



Ron Clark Academy- Whale Branch Elementary Style

Many of you have heard and/or seen some of the activities that the fourth grade team has been implementing. These activities have been based on the concepts embedded at the Ron Clark Academy. The Ron Clark Academy (RCA) is a highly-acclaimed school located in Southeast Atlanta. The Academy has received both national and international recognition for its success in educating students with academic rigor, passion, and creativity balanced by a strict code of discipline.

RCA is a demonstration school – a place where visiting educators engage in a vibrant professional development experience by observing best practices in action before participating in hands-on workshops. In the past seven years, more than 22,000 superintendents, district level administrators, and teachers from 42 states and 22 countries have participated in the RCA Experience to learn better ways to engage students, promote academic rigor, and create a climate and culture that promotes success.

At the Ron Clark Academy (RCA) students begin their tenure by finding out what house they are in by spinning a wheel. We chose to have students pop black balloons to find out their house assignments. When they popped the balloon they received a wrist band in the house color with the name of their house. Each 4th grade teacher is a “Head of House” for one of the 4 houses (Altruismo, Amistad, Reveur, and Isibindi). The student’s homeroom teacher isn’t necessarily going to be the house that they belong to. Every other Friday students will eat lunch with their house mates and we will end the day with house meetings.

Throughout the school year the houses will compete in a points style race to claim the title of “House Champions” for each quarter. Students can earn points for their house by following rules, creative/critical thinking, and problem solving; these points are awarded at the discretion of the teacher based on a student’s performance in the classroom. We also have fun house battles throughout the year to help keep students motivated and engaged in the house system. The first house battle consisted of house cheers. The next battle was a dance off among houses. (This was so much fun!) Each house leader selected one of eight songs and houses were given time to create and practice a dance to perform.

The Ron Clark Academy was founded upon Ron Clarke’s famous Essential 55, which is 55 rules that will build kids’ self-esteem by teaching life skills that also happen to help create better students. The 4th grade team went through and picked the ones we believed to be the most beneficial for our students, which led to the creation of the Essential 26. Students have

learned the Essential 26 through class lessons at the beginning of the year; we also sent copies of the rules home and posted the rules in the classrooms. Our goal is for our students to not only learn the curriculum, but also how to become upstanding citizens in their community.

The teachers at RCA teach many different ways, one of which is through classroom transformations. These transformations are used certain times throughout the school year to reinforce classroom topics and motivate students to achieve goals in the classroom. Some examples include transforming the classroom into a football field to literally put students side by side and head to head as their progress throughout the lesson moves them down the field towards a goal. Another one is turning the classroom into the inside of a spaceship and the teacher dressing up as an alien to spark creativity in literary projects. In order to achieve this, we implemented “Wacky Wednesdays”, during which each teacher in 4th grade is responsible for one of the 5 subjects and plans a lesson that is a little out of the ordinary for their subject. On “Wacky Wednesday” the students rotate through the different classrooms with their housemates to participate in a 50-minute lesson and receives lessons in all 5 subjects that day.

The discipline system at RCA is a detention system and we have modified their system to work for us. Students who are struggling with adhering to The Essential 26 write their name on the board, as a warning. If a student continues to exhibit the same negative behaviors, they are then asked to place a checkmark next to their name; One checkmark results in a silent lunch. If they continue and receive another check, they will receive an after school detention, as we do not believe in taking recess from our students because they need that time to run and socialize. After school detention is held on Thursdays and students that receive detention will have letters sent to their parent, or guardian, that is returned showing that they agree to pick up their child, as there is no transportation. Parents have been very supportive of this discipline system and alternatives are offered for those who don’t agree.

The RCA experience at Whale Branch Elementary has begun with a bang and students have been very responsive.

Written By: Amy Turner, 4th grade teacher

