

Day in the life (Elementary School)

The following provides an example of what a day in the life at a Vista Elementary School might look and feel like for a student. Schools are dynamic, human-centered organizations and, while schedules and basic routines will have consistency, no two days will look exactly alike. The following description strives to highlight unique features of a day at Vista, but is solely demonstrative.

Miguel, a second-grade student, gets off the trolley with his mother and walks across the parking lot to Vista. He looks up and sees the giant mural of the Eagle and the Condor and remembers the assembly they just had where his principal reminded them about what their school mascot symbolizes. He loves the new big word his principal taught them and looks up at his mother and says, “Mama, did you know that the condor is an ancient symbol?”

“Yes, *Mijo*, but tell me the story again, so I can remember it better.”

Beaming with pride, Miguel excitedly tells her, “The Condor is a symbol of our ancestors that teaches us that the heart is as important as the mind if we want to be good global citizens.” Milo then points out the mural of the Eagle on the other building and tells his mom all about how the eagle represents the mind and technology and careers and college. His sister goes to the middle school, and her uniform has the eagle on it.

Miguel loves the days when the kids from the middle school get to be their reading buddies. He looks down at his own uniform and sees the condor and thinks, “It’s just like my principal and teacher tell me...when the condor and eagle fly together, that’s

when we can transform the world.” Miguel wants to make his teacher and mom proud and transform the world one day. He then remembers that they are working on a project to learn about water conservation and are going to use the sand tables again and make a hypothesis about erosion.

Miguel isn’t even at the door yet, but he is excited and beaming with pride to be at Vista.

Miguel’s mother leans down and kisses him on the forehead. “*Mijo*,” she says, “*Aqui te dejo*. I get to have coffee with the principal and other parents this morning. Your

principal is going to tell us all about the great things your school is doing and then we have committee meetings. But I will see you later, today I get to volunteer in your class.”

Miguel quickly kisses his mom again, but is happy to be in line with his friends in front of his classroom. Ms. Amaya is standing at the door greeting each student as they come into the room. Miguel shakes his teacher’s hand and says, “Good morning, Ms. Amaya. It’s a great day to be a condor!” Ms. Amaya smiles and thanks him for such a pleasant morning greeting.

Miguel walks into the class and puts his backpack away. He gets his Chromebook off the cart and sits at his desk next to the other three students on his class team. He looks at his team table cards and remembers to greet his shoulder and face partner with a warm welcome and a compliment. No sooner do they finish their greetings when Ms. Amaya starts the class off with a Kagan community building activity. They have been learning about their family tree and history, and it doesn’t surprise Miguel that the activity involves sharing things he loves about his family. The computer-generated Kagan spinner on the screen in front of the class stops on two. Miguel feels disappointed he doesn’t get to start, but congratulates his shoulder partner. Each one of his team members gets to share, and they remember to compliment each other after they share. “I love the story about your big sister, Miguel,” his partner tells him, and Miguel beams with pride—not for the first time this morning, and it’s not even 8:15 yet.

8:15

Ms. Amaya calls all the students to the front of the room to find their place on the carpet next to their literacy partners. She reminds them to bring their writing journal with them.

Miguel grabs his reading journal and heads to the carpet. He can’t wait to see what his teacher is going to do today in Writer’s Workshop.

Ms. Amaya gets right to the point, “Writers, remember yesterday when we talked about making our writing more exciting for the reader? Today I want to show you one way to do that. One thing that great writers do to engage their readers is to surprise them by making inanimate objects—remember that is something that is not living like a rock or a mountain, or something that is not human, like a dog or animal—act like a human.

When an author does this, we call it personification. Today, I'm going to show you how to use personification to make the stories you are working on more exciting for your readers." Ms. Amaya knows how important modeling is and has planned for it and says, "Let me show you some examples of how published authors have done it."

