LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM OVERVIEW GRADE 8

The eighth grade Language Arts program continues to build on and extend the knowledge gained and skills established in previous grades. Major new concepts and skills that are emphasized include: interpreting the effect on meaning of the use of symbolism and figurative language; comparing and contrasting the content, narration, and language of fiction and non-fiction literature; connecting all parts of a composition to a central focus with appropriate detail; organizing logical paragraph structure with closure at the end of a composition.

Classroom instruction is designed to achieve the delicate balance between providing teacher explanation and support, and fostering the student's ability to undertake and complete assignments on their own. There is a strong emphasis on increasing the students' understanding of their individual reading and writing ability, both strong points and those areas that require further attention. This awareness enables students to approach their work independently and analytically. Self and peer assessment of particular written products and oral presentation, evaluation of their approaches to reading and reading preferences combined with teacher conferences help students develop this understanding. In addition, selecting work for a writing portfolio which includes representative samples of writing assignments provides another opportunity for students to review and evaluate their work.

Many assignments focus on the analysis of literature through group discussion, writing responses to a text, and also highlight varied experiences with essay writing. Students are also expected to assume responsibility for editing their own writing and planning and executing individual and group projects and presentations. The result is that students gain greater insight into their own approaches to reading comprehension and learn how to craft their writing to communicate their ideas clearly and accurately.

Instruction in the Language Arts centers in three major areas:

- Oral Communication Skills
- Literature: Its Meaning and Structure
- Writing: Narrative, Exposition and Poetry

The relevant concepts and skills defined in the Language Arts Learning Expectations in both grade seven and grade eight are brought together through appropriate curriculum units which integrate reading and writing instruction and oral language development. Full-length novels, groups of short stories, poems and essays are the texts for these units. A major difference in eighth grade is the difficulty of the texts studied. Romeo and Juliet is read in all classrooms. Huckleberry Finn and The Crucible are frequent selections. In addition, works of historical fiction linked to the Social Studies content may be studied both from a literary perspective and as a way to promote understanding of a historical period.

The units are approximately four to six weeks long and give students the opportunity to read closely with the guidance of the teacher and to compose drafts of narrative, exposition and poetry which receive feedback from peers and the teacher prior to completion of the final product. Explicit lessons on new skills as well as areas requiring review occur within these units of study. These units often culminate in individual or group projects. Art, drama, and oral presentation are challenging ways to extend the meaning of the texts studied and are part of many projects.

An important way for parents to maintain a vital link to the Language Arts program is to read and discuss the books that students are reading both in class and for their independent reading. Sharing reactions and interpretations of a text will add to the student's understanding of possible readings. These authors are frequently read by eighth graders: Maya Angelou, Bruce Brooks, Willa Cather, Susan Cooper, Rosa Guy, Ursula LeGuin, George Orwell, Gary Paulsen, William Saroyan, Elie Weisel and Paul Zindel. The Brookline Reading List and teacher recommendations are resources for additional suggestions. Encouraging students to explain how they planned and worked to complete a project or composition as well as noting the strengths of a final product are another constructive connection.

Decisions on course selection at the High School are naturally an important eighth grade task. Eighth grade teachers are able to assist student and parents in appropriate course selections.

LANGUAGE ARTS LEARNING EXPECTATIONS Grade 7 and 8

I. ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

A. Students will develop the ability to communicate effectively for varied purposes They will be able to:

- Choose, adjust, and extend appropriate vocabulary
- Answer questions to add and to clarify information
- Organize and advance a complex viewpoint
- Organize ideas and information to emphasize main points

B. Students will develop the ability to respond to a range of ideas and opinions showing understanding of and respect for different points of view.

