

Instructional Approaches

Accomplished English language arts teachers make strategic decisions about which elements of language study to emphasize and how to teach them based on the backgrounds and needs of their students. Teachers possess a repertoire of instructional strategies to engage students with language—including its grammar, meaning, and conventions. Accomplished teachers guide students in the exploration of language both through planned units of study and through teachable moments that arise in all the strands of language arts.

Accomplished English language arts teachers know how to convey to students that conventions are the underlying rules of language. Teachers understand that, while isolated lessons on particular aspects of grammar and usage may occasionally be useful, the rules of grammar can most effectively be elucidated and applied in context. Accomplished teachers use formal and informal assessment methods to identify the areas where their students struggle with grammar, usage, and mechanics, and then they create planned interventions to make improvements. Teachers draw on both students' writing and published texts that can serve as models for how to effectively use the conventions being studied. (See [Standard IV—Instructional Design and Implementation](#) and [Standard X—Assessment](#).)

Accomplished English language arts teachers use multiple strategies for teaching vocabulary. For the most part, they approach vocabulary within the context of speech and written texts, pointing out how authors' and speakers' choices of words affect meaning. Teachers present a range of vocabulary strategies to help students access challenging texts and to develop precision in using English. For example, when preparing students to read an informational text, a teacher might provide students with instruction on how to use their knowledge of Latin roots and affixes to interpret technical terms. Similarly, by using literary texts as models, students can see how word choice affects meaning as well as style and tone.

Accomplished English language arts teachers incorporate resources such as newspaper reports, song lyrics, commercials, and political speeches to study the power of language. They may point out how a writer's or speaker's control of denotation and connotation can influence the reader or listener. For example, accomplished teachers might help students uncover examples of denotation and connotation that enhanced national propaganda in times of war, shaped nations'

perceptions of distant peoples and lands, and alternatively elevated or debased certain occupations depending on a society's values. Teachers might also make transparent to students how novelists use connotation to develop characters and create mood. Accomplished teachers demonstrate how to effectively use a thesaurus to deploy more varied vocabulary when writing or making a formal speech. To help students understand the importance of selecting the appropriate synonym or antonym, a teacher might compare drafts of a manuscript to the published text, noting how the meaning and tone has changed through each phase of the process.

Although most vocabulary instruction is incorporated into reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities, accomplished English language arts teachers may, in certain circumstances, teach with a primary focus on vocabulary skills and strategies. They might give students practice distinguishing among commonly confused or misused words, or provide students with sets of related words, such as lists of shades of the same basic color, and have them play with the examples to create different effects. Teachers might teach the strategy of using context clues to determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word or give all students practice writing metaphors and similes.

Accomplished English language arts teachers know that one of the pleasures of language study is experimenting with words, and they appreciate the enjoyment as well as the cognitive challenge that puns, rhymes, oxymorons, malapropisms, idioms, and forms of figurative language provide to early adolescents and young adults. Teachers might have students compile their own illustrated dictionaries or have students create dramatic performances of idioms to deepen their understandings of the language. Teachers might develop students' responsiveness and attentiveness to language use by providing opportunities for students to produce poems, speeches, songs, and digital media. Accomplished teachers encourage students to use language as a vehicle for humor, vivid description, the exploration of emotion, the creation of drama, and precise explanation. Teachers understand that such language exercises not only enliven language, but also reinforce the understanding of literary devices.

Accomplished English language arts teachers know that although all students acquire English language skills differently, English language learners and students with exceptional needs often face especially complex challenges. In interacting with these students, accomplished teachers are particularly sensitive in their use of language. Teachers may adjust their speaking rate, provide explicit instruction in academic vocabulary, clarify idioms, avoid confusing terms, or restate rather than merely repeat important ideas. Teachers make use of visual supports as well as performance strategies, such as selecting photos to illustrate adjectives describing character traits or acting out a series of synonyms such as skip, hop, lope, walk, stroll, and amble to clarify nuances. When appropriate and possible, accomplished teachers seek the expertise of language and reading specialists to make the curriculum accessible to all students. Accomplished teachers periodically make use of small, homogeneous groups to create safe havens in which English language learners can converse and gain the confidence to speak in larger, mixed-group settings. However, teachers

monitor such small-group discussions and use strategies such as reflecting English language learners' ideas back to them as a means of elevating the group's oral language skills.