Ms. Amaya pulls out three books, and says, "Let's see how some of our favorite published authors use personification in their writing to engage us as readers. The first one is *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein, and Miguel remembers when his teacher read that to them. She picks out a small passage and reads it to the class and shows how the author gives the tree human attributes and feelings. She says, "This makes me love the tree so much." She explains how personification helps the reader feel sad and happy for the tree by the end of the story. She shares two more examples. This only takes a few minutes, and then she clearly repeats the day's objective, "So, remember authors...Great writers sometimes use personification to engage and excite their readers. Watch me now, as I try to use personification in the story I am writing."

Ms. Amaya sits before her story, which she has projected onto the screen, and starts to read, "The little boy was racing all around the woods chasing butterflies until he got so tired he had to sit on an old tree stump."

"Hmmm," Ms. Amaya thinks out loud to herself, I wonder what would happen if the tree stump could talk." She starts to write, "As the winded boy sat..." She crosses out "sat" and says, "He's tired from running around, so he is really going to plop down." She writes instead, "plunked down hard on the stump." She continues, "The little boy heard someone scream "Ouch, that hurt!" The little boy looked around the woods, but didn't see anybody. "Oh my gosh, you are so heavy. At least you could have asked for my permission." This time the boy heard the voice come from under him, down by his feet and he jumped so high, he nearly hit his head on the branch of a nearby tree."

The whole class laughs, and so does Ms. Amaya. But, she quickly turns back to the lesson, "Do you see how I gave the tree stump a voice and made it react like a human? I used personification when I did that. I think it's time for you to give personification a try. Take out your stories and, for the next 60 seconds, I want you to look for inanimate objects in your stories where you might use personification to excite and engage your reader."

Right away, Miguel and his partner open their journals and search for inanimate objects in their stories. Miguel found two and can't wait to share. Another bell goes off and the teacher asks if anyone needs more time. She tells them to use one finger for

a little more time, two for a lot, or just raise their whole hand if they are ready. Everyone is ready.

A bell the goes off. “Ok, you and your partner will use the *Kagan Rally Robin* structure to share all of your ideas. Don’t forget, you share one idea and then your partner shares one until you don’t have any more ideas left or the timer goes off. If you finish before the timer, please use the rest of the time to ask your partner probing questions.

She spins the partner button and says, “Partner A begins.”

The class is suddenly abuzz with conversation and sharing. Miguel and his partner share all their ideas, but the bell hasn’t gone off. Miguel says to his partner, “I really like your idea of using personification with your family car! What do you think your car might say or do to make it seem like a person?” The partners are deep in conversation when the buzzer goes off, and they look up at Ms. Amaya. Ms. Amaya had been going from pair to pair during the time, and says, “I really love how so many of you found great places to use personification in your writing!” She goes on to share a few examples that she heard.

“Please turn to your partners and thank them for sharing their thoughts and ideas with you.” Once this lesson concludes, Ms. Amaya says, “So remember, authors, great writers use personification in their stories to engage the reader and make their writing exciting and interesting. How many of you will try to use personification in your stories today?” Hands fly up. It has been 12 minutes since the lesson began, and the class is ready for a change.

“Let’s go back to our desks and work on your stories. I’m going to set the timer for 30 minutes today. You are really building up your writer’s stamina, and I’m so proud of all of your efforts.”

While the students work on their stories, Ms. Amaya calls a small group to work with her. She had read the writing journals over the weekend and noticed a small group was still struggling with strong openings. She has a small lesson to help them along. Later, she calls Miguel up for a one-on-one conference and works with him on breaking his story into paragraphs, but soon the five-minute bell rings. It’s almost time for recess.

