

Standard VIII

Language Study

Accomplished English language arts teachers develop their students' appreciation of the functional and aesthetic aspects of language and expand their students' capacity to use language effectively.

Accomplished English language arts teachers are well versed in the basic underpinning of their discipline: language. They recognize the flexible, shifting nature of language, understanding that languages have evolved over time in relationship with one another and in response to significant cultural, social, and economic forces. Accomplished teachers are well informed about the history of the English language and how it continues to develop in terms of pronunciation, word choice, idiomatic usage, degree of formality, speed of delivery, intonation, and grammatical structure. They understand that English is both a tremendously empowering communicative tool and an artifact of human ingenuity with a fascinating history, a vigorous present, and an expansive future. They are aware that language use is closely related to context and that varied modes of English language usage have different effects on listeners and readers.

Accomplished English language arts teachers encourage their students to approach the study of the English language with objectivity, open-mindedness, curiosity, and an alertness to the many stories and nuances of meaning embodied in our language and its rich dialectal variations. Accomplished teachers understand that certain language forms provide greater access to the economic, political, and academic advantages of society than do other forms; therefore, teachers promote language study as a means of equitable access to social benefits for all students. Because language study is integrated across reading, writing, speaking, and listening, accomplished teachers usually evaluate language skills as a part of a larger whole rather than in isolation.

The Evolving Nature of the English Language

Accomplished English language arts teachers acquaint students with the development of the English language. For example, they might discuss major influences from the Greeks and the Romans to the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans. In addition, accomplished teachers guide students to discover the infusions of vocabulary that came into English from other sources, such as the Native American words absorbed by English colonists and the Arabic words introduced into English by travelers on the trade routes between England and the Middle East during medieval

times. Accomplished teachers demonstrate that language is an evolving human invention, and they capitalize on the language diversity in a learning environment to examine the words that constantly enter English from other languages.

Accomplished English language arts teachers understand how historical events have influenced the growth of the English language. For example, they help students explore how advancements in the field of technology have changed the language, from the printing press to modern technology, or how words from specialized fields can become part of everyday usage. Teachers might have students identify words such as “mouse” that have acquired new definitions as new technologies have been invented. Furthermore, accomplished teachers show students how English came to have abundant synonyms and how some words became taboo words while others were accepted as formal and proper. An accomplished teacher might help students understand the concept of how language changes by asking students to predict which of their own slang terms and casual expressions will find their way into the mainstream language and perhaps into the dictionary.

Accomplished English language arts teachers accept that language use and language contexts are always evolving. New words enter the language, old words develop new meanings, and grammatical structures are modified. Accomplished teachers understand that rapidly developing technology has not only resulted in the introduction of new words, but also has affected the speed with which these words become widely used in everyday language. Teachers realize that the language of youth and popular culture is rapidly spreading to the world at large. Accomplished teachers are aware of changes not only in vocabulary, but also about the alterations taking place in the use of grammar and punctuation and in what constitutes acceptable usage. For example, teachers are aware of the increasing tendency to use as verbs certain words that were once used only as nouns. Accomplished teachers welcome alterations in language as tools for teaching and deepening students’ appreciation for language’s role in communication.

Accomplished English language arts teachers use the study of literature as a natural opportunity to survey the history of the English language. By reading novels and plays, students can notice how language has shifted over time and across locations. Accomplished teachers help students learn how to read earlier forms of language and understand their social and historical contexts. For example, a teacher might have students compare the language in different translations of *Beowulf*.