

Day in the life (Middle School)

The following provides an example of what a day in the life at a Vista Middle 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. Times and the actual bell schedule has been manipulated to showcase innovative programs, approaches, and signature practices.

Miguel, a sixth-grade student, gets off the new trolley with his mother and little sister at the front of the school. They walk to the front of the school where his mom drops him off and she continues on to drop off his little sister at Vista next door. Although he knows he is now in middle school and expected to be more independent, he is secretly happy to be immediately greeted by Dr. Felch, the principal.

“Good morning, Dr. Felch,” he shyly says to him and in return receives a big, “Miguel! Good Morning! It’s great to see you. How are you enjoying the year so far?” Miguel tells him that it’s been really good and quickly walks through the front doors and into the main entrance, where he gets greeted again by Ms. Limon, as he passes her at the front desk. He looks up and sees the giant mural of the Eagle and the Condor and remembers the assembly they had where his principal reminded them about what their school mascot symbolizes. Right then, his favorite teacher, Ms. Huff sees him looking at the mural and asks him if he remembers what it means.

“Yes, Miss,” but Miss Huff pushes him to tell the story to him.

A little embarrassed, but secretly beaming with pride that his teacher is giving him the opportunity to tell her what he knows, Miguel tells her, “The eagle is an ancient symbol of our ancestors that represents the importance of the mind, intellect, progress, and technology and reminds us that we need to strive hard to get a good education.” Miguel then points to the condor and tells his teacher that the condor is also an important symbol that teaches us that the heart is as important as the mind and that taking care of the environment is as important as technological progress and that working to be both the eagle and condor is needed if we want to be good global citizens. Miguel’s sister goes to the Vista Elementary School and her uniform has the condor on it, but now that he is in 6th grade, his has the Eagle.

Miguel loves the days when the kids from the middle school get to go to the elementary school and be a reading buddy with them. Last year he got to have a reading buddy, but this year he gets to be the buddy. He looks down at his own uniform and sees the eagle 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 parents proud and transform the world one day. That thought reminds him that they are working on a project in his science class where they are learning about a little girl with muscular dystrophy and that today they are going to use the computers to design a boot to help her walk better. Miguel is excited and really likes the design team he is working with and excited about the project.

Miguel has barely gotten through the door yet, but he is excited and beaming with pride to be at Vista.

Miguel is surprised when he sees his mother again and a bit embarrassed when she leans down and kisses him on the forehead. "*Mijo*," she says, "Today, 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 leave her and go have breakfast with his friends before the first class starts. Pretty soon, Miguel hears the bell and heads to his first class.

Language Arts

Ms. Huff 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. Huff, It's a great day for learning!" Ms. Huff laughs because Miguel beat her to her own daily greeting. He knows the routine, but she directs all the students to the front of the room to find their place next to their literacy partners. She reminds them to have their writing journal with them and ready to go, but that they will start with a Kagan Community builder.

Miguel walks into his advisory class and puts his backpack away. He gets his Chrome book 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 than Ms. Huff starts the class off with a Kagan community building activity. They have been learning about writing a personal narrative and the last few weeks they have focused on their family genealogy, heritage, and stories, 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 *abuela* and how she got to our country, 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.

After the community builder Miguel grabs his writer's journal and heads to the mini lesson area. He never thought of himself as a good writer before, but he now thinks that he might want to be an author when he grows up. He can't wait to see what his teacher is going to do today in Writer's Workshop.

Ms. Huff 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 or non-human characters—remember inanimate is something that is not living like a rock or a mountain, and non-human characters are 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. Huff 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. Huff 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 during their unit on Poetry. 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. Huff sits before her story, which she has projected onto the interactive touch 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. Huff 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. Huff. 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 then 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. Huff. Ms. Huff 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. Huff says, “So remember, authors, great writers

can 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 to get to work.

“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. Huff 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 keeping a narrative focused. 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 by using good transitional sentences at the end and beginning of each paragraph to keep the reader focused and the narrative sharp, but soon the five-minute transition bell rings.

