

Overview of Middle School English Language Arts for Families Grade 8

Wake County Public Schools Middle School English Language Arts (ELA) classes provide students the opportunity to engage in reading, writing, speaking and listening each day. Your child's teacher provides strong instruction using *EL Education*, a standards-aligned curriculum that emphasizes close reading, active learning and student engagement. Classrooms are structured with highly collaborative activities that allow students to engage in academic conversations and study rich academic topics.

What will my middle schooler be doing in class?

The year is divided into four modules and each module is about nine weeks in length. During each module, students build background knowledge about a topic. They engage in research guided by essential questions. They read a variety of literary and informational texts as well as digital resources which are provided to all students. Students engage in critical thinking to gather evidence to support their thinking or claims about the featured topic or issue. In the journey to develop their own perspectives, students collaborate and communicate with their peers. Students are ultimately able to create products (performance tasks) to capture and share their learning and demonstrate perseverance by taking responsibility and initiative for completing high-quality work. Grammar and conventions are incorporated into reading and writing lessons.

What will my middle schooler be doing at home?

Students will extend their learning experiences at home, continuing to read and write each day. As a family, you may have opportunities to engage in conversations around topics of study and current events. Students will also engage in independent reading of choice.

What can I do to support my middle schooler with English Language Arts?

- You may want to consider reading the texts and sharing your own experiences related to the topic. Engage in conversations by asking probing questions about your child's learning experience such as:
 - What new information did you learn about?
 - What does this new learning remind you of?
 - What do you wonder about?
 - How can I help you find out more?
 - What questions do you have?
- Read your child's writing, or have your child read his/her writing aloud to you. Not only will you as a parent or guardian begin to understand your child's thinking, but you can also help your child clarify his/her own thinking by talking through the writing process with him/her.
- Ask your child what he/she is doing for research around the topic.
- Support your child with independent reading (ie. encourage your child to go to your school's media center or public library, encourage time and space for independent reading at home).

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Module 1: Finding Home: Refugees

Students read the novel, *Inside Out & Back Again* by Thanhha Lai, and analyze how critical incidents reveal the nature of the main character. Students will analyze the impact of specific word choice on tone and meaning. They also will read informational texts to learn more about the history of war in Vietnam. Students will work in research groups to study the experiences of refugees from one of several cultures and then write two, researched-based free verse narrative poems.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- How do critical incidents reveal character?
- How can we tell powerful stories about people's experiences?
- How does the text make connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas or events?
- What does it look like to write appropriate to task, purpose and audience?
- How does the structure of text differ to impact meaning and style?

Module 2: A Midsummer Night's Dream

Students read and analyze Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, focusing on theme and character development. Students build background knowledge as they explore the appeal and authorship of Shakespeare. They also compare a film version of the play with Shakespeare's original script. Students write an argumentative essay. They will conclude the module by writing a narrative from the point of view of one of the characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Throughout the module, students will engage in discussions about Shakespeare, his universal appeal and the themes within the play.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- When comparing and contrasting a story presented using different types of media (novel, script, play, movie), what are the advantages and disadvantages of using different types of media to present a story?
- When writing a narrative from the point of view of one character in a story, how does a writer decide when to connect and diverge from the original work?
- How does an author develop the narrator's point of view and perspective?

Module 3: The Civil Rights Movement and the Little Rock Nine

Students read the memoir, *A Mighty Long Way* by Carlotta Walls, LaNier and Lisa Frazier Page and a photo essay titled *Little Rock Girl 1957* by Shelley Tougas and consider the different ways in which the story of the Little Rock Nine has been told. They begin by reading primary sources, such as the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision and the dissenting opinion by Justice Harlan. Students then analyze the role of various mediums (photographs, speeches, television reports, newspaper articles, etc.) in depicting the Little Rock Nine and write an informational essay. Students end the module by presenting a song choice for a film soundtrack and photographs to lift up as key events in a film based on the memoir.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- How does studying multiple sources about the same topic but from different perspectives build understanding?
- How can you compare photographs to text that relate to the same topic or incident?
- How does language affect how the author conveys a message or satisfy a specific purpose?

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Module 4: Sustainability of the US Food Supply Chain

Students read Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* while analyzing Michael Pollan's arguments and the evidence he uses to support his claims about food supply chains. Students engage in a research project in which they further investigate the consequences of each of the food chains and the stakeholders affected in those food chains. Students use a decision-making framework to help them understand the implications of various choices and take a position. They finish by writing a position paper and create a product featuring their position that they share with their peers.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- How can you determine if an author or speaker uses sufficient relevant evidence and sound reasoning to support his or her claim?
- How can I support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources while demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text?
- How does reading for research help me to form an opinion and make an argument?

Resources from the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI)

- [DPI 8th Grade Parent Guide](#)
- [DPI 8th Grade Parent Guide \(Spanish\)](#)
- [DPI 8th Grade Parent eBooklet](#)