They will be able to:

- Analyze the effectiveness of a group's interactions
- Question ideas and information presented by others
- Synthesize ideas presented during a discussion
- Make connections between ideas expressed by a speaker with known information from other sources
- Locate relevant information and organize the findings

C. Students will develop the ability to deliver effective oral presentations.

They will be able to:

- Support main points or themes with concrete, verifiable evidence
- Project voice and establish eye contact
- Use gesture, tone, and pace to emphasize and to extend meaning
- Incorporate language devices such as repetition, rhetorical questions and detail to build a theme or argument
- Present charts, pictures, and other visual materials to reinforce and extend meaning of the oral presentation
- Develop and use strategies (e.g., index cards, outlines) to increase public speaking fluency

II. LITERATURE

A. Students will develop the ability to analyze meaning and structure of literature (Novel, Short Story, Drama, Essay, Poetry) through discussion and writing.

They will be able to:

- · Recognize, question and reflect on issues encountered in texts
- Identify, plot, climax, conflict, resolution, foreshadowing, mood, tone, irony, and theme
- Identify figurative language including alliteration, hyperbole, simile, personification, and metaphor
- Compare and contrast the quality of texts citing content, narrative structure, and language choices
- Connect experience, knowledge, prior reading, and observation in response to a text
- Explain the author's point of view and construct more than one interpretation to show divergent readings

B. Students will develop the ability to read and respond to a variety of texts written by major `authors representing a range of cultural traditions.

- They will be able to:
- Choose appropriate books for independent reading and research
- Explore a variety of literary genres including personal narrative, biography, historical fiction, realistic fiction, and science fiction
- Expand the literary canon to include a wide range of literary experiences
- Develop an appreciation for literature that will result in life long reading habits

III. READING

A. Students will develop the ability to differentiate reading instruction to take into account differences among students in the classroom. These differences include: language and cultural background, prior experiences with print and learning styles. They will be able to:

- Develop and apply strategies *to decode* grade level reading material with fluency and apply reading strategies: e.g., syllabication skills and context clues
- Develop and apply strategies *to summarize* content and retell a story by identifying: characters, setting, conflict, climax, and resolution
- Develop and apply strategies *to comprehend* the main ideas of expository writing and be able *to make inferences* by recognizing elements of text structure, e.g., title, heading, topic sentences, supporting details and concluding sentences
- Develop and apply strategies to identify unfamiliar words in any piece of writing and use appropriate references and context clues to uncover meaning
- Be able to restate the definition of new vocabulary in their own words and use in a clear sentence
- Apply strategies to make reading accessible by using graphic organizers to chart story, organize and track themes, identify characters
- Apply multiple strategies (structured and unstructured) for responding to literature,
- o for learning and recalling vocabulary, for memorizing and presenting text and
- for note taking and test-taking
- Use audio/visuals or discussion to aid comprehension

IV. WRITING: NARRATIVE, EXPOSITION AND POETRY

A. Students will develop the ability to exhibit knowledge of the craft of writing through control of language for a variety of purposes and audiences.

They will be able to:

- Sustain writing style throughout composition
- Maintain consistent narrative voice and point of view
- Relate all parts of composition to the central focus with closure at the end• Organize paragraphs to build logically cohesive composition
- Sustain organization of idea with supporting detail
- Engage the reader with strong leads, details dialogue and story line or thread of argument
- Make purposeful use of dialogue and description in narrative writing
- Explore poetic forms and conventions, use symbolic language, and further differentiate poetry from prose
- Employ vocabulary, style and tone appropriate to the audience
- Read work aloud in both informal settings and formal presentations
- Convey meaning through vocabulary showing understanding of the subtleties in language
- Construct a convincing argument and support claims and generalizations with detailed evidence in exposition
- Tell a story or provide information from consistent point of view
- Express ideas with clarity, eliminating unnecessary words, phrases or ideas
- Use imagery and figurative language: e.g., similes and metaphors
- Write a cohesive five paragraph essay which includes a thesis statement, topic sentences, supporting details, and concluding sentences

B. Students will develop the ability to maintain accuracy in use of language conventions in a final product.

They will be able to:

