

Overview of Middle School English Language Arts for Families

Grade 7

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: Journeys and Survival

Students read *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park along with informational texts about the people of South Sudan. They will write a literary essay analyzing the theme of survival within the novel. They will also create a research-based two-voice poem that will offer an analysis of the characters, theme of the novel and their research of the time period. Students will enhance speaking and listening skills by engaging in discussions about the texts and sharing their writing with their peers.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- How does reading from different texts about the same topic build our understanding?
- What are the ways that an author can juxtapose two characters?
- How does the way an author uses words in a text help the reader determine their meanings?
- How do you quote or paraphrase information from a variety of sources while avoiding plagiarism?

Module 2: Working Conditions Then and Now

Students read the novel *Lyddie*, by Katherine Paterson exploring working conditions during the Industrial Revolution. They write an argumentative essay, taking a stand about the choices that Lyddie makes in the novel. They then read informational texts about modern day working conditions, analyzing arguments within the texts. After extended research and discussion, students write a research synthesis about their findings and create a consumer's guide to working conditions in the garment industry. Students will work with their peers to conduct the research and publish the consumer's guide. Students will have the opportunity to present their work to their peers.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- How does closely reading one section of a text help me better understand it?
- How can you tell the difference between a research question that is useful and one that is not?
- How does a speaker develop and organize his/her central claim?
- What connections can you make between literature and other texts, ideas, or perspectives?

Module 3: Slavery: The People Could Fly

Students explore the life of Frederick Douglass by reading excerpts from his work, the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Students will examine questions on what makes stories powerful and read *The People Could Fly*. Students study related poetry and the tools that poets and other writers use to make stories powerful. They write their own powerful story using a model and select one event from Douglass' *Narrative* to rewrite as a picture book for younger students, making sure that the story they create is strong. Students participate in a "writer's roundtable" where they present their work and get feedback from their peers prior to submitting the final product.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- What gives stories and poems their enduring power?
- How does an author's purpose and audience shape how a story is told?
- How can you use language, images and theme to give stories enduring power?

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Module 4: Screen Time and the Developing Brain

Students explore how the adolescent brain develops and the effects of entertainment screen time on the brain. They research the potential benefits and potential risks of screen time using a researcher's notebook and conducting online research. Students engage in a decision-making framework to help them understand the impact of various choices before formulating their own opinion. Students write a position paper and have opportunities for revision and feedback prior to sharing a visual presentation paper.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- How do authors write arguments that are supported with clear reasons and relevant evidence?
- How can I make an informed decision about an issue and then effectively argue my position?
- How can I compare and contrast different media versions of informational text?

Resources from the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI)

- [NCDPI 7th Grade Parent Guide](#)
- [NCDPI 7th Grade Parent Guide \(Spanish\)](#)
- [NCDPI 7th Grade Parent eBooklet](#)