

A Day in the Life

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VISTA at Martin Luther King in Vancouver, WA

- ❖ *7:30 - 8:35 AM Arrive, Check In.* This is a time for general preparing & planning. Here at King, you are supposed to arrive at school at 7:30am. Does this seem early? On some days, definitely. Especially during the winter months, before daylight savings, it gets tiresome because you'll likely be driving to work in the dark, and driving home in the dark - and you might, just might, get the sensation that your life is getting sucked away. Fight against those emotions, however, because the rewards of working (I mean, *servicing*) in this school outweigh any challenges. The teachers and staff rely upon and respect the WRC incredibly - not to mention the impact you'll have on students.

On Tuesdays, our WRC had meetings with our site supervisor. This is time to talk about how the program's running, what problems are arising, what ideas you have, what you want to accomplish, who wants to do what, etc.

- ❖ *8:35 - 9:05AM Read Well* with first graders for a half hour. *Read Well* is curriculum that you'll spend ample time with reading specialists learning and implementing. The downside of *Read Well* is that it is rigid, heavily structured and (I'll say it) monotonous. The plus side is that it works! And it's endearing to facilitate the learning of four first graders. Before you realize it, you'll see them make incredible headway, sounding out words, reading independently.

- ❖ *9:05 - 9:45 AM VISTA Time.* This is a good time to solicit donations for literacy events: calling businesses, getting them interested to support whatever you're doing, writing them letters.

At 9:30, check in with whoever's running attendance. You'll have already come up with a volunteer schedule, laying out who volunteers when, with whom, etc. If the child was absent, I called and forewarned the volunteer. Volunteers need as much heads up as possible, because you want to save them the trip of coming all the way to school. For those tutors with more than one student, I'd call them up even if just one student was absent, so that they can make arrangements if necessary.

- ❖ *9:45 - 10:45 AM Writing.* Personally, this was the highlight of my day. Each of us were paired off with two or three students each, depending on how well they worked together. These assignments offered the most potential for creativity and imagination. With a one-hour block of time, you can be very personal, and delve into topics that are interesting, and come away with some noteworthy pieces of writing.

This is a perfect chance to solicit material for newsletters, or bulletin boards - simply by asking students if they'd be willing to share their work. Or you can decorate your desk area with their writings.



On Thursdays we had a group of 10 fifth grade peer cross-age tutors come and read with second and first graders. My task was to be there to pair everyone up. You'd have to try to match up who would work best with whom, and make adjustments whenever necessary. The fifth grade students look forward to tutoring beyond belief.

- ❖ *10:45 - 11:30 AM Lunch.* It's up to you where you want to eat lunch. Initially, we ate in the staff room, mingling in with the teachers. Later, we all ate in the media center, near our desks or at the big tables in the library. Pretty soon, we all had fourth and fifth graders asking (begging) if they could eat with us.
- ❖ *11:30 - 12:00 AM More Writing.* During this time, we returned working on the writing assignment that we'd started before lunch.
VISTA Time. When this school got a fourth AmeriCorps person, a part-time member, this half hour was used to welcome the volunteers, assist them in any way. You can also use this time to write letters, solicit donations or recruit more volunteers, by sending emails to various colleges, other program, etc.
- ❖ *12:05 - 12:35 PM Read Well,* again, with a different group of first-graders.
- ❖ *12:35 - 12:55 PM Time for a break.* Use the bathroom. Or check the staff room for snacks - you'll be amazed how often this school provides sweets and goodies.
- ❖ *12:55 - 1:25 PM Second Grade Read Well.* You may have students who can read anything you put in front of them. I did. They were likely to get bored if you slowed them down, or paced them with the rest of the group. I found it easier to let some of my readers take off on their own, if they felt comfortable, and for the ones who were challenged, I gave them more individual help. This is a hard act to juggle.
- ❖ *1:30 - 1:45 PM Recess.* Time for kickball, basketball, tetherball, wall ball or four square. Or else, you can chose this time for yourself to take a break.
- ❖ *1:45 - 2:15 PM VISTA Time / PAPERWORK.* With the huge national deficit, social programs are usually first to go. This, then, is the era of "accountability" - social programs must attest to the merits of their programs, providing thorough & meticulous data, or else face the chopping block. Thus, the need for paperwork.
- ❖ *2:15 - 2:45 PM Read Naturally,* another rigid, structured and monotonous reading curriculum, but you can have fun with it. Seriously.
- 2:45 - 2:55 PM Students Leave for Home.* We'd always go out to the bus stop and wave goodbyes. I'd try to initiate brief conversations with students as they were walking home or headed towards the bus. Finding out what you can about their lives, interests, who they are: this will help you have a closer connection with students.
- ❖ *2:55 - 3:30 PM VISTA/ PAPERWORK.*

