

Wisdom from those who once were where you are –
A note to those entering the logic stage

1. EXPECTATIONS. 5th graders (as well as those who enter Trinitas in 6th - 8th grade) are usually nervous. They have new teachers, new subjects, and they're worried they don't know what the teacher wants. The teachers know there will be an adjustment period--it's OK to give answers they're not sure are the "right" ones.

We do not want them to spend all evening on one assignment. A note from the parent explaining the time and effort spent (and questions remaining) is appropriate. Not everyone is in the same place, developmentally speaking, so the first couple/few weeks involve a fair amount of figuring out where everyone is.

Not all students will need to be told to relax. Some need to be told, "Quit. It's good enough." and others, "I think you can say more here. Look over it again," etc. Parents, you, usually know what type of encouragement your child needs (calming or a bit of pushing).

2. "THE OTHER KIDS KNOW SO MUCH MORE." It can be intimidating being in class with 6th graders; they seem to know the terms the teacher is using, etc. Remember, the 6th graders were unfamiliar with all of this just a year ago. Look how far they've come.

3. TIME and STUFF MANAGEMENT. First, it will get easier (for your student and for you). Parents have found that the first few weeks require quite a lot of attention from them, but by the end of the year, the kids were very independent.

Use an organizational system that works well for your child. Once a month or every two months, it may be helpful bringing home the whole crate. It's doesn't hurt to organize it a couple times a year.

Assignment Logs: Students need to keep assignment logs with them for each class. Write down assignments in that class (don't wait until the end of the day). Some write assignments on the day they're due only, so that they're not overwhelmed by the number of things on each day, and you actually know when they're due. Discuss alternatives, stress the next manageable action.

Break all assignments into smaller chunks, especially literature.

PLAN AHEAD. What afternoons and evenings are typically busy for you with various extra-curricular activities? You learn quickly that most of Tuesday/Thursday work needs to be done over the weekend so that Monday can be spent just polishing things up and doing any other homework that is assigned on Mondays. The teachers have a regular assignment and test schedule, so planning ahead can be very effective. Recommendation: get the homework done on Friday or Saturday so that it doesn't hang over everyone's head all weekend and so Sunday can be a no homework day. Saturdays are busier, but the kids really appreciate the Sunday break.

You may need to cut back on outside activities (if only for a while) to get back on top of school work. We're not suggesting that kids drop their extra-curriculars, only that parents have found they needed periodically to free up the schedule a bit.

Try everything in your power to avoid late night homework sessions, working on an empty stomach, or saving assignments for the last minute—especially writing assignments!--everyone's patience is short.

4. LITERATURE Re: Active Reading

It can be overwhelming at first to think about marking all the sorts of things students are asked to mark. A good place to start is simply to mark things you notice. What strikes you as interesting/important? What do you notice about the word choices of the author? As you try simply to notice things while reading, you'll find that you naturally notice a lot of the things you're supposed to notice. NB: Have fun with the tools. Some students like using different colors to actively read, even if it's just with highlighters or blue, red, and black pens.

Re: Drafts

Get in the habit of typing drafts so revisions are easier. You may wish to help your child by typing the drafts in the beginning, letting him dictate to you so you can talk through the draft together as you type. This is less intimidating and faster. As the year progresses and your child's confidence and typing improves, you can shift the responsibility of typing to him.

Re: Dress-ups and Openers

These are a bit like piano scales--important for training, but not always pretty. Do your best, and if you just can't fit in that last because clause, write a note explaining you tried. The teachers like to know you made a conscious decision and didn't just miss it. (Of course, they'll think it suspicious if you leave out the same style requirement every time.)

5. LOGIC: Be sure to do regular review and any/all work that is assigned. This is a new realm, and it's not unlike learning to read. Work on the basics (i.e., memorizing definitions, steps, diagrams, etc.), and don't be concerned that your child doesn't grasp the "why" of what he is doing just yet. We will get there in time.

6. HISTORY. Story of the World can be found on CD. Listening to the chapters can be a nice way to review. Students can do other things while they listen to it; some like being a little bit active as a break-- stretching, running on a treadmill, acting the chapter out with their door closed, etc.

FINAL COMMENT

Grades 5-8 are years of tremendous growth. You will almost certainly begin these school years thinking "How are they (or we) going to do this?" But you will be amazed at what the kids can do and how much they mature each year. Some used to take 2 hours to do a 15 minute assignment and their organizational skills held them back. Now, they're in high school--organized (even working ahead) and adjusting very well. The key, and perhaps the biggest challenge: simply create a peaceful environment through the transitions. Support your children; it's a blessing to be involved in their education (even if it doesn't always feel like it!), and don't forget to pray, pray, pray.