

English Language Arts: Spotlight on Equity Resources

The Spotlight on Equity includes a list of considerations for the purpose of providing an equity literate and socially conscious lens to the teaching and learning of English Language Arts (ELA), as well as to recognize the historic exclusion and marginalization of groups and communities. Neither the enumerated considerations, nor the resources below, are a complete list, but rather a starting point from which educators can design historically and socially relevant learning opportunities in ELA.

Reading Graduation Proficiency

Comprehend, interpret, analyze, and evaluate a wide range and level of complex literary and informational texts.

Spotlight on Equity:

Instructional Considerations

- Representative authors, characters, and topics in classroom libraries
- Access to texts in home languages
- Access to multiple formats (braille, audio, etc.) for students with visual impairments
- Potential for biased content
- Strategies for vocabulary acquisition (e.g., cognates to connect with first language)
- Access to books at home

Content and Curricular Considerations

- [Diversify classroom library](#) and required reading list by replacing or [supplementing canonical texts](#) with [those that center the voices and lives of diverse people](#)
- Use [text sets](#) to build vocabulary, develop [background knowledge](#), and expose students to [multiple perspectives](#)
- [Pre-teach important vocabulary](#) and necessary background knowledge to make complex texts accessible to readers of all ability levels, including English Learners
- Teach students about implicit bias and [how to evaluate sources for biases](#)
- Teach [vocabulary strategies](#) (e.g., using cognates to connect new vocabulary with similar words in a student's first language)
- Include lessons about [how to access books](#) (e.g., school and public library)

Writing Graduation Proficiencies

Text Types and Purposes: Produce clear and coherent writing for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Contact Information:

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Spotlight on Equity:

Instructional Considerations

- Social, historical, and cultural factors that influence how students write
- Perceived value of some types of writing over others
- Culture and first language of the writer
- Relationship and power structure between writer and reader
- Perceived value of academic classroom English over other forms of English
- Importance of explicit instruction and modeling for authentic purposes and audiences
- Varied and representative models of excellent writing
- Variety of writing tools (e.g., voice to text, pen and paper, or computer)
- Option to write in first language
- Personal or sensitive nature of writing topics and expectations around sharing work

Content and Curricular Considerations

- Allow students to explore writing through their own [cultural lens](#) and honor their work
- Explicitly teach about purpose and audience
- Teach about the evolution of the English language and historical language movements (e.g., [plain language](#))
- Place equal value on diverse forms of English that differ from standard academic classroom English (e.g., [Ebonics](#), etc.)
- Include varied and representative models of excellent writing
- Use a rubric or scoring criteria to make expectations clear for each assignment
- Encourage and accept use of a variety of writing tools (e.g., voice to text, pen and paper, or computer)
- Allow students to choose topics and whether or not to share (and with whom)
- Make sure students are aware of sharing requirements before they begin writing

Research: Conduct short and sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Spotlight on Equity:

Instructional Considerations

- Bias of source material
- Access to texts in first language
- Access to multiple formats (braille, audio, etc.) for students with visual impairments
- Multiple perspectives and interpretations of materials
- Sensitive nature of some topics to specific communities
- Expectation of background knowledge
- Culturally dependent parameters around plagiarism and “text borrowing”

Content and Curricular Considerations

- Teach students about implicit bias and [how to evaluate sources for biases](#)
- Allow students to choose topics and whether or not to share (and with whom)
- Use [text sets](#) to build vocabulary and [background knowledge](#) and to expose students to [multiple perspectives](#)
- Explicitly teach expectations for [citations](#), paraphrasing, and avoiding plagiarism

Speaking and Listening Graduation Proficiencies

Discussion: Initiate in and participate effectively in a range of discussions, responding thoughtfully to diverse perspectives and expressing ideas clearly and persuasively.

Presentation: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence conveying a clear and distinct perspective.

Spotlight on Equity:

Instructional Considerations:

- Voice and choice in topic
- Diverse and flexible groupings to build knowledge and explore perspectives
- Opportunities to share in first language
- Ensuring all voices are heard
- Modeling inclusive thinking and respectful use of language
- Social, historical, and cultural factors that influence how students speak
- Creating a safe space for honest sharing
- Sensitive nature of some topics to specific communities
- Opportunities to present in multiple formats

Content and Curricular Considerations:

- Teach about [civil discourse](#) and [respectful communication](#)
- Create a [culture of community](#) at the beginning of the year
- Provide opportunities for students to present in multiple formats and languages

Language Graduation Proficiency

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Spotlight on Equity:

Instructional Considerations:

- Relationships among group affiliation, identity, and language
- Differences among patterns in English dialects, other languages, and more conventionally written English

- Perceived value of academic classroom English over other forms of English
- Multilingual writers
- Evolution of language
- Linguistic resources of all students
- Strategies for vocabulary acquisition (e.g., cognates to connect with first language)
- Differences of grammar, usage, and syntax based on purpose and audience
- Option to write or speak in first language

Content and Curricular Considerations:

- Explicitly teach about [differences among patterns](#) in English dialects, other languages, and more conventionally written English
- Use a rubric or scoring criteria to make expectations for the conventions of English grammar and usage clear for each assignment
- Teach about the continued evolution of the English language
- Teach [vocabulary strategies](#) (e.g., using cognates to connect new vocabulary with similar words in a student’s first language)
- Teach about the ways in which purpose and audience dictate differences in grammar, usage, and syntax for written and spoken communication

Resources

General ELA Resources

[Teaching Strategies](#) (Learning for Justice) – This collection of teaching strategies from Learning for Justice helps teachers build literacy as well as social emotional skills while exploring meaningful texts. Each strategy is aligned to the Common Core and includes a special note about English language learners and connections to anti-bias education.

