



EL Education Expeditionary Learning ELA Grades 6-8 Curriculum

Overview

The Expeditionary Learning ELA Curriculum was created by EL Education, one of the leading K-12 nonprofit organizations in the United States. For over twenty years, we have worked with schools and districts to create classrooms where teachers can fulfill their highest aspirations and students achieve more than they think possible, becoming active contributors to building a better world.

The Expeditionary Learning ELA Curriculum was developed for teachers, by teachers. The curriculum for grades 6-8 was created by EL Education on behalf of Public Consulting Group, while the grades 3-5 component was created directly for EngageNY. Over 50 teacher-experts lent their passion and practical wisdom in designing the curriculum, undergirded by EL Education's decades of experience partnering with hundreds of schools to prepare students for careers and college. In the coming year, EL Education will also be launching a curriculum for grade K-2.

EL Education's [Expeditionary Learning Grades 3-8 ELA Curriculum](#) combines rigorous, standards-aligned content with effective instructional practice, bringing together the “what” and “how” of implementing College and Career Ready Standards in the classroom. Our curriculum helps all teachers to envision and implement key instructional routines and adopt strategies that enable all types of learners to achieve high standards. We see curriculum as a potent tool for professional learning, not a script. It can be adapted for teachers at all stages of their practice—as an exemplar for veteran educators and coaches, or as a template for novice teachers.

Currently in use in over 550 districts in 43 states, this open-source, free curriculum has been downloaded well over 6 million times. Our unique, proven combination of services and resources complement the curriculum:

- » [Deep professional development partnerships](#) equip and empower teachers to meet the challenge of today's higher standards, through direct coaching, engaging institutes, and leadership development.
- » [Professional Learning Packs](#) (PLPs), web-based learning tools dedicated to a theme. Each PLP includes topic pages with carefully selected text and video, as well as questions for teacher discussion. Explicitly teaches and formally assesses a bundle of targets: CCSS ELA standards.
- » [Instructional Videos](#): Our library of [100+ videos](#) from EL classrooms demonstrates instructional practices that teachers can adopt, customize, or use to spark reflection and discussion. [Watch](#) 8th graders as they read closely, evaluate evidence, and debate claims about *To Kill a Mockingbird* before writing a summative essay. Harry Gillam, Director of Middle School at the Murphy School in Boston noted:

I've been doing this for 22 years now and I've had students in the past say there's no way I can read this. The students now have a routine [and say] 'we can do this. There is no text I can't break down.' And the quality of student writing and the ease to which it is being produced is unlike anything we've seen before. The students are able to not only retain information from a novel. They're able to synthesize it in a way to demonstrate they understood it, internalized it, and used it to formulate their own opinions.

- » [Transformational Literacy: Making the Common Core Shifts with Work that Matters](#), is one of a set of books illuminating our approach, which also includes: [Management in the Active Classroom](#), [Leaders of Their Own Learning](#), and [Learning that Lasts: Challenging, Engaging, and Empowering Students with Deeper Instruction](#).

- » **Models of Excellence: The Center for High-Quality Student Work:** The largest curated, open-source collection of exemplary PreK-12 student project work and writing, along with resources to support the use of student work models to inspire and elevate teaching and learning. Created in collaboration with the Harvard Graduate School of Education.
- » Hundreds of additional free, supplementary resources available on the EL Education [website](#).

EL Education's unique approach to literacy curriculum addresses the achievement gap through its focus on building knowledge and vocabulary and grappling with complex text. Through our curriculum, students are exposed to a wide range of increasingly difficult texts to build background knowledge and interest. Effective literacy instruction is accomplished through the use of compelling topics that engage students, while aligning with the rigor of states' higher academic standards.

Literacy Foundations

The principles of content-based literacy ground our approach to helping students build knowledge. This approach is different than “reading to learn,” which posits that students must first build strong literacy skills so that they can access texts that allow them to build their knowledge of the world. In contrast, recent research overwhelmingly finds that, as students develop deeper content knowledge, they are able to understand more of what they read, speak and write more clearly, and master new, related content more effectively.

