

Planning Effectively for Kindergarten to Grade 12 English Language Arts

The provincial time allotment for Grades 1 to 6 English language arts is 35 percent of instructional time and it is 27 percent for Grades 7 and 8. Teachers have considerable flexibility in the way that they plan for this instructional time, including integration with other subjects. Teachers need to be aware when integrating that each discipline has specific ways of thinking, being, and doing, and specific types of texts to comprehend and create. Teachers should consider the following when planning English language arts.

Planning for Rich, Meaningful Learning Experiences and Deeper Understanding

Effective English language arts planning provides opportunities to explore significant and complex ideas (e.g., extinction versus the topic of dinosaurs) and to consider questions for deeper understanding.

Questions for deeper understanding can be used to initiate and guide rich learning experiences and give students direction for developing deep understandings about a topic or issue. It is essential to develop questions that are evoked by students' interests and have potential for rich and deep learning. The process of constructing questions can help students to grasp the important disciplinary or transdisciplinary ideas that are situated at the core of a particular curricular focus or context. These broad questions will lead to more specific questions that can provide a framework, purpose, and direction for the learning experiences in a lesson, or series of lessons, and help students to connect what they are learning to their experiences and life beyond school.

In the context of play and inquiry, questions and wonderings could emerge during learners' engagements. Teachers would observe learners in action to notice these questions in order to help inform further and deeper learning. Prompts in many forms (e.g., objects, concepts, specimens, visuals, events, books) can also inspire wondering and questioning to guide deeper learning.

Through rich learning experiences and processes to deepen understanding, students are given opportunities to engage meaningfully in the four practices of English language arts. By exploring broad questions and significant ideas, students will be using language as sense making, system, exploration and design, and power and agency. When planning, teachers need to ensure that the learning experiences are rich enough to engage students meaningfully in all four practices.

Considering significant and complex ideas that are rich enough to meaningfully engage students in the four ELA practices provides the "content" for English language arts. Unlike science or social studies curricula that

indicate specific content to teach the skills, strategies, attitudes, and behaviours (or the practices) of the discipline, English language arts foregrounds the practices and allows teachers the flexibility to be responsive to the specific interests, contexts, and strengths of particular students. Teachers could consider the following examples:

- topics, issues, and questions of student interest
- topics, issues, and questions that arise in other curriculum areas
- topics, issues, and questions from life and literature

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Using Lenses to Plan Rich, Meaningful Learning Experiences

The following lenses provide both a focus on language learning so that students are able to enact the practices of English language arts while also providing opportunity for students to explore and investigate complex issues, ideas, and questions about themselves and the world. When students have opportunities to examine, investigate, and explore issues, ideas, and themes through the four lenses, they develop deep and flexible thinking. The lenses also support teachers in considering topics, issues, themes, and ideas from different perspectives: personal and philosophical; social, cultural, and historical; imaginative and literary; and environmental and technological. These lenses can also help teachers and students deepen their foci for learning experiences. When planning, teachers should reflect on the use of the lenses over the course of year to ensure a well-rounded, comprehensive engagement with English language arts.

Lenses to Support Planning Rich, Meaningful Learning Experiences

A **personal and philosophical lens** gives students opportunities to explore their identity and their self-concept. Fostering the learning spirit inside each student comes from the heart and mind connection that is revealed through each student's reflection on personal feelings, self-image, influential life forces, ideas, belief systems, values, and ways of knowing. Who am I, what is my place, and where am I going? What does the future hold for me?

A **social, cultural, and historical lens** gives students opportunities to explore relationships with others, community, culture, customs, multiple ways of knowing, national and international events and issues, and the history of humanity. What are my rights and responsibilities in communities, cultures, and economies? How and who am I in relation to communities, cultures, and economies? How am I defined by these relationships?

An **imaginative and literary lens** gives students opportunities to use their intuition and imagination to explore alternative worlds and possibilities; different types of classical and contemporary genres, such as fantasy, science fiction, and humour; and particular authors. How do I use my imagination and intuition and that of others to understand and relate to people, the community, the world, and society in a positive way? How do I foster imaginative ideas of self and others? How do I use intuitive hunches to support creative problem solving or inquiry?

