

Writing and Language 8A

Writing and Language 8A—like its counterpart in ninth grade—puts writing at the center of teaching and learning. This course prepares students to communicate in a world that is changing so rapidly we may not even be able to imagine future means of communication. The tools students use to express their ideas have rarely been stable, but while the means for transmitting language has changed, the need to read, write, and think critically have not. English 8 and 9 are parallel courses that help students realize the promise of language and literature for their own purposes and audiences, no matter how the tools may change before they graduate.

Enduring Understandings

- Writing helps us understand what we think and express what we know.
- Writing arguments challenges us to risk changing our minds.
- Writers explain things audiences do not understand in terms of things they do understand.
- Writers tell stories to share their experience of being human in a world of other humans.
- Careful craft and thoughtful revision lead to clearer, more resonant writing.

Essential Questions

- How does writing help shape my thinking?
- What techniques will make readers hear and consider my argument?
- How can I communicate knowledge and ideas clearly and effectively?
- How can I tell the stories that are important to me?
- How does reading the work of other writers help me become a better writer?
- How does collaborating with others help me to hone my own ideas?

Writing and Language 8A focuses on developing the skills students need to communicate effectively for a variety of purposes, audiences, and media. The course is designed as a workshop: Students write every day, keep a portfolio to track progress and set goals, and explore ways to convey their own voice. They read as writers, analyzing short texts, practicing the writers' techniques, and imitating the style and sentence structures of published authors. They study literature and language as an integral part of the writing and revision process. Students write to explore their own thinking, engage in reflection, and learn each day that they have control over improving their craft.

What does a writing class look like?

- While students write and study language in all courses, teachers should [make these practices the center of instruction](#) during first semester:
- Students [keep a portfolio](#) of their work, reflecting on their growth as writers throughout the semester. A final portfolio project is used as a culminating activity at the end of the course.
- Students [write daily and reflectively](#), to build up their fluency and stamina.
- Students write over both extended time frames and shorter time frames. Though students have opportunities for timed, on-demand writing, the course focuses on the writing process, where students have frequent opportunities for research, reflection, and revision.
- Students get frequent and concrete feedback during the writing process, rather than after the writing is complete, to emphasize that revision leads to critical thinking and learning.
- Much of the writing that students do in the class is not graded. Students need to feel an urgency to write that goes beyond the grade, and they need the freedom to take risks. If students write only what the teacher has time to grade, they have fewer opportunities for critical thinking and writing.
- Students have choices of topics and genres whenever possible, to engage them in their own writing.
- Language conventions are taught in the context of reading and writing, not as separated skills. Reading professional models and keeping a portfolio help students target specific skills and increase facility with language.
- Teachers write with students, which helps them consider the challenges of the writing tasks they assign and to model the thinking and revising that are fundamental to the writing process.
- Reading in this course is primarily for the purpose of giving students models for their own writing; students explore the literature from the [perspective of the choices an author makes](#).
- Students read any book-length works independently, and classroom instruction is used to model passages or discuss the book in literature circles in preparation for writing rather than to “teach the book.”
- Whenever possible, students write for authentic purposes and audiences; student engagement is key to success.
- The classroom environment encourages and supports students in taking risks as they think and write.

A Note about This Guide:

This document is intended as a resource and supplement for the English 8 course page in the Instruction Center. It contains hyperlinks to web pages both inside and outside MCPS. It will be updated and revised frequently, with all updates announced through the English Forum. While this document may certainly be printed, it is perhaps better used electronically, to take advantage of its dynamic nature. Please note the date on the title page to ensure that you have the most up-to-date version.

WRITING TASKS — ENGLISH 8A

Throughout the two marking periods of the writing course, students write frequently and for varying purposes. Additionally, students use a portfolio throughout the semester to set goals, track their own progress, and show growth in their writing.

- Students complete a minimum of three writing tasks each marking period.
- Teachers who wish to make more time for re-teaching a common task may choose to omit these starred tasks or blend them into others, but the relevant skills and concepts must be incorporated into instruction during the semester.
- Teachers should plan with their team to sequence the tasks in the order they deem most appropriate for their students.
- Regardless of which sequence students follow to complete the tasks, teachers should review the formative assessment at the beginning of the first marking period to ensure that students have opportunities to practice the reading and writing skills needed on the formative.