Recess

The TA walks the class over to the gymnasium. Miguel is excited because he has been playing soccer with his friends, but no sooner do they start than his friend says something mean and they start to argue. Soon, a crowd is starting to gather, but quickly the TA is there and gently asks Miguel and the other boy to come over to the Way of Council bench. He reminds them about their peace pledge and asks them to use the Peace Talk Protocol. When they are ready, they can go back and play. Miguel and his partner look up at the plaque. The TA helps them to read it together:

- Sit face to face
- Share: This is what happened, this is what I wanted to happen, this is how I can make things better
- Speak and listen from the heart
- Use a talking piece

The boys go through the protocol, and within a few minutes are laughing and hugging each other. There is still time to play, and they race off together.

Instructional Time

Back at class, Ms. Amaya is sitting at her teaching station. She tells the class to grab the Just Right book they are reading and come to the carpet. Miguel loves Reader's Workshop. It is just like Writer's workshop, but he gets lots of time to read his new favorite book. Ms. Amaya teaches a mini lesson about inference and uses lots of examples from her read aloud. Soon, the class has practiced, and they get to read. While the class reads their books silently, Miguel is asked to join the TA. She says that she thinks he has made so much progress and that he might need to re-think his Just Right books. She has him read a passage from the Fountas and Pinnell leveled reading inventory and then another. He is so excited to learn, he has jumped two levels from L to N. She asks him if he would like to pick out an N book. He does, but he wants to finish the book he is reading. She quickly replies, "Oh, of course, I can never leave a book when I love it. Sometimes, I'm even sad when I finish it, because I love the characters so much. Has that ever happened to you?"

Miguel goes to the leveled library to pick a book, but he is excited to go onto his Chromebook and see all the other N level books he might choose from, too.

After Reader's Workshop, Ms. Amaya gathers the class for a quick community builder. She picks a Kagan strategy that gets the kids moving a bit, as they have been sitting and reading for almost 30 minutes straight. After the two-minute activity, she calls them to the carpet for math.

Math is structured just like Readers and Writers Workshop. Teachers at Vista will understand that you learn by doing, not by listening, so the lesson is structured to maximize independent and guided work time. It starts with a real-life connection; usually to a project the class is working on or something they might need in life, is followed by a mini lesson with a clear objective, guided group practice, independent work time with students being called to small group instruction, or one-on-one as indicated by my formative assessments. Some days the math mini lesson is drawn from an adopted math program, but today they are using CGI. The students work on using math skills to solve word problems.

Miguel loves CGI Fridays because he gets to show how he solves difficult work problems in multiple ways; with a mathematical sentence, an English sentence, a drawing, or with the math tool manipulatives. His favorite part is at the end of the work time at the class conference. He hopes that today he can come up with a new way of solving the problem and that his teacher will share it with the class. When a student finds a new way to do something, it is called by the student's name. Miguel hopes to have "Miguel's Way" up on the math wall again, so he can show his mom what a great mathematician he is.

Lunch

Miguel loves his classroom, but maybe not as much as lunch. The cafeteria always has such great food, and he is proud that his school serves a "homemade" meal every day that is healthy and good! After they eat, they all go and play. There are no problems today, and that is good, because the last few days some kids in his class were mean to each other and some even cried. Too soon, the bell rings, and it is time for class.

After Lunch Friday Council

When Miguel gets back to his class, the furniture has been rearranged. The desks are against the wall, and the chairs are in a circle. In the middle of the circle is the council table. It is covered in a beautiful tablecloth. It is the one his mother brought back from Guatemala. Miguel beams with pride that his teacher loved her gift. The low table is covered with a few flowers in a vase, the dedication bowl, and talking pieces the class has brought in to share.

Everyone sits quietly in the circle, and Ms. Amaya asks if anyone would like to make a dedication. A few students make dedications by walking up and dropping a stone

into the bowl; as they do, they dedicate the Council to their moms. Miguel is a little nervous, but remembers how much he misses his family dog that recently passed. He quietly walks up, drops a stone into the dedication bowl, and says, "I dedicate this to my dog that died this year." As Miguel walks back to his seat, the students and Ms. Amaya raise their hands and wiggle their fingers in silent support.