An **environmental and technological lens** gives students opportunities to explore the natural and constructed worlds including the land, the sky, animals, the sea, space, technologies, and environmental and technological issues. How do I describe, analyze, and shape the world around me? How do the natural and technological worlds affect and shape me?

Adapted from Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. *English Language Arts 3*. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010.

Rich learning experiences can be related to and developed through one or more of these lenses. All lenses can be used and applied at all grade levels and grade bands. Each lens provides opportunities for integration with topics, issues, and questions arising from other subject areas.

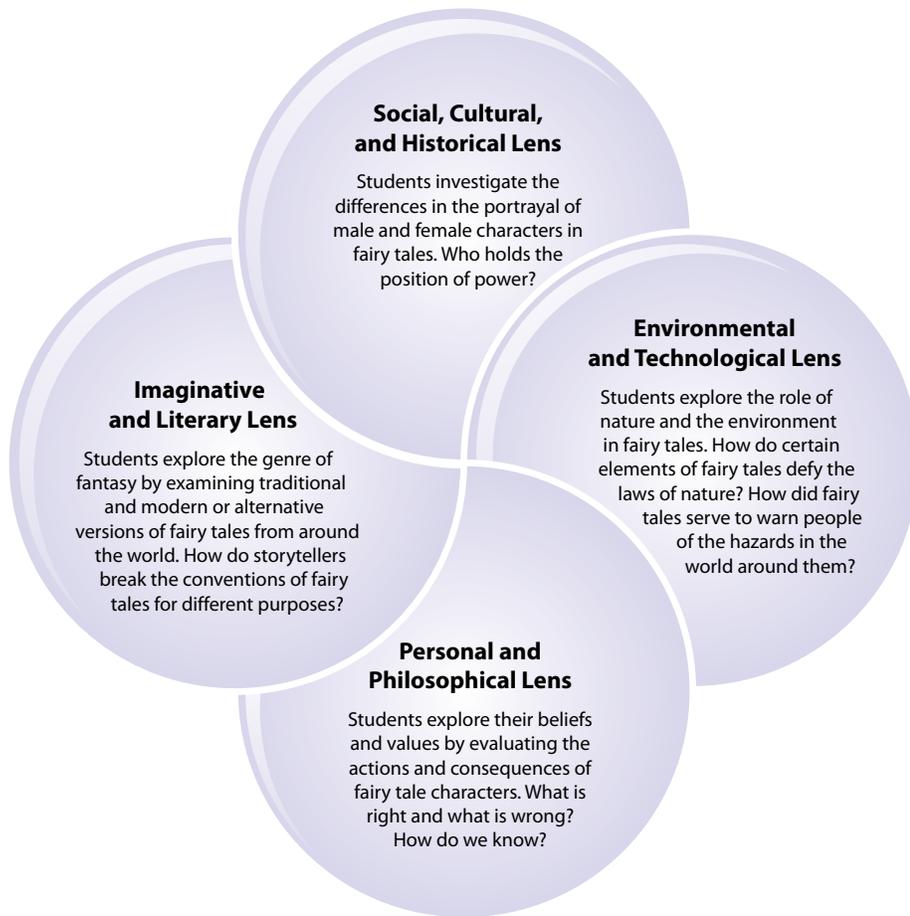
Using Lenses to Focus and Deepen Learning Experiences

The following charts provide examples of how lenses can be used to focus and deepen learning experiences.

Using Lenses to Deepen Learning Experiences

From	To
Students learn about apples.	Students explore ideas of sustainability through consideration of Canadian apple crops. (environmental)
Students learn about fairy tales.	Students explore the literary devices used in fairy tales and experiment with breaking conventions to create new texts. (imaginative and literary)
Students read and study Shakespeare.	Students consider <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> and other sources as artifacts in order to interrogate issues related to anti-Semitism in different periods of time, and from the perspectives of different cultures, values, and beliefs. (social, cultural, historical)
Students write a five-paragraph essay on character development in a novel study.	Students examine and use persuasive writing in a variety of forms to communicate a position related to inquiry/study about whether identity is fixed or not. (personal and philosophical)

Example: Exploring Fairy Tales through Multiple Lenses



English language arts learning, designed around significant questions, themes, topics, and issues, can ensure that students engage with and deepen their English language arts practices in meaningful and multiple ways.

