of us.

As many of you will remember, I had surgery at the end of last year. My recovery from that surgery is how my summer commenced and all is well with me now. Yahoo! Seven weeks to the day following my surgery, Nona, my mother (and frequent helper in my classroom), had a complete knee replacement (on her left knee, in case that isn't clear when you see her). So, a little bit of a bummed summer for us, but we're getting stronger every day. Thank you to all of our well-wishers and helpers out there. We are so grateful for your love and support.

For those of you with a returning 8th grader, the schedule will be exactly the same as last year. Your child will have me for one period of their day (50-minutes). For those of you with a 7th grader, know that 7th and 8th graders are mixed in together versus being a self-contained grade level. This is da Vinci's second year with this schedule format, so language arts and social studies teachers are still piloting a million new ideas and creative teaming options so that we may continue to give a full-spectrum humanities experience to our students. Adjustments all around for everyone; therefore, please be patient with us while we continue to navigate the schedule.

Our weekly class schedule includes daily lessons (direct instruction/mini-lessons) focusing on reading (Readers' workshop - fictional texts - literal comprehension, locating information, literary elements, connections; independent/self-selected reading & whole class reading), literature (plot, character, theme, analysis), and writing (Writers' workshop process/composition, research, style, editing, grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and much more). **Please see information sheets included in this packet for detailed curriculum outlines.** Informational texts, argumentative writing, and speaking will take place in social studies and science classes.

Tentatively, each quarter, students will complete two to three major essays and other smaller written pieces, read for 30 minutes twice weekly in class and 30 minutes nightly at home, and do regular vocabulary assignments. Students are expected to read self-selected novels as well as novels for book groups (literature circles—groups of students reading a common novel).

Regarding supplies, I would like students to have two composition notebooks - **NO SPIRALS**, please. The standard marbled black and white covered notebook is perfect. Over the years I have found spirals are bothersome, entirely too disposable in nature, and contribute to a student's disorganization. Students should also come to class with pens and/or pencils that inspire writing. I recommend students have a water bottle that they can use daily. Many water stations are set up in the hallways, but we will not have time for several visits out there for drinks, so the bottle will help. In regard to other school materials, please see my website under—*STUDENT SUPPLY LIST*. I will also go over this with students the first week of school. I also recommend buying supplies in bulk while they are relatively inexpensive. One binder rarely lasts all year long. Please let us know if you need support with school supplies. Our school counselor is mad about school supplies and stocks her closets chock full of them all year long. Don't hesitate to ask for whatever it is you think your student needs.

Another element of my curriculum, or I should say my passion, involves the importance community plays in our classroom and throughout the school. When community exists in the classroom, learning is strengthened — everyone gets smarter, more ambitious, and productive. Kids simply feel safer and they take the risks necessary for real learning to occur. In all of my years teaching, I have found that well-formed ideas and intentions amount

**Creative minds for
challenging times.**

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to little without a community to bring them to life. Believing in these ideals, I include experiential learning activities and community “games” in my curriculum whenever possible and applicable.

Helping students find ways to get, and stay, organized, to set appropriate academic goals, and learn to be accountable for their own learning and behavior is an on-going priority of mine. Organization is one of the most difficult skills a middle schooler faces, and is often a skill parents have the most questions and concerns about. An essential organizational tool each student must have is a planner/calendar of some sort. Da Vinci provides a planner for students. However, I know this doesn't match every student's learning style. Therefore, my requirement is this: Select some form of organizational tool (self-made calendar, calendar on your phone), but have one. Mastering organization is one of the major steps students take toward being independent and successful learners. Accountability breeds responsibility, and students who develop the tools to target and improve academically will, in turn, develop the skills they need to go far in life. When students are placed in positions of responsibility and control of their lives, the classroom becomes more meaningful for them.

I have a website that I update weekly. **My website address is: <http://swasson.weebly.com>.** The site contains a calendar and tabs for reading, writing, and vocabulary information and resources. I expect students to check my website and their Synergy account WEEKLY. Doing so will help develop habits of staying informed about their progress and be aware of any grade slippages or discrepancies. The 7th/8th teams are preparing students for high school and learning to be independent. I will gladly discuss academics with families, but a vital skill in moving toward high achievement is the student being in communication with me. Practicing these skills will also be helpful during times of absence. Please be sure to go over policies around absences (due to illness, appointments, and vacations) and work that may be missed.

I believe a learning community is something teachers, students and their families actively construct together. I know the power of a classroom that learns how to nurture kindness, celebrates diversity, stops hatred, and understands the importance of culture and community. Community is cooperative and that's why **your help is necessary in assuring the success of these goals. Please join me in the achievement and well-being of every child by reinforcing these goals at home.**

Contained in the packet, along with this letter, you will find a **Homework Philosophy and Criteria and Grading Scale** brochure that lays out my rationale for moving to proficiency-based grading, a parent survey, a donation plea, academic expectations, curriculum outlines, handout on policies when a student is away from school, and a parental acknowledgement signature form (found on the insert within the *Homework* brochure). Please, be certain to go over all of these materials with your child and return vital information on or before the deadlines. I realize it's a lot of information but please take the time to review each piece carefully as I have tried to be thoughtful with what I've included.

Parents, I look forward to meeting you. **Please join us for Back to School Night in mid-September.** In the meantime, please feel free to call me at school (503) 916-5356, at home (503) 309-5209, or email me at, swasson@pps.net. I am usually available Wednesdays at school from 7:30 to 8:00 a.m. and Monday and Thursday from 3:15 to 4 p.m. Please contact me if you require an appointment outside of these days and times.

Students, I am available in my room before school or at lunch (by appointment) and after school until 3:30. I encourage your questions and hope you will share any concerns you have with me. Please call me on my cell if ever you have a question, concern, or tale of woe.

REMEMBER, SCHOOL BEGINS AT 8:30 and ENDS AT 3. Unless students are involved in an after school event, they are expected to leave campus by 3:30.

In the spirit of da Vinci,

Shannon Wasson
Language Arts
da Vinci Arts Middle School

Items to remember:

- Complete *Parent Survey* — **due Friday, September 9**
- Review the *Homework Philosophy and Criteria* brochure with your child, as well as, curriculum outlines
- Sign and return parental acknowledgement form (found in *Homework brochure*) — **due Friday, September 9**
- Visit my website & Synergy
- Contribute supplies from the donation plea, if able
- Gather school supplies needed for language arts