It is time to end Writers Workshop and move on to Readers Workshop. The students have been working for an extended time and Ms. Huff 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 30 minutes straight. After the two-minute activity, she tells them it is time for Readers Workshop to begin.

Ms. Huff doesn’t spend a lot of time at the front of the class. She is usually walking around or working with small groups or one to one with a student, but she always starts workshop at her teaching station for a mini lesson. She tells the class to grab the book they are reading and come to the carpet. Miguel loves Readers Workshop. It is just like Writers Workshop, but he gets lots of time to read his new favorite book. The last unit was on non-fiction, but they are working on fiction to go along with their unit on narrative writing. Ms. Huff teaches a mini lesson about inference and uses lots of examples from her own book. Soon, the class has practiced, and they get to read. While the class reads their books silently, Miguel is asked to join the T.A. at her teaching station. She says that she thinks he has made so much progress and that he might need to re-think his current level. She has him read a passage from the Fountas and Pinnell leveled reading inventory and then another. He is so excited to learn that he has jumped three levels from Q to T. The T.A. points out that he is almost at a high school reading level asks him if he would like to pick out a T level 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?” “Oh yes, after reading the last Harry Potter book, I

was so sad that I wanted to start from the first book all over again!" Miguel goes to the leveled library to pick a book, but he is excited to go onto his Chrome book and see all the other T level books he might choose from, too.

Again the bell rings sooner than Miguel could imagine. He loves the block schedule and is always surprised that two hours can fly by that fast.

Recess/Nutrition

The T.A. walks the class out to the yard. 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 Coach G 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. Coach G 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. There is still time to play soccer, and they race off together. Soon the bell rings and Miguel heads off with his friends to math.

Math

Miguel knows the routines of Math class like the back of his hand. Upon being greeted by his teacher Ms. Sotero, he joins the other students at his assigned table, as they all retrieve their assigned Chromebooks and log in to Google classroom. There he finds his Math Goals Tracker form. On this form he reviews the work he accomplished during the last class. He reminds himself that he was in the middle of practicing translating the information included in word problems into an appropriate equation that Ms. Sotero had taught him and his group at the teacher's table.

Miguel understands that he still needs to practice this skill today, because on Monday he did not reach his goal: I will select the best equation to solve a problem, based on the information contained in the word problem in at least 4 out of 5 tries. Shaking his head, Miguel remembers how he struggled on Monday. He reassures himself by recalling what Ms. Sotero said to him then, when she saw his scrunched up face.

“Remember, Miguel, what I always say. Fail early and fail often. As long as you keep your Growth Mindset, you will get better. Don’t give up on yourself. I’m here when you need my help.” Smiling with confidence, Miguel decides he will continue to work on the same goal. He is not going to give up on himself.

“What’s your daily goal, Miguel?” asks Anahi, his elbow partner.

“I’m still going to practice word problems,” he responds. He glances at Anahi’s tracker and sees that she has a completely different goal. Anahi will be using Khan Academy for independent practice on inequalities. Miguel practiced his inequalities last week, and feels the pride that comes from accomplishing a goal one sets for oneself. He submits his daily goal tracker online, and opens the application Edulastic (an online assessment platform) and finds the Word Problem practice that Ms. Sotero has uploaded.

Just as he is about to begin, Ms. Sotero calls the class to attention. “By now, you all should have submitted your daily goals...Anahi, it looks like I still don’t have yours.” Miguel notices Anahi quickly hit a button on her keyboard. Soon after, Ms. Sotero says, “Ahh, there we go. Thank you Anahi, my friend.”

“I noticed on Monday that a few of you still had some questions about how to pick the proper equation for word problems. So today I will start by meeting with you at the Teacher’s Table. So can I see Eduardo, Miguel, Daniella, Hector and Estrella up here with me. In the second rotation I would like to see Angel, Ashley, Raymond, and Sissi at the teacher’s table, and we will review ratios, okay? Raise your hand if you would like to begin with Independent Practice.” Miguel sees the hands of seven classmates go up in the air. “Great. You all start the rotation at the back tables. Who is ready for an assessment?” Only two hands go up. “Okay, Jesse and Maribel, do you know what standards you are assessing?” They nod in the affirmative. “Okay, all the assessments are already in Edulastic listed by standards. Take your time. I suppose the rest of you are looking to begin with peer study partners?” Many head nods. “Ok then, get to it.”