Argument

[An evaluation or review of a product, service, or experience](#)

[A persuasive piece written to an authentic audience](#) *

[An argument that uses information from multiple sources](#)

Informative/Explanatory Writing

[An analytical response to a piece of literature from the unit](#)*

A comparison of narrative elements in two texts

[An informative essay about a complex process](#)

Narrative

[A description of a setting](#) *

[A personal narrative about a significant event](#)

[A fictional narrative that develops a theme](#)

Writing and Language 8A Texts

The primary purpose of any text in Writing and Language is to offer students models for their own writing: to see what choices professional writers make about diction, sentences, and use of detail. Students read all texts from the perspective of a writer and experiment with ways to use similar techniques in their own writing.

Most reading selections should be shorter texts—essays, short stories, nonfiction narratives. Teachers choose these works from available anthologies, current periodicals, and subscription databases to give students experience with a diverse group of skilled writers. Centrally developed lesson packages include suggested titles from approved anthologies and appropriate online sources as well as excerpts from second-semester texts.

Recommended Anthologies

<i>Junior Great Books/Great Books Roundtable</i>	Great Books Foundation
<i>The Language of Literature</i>	Arthur N. Applebee, et. al.
<i>A Multicultural Reader, Collection One</i>	Rebecca Christian, ed.
<i>A Multicultural Reader, Collection Two</i>	Rebecca Burke, ed.
<i>Will of the People: Readings in American Democracy</i>	Great Books Foundation

Recommended Writing Resources

<i>Grammar for Middle School</i>	Don and Jenny Killgallon
<i>Write Source</i>	Dave Kemper, et. al.
The Center for Writing Studies	U. of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab)	Purdue University
Grammar Girl Quick and Dirty Tips	Mignon Fogarty
The Writing Center	U. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Literature Circles Texts

In order to encourage students to read extensively outside of class—always an advantage for a thoughtful writer—teachers have them choose from a variety of works to conduct literature circle discussions and then share their ideas in writing. Rather than reading checks and comprehension quizzes, teachers encourage students to reflect on their own reading both in writing and in class discussion. Teachers may choose literature circle texts from two sources:

- English 8B core texts that will not be used instructionally by any eighth grade teacher in the school
- A designated list of literature circles texts to be used at appropriate times throughout the school year

Teachers will need to plan with their eighth grade team to make decisions about which texts to use in each semester.

Language Conventions

Teachers plan instruction to incorporate language instruction into writing; the goal is for students to think clearly about ways to improve their own writing. Exercises in sentence combining, expansion, and imitation offer ways students can compose more sophisticated and effective sentences. *Separated* and *simulated* instruction may be used to introduce concepts; include *integrated* instruction to ensure that students apply these and other skills in their writing.

Common Core Language Standards for Grade 8

- L.8.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- Explain the function of verbals (gerunds, participles, infinitives) in general and their function in particular sentences.
 - Form and use verbs in the active and passive voice.
 - Form and use verbs in the indicative, imperative, interrogative, conditional, and subjunctive mood.
 - Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb voice and mood.
- L.8.2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
- Use punctuation (comma ellipsis, dash) to indicate a pause or break.
 - Use an ellipsis to indicate an omission.
 - Spell correctly.
- L.8.3 Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
- Use verbs in the active and passive voice and in the conditional and subjunctive mood to achieve particular effects (e.g., emphasizing the actor or the action; expressing uncertainty or describing a state contrary to fact).

Teachers should consult the list of [Language Progressive Skills](#) to identify concepts initially taught in earlier grades that are most likely to require review and re-teaching, based on students' needs. The portfolio provides an opportunity to individualize instruction on these skills. The most relevant to improving student writing through whole-class instruction may include the following:

- Produce complete sentences, recognizing and correcting fragments and run-ons (L.4.1f).
 - Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others' writing and speaking, and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language (L.6.1e).
 - Vary sentence patterns for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style (L.6.3a).
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Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

Vocabulary acquisition continues to be a necessary and vital part of the English curriculum. Vocabulary study not only enhances understanding of the writer’s craft—how word choice creates character, defines mood, and sets tone—but also is the key to a richer reading of all texts. Determining meaning and understanding word structure give students the tools to become independent, strategic readers of challenging texts. As students learn about the variety and richness of English, they should be encouraged to use language that is both precise and expressive.

