



Language Arts: *Discussion Guide*

Overview

Reading, writing, speaking, and viewing are the four building blocks of the language arts. Focus on each of these areas with engaging activities that foster growth in skills, understanding, and appreciation of the language arts.

Classroom Activities

1. Show the “Different Stories, Common Themes” segment from the *Discovering Language Arts: Fiction (Grades 6–8)* video.
 - **Pre-Viewing Activity:** Motivate students to delve into the language arts area of reading. Ask students to jot down their favorite books, their favorite fictional characters, and their favorite magazines. Discuss what they like about this reading.
 - **Discussion:** Discuss the value of reading and developing reading skills. Ask: What can you learn from reading fiction? What makes reading enjoyable? What makes reading worthwhile? How can you get the most out of your reading? How can you improve your reading?
 - **Comparing:** The video compares *The Wizard of Oz* with *Huckleberry Finn*. Discuss how to compare two works of literature, by looking for similarities in characters, setting, plot and theme. Ask students to compare two other stories they have read independently or as a class, using a two-column comparison chart.
 - **Contrasting:** Ask students to contrast *The Wizard of Oz* with *Huckleberry Finn* by identifying differences in characters, setting, plot and theme. Have students complete a two-column contrast chart.
 - **Making Connections:** Ask students in what ways they identify with the characters in *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Wizard of Oz*. Ask what feelings or motives they might have that are similar to those of the characters.
 - **Reading Response:** Have students create reading diaries to keep track of what they read and their reactions to their reading. Encourage them to note

both their emotional response and their cognitive responses—the feelings, thoughts and ideas that their reading sparks.

- **Discussing Literature:** Have students read a compelling story such as Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery” or Saki’s “The Open Window,” and provoke discussion with interpretive questions such as “Does the author think people are essentially good or bad?” Encourage students to support their points of view with specifics from the stories.
 - **Independent Reading:** To encourage independent reading, counsel students about books and articles that reflect their interests. Also, provide suggested reading lists and give inspiring book talks to get students interested in reading. Consider instituting an incentive program or a book club to encourage students to read more.
2. Show the “Making a Speech” segment from the *Discovering Language Arts: Listening and Speaking (Grades 6–8)* video. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)
- **Pre-Viewing Activity:** Motivate students to explore the speaking and listening aspects of the language arts by prompting them to take a self-inventory. Ask them questions such as these, and discuss students’ responses:
 - What is active listening? Why is it important?
 - When have you spoken in public? What have you learned?
 - What do you think makes a good speaker? A good listener?
 - What careers involve speaking and listening?
 - **Analyzing:** Show students a video of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s I Have a Dream speech, and discuss the techniques he uses that are most compelling. For example, be sure to discuss King’s use of emphasis, word choice, repetition, pace, and volume.
 - **Demonstration:** Have students demonstrate “dos and don’ts” for the following techniques of effective public speaking:
 - eye contact
 - natural gesturing
 - suitable volume and tone of voice
 - clear enunciation
 - good posture
 - use of visual aids
 - appropriate pace
 - **Checklists:** Ask groups of students to develop checklists of effective speaking and listening techniques.

- **Supporting a Point of View:** Give students practice in supporting a point of view on a current topic. Have them do research to find facts, details, examples, and expert statements that reinforce their point of view.
 - **Outlining:** After doing research on a topic of interest, have students outline an informative speech on the issue. Remind students to develop a strong introduction and conclusion.
 - **Public Speaking:** Have students deliver a speech with the purpose of informing their audience about a topic of their choice.
 - **Listening:** Emphasize the importance of active listening by having students take notes on each other's talks.
3. Show the "Research Papers" segment from the *Discovering Language Arts: Research (Grades 6–8)* video. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)
- **Pre-Viewing Activity:** Motivate students to explore the language arts area of writing by brainstorming with them to list various reasons for writing. Then have students imagine that there is no such thing as writing, and ask how their lives would change.
 - **Descriptive Writing:** Examine word choice in a descriptive paragraph, asking students to notice the moods that specific words evoke. Then ask students to write vivid descriptions of a place that is meaningful to them.
 - **Outlining:** Have students outline the steps for writing a research paper, as presented in the video.
 - **Choosing a Topic:** Ask students to choose and refine a question to answer in a research paper of a specific length, such as five pages. You might have students confine their topics to a general area such as travel, health, or inventions. Discuss how to determine if a topic is narrow enough but also broad enough for the specified length.
 - **Gathering Information:** Discuss sources for research, both online and in the library. Demonstrate how to use sources such as library databases, Web sites, and reference books. Help students learn to identify reliable online sources, such as noncommercial educational Web sites with well-qualified writers and current information.
 - **Models:** Show students models of good papers, and point out the effective characteristics, such as clear purpose, adequate support, cohesiveness, logical organization, continuity, and effective introduction and conclusion.

- **Checklists:** Ask groups of students to create checklists for editing and revising writing, including checkpoints for the use of correct grammar, high-interest openings, a clear main idea with supporting details, and transition words.
- **Diagramming:** Discuss the process of writing and how to ensure good writing at each stage of the process.



- **Writing:** Assign students to research and write a one-page report on a topic that has been sufficiently narrowed. Have students exchange papers for peer editing.

4. Show the “Evaluating Media” segment from the *Discovering Language Arts: Viewing* video. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)

- **Pre-Viewing Activity:** Motivate students to delve into the language arts area of viewing by displaying photographs and asking students about the message that the photos communicate.
- **Discussion:** Ask students: How can you identify the point of view in a documentary or news program? How can you check the facts in a documentary? What are the clues that something is slanted?
- **Evaluating Point of View:** Discuss the opposing points of view presented in both the JFK documentary in the “Evaluating Media” video and the Kennewick Man account in the “Research Papers” video. Ask students which point of view is supported with the most factual evidence.
- **Debates:** Have students take sides and do research for a debate on one of these topics:
 - Did Lee Harvey Oswald act alone in assassinating Kennedy?
 - Should Kennewick Man be buried?
- **Analyzing Ads:** Show videotapes of television commercials and discuss the techniques of persuasion that are used, such as testimonial, loaded words, and the bandwagon approach. Ask students if they think the commercials are manipulative.
- **Exploring Careers:** Invite to class speakers who have careers in language arts-related fields, such as journalism, public relations, publishing, teaching, fiction writing, advertising, and acting. Assign students to research one of these careers that they find interesting.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K–12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national language arts standards:

- Writing
 - Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process
 - Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing
 - Gathers and uses information for research purposes
- Reading
 - Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process
 - Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts
 - Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts
- Listening and Speaking
 - Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes
- Viewing
 - Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, visit www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm

This lesson plan addresses the following English standards:

- Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts
- Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
- Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).