[Qualities of Antiracist ELA Curricula](#) – This short infographic from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) reminds teachers that “racism can be enacted through English language arts curricula” and lists the ways that ELA curricula can help sustain cultural diversity as part of educational justice.

[What Antiracist Language Teachers Do](#) – This short infographic from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) reminds teachers that “racism can be enacted through the instructional choices of English language arts teachers” and lists the ways in which ELA teachers can combat racism through practice.

[Instructional Practice Guide for Equitable Teaching and Learning in English Language Arts Grades 9 through 12](#) – This resource, published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction in collaboration with Wisconsin English language arts teachers, provides a collection of instructional practices to ensure educational equity and help all students develop as literate individuals.

[20 Ways to Bring More Equity to Your Literacy Instruction](#) – This article from We Are Teachers describes strategies for increasing equity in the ELA classroom.

Resources for Reading:

[“Book Deserts” Are Real. Here’s What Schools Are Doing to Help Kids Who Live in Them.](#) – This article from We Are Teachers describes ways schools can help students gain access to print material, regardless of where they live.

[Who Are Your Readers? Getting to Know Your Students and the Books They Love](#) – This article from We Are Teachers provides ways for teachers to find out about the reading habits and abilities of their students.

[Kids Can’t Wait: Strategies to Support Struggling Readers](#) – This article from the Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity presents strategies to support students who struggle with understanding classroom reading assignments, written expression, and written assessments.

Resources for Diverse Texts:

[Tricia Ebarvia: How Inclusive Is Your Literacy Classroom Really?](#) (Heinemann Blog) – This resource includes eight questions educators can ask themselves in order to evaluate the authenticity of their efforts toward inclusivity.

[Diverse Texts for Secondary ELA](#) – This resource from Nouvelle ELA helps educators diversify classroom libraries, providing students with a broader viewpoint of the world and a way to celebrate greater representation. Each list includes a variety of voices from a diverse range of authors and protagonists.

[Reading Diversity: A Tool for Selecting Diverse Texts \(Extended Edition\)](#) – This interactive tool from Learning for Justice provides educators with a multi-dimensional approach to the text selection process that includes considerations that prioritize text complexity, critical literacy, and cultural responsiveness.

[Rethinking the Classics: Supplements and Updates for 10 ELA Texts](#) – Writers for the Secondary English Coffee Shop blog identify ten texts commonly taught in secondary ELA and reexamine them through a lens of inclusivity, making suggestions about supplemental texts that could be added immediately as well as curriculum updates for the future.

[The Danger of a Single Story](#) – In this TED Talk, author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie talks about the fact that a person’s cultural identity is made up of many stories and the risk involved in making assumptions about a whole culture based on a single story.

Resources for Investigating Bias of Texts and Other Materials:

[Screening for Biased Content in Instructional Materials](#) – This tool from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction helps educators evaluate texts and other resources for biased content.

[Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education](#) – This publication from Learning for Justice provides teachers with practical strategies for creating a learning environment that is culturally responsive and promotes anti-bias values.

Resources for Writing and Research:

[Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing](#) – This position statement from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) points out that writing is affected by complex social relationships and languages, including relationships of power and those in which one person’s voice or language is valued more than another’s. Many cultural factors influence a student’s writing, including linguistic, racial, economic, geographic, and ideological, among others.

[Statement on Second Language Writing and Multilingual Writers](#) – This resource from the Conference on College Composition & Communication (CCCC) discusses the ways in which multilingual writers can have different understandings of expectations of writing based on their own cultural assumptions and experiences. Additionally, they may pull from knowledge of multiple languages when writing. This paper provides suggestions for supporting multilingual writers throughout instruction and assessment, including attending to ways in which cultural and educational backgrounds can affect background knowledge, interpretation of materials, and sensitivity to certain subject matter.

[10 Smart Ideas for Integrating Language Arts and Social Studies](#) – This article from We Are Teachers explores ways in which educators can expand the background knowledge, vocabulary base, and critical thinking skills of their students by integrating social studies concepts, practices, and texts within their ELA curriculum.

Resources for Speaking and Listening:

[Teaching Strategies: Community Inquiry](#) - This resource from Learning for Justice includes strategies that help students develop speaking and listening skills by asking them to draw upon texts during meaningful—and respectful—classroom discussions.

[Why Group Work Could Be the Key to English Learner Success](#) – This article from KQED Mind Shift describes ways to maintain cognitive rigor engagement for students for whom English is not their first language through multilingual discussion groups.

[Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education: Classroom Culture](#) – This section of a publication from Learning for Justice focuses on ways to honor the experiences of all students by providing safe spaces for them to feel comfortable sharing their unique stories along with ways to help students build necessary communication skills.

[How to Have an Equitable Class Discussion](#) – This article from Usable Knowledge provides information about how teachers can be intentional about calling on a diverse set of student voices to ensure multiple perspectives are heard.

Resources for Language:

[Teaching Strategies: Word Work](#) – This resource from Learning for Justice includes vocabulary strategies to help students build comprehension and language skills by using key words from specific texts in their own reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

[Students' Right to Their Own Language](#) – This statement from the Conference on College Composition & Communication (CCCC) affirms students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language as part of their cultural identity and includes explanations of relevant research on dialects and usage.

Additional Vermont Agency of Education Resources

[Cultural Diversity and Equity Resources \(June 2020\)](#)

[Educational Equity Webpage](#)

[Equity Literacy Resources – Fall 2019](#)

[Equity Literacy Resources – Spring 2019](#)

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