



Language Arts Benchmarks

8

Dear Parents,

This document was produced in an effort to give you a preview of the skills and concepts introduced at this grade level. Teachers seek an active partnership with parents. Please make opportunities to reinforce the skills developed in grade eight in your home. Each teacher combines individual creativity with a school philosophy of education to teach students. Different strategies will be used to approach the instruction of these skills and concepts. These benchmarks represent the skills and strategies eighth graders must know and be able to do independently by the end of the year. We invite you to meet with your child's teacher so that you will understand how you can reinforce what is taught in your child's classroom.

Reading & Responding:

In the area of reading, your eighth grade students will be able to:

- q Determine the meaning of words using prefixes (e.g., a, ambi, bene, circum) and suffixes (e.g., cy, esque, some, tude)
- q Infer word meanings through identification and analysis of analogies and other word relationships.
- q Use idioms, analogies, metaphors, and similes to infer the literal and figurative meaning of phrases in literary texts.
- q Identify the connotation and denotation of new words and apply them in speaking.
- q Identify the subtle differences in the meaning of synonyms. (e.g., hobo0bum, crowd-mob)

- q **Identify and use synonyms, antonyms, homographs, and homophones in context to determine word meanings and to write sentences.**
- q Read at least 10 pieces of literature appropriate for their independent reading level to read for a variety of purposes. (e.g., literary experience, to gain information, to perform a task for enjoyment)
- q Read independently in class for a minimum of 75 minutes weekly between LA I and II classes.
- q Read prose, poems, or dramatic dialogues aloud with fluency, using clear diction, tempo, volume and phrasing.
- q Analyze how the plot and characterization determine resolution of story conflict.
- q Summarize text in a manner that reflects the main ideas, significant details, and underlying meaning.
- q Synthesize main ideas and concepts and identify their relationship to other sources, related topics, or prior experiences.
- q Identify use of the text structure (e.g., to gain information on a selected topic, complete a process)
- q Identify and trace the development of an author's argument, viewpoint, or perspective in a text (e.g., author's purpose)
- q Draw inferences, conclusions, or generalizations about the text and support them with textual evidence and experience.
- q Generate literal, inferential, interpretative, and evaluative questions before, during, and after reading.
- q Analyze and apply a variety of focusing, monitoring, and assessing strategies during reading.
- q Predicts outcomes and actions in text based on contextual clues and prior knowledge and evaluate the accuracy of the prediction.
- q Analyze characterization as delineated through a character's thoughts, words, speech patterns, and deeds.
- q Explain how the literary elements (e.g., figurative language) create meaning for readers.
- q Compare the works that express a universal theme (e.g., good and evil) and providing evidence to support ideas.
- q Write a summary and check the extent to which the summary accurately reflects the main ideas, critical details and underlying meaning of the original text.
- q Compare and contrast information from different sources that address the same topic.
- q Evaluate the purposes of text.
- q Compare and contrast the ways similar themes are expressed in multiple literacy works, and explain how the them represents different views and values.



Producing Texts (e.g., Writing):

In the area of writing, your eighth grade students will be able to:

- q Write independently for an extended period of time to produce first drafts and final products.
- q Write independently to produce texts in a variety of forms yearly. (e.g., expository, narrative, letter writing, response to literature, persuasive)
- q Write formally and/or informally in class for a minimum of 75 minutes weekly between LA I and II.

- q Determine the purpose and topic of writing and select a form, point of view, and style (formal vs. informal) that are appropriate for the purpose and audience.
- q Write an essay with transitions among sentences and descriptions to unify key ideas and make the message or theme clear to the reader.
- q Reinforce coherence across paragraphs by using parallel structures (e.g., the same verb tense, word choice and/or phrases) to reinforce main ideas.
- q Use precise language, action verbs, sensory details, colorful modifiers, and active rather than passive voice when appropriate.
- q Support all statements and claims with relevant anecdotes, descriptions, facts, statistics, and/or specific information from personal experience and/or text.
- q Write to express personal ideas in a variety of ways (e.g., plays, biographies, short stories, autobiographies, and other writings) about an event, situation, or story. Use well-chosen details, reveal the writer's significance of, or the attitude about the subject, and purposefully use rhetorical elements such as figurative language, description, foreshadowing and symbolism. (e.g., write short stories, poetry, creative writing) **(Primarily LA I)**
- q Write letters that address audience needs, stated purpose, context, adheres to stated purposes, and follows the conventional style for the type (e.g., letter, memo) using appropriate technical terms. **(Primarily LA II)**
- q *Informational texts:* Write essays of comparison/contrast, cause/effect and problem/solution for an intended audience and purpose that state the purpose of the paper, and begins to develop a thesis, follows an organizational pattern or form, and offer