Designing and Organizing Teaching and Learning within Rich and Meaningful Learning Experiences

Educators can approach the design of learning experiences in various ways depending on purpose and needs. Educators use a variety of approaches to instructional design and consider many structures in order to embed focused and targeted teaching and learning within these designs. They will want to consider designs that provide opportunity for learners to practise meaningfully in the field of English language arts.

Approaches to Instructional Design

The following instructional designs provide different ways for learners to engage in learning. Educators will need to consider their learners and purposes in relation to their instructional designs. Educators should use different designs over the course of the year.

Multi-genre thematic design is built around a theme or topic and includes a range of prose fiction and non-fiction, poetry, plays, and other texts. This is the most common type of English language arts design because it allows teachers to vary learning experiences within a broad theme or topic to suit the differing ability levels of students while supporting their learning. For example, a class may engage in learning about the importance of water by engaging in and creating a variety of texts. Various forms of texts provide a range of ideas, information, and perspectives on the theme or topic.

Inquiry and/or interdisciplinary design is usually built around a theme or topic that is related to one or more important questions for inquiry and research. Although teachers consistently engage students in an inquiry stance, they may at times use approaches that guide and focus inquiry processes. The emphasis in an inquiry design is on exploring the possible answers to a question or questions that the students have about the theme or topic and then using inquiry processes to guide their work in the design. When the design is interdisciplinary, it considers and addresses both English language arts practices while valuing other discipline-specific practices.

An **author or genre study** design focuses on the works of a specific author or illustrator or on a specific genre (e.g., poetry). This focus considers the craft of writing and/or illustrating as well as thinking about big ideas around literature and writing. Teachers will need to remember to set this particular design within rich learning experiences. For example, students might engage in learning about how poetry exists in their lives, how different storytellers draw upon cultural beliefs, or how one can be persuasive. Author or genre study can also be set within an inquiry and interdisciplinary design. For example, teachers might incorporate the study of legends and tales into an inquiry of “the place of story in communities.”

In English language arts classrooms, it is also important to plan for structures that allow for the targeted instruction and practice of particular skills, strategies, and processes. This focused and responsive teaching and learning should be embedded in rich and meaningful learning contexts where it is related directly to the topic, theme, or inquiry. For example, small group targeted instruction on particular reading processes can be embedded in and relate to the larger theme, topic, or inquiry. Responsive instruction may also come in the form of short, direct, and responsive one-on-one conversations with learners.

Setting this focused work within rich learning experiences provides better opportunity for students to engage meaningfully. If this programmatic planning is set apart from rich learning contexts, it should not be more than half of the ELA instructional time. Teachers will need to design ways to support students with transferring and applying learning from distinct programmatic structures to rich learning experiences.

Embedding and Connecting Programmatic Structures in Rich Learning Experiences

The following programmatic structures are best embedded in and connected to rich learning experiences:

Workshop models: Workshop models provide a time structure that allows teachers to differentiate instruction and allows students to use the ELA practices. The common components of a workshop model include the following: mini-lesson, goal setting, independent reading, writing, and conferring, small group instruction, response and reflection, and sharing. For example, teachers may include workshop opportunities within the context of a larger rich learning experience to support students as they engage in design work.

Centre models: Centre models provide a structured way for students to use ELA practices while the teacher either confers with individuals or small groups, or observes students while they are engaged in work. Centres could include, for example, language play, dramatic play, independent reading and writing, inquiry and research groups, design space, and literature discussions. Centres could connect directly to the big idea or question that drives a rich learning experience. Features, purposes, and foci of these centres would be supportive and complementary.

Small group targeted instruction: Targeted instruction allows teachers to respond to specific needs of small groups of students. Through formative assessment, teachers identify a common skill, strategy, or process that several students need and teach to that need. Students follow up with independent practice. Groups are formed based on need not on level of ability, and are

frequently disbanded and reformed with different students. Teachers would plan intentionally for targeted instruction as they design rich learning experiences. Focus for targeted instruction would also emerge as students engage within rich learning experiences.

Routines: Teachers may address programmatic needs by building in regular whole class routines. For example, when planning, teachers should ensure that students are read aloud to daily and have at least 30 minutes of time on text in addition to targeted instruction time. These daily routines could connect directly to the larger ideas/questions that are the focus of a rich learning experience.

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