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The Writing Studio

By Sophie Braccini



Shoshana Mark in front of The Writing Studio Photo
Sophie Braccini

Writing well requires thinking well, and can lead to overall success in school and in life. The essay, for example, is an important aspect of college admissions, yet while Lamorinda communities thrive on excellence and have many private specialized schools for math, none are dedicated to writing - until now. On Oct. 28, Shoshana Mark opened The Writing Studio at 3455 Golden Gate Way in Lafayette. The writing school trains third- to 12th-grade children, emphasizing creativity for its younger students, critical reasoning for older kids.

Mark is a former English teacher from New York who went on to different writing-related jobs before moving with her family to Lafayette 10 years ago. While raising her two children, she worked as a writing instructor for Lafayette Arts and Science Foundation - now Lafayette Partners in Education - for many years. "We have wonderful teachers here, but teaching one-on-one is impossible for them, and some kids fall through the cracks," says Mark, adding that over all her years working for LASF she was saddened to see so many kids who were not proficient writers.

Now that her own children are older, she decided to open her own studio. "I love teaching kids of all ages," she

says. "With the younger ones, we'll learn to use our five senses and to allow them to become natural writers, connecting with their own voice." She believes that elementary school years are the time for creativity and narrative writing, while middle and high school students should focus on expository essays.

"As students mature," she says, "organizing their thoughts before even starting to write becomes crucial." Mark describes the essay as a funnel: the introductory paragraph starts wide, narrowing as writers become more specific, leading toward their thesis statement.

Mark groups students by age and works with them twice a week. "The first session, the children come in and I tell them that this will be the only time they'll hear the sound of my voice," she says. "After that, every interaction, even the most trivial one, will be done in writing. This becomes my mantra, and this is how they connect with themselves; they do not speak, they write."

The students come back to work with Mark one-on-one a few days after the group lesson. "I do not give homework; I want to see the process, and we go over every word, every paragraph. That's how they learn."

Cost for a 10-week session (two days a week) is \$375. For information, call (925) 385-0211.

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