

Instructional Strategies

Accomplished English language arts teachers have the pedagogical skills necessary to help all students improve the way they navigate through text. Teachers understand that the meaning-making process is influenced by a multitude of factors, including the purpose for reading; the evolving knowledge, interest, and skills that the student brings to the task; and the nature of the text. Accomplished teachers are sensitive to the ways in which these factors interact, and they adjust and implement strategies in light of the particular context rather than following a prescriptive or formulaic approach. Teachers motivate students to find personal meaning in texts through a variety of best-practice, research-based instructional techniques.

Accomplished English language arts teachers are able to select appropriate texts based on student needs because they are aware of students' comprehension levels and individual interests. Teachers can identify and access materials that have a wide range of readability; they also know how to provide texts with similar subject matter in different formats and at different levels of difficulty, such as a Shakespeare play and a high-quality graphic novel or film version of that story. Accomplished teachers introduce students to the richness of literary traditions within and across cultures, both to reflect the diversity of students in the learning environment and to increase students' global awareness of traditions they have never directly encountered. Teachers select texts that evoke profound questions around issues such as coming of age or justice. Accomplished English language arts teachers view their school media center and their library media specialist as important resources for their students and themselves. Teachers present challenging, high-quality texts to all students, and they provide the strategies necessary for students to improve their skills in reading and viewing. (See [Standard XI—Collaboration](#).)

Accomplished English language arts teachers use a variety of appropriate instructional activities to help students plan, engage with, and respond to ideas and topics in their reading and viewing. Teachers show students how to monitor their understanding of texts in order to make decisions about how to adjust their reading pace and how to determine what to read carefully, what to read quickly, what to skip, and what to reread. In the case of digital resources such as websites, digital databases, video, and other media, teachers instruct students in specialized strategies such as analyzing the camera angles, voiceovers, and music that a director used in a filmed short story to add subtleties to the narrative. (See [Standard IV—Instructional Design and Implementation](#).)

Accomplished English language arts teachers use scaffolding to help students learn how to interpret more complex texts over time. When students experience challenges, accomplished teachers help them work through the ensuing frustration

by giving them strategies to unlock meaning and continue. Teachers model for students how to visualize what they are reading, summarize what they have read, and ask and answer questions about texts. In the case of nonprint texts, teachers teach students to be active viewers in order to pay attention to detail, to make inferences, and to interpret complex visual features to derive deeper meaning. Accomplished English language arts teachers provide students with a range of resources that help them interpret texts. For example, a teacher might show students a nineteenth-century portrait to help them visualize the clothing and hairstyle of a character from a historical novel, or provide students with literary criticism to help them understand complex imagery in a poem. In a different context, a teacher might use emoticons to help an English language learner to develop precise vocabulary for the range of emotions that a character experiences.

Accomplished English language arts teachers model the way that experienced readers progress through difficult text. As students read a novel written from multiple perspectives, for example, teachers can help them track the narrator for each section. Teachers may help students synthesize information from each chapter to determine the main idea of an informational text. Accomplished teachers recognize that effective interpretation of text is recursive, so they teach students how to revisit sections of a text to clarify, deepen, or modify an evolving understanding. For example, when students are analyzing the relationship between characters, teachers may emphasize the importance of returning to the characters' many interactions over the course of the text to follow the dynamics of the relationship. Similarly, teachers may replay a portion of a film that foreshadowed a significant event.

Accomplished English language arts teachers are lifelong readers and sophisticated viewers who model reading and viewing behaviors for their students. Teachers share stories of their personal experiences with texts: the difficulty and frustration of taking on challenging texts and the excitement, satisfaction, and accomplishment they derive from reading and viewing. Accomplished English language arts teachers enjoy finding the connections between reading and other parts of life, and they model this open and curious disposition. Accomplished teachers demonstrate that literature is a tool for building a shared vocabulary and set of allusions with the rest of the English-speaking world and show how these shared references can connect popular culture with canonical works in a layered way. Accomplished teachers recognize that sharing their passion is a powerful tool for cultivating a similar passion in their students.

Accomplished English language arts teachers understand that reading and viewing are interrelated with writing and speaking. Teachers realize that building reading and viewing skills enhances the skills of writing and speaking. For example, a reader draws a conclusion from a text using clear evidence contained within the work, whereas a writer embeds clear evidence in a text to guide the reader toward a specific interpretation. Viewing and producing are similarly related. A viewer interprets the meaning of visual symbols, and the producer creates those symbols. Teaching students to read and view critically demystifies the sometimes intimidating processes of writing and producing because students perceive that writing and producing involve a set of logical, understandable, manageable steps.

Accomplished English language arts teachers help students learn to derive meaning from texts through writing activities such as response or dialogue journals, graphic organizers, and formal analytical essays. Accomplished teachers also develop reading through oral activities such as question posing; student-led but teacher-facilitated discussions; dramatic performances such as role-playing, readers' theatre, and dance; and visual representation. To deepen students' understanding of texts, accomplished teachers regularly foster opportunities for public conversation so that students can meaningfully express their ideas and then clarify their understanding about what they have read or viewed. Accomplished teachers may facilitate small student-led group discussions; whole-class discussions; and conversations outside the classroom, such as video conferencing, discussion boards, written correspondence, and book clubs.