Ms. Amaya reminds them that in Council they are to speak from the heart, listen from the heart, be spontaneous and not worry about how good their story might be, and to be lean so everyone in the circle can say what is in their heart.

Ms. Amaya starts by talking about what happened this week during lunch and recess breaks. She says that being mean to each other can sometimes be called bullying. She then tells the class about a time when she was bullied in the second grade and how it made her feel. After her framing story, she says to the circle, "So today, fellow global citizens, tell the circle a story of a time when you were bullied and how it made you feel. But, maybe, if you are feeling brave, you can tell a story of a time when you bullied someone and how that made you feel."

For the next 30 minutes the talking piece is passed. Miguel remembers what happened at recess and shares that story. Some kids are brave and tell how about when they were a bully, and how that made them feel bad inside. Council winds down with a witness round, in which students can witness something that touched them during the circle and then a closing. Sometimes Councils are fun, but today it was serious. Miguel decides he is going to try really hard not to be a bully, as he realized that his classmates feel the same thing he does when he gets bullied. The Council is over and Ms. Amaya has the class stand up and sing the song they have been working on. They all help put the class back to normal. They are so excited, because they are going to do their science experiments next.

Science and Technology.

Miguel never thought about being a scientist before, but he is having so much fun that he now thinks he will study science in college. Today is really special, too, because his mom is a special science helper. She does this every Friday. Miguel can tell how much his teacher likes his mom, and this makes him love his teacher even more.

Students are exploring how the surface of the earth is always changing. They are introduced to different types of maps and explore how these maps convey different information about the world in which they live, including where water is found on Earth. Miguel and his team introduce the design problem when faced with the

challenge of helping a community threatened by a potential landslide. They have been investigating the different forces that shape the surface of the Earth and have designed solutions to limit the impact of erosion on a fictional community that is located at the bottom of a hill recently destabilized by a fire. Even though the town they are working for is fictional, Miguel remembers how Ms. Amaya showed them what happened in the hills surrounding Los Angeles after the drought and fires and when all the rain came in the winter.

Miguel thinks his team's drawings and ideas were some of the best solutions in the class, but he also likes a lot of the other ideas. Soon, they build their prototypes and test them. The tests are fun, but Miguel has to think really hard as his teacher pushes his team to consider failure points of data to identify aspects of the design solution that can be improved. He knows this part of science is important, and he wants to help his team, because next week they are going to present their solutions and suggestions for improvement to their classmates and then to their sister school classmate via Skype at the American School in Guatemala City. Their sister school friends told them that they have had bad mudslides there, too. Miguel hopes that their solutions can help their friends in Guatemala. Even though presenting is hard, Miguel likes getting feedback, because, as a global citizen, he knows that understanding different perspectives is important. He also loves science because it helps him design real solutions for real- world problems.

End of the day

Miguel can't believe how fast the day went. It seems like he was just eating breakfast. In fact, he thinks he might have been in FLOW today. His teacher always tells him that FLOW is the best part of learning and that you know you are in flow when you are thinking hard, having fun, and forget about everything else except what you are doing. Miguel is sure he was in FLOW today during Writers Workshop and science. He tells Ms. Amaya that he was in FLOW a lot today and thanks her for being his favorite teacher ever. Ms. Amaya thanks Miguel for taking his learning so seriously and thanks his mom for her help. She asks his mom if she is able to use the Learning Management System and lets her know there will be another parent-training coming up soon.

Normally, Miguel would go to the after-school program, but on Friday's his mom takes him home with her. Miguel walks across the parking lot with his mom, and they wait for the trolley to take them home. As the trolley approaches, Miguel takes one last look at the murals of the Condor and the Eagle and reflects on how his day was all about bringing the heart and the mind together to make the world a better place for himself,

his family, and even his friends in Guatemala. He is, once again, beaming with pride to be a Vista student.