compelling evidence in the form of facts and details **(Primarily LA II)**

- q Write pieces and/or reports for an intended audience and purpose that convey a clear and accurate perspective on the subject, support the main ideas with facts, details, examples, and explanations, and pose relevant questions and tightly drawn questions about the topic.
- q *Persuasive texts:* Write to persuade an audience by selecting an appropriate form that makes a clear and knowledgeable judgment, support arguments with detailed evidence, examples, and reasoning, differentiate between evidence and opinion and refutes counter arguments. **(Primarily LA II)**
- q Identify topics, ask, and evaluate questions, and develop ideas leading to, inquiry, investigation, data collection, and research.
- q Read and use in writing the organizational features of printed texts such as citations, bibliographic references, and appendices to locate relevant information and to take notes.
- q Use electronic information and computerized library catalogs (when available) to research information for specific purposes.
- q Give credit for both quoted and paraphrased information in the body of the piece using consistent format methodology for citations.
- q Use a variety of prewriting techniques to generate and record ideas (e.g., brainstorming, outlining, constructing graphic organizers, keeping notes on ideas.)
- q Provide an oral or written explanation of decisions about organizational patterns (e.g., form, purpose, audience, and topic) and sentence structure. (Peer, group, and/or teacher conferencing)
- q Self-edit and revise writing using Standard English conventions of language and appropriate print and non-print resources (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus, spell-check software).
- q Publish at least two pieces of text in different forms throughout the year. (One piece from LA I and II)
- q Evaluate the logic of ideas, word choice, and transitions among paragraphs and passages by revising writing based on given or self-generated criteria. (rubric) (e.g., when writing to inform, open with strong thesis statement, use consistent organization with supporting details and transitions, and close with a strong conclusion.)
- q Prepare writing for publication (e.g., final draft) using consistent and sanctioned format and principles of design (e.g., headings, margins, spacing, columns, page orientation) using electronic resources (when available) to enhance final product.
- q Print and/or write in cursive neatly and legibly.



Applying Standard English:

In the area of oral and written communication, your eighth grade students will be able to:

- q Identify and use infinitives in sentences (e.g., I love to *listen* to the early songs by the Beatles.)
- q Maintain noun-pronoun and subject-verb agreement (including when there is a phrase between the subject and verb) in writing. (CMT)
- q Use a variety of pronouns appropriately in sentences.
- q Revise sentences and/or clauses in need of combining or separating.
- q Use a comma to set off nonessential clauses and phrases (e.g., The new art museum, which is located downtown, is a valuable educational resource.)
- q Capitalize the names of historical documents and laws. (e.g., Magna Carta)
- q Spell a wide range of grade-level words, including commonly misspelled words, in their writing.
- q **Spell words related to concepts being learned in other subject fields.**
- q Use specific words and phrases.
- q Revise for redundancy.
- q Identify ways that different regions of the U.S. have influenced our common language.
- q Identify words and expressions that have been absorbed into American culture from a variety of foreign languages.
- q Identify words and expressions in fiction selections and poetry that are not currently used in everyday language.
- q Identify the origins of a variety of English words.
- q Apply listening skills in various settings, using note taking to assist listening when appropriate.
- q Apply listening skills in large and small group settings, constructing appropriate questions and response to the speaker's message.
- q Speak and respond clearly in various roles (e.g., leader, recorder, time keeper) in discussion groups.
- q Select and use verbal and non-verbal techniques to enhance communication to solve problems.
- q Choose vocabulary carefully, adapting it to the audience, purpose, and occasion.
- q Gather and convey information from listening to support or refute an idea.
- q Present a short dramatic presentation and/or reading.
- q Make inferences or draw conclusions based on tone of voice, mood, and emotion in oral communication.