Accomplished English language arts teachers understand that reading and viewing are interrelated with the study of language. In the course of teaching reading and viewing, teachers focus on vocabulary, word choice, and sentence structure as they relate to style, voice, and rhetorical effect. Teachers know that reading is the single greatest way to develop students' vocabularies and overall language fluencies, but they also realize that intentional vocabulary instruction before and during reading is an important component of reading assignments. Teachers demonstrate how words are conceptually related to one another through such activities as etymological study, semantic mapping, classification, and the study of word structures. Students of accomplished teachers also learn a range of word-attack strategies that they can apply to unfamiliar words, such as consulting the dictionary, analyzing roots and affixes, analyzing inflections, transferring their knowledge of foreign languages, and making inferences based on contextual clues. (See [Standard VIII—Language Study](#).)

Accomplished English language arts teachers create independent, critical readers and viewers by scaffolding students' thinking through complex issues. Accomplished teachers understand that all students need support regarding different aspects of reading and viewing. Teachers understand that students may grapple with comprehension of print and nonprint texts for a variety of reasons, including unfamiliar vocabulary, difficult figurative language, and complex sentence structure. Students' background knowledge, cultural assumptions, and lived experiences may also significantly influence students' understanding of text. Whereas most early adolescents and young adults already possess the skills to decode and read with some fluency, some early adolescent and young adult students continue to experience difficulty. In these cases, accomplished teachers offer sensitive assistance and developmentally appropriate materials that respect the student's chronological age and interest. For example, in the case of a student who reads significantly below grade level, an accomplished teacher would strive to locate a text with a lower readability level but with age-appropriate content. The teacher would also be sensitive about how to present the book in a way that shows respect for the student's dignity as a learner. When student difficulties are profound, teachers may need to create partnerships with other adults such as reading specialists, reading or literacy coaches, teachers of English language learners, or special education teachers to help all students experience growth. Accomplished teachers realize that

the goal of all support strategies is ultimately to empower students to interpret texts on their own.

Accomplished English language arts teachers realize that many students can be reluctant readers at times. This reluctance may have interrelated, complex causes related to both skill and emotion. Students may struggle with the rigor of the structure, vocabulary, or content, and they may have had negative prior experiences with reading. Some may lack interest in specific subject matter or genres. Skilled readers who are accustomed to comprehending with ease may resist certain texts because they are not used to frustration and may even feel that their identities as proficient readers are being challenged. Accomplished teachers inspire interest in reading and generate confidence in their students by helping students select relevant, accessible, engaging texts that appeal to students' interests, experiences, and genre preferences. When students are ready for additional challenges, accomplished teachers offer more sophisticated, challenging material. (See [Standard I—Knowledge of Students](#).)

Accomplished English language arts teachers recognize that assessment is an ongoing process that helps drive instruction. They know that to comprehend texts proficiently, students draw from a variety of reading and viewing strategies to relate new ideas to what they know, to attend to how well they are understanding the text, and to monitor and improve their comprehension. Teachers may assess students' skills in these strategies through activities such as process journals, sticky notes, student think-alouds, or individual conferences. Accomplished teachers who have taught their students strategies for comprehending and interpreting paintings or films might assess their students' ability to comprehend and interpret a film director's technique and its contribution to the film's message, or how an author's treatment of theme compares to a visual artist's treatment of the same theme. For example, an accomplished teacher might assess students' ability to compare and contrast Lee's treatment of racism in Bob Ewell's attitude toward Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Rockwell's treatment of racism in *The Problem We All Live With*. In another example, an accomplished teacher might ask students to interpret Robert Mulligan's use of camera angles in the court scene of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) to deepen students' understanding of the characterization of Atticus Finch. In such assessments, an accomplished teacher reinforces the strategies needed to develop students' ability to read texts critically.

Accomplished English language arts teachers use a variety of methods to assess students' comprehension. They may quickly monitor in-process reading comprehension during class by using student-response systems, and they may check for literal comprehension of a short story by using exit questions or by having students map the main events of the plot. To assess students' skill in making inferences, teachers may have students outline the claims of an argument or write about the traits of a character, citing evidence for their inferences.

Accomplished English language arts teachers understand the many ways in which reading skills can be assessed. They study student performance data to form hypotheses about the strengths and needs of their students, both individually and

as a group. They recognize where their students fall on a critical reading continuum, and they make adjustments to broad-based plans to tailor appropriate instruction for individuals as well as for the group. To the extent possible, accomplished teachers embed the reinforcement of targeted reading skills in their regular instruction and monitor progress on those skills, rather than teaching to the test by practicing the skills in isolation. (See [Standard X—Assessment](#).)