- Vary sentence structure to include effective use of simple, compound, complex and compound-complex sentence patterns
- Use parts of speech accurately: Noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, conjunction, preposition, interjection
- Capitalize, punctuate, and spell accurately, and observe conventions of usage
- Sustain subject-verb agreement and use past, present and future verb tense accurately
- Develop and apply multiple strategies for proofreading for spelling and punctuation

C. Students will develop the ability to demonstrate knowledge of the writing process. They will be able to:

- Plan, outline, and develop topics, write and revise successive drafts, edit, proofread and publish major pieces of writing
- Edit and revise own writing through: self-assessment, conferences with peers and adults, and large group sharing
- · Reflect on own writing strengths and weaknesses and determine strategies for

improvement

• Use computer programs in connection with writing

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES* LANGUAGE ARTS Grade 7

Texts for study are selected from the following:

Novels and Plays

A Day No Pigs Would Die, Robert Peck

A Light in the Forest, Conrad Richter

Annie John, Jamaica Kincaid

April Morning, Howard Fast

Beowulf - Retelling, Bernard Eveslin

The Dark is Rising, Susan Cooper

Dragonwings, Lawrence Yep

Fallen Angels, Walter Dean Myers

The Friends, Rosa Guiy

The Hobbit, J.R.R. Tolkien

House on Mango Street, Sandra Cisneros

Lyddie, Katherine Paterson

Midsummer Nights Dream, William Shakespeare

The Pearl, John Steinbeck

The Pigman, Paul Zindel

The Red Pony, John Steinbeck

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, Mildred Taylor

Tom Sawyer, Mark Twain

Walkabout, James Marshall

Poetry

Reading and Writing Poetry with Adolescents, Fred Lown and Judith Steinbergh Reflections on Gift of Watermelon Pickle ed. Stephen Dunning Robert Frost Collected Works

Writing Skills

Brookline Editing Handbook for grades 7 and 8 Warriner, *English Grammar and Composition*, First Course

Short Story Anthologies

Best Short Stories, Jamestown Publishers

A Gathering of Flowers, ed. Thomas

Somehow Tenderness Survives, ed. Hazel Rochman

* This list represents the materials available to and widely used by Brookline teachers. Other optional books and materials may be used by teachers in planning and teaching subject matter included in the Learning Expectations.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES* LANGUAGE ARTS Grade 8

Texts for study are selected from the following:

Novels and Plays

- A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, Betty Smith
- All Quiet on the Western Front, Erich Remarque
- Animal Farm, George Orwell
- Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl
- Betsey Brown, Ntozake Shange
- The Chocolate War, Robert Cormier
- The Crucible, Arthur Miller
- Friedrich, Hans Richter
- The Human Comedy, William Saroyan
- I Am the Cheese, Robert Cormier
- o I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Maya Angelou
- Inherit the Wind, Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee
- Night, Elie Weisel
- Raisin in the Sun, Lorraine Hansberry
- Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare

Poetry

- Against Forgetting, Carolyn Forche
- Poetspeak, ed. Paul Janeczko
- o Some Haystacks Don't Even Have Any Needles, ed. Steven Dunning
- I Am The Darker Brother, ed. Arnold Adoff

Writing Skills

- Brookline Editing Handbook for grades 7 and 8
- · Warriner, English Grammar and Composition, Second Course

Film

- Romeo and Juliet, Franco Zefferelli
- Inherit the Wind, Stanley Kramer
- Huckleberry Finn

Short Story Anthologies

- Coming of Age, ed. Bruce Erma
- o Points of Departure, ed. Gold
- The Secret Sharer and Other Stories, eds. Lass and Tasman

Whom to Contact:

Mary Matthews, Curriculum Coordinator, Language Arts K -8 <u>Mary_matthews@brookline.k12.ma.us</u>

^{*} This list represents the materials available to and used by all Brookline eighth grade teachers. Other optional print material, games and software may be used by teachers in planning and teaching subject matter included in the Learning Expectations. Other appropriate titles can be found on the Public Schools of Brookline Reading List.