Common Core Language Standards for Grade 8

- L.8.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words or phrases based on *grade 8 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
- Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
 - Use common, grade-appropriate Greek or Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., *precede*, *recede*, *secede*).
 - Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech.
 - Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).
- L.8.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- Interpret figures of speech (e.g., verbal irony, puns) in context.
 - Use the relationship between particular words to better understand each of the words.
 - Distinguish among the connotations (associations) of words with similar denotations (definitions) (e.g., *bullheaded*, *willful*, *firm*, *persistent*, *resolute*).
- L.8.6 Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.
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English 8 Course Terms

The list below is **not** comprehensive; it is intended as a guideline for establishing a common language for instruction. Rather than a list of definitions to be memorized, the list should be considered as concepts students apply to their own writing. While a term may be listed under a particular writing type, students may encounter it in several different contexts.

ARGUMENT

Allusion
 Alternate or opposing claim
 Audience
 Bias
 Claim
 Concluding statement/section
 Credibility
 Evaluation
 Evidence
 Logical reasoning
 Opinion
 Persuasion
 Speaker
 Thesis

NARRATIVE

Characterization
 Conflict
 Description
 Dialogue
 Exposition
 Flashback
 Foreshadowing
 Inciting action
 Mood
 Narrator
 Pacing
 Perspective/point of view
 Plot structure
 Resolution
 Sensory imagery
 Setting
 Suspense
 Theme

INFORMATIVE/EXPLANATORY

Analysis
 Cause and effect
 Chronological order
 Citation
 Conventions of genre
 Objective tone
 Organization
 Paraphrase
 Quotation
 Sources (digital and print)
 Structure
 Transition

LANGUAGE

Active and passive voice
 Ellipsis to indicate an omission
 Moods of verbs (indicative, imperative, interrogative, conditional, subjunctive)
 Precise language
 Punctuation (comma, ellipsis, dash) that indicates a pause or break
 Verbals (gerunds, participles, infinitives)
 Language Progressive Skills

OTHER KEY TERMS

Connotation
 Denotation
 Diction
 Editing
 Figurative language
 Genre
 Irony
 Revision
 Style
 Tone
 Varied sentence patterns
 Voice
 Word choice
 Writer's purpose

English 8 Literature Circles Texts

The works listed below are all approved for English 8, but most do not need the same level of instructional support as the core texts. Throughout the year, consider giving students the opportunity to read some of these works independently and to use them for student-guided discussion. Teachers may also wish to use approved core texts that they are not using instructionally in English 8B as literature circle texts.

Across Five Aprils.....Irene Hunt
BeautyRobin McKinley
Brian’s Song William Blinn
Canyons.....Gary Paulsen
Chains.....Laurie Halse Anderson
Chinese Cinderella Adeline Yen Mah
The ContenderRobert Lipsyte
Cuba 15 Nancy Osa
Deathwatch.....Robb White
Dacey’s Song Cynthia Voigt
The Girl Who Owned a City O. T. Nelson
The Good Earth Pearl Buck
Growing Up Susan Campbell Bartoletti
in Coal Country
Harriet Tubman: Conductor on Ann Petry
the Underground Railroad
Herland.....Charlotte Perkins Gilman
Homecoming Cynthia Voigt
House of Dies DrearVirginia Hamilton
The House of the Scorpion Nancy Farmer
I Heard the Owl Call My Name. Margaret Craven
Jane EyreCharlotte Brontë
Kim/KimiIrwin Hadley

Life as We Knew ItSusan Beth Pfeffer
The Mostly True Adventures.... Rodman Philbrick
of Homer P. Figg
Mother Jones: The Most..... Elliott Gorn
Dangerous Woman in America
My Brother Sam.....James Lincoln Collier
Is Dead and Christopher Collier
Nation Terry Pratchett
Of Nightingales That Weep.. Katherine Paterson
Pedro’s Journal Pam Conrad
The Pigman..... Paul Zindel
Red Moon at Sharpsburg.....Rosemary Wells
The Red Pony..... John Steinbeck
The River Between Us..... Richard Peck
The Road to Memphis Mildred Taylor
Ship Breaker Paolo Bacigalupi
Solitary Blue..... Cynthia Voigt
Thunder Rolling Scott O’Dell and
in the Mountains Elizabeth Hall
Treasure IslandRobert Louis Stevenson
TroubleGary D. Schmidt
Uglies..... Scott Westerfeld
Z for Zachariah Robert C. O’Brien