- q Explain how the effects of language sounds (e.g., repetition, rhyme) contribute to meaning.
- q Explain reasons for selecting memory techniques for specific learning tasks. (e.g., acronyms, graphic organizers)
- q Create visual aide, using technology (when available) to support presentations.
- q Support a position and acknowledge opposing views.
- q Speak in a variety of situations choosing an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and purpose.
- q Generate and use criteria to evaluate oral presentations and discussions.



Exploring & Responding to Literature:

In the area of literature, your eighth grade students will be able to:

- q Identify the author's message and explain how the characteristic of different forms of prose from diverse cultures and authors (e.g., short story, novel, nonfiction, essay) shape the meaning of the author's message.
- q Identify characteristics of different forms of poetry from diverse cultures and authors (e.g., ballad, lyric, couplet, haiku) and how they shape the meaning of the selection. **(Primarily LA I)**
- q Define *irony* and identify its use.
- q Identify symbolism as literary device in fiction and poetry selections. **(Primarily LA I)**
- q Identify the mood (or moods) of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry selections and explain how the mood contributes to the overall effect of the selections.
- q Identify and interpret figurative language in fiction and poetry selections, including alliteration, onomatopoeia, similes, metaphors, hyperbole and personification. **(Primarily LA I)**
- q Explain the themes of plays.
- q Identify techniques that provide cohesiveness in a given nonfiction selection (e.g., organization structures, transition words and phrases). **(Primarily LA II)**
- q **Identify and analyze the characteristics of a variety of nonfiction texts. (e.g., biography, historical writing, journalistic writing, magazines, newspapers). (Primarily LA II)**
- q Examine and interpret the influence of culture, ethnicity, and historical eras on the themes and issues of literary texts.
- q Compare and contrast the motivations and reactions of characters from different times and places that confront similar challenges and

situations and connect them to prior experiences or the experiences of others

- q Discuss conflicts between cultures and between generations in fiction selections.
- q Compare and contrast the representations of other cultures in fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama selections. (e.g. customs, themes, characters' experiences)
- q Explain the literal and interpretative meaning of a text, using additional resources to extend and clarify one's response.
- q Compare and contrast one's personal view with the author's view of human experience and character.
- q Evaluate the effectiveness of foreshadowing in fiction selections and narrative poems.
- q Evaluate the effectiveness of flashback as a literary device in fiction selections read or in television programs or films seen.
- q Evaluate the effectiveness of the point of view (i.e., first person, second person, third person) in which given selections are written.
- q Analyze the effectiveness of the use of dialect in fiction selections and poems.
- q Evaluate the overall merit and aesthetic attributes of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry selections, using teacher generated criteria (e.g., the effectiveness of the plot, characterization, theme, author's writing style).
- q Evaluate the effectiveness of propaganda techniques and other persuasive techniques in nonfiction selections. **(Primarily LA II)**
- q Analyze elements of classic novels
- q Analyze elements of contemporary novels representing a variety of cultures.
- q Analyze elements of classic and contemporary short stories and poetry representing a variety of cultures.
- q Analyze elements of classic and contemporary poetry representing a variety of cultures.
- q Relate the themes of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry selections to their lives.
- q Identify the ways in which the author establishes the mood of fiction and poetry selections (e.g., through author's descriptive language, the characters' words and actions).
- q Analyze visual texts.
- q Analyze the impact of the historical period, culture, and personal experiences of various authors on the fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and/or plays they wrote.
- q Explain the themes of plays.
- q Describe the writing styles used by authors of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry selections (e.g., descriptive colorful language; long complex sentences; use of first person) and describe what the style contributes to the overall effect of the selections.

- q Read and respond to a variety of nonfiction selections (e.g., textbooks, magazine and newspaper articles, technical writing, persuasive writing, personal narratives, procedures, directions, biographies). **(Primarily LA II)**
- q Offer an alternative perspective to the author's point of view in nonfiction selections. **(Primarily LA II)**
- q Analyze the contribution of figurative language in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry selections.
- q Analyze persuasive techniques used in nonfiction selections. **(Primarily LA II)**
- q Analyze an opinion column in a newspaper to identify the writer's point of view and to judge the organization and clarity of the writing. **(Primarily LA II)**
- q Analyze news stories in a newspaper to determine the most important points and to judge the organization and clarity of the writing. **(Primarily LA II)**