



## **Homework Helpers**

### **Homework Success Starts with Planning and the Homework Planner**

Successful management of homework begins at school. Each teacher has a method for creating a homework list and the students are given time to copy the homework assignments into their planners. At the end of the day, students should open the planner and check on each item—and ask themselves, “What do I need for this?”

Unfortunately, the homework assignment list doesn’t follow you around the kitchen saying, “Check me! Look at me!” It is important to check over the planner to be sure all homework has been completed and put in the binder/backpack to return back to school.

A student who packs his/her own backpack is a student who knows whether or not he/she has the necessary items for school the next day. Make packing up for the next morning part of the routine the night before.

For our Middle School students, daily review of assignments on PBworks is key to success.

As homework should be a reinforcement of skills already learned, homework itself should not be too terribly difficult. If a student is having a hard time with the homework, we ask parents to write a note letting the teacher know or to put a star next to problem that was difficult for your child. We don’t want our students becoming frustrated or taking long hours to complete a task. A note or an email lets us know that we should work with the student on the skill that was being reviewed with the homework.

### **Homework Routines are Important**

- Help students with time management.
- Establish a set time for homework and discuss how to manage time for bigger projects.
- Set up a personal work space supplied with materials such as pencils, pens, highlighters, dictionary, etc. Make sure it is well lit and quiet. Keep distractions to a minimum.
- Small scheduled breaks, a little exercise, and a snack are recommended.
- Parents should provide guidance, not answers.
- Read when your child is reading.
- Read the same books as your child and have discussions in the car as you travel to and from activities.

### **A Quick Review Before and After Can Help**

Before tackling a homework assignment, we suggest to students that they:

- Read over any notes from class and the lesson in the textbook related to the assignment.
- Read and follow directions carefully.
- Show their work on the paper to be turned in to the teacher, not on scratch paper.
- Keep the work organized as it enables the teacher and student to analyze errors.

Once done with the assignment:

- Check for grammar or spelling mistakes.
- For math, check for copying errors, computation, and sign errors.
- Make good corrections when papers are checked in class or when they are returned.
- Review old quizzes and corrected assignments as a good way to prepare for tests.
- Be prepared to ask questions about problems they have difficulty with during class on the following day.



### **For Spelling/Vocabulary/Literature:**

- Students should start studying the words as soon as the teacher has identified them.
- One strategy is to put shaving cream on a cookie tin and have the child use their finger to spell the words.
- Another is to use color and texture to write or trace the words on paper.
- Rainbow spelling: copy your spelling words 3 times using a different color per letter.
- A lot of our boys use basketball hoops to remember the words, taking a shot after every letter of the word.
- Placing the words on Post-it Notes and placing them on the bathroom mirror helps.
- Essentially, increasing the frequency of how many times a child sees the word is key. For some students, simply “memorizing” the word isn’t enough.
- Use Scrabble or Bananagram tiles to physically move and create the words turning the spelling into a game.
- Play reverse Memory. Match words to their definitions after writing words on one set of flash cards and definitions on another set.
- Draw pictures of vocabulary.
- Matching: match elements of the literary term to parts of the story or character
- Plot: Tell another person the story. Students understand more when they can “teach” someone else.
- Literature: write a 20 words or less summary. This will help students focus on the really important events and themes.
- Review discussion questions by re-answering them on a separate sheet of paper. Check answers against those reviewed in class.
- Create a timeline of important events throughout the story.
- Draw character maps (stick figure with an issue/trait at the heart, one for the head to express worries or dreams, mouth/hands for what character likes), etc.

### **Spanish/Foreign Language:**

- Daily exposure to a foreign language not only helps students learn, it makes them smarter!
- Driving to and from school is a great time to practice Spanish. For older students, it’s helpful to keep a ring of flashcards in the glove compartment so they can practice new vocabulary and refresh their memory of past lists. Students who prefer not to use flashcards can photocopy their unit vocabulary lists and keep them in the car for a refresher.
- For younger students, and those new to Spanish in any grade, counting is a great way to keep their minds working bilingually. Encourage your children to count in Spanish while you drive. They can count cars (*carros*) or trees or people, going as high as they know how. Students also learn colors in the early grades, so ask them to tell you the Spanish colors of houses and cars. If they’re having trouble, copy the lists from their Spanish notebooks and keep them in the car.
- Of course, one of the best ways for children to build fluency is to talk to each other in Spanish. From second grade on, St. Michael’s students begin to learn question and answer patterns that they can practice with siblings or car pool friends.
- Older children can help younger students with remembering and pronouncing phrases, as well as sharing additional phrases they know. Teaching is one of the best ways of learning!
- Learn Spanish vocabulary words by labeling the house with signs. Looking at a visual over and over works wonders. For example, if studying foods, open their fridge and pantry and label in each food item they have to learn from our list of new vocabulary words. If they study Milk- write LECHE- and place the label on the milk carton, every time they open the fridge, they will have that visual. After 5 or 6 times, they will recognize LECHE without a problem. Same with any other list of words. Parents may go a little crazy looking at all the labels but the family can ALL learn together.



**Also,**

- **Quizlet.com**, is a great online study tool. Students can make notecards, study guides, etc.
- **Freerice.com** is a great way to learn geography and other subjects while contributing grains of rice (for correct answers) to be sent to feed the hungry in developing countries.
- **Freotypinggame.net** for keyboarding practice, which is an important skill for all students to learn.
- Many of our students love Spelling City as an online tool for preparing for spelling tests. **www.spellingcity.com** (Spelling City also has games, videos and lessons to teach parts of speech.)

We will plan to share additional online resources throughout the year.

\*\*\*

### **Homework Tips for Parents (by Dr. Harris Cooper, Director of the Program in Education at Duke University)**

**Be a stage manager.** Make sure your child has a quiet, well-lit place to do homework. Make sure necessary materials (paper, pencils, dictionary) are available.

**Be a motivator.** Homework provides a great opportunity for you to tell your child how important school is. Be positive about homework. The attitude you express will be the attitude your child acquires.

**Be a role model.** When your child does homework, don't sit and watch TV. If your child is reading, you read, too. If your child is doing math, balance your checkbook. Help your child see that the skills he is practicing are related to things you do as an adult.

**Be a monitor.** Watch your child for signs of failure and frustration. If your child asks for help, provide guidance, not answers. If frustration sets in, suggest a short break.

**Be a mentor.** When the teacher asks that you play a role in homework, do it. If homework is meant to be done alone, stay away. Homework is a great way for kids to develop lifelong learning skills. Over-involvement can be a bad thing.