



Birchwood School  
of Hawken

## Reading Day at Birchwood

Once a month on early dismissal half day the third through eighth grade students spend the entire morning reading. This is the practice enjoyed by schools across the country called ***Sustained Silent Reading, or SSR***. We all read silently for a sustained period of time. We read on the floor with pillows and stuffed animals. We read on bean bag chairs. We read at our desks. We read fiction and nonfiction, from history or science, magazines and poetry. We read in 30 to 45 minute stretches (depending on the grade level), and then we take a break or have a snack. Then we go back and read some more. We might continue in the same book in order to have the experience of remaining submerged in the plot line through an entire book; or maybe we'll switch from a novel in order to browse through a National Geographic magazine.

SSR is a research-based practice grounded on the understanding that uninterrupted times of reading cause deep learning which, in turn, is engaging. This immersion affects motivation to read. It is an effective approach to improving attitudes about reading, increasing comprehension and improving skills. For younger readers, SSR automatizes reading skills and enhances both reading fluency and rate. For everyone, reading deeply allows for better acquiring of vocabulary, better knowledge of grammatical construction, better spelling, and a better sense of writing style. Ask a famous writer what the secret to good writing is and the answer will be, "I was a reader."

Reading deeply offers a chance to really engage children to read for the message, interest and pleasure. Part of the normal reading experience of a full-fledged novel is that one must persist past the new terms, characters, and style presented in the first few pages. Once a reader gets past this, the reading is smooth and leads into comfort and pleasure. Reading in the company of readers engaged in the pleasurable act of reading is a powerful influence on peers. And, when every reader has a sense of being part of a reading community and, throughout the school, other grades are reading too, SSR really truly works.

Having a READING DAY at Birchwood School of Hawken is a message in itself!

### ***The Birchwood Reading Program: Learning to Read by Reading – Making Every Child a Reader***

Prepared by Mrs. Debelak with credit to research by LaBrant (1958), Lamme (1976), McCracken (1960-1970s), Krashen (1990-present). SSR and similar programs with different titles such as DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) are sponsored by the National Education Association (NEA), Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) which is a division of the American Library Association, the National Association of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the International Reading Association (IRA).