Testimonials from teachers, principals, and district leaders point to the power of EL's curriculum and associated professional development services. Highlights of the Expeditionary Learning curricular design include:

- » EL Education's **4 Ts Framework:** Topic, Task, Target, Text (see video [here](#)).
- » Informed by leading research on **closing opportunity and achievement gaps** through building vocabulary and background knowledge, decoding strategies, fluency, and the ability to work with complex syntax.
- » EL Education's student-engaged assessment methods include embedded assessments rather than decontextualized “test prep,” as well as scaffolding of student learning through models, critique, and descriptive feedback.

Past research by leading independent researchers on the effectiveness of EL Education's partnerships with schools has found that students significantly outpace their peers in learning (see summary of longitudinal study by Mathematica Policy Research [here](#)). In recognition of the evidence supporting the ability of EL Education's comprehensive school model to result in significantly increased student achievement, the U.S. government awarded EL Education a \$12 million, three-year research grant under the “Investing in Innovation” (i3) Validation program. The resulting Teacher Potential Project, currently underway, tests the efficacy of the Expeditionary Learning ELA curriculum and related professional services. The research is being conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, with results available in 2018. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) is also conducting an evaluation in the Denver Public Schools, which has adopted the Expeditionary Learning ELA curriculum district-wide as an option for middle and elementary schools.

Our curriculum has consistently received high reviews from multiple sources, including:

- » **EQIP:** Educators Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Products, created by [Achieve](#) to identify high quality materials aligned to the Common Core State Standards, has given its highest “Exemplar” rating to EL Education's Grade 6-8 curriculum units.
- » **New York:** New York State commissioned EL Education to create the curriculum and the New York City Department of Education recognized it as among “the highest-quality Common Core-aligned curriculum materials currently available.”
- » **Connecticut:** The Connecticut State Board of Education has reviewed more than 10 of our curriculum units, giving them its highest “exemplary” rating. The reviewers noted the curriculum “makes reading texts closely, examining textual evidence, and discerning deep meaning, a central focus of instruction and includes a progression of academic vocabulary instruction where skills advance and deepen over time.”
- » **Washington:** The Digital Learning Department of the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction recommended several of our modules, noting they are “tightly aligned with standards and clearly addressed shifts

throughout. Content is engaging and compelling, which helps middle school students grapple with complex texts. Work encourages meaningful, collegial discourse.”

Implementation Support

Comprehensive materials and tools that help teachers to effectively implement the curriculum are a cornerstone of EL Education’s approach: from extensive teaching notes to suggestions for supporting students with special needs, and step-by-step guidance for walking students through the close and careful reading of complex texts.

Our [portfolio of professional services](#) provides additional support for high-quality implementation of the curriculum, combining institutes, coaching, and instructional resources that transform professional practice and drive new levels of student achievement. Adult learning is active and engaging, modeling the same instructional practices that teachers will use with their students. In 2015-2016, we partnered with 581 schools in 30 districts nationwide.

Background

At [EL Education](#), our mission is to create innovative, high-impact learning experiences in diverse classrooms all across the country. A non-profit founded in 1993 through a collaboration between the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Outward Bound USA, EL Education combines the research-based best practices of Harvard with the spirit of courage, service, and teamwork from Outward Bound. We believe that academic success is built on collaboration, perseverance, responsibility and compassion, and that character is shaped through engaging and challenging academic work. Our three-dimensional definition of student achievement: mastery of knowledge and skills, positive character, and high-quality student work is reflected in all aspects of EL Education’s approach to education.

As a national network of education practitioners, we transform teacher practice and elevate student achievement through high-quality professional learning, resources, and implementation support, which, like our curriculum, are research-based, practice-oriented, and grounded in over two decades of experience with educators nationwide.

We believe that schools in every community should ignite students’ passion for learning, inspire their curiosity, and give them the knowledge and skills they need to imagine a better world and work with one another toward realizing it. EL Education’s objective is to empower students, regardless of their background, race, or income level, to take charge of their learning, pursue quality in their work, and use their knowledge and skills to make a difference in their communities. No matter the level of experience, we view this curriculum as a bridge to every teacher’s ability to design rigorous, joyful, and standards-aligned curriculum.

For more information on our curriculum, visit commoncoresuccess.ELeducation.org