The classroom explodes with movement as students pack and stack their belongings and move to the appropriate table. The students in the back at the independent practice table pop earbuds in and begin intently watching the Khan Academy videos their teacher had linked to their accounts. Other students paired off, and began to hold quiet “six inch voice” conversations about their Math assignments. Jesse and Maribel transitioned to the assessment corner. Miguel was impressed as he looked at Jesse, who had an eager and determined look on his face. Miguel could remember a time where Jesse hated Math class, and would spend most of his time misbehaving or checking his cell phone. However, ever since joining Ms. Sotero’s class, her way of

teaching Jesse has changed completely. It seems to Miguel that Jesse actually enjoys Math class.

Miguel knows why. In the past, the entire class had to sit quietly while the teacher would speed through practice problems on the board, assign the same practice problems for homework, and give the same exam to everyone on Friday. Now, in Ms. Sotero's class, students are given the choice to work on the things that they want and need to work on. No longer is the Math lesson one-size-fits-all. Ms. Sotero meets every day with small groups of students and teaches them the standards they still have to Master. Miguel finds it much more exciting and fun because every day, he knows he is learning exactly what he needs to know, and he is ready to learn it, and eager to demonstrate when he masters a new idea.

Ms. Sotero's lesson reminds him of lessons he has learned all through elementary school, except now he only learns what HE needs to learn and he learns it in small groups. Ms. Sotero is easily able to understand exactly what confuses him, and provides him with instruction that is best for him. He loves it. The quiet energy in the room shows!

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 to the auditorium and play. There are no problems today, and that is good, because the last few days some kids in his class were pretty harsh to each other and one girl even cried. Miguel's advisory teacher said they were going to have a council about some of the events this week. Miguel thought that was a good idea too. Too soon, the bell rings, and it is time for his science class.

Science and Technology

Miguel never thought about being a scientist before, but Mr. Bailey makes learning so exciting 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 Tuesday, which helps the teacher with all the set up needed for the Project Lead The Way units. Miguel can tell how much his teacher likes his mom, and this makes him love his teacher even more.

Miguel's class is learning about the effects that Muscular Dystrophy can have on a person's life. They started the unit learning about a girl with the disease and then spent time learning all about it. One of the things they learned is that the disease can affect fine motor skills and even how a person walks because of the damage to the muscles.

The little girl they learned about was affected in that way and walks on the balls of her feet. The teacher has tasked them with designing a boot that can help her rehabilitate her muscles and train her to walk normally again.

Miguel and his team introduce the design problem when faced with the challenge of her rehabilitation. Even though the girl they are working for is fictional, Miguel remembers how his teacher showed them real life examples when they went on a field trip to Children's Hospital and got to talk to real doctors and researchers. Mr. Bailey always reminds the class that one of Vista's main global outcomes is for students to take action in the world with their learning. Miguel loves that the project might actually help someone with this problem.

They start the period by presenting their ideas and 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 classmates via Skype at the American School in Guatemala City. Their sister school friends told them that one of their classmates uses crutches because of the disease and that makes their designs have even more relevance and meaning. 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.

Advisory

Miguel can't believe the day is almost over and that they are already at their advisory class. When Miguel gets to the 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. Mackie 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. Mackie raise their hands and wiggle their fingers in silent support.

Ms. Mackie 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. Mackie starts by talking about what happened this week during lunch and recess breaks. She says that being mean to each other is sometimes bullying or can lead to bullying if we don't think about how our actions can affect others.

She then tells the class about a time when she was bullied when she was in middle school 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 treated someone else not very nicely or 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 it 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. Mackie has the class help put the furniture back and ready for the next day.

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. Mackie that he was in FLOW a lot today and thanks her for being his favorite teacher ever. Ms. Mackie 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 since his mom volunteers on Monday's she 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.