General Principles of Middle School Grading in
English Language Arts (ELA)

General Principles of Middle School Grading:

➔ Grades should represent student mastery of essential standards in a subject.

➔ Non-academic factors such as participation, effort, and attitude should be reported separately from academic grades.

➔ Student work should be measured based on predetermined levels of quality (proficiency scales) rather than subjective or changing criteria.

➔ Grades should provide meaningful feedback to help drive improvement.

➔ Students learn material at different rates, so they should have the ability to relearn and re-assess in order to show improvement.

Is an ELA grade based on *specific content or skills*? The short answer is skills.

➔ Middle school ELA is a skills-based class with the primary goal of developing life-long readers and writers who can think critically and communicate effectively in our global, information-rich world. For this reason, we choose to value **skills** that are transferable to any content and that can be developed over time.

➔ These skills cannot be demonstrated without **rich, relevant content** to explore**.** Therefore, students **read** and make sense of a wide variety of text which includes both literature (novels, poems, short stories, memoirs, drama, etc) and informational text (social studies, current events, science, entertainment, the arts). In the middle grades, student writing falls into two categories:

   1. **Writing to Learn:** The purpose of this type of writing is to make sense of information. It may include such things as answering questions about text, journaling, and summarizing

   2. **Learning to Write:** The purpose of this type of writing is to develop writing communication skills in various formats (narrative, informative, argumentative) using standard English grammar and conventions (spelling, punctuation, capitalization).

How can I help my student?
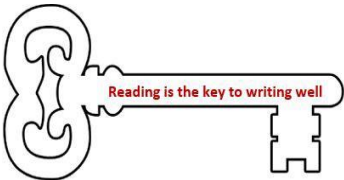
Ways to Support Your Middle Grade Reader	
Model Reading 	There are multiple positive effects of students being read to and students seeing their family members read. If we want our learners to read, we have to "walk the walk." ● Let your children see you read ● Talk about what you are reading and why ● Share interesting quotes, vocabulary, events, and or ideas from your text ● Explain what you like and/or dislike about the text ● Read to your children (kids are never too old to benefit from being read to)

Encourage Reading	Life gets busy, but encourage your child to make time for reading outside of school every day.
	● Read in the car while running errands
	● Read on the bus or in the car going to/from school
	● Read during commercials while watching a favorite tv show
	● Put the electronics away and read for 20 minutes before going to bed
Develop Vocabulary	A primary indicator of student success is his/her vocabulary. The more students read, the larger their vocabulary, and then the more texts they can understand and analyze.
	● Talk about difficult or unknown words that come up while listening to music, watching a tv show, looking at billboards and road signs, shopping for groceries, reading a magazine or newspaper, etc.
	● Play vocabulary games such as *Pictionary, Boggle/Boggle Jr., Scrabble/Scrabble Jr., Charades, etc.*
	● Use an online dictionary to look up confusing or unknown words
Provide Reading Material	Expose your reader to all types of texts: books of all genres, magazines, newspapers, online texts and e-books, comics, etc.
	● Visit the library
	● Check out the book/magazine section at grocery and department stores
	● Visit bookstores like Barnes and Noble and Half Price Books
	● Sign up for free e-books and free online news subscriptions

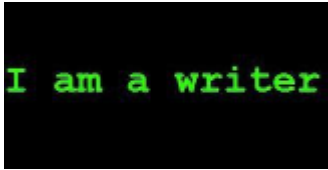|	
Ways to Support Your Middle Grade Writer	
READ-READ-READ	The best activity to improve writing is reading.
	● If your child reads good books, he will be a better writer
	● Reading exposes students to general vocabulary, word study and content-specific vocabulary
	● Through reading, students see a variety of authors' techniques that they can use in their own writing.
Model Writing	There are multiple positive effects of students seeing adults write in their everyday lives. Make sure your child sees you as a writer.
	● Point out times you use writing to communicate with others either at work or at home
	● Explain the purpose of your writing and the target audience
	● Journaling, memos to yourself or family members, shopping lists, instructions to children are all good examples of authentic writing
	● Discuss authentic writing in the community such as articles and letters in the newspaper, on billboards, or in written advertisements

Encourage keeping a Journal	This is excellent writing practice, as well as a good outlet for venting feelings. ● Encourage your child to write about things that happen at home and school. This reflective journal can be used to develop the "senses" of writing ● Provide experiences in your community that will interest your child and spark her writing ● Encourage your child to write about personal feelings — pleasures as well as disappointments. When reading your child's journal (only if your child invites you to, of course), share your own feelings and ideas paired with positive feedback about your child's writing.
Provide Authentic Writing Opportunities	Helping children make the connection between writing and the "real" world will increase an interest in writing ● Have your child write his own thank-you notes, party invitations and letters to family ● Let your child make the grocery list ● Help your child find an online pen pal
Free Online Resources	
News and Current Events Sites for Kids	**DoGo News** • Ages 9+ • Interactive, kid-friendly news source gives kids the scoop **Tween Tribune** • Ages 10+ • Trustworthy tween news site has cool classroom component **Scholastic Kids Press** • Ages 10+ • News site focusing on the student-created stories
Vocabulary Development	**Vocabulary.com** • Ages 12+ • Goal-oriented learning resource with the potential to turn vocab lessons into a fun challenge
Writing Development	**Penzu** • Ages 11+ • Online journaling platform **No Red Ink** • Ages 10+ • Online web-based language-learning platform that is adaptive and interest-based