

# Family Guides to Support Learning

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Parents and caregivers want their junior high student to succeed in school – to be engaged and excited about learning; to build strong relationships with their teachers and peers; and to learn each year the knowledge and skills they need to be successful academically.

But it hasn't always been easy for parents and caregivers to figure out what children should know and be able to do by the end of each grade – and how to discuss these topics with their children and their teachers.

Moreover, while families are usually able to help if kids get stuck in the early grades, the content gets more challenging as students get older. Suddenly, parents and caregivers may feel like they don't have much help to offer. But that's not the case. Research confirms that families still have a big role to play in helping students learn. It's just a different role.

In addition to providing encouragement, a study of more than 50,000 students found that relating what junior and high school kids are learning in school to their future life goals is one of the most effective ways families can help. What doesn't work? Trying to be directly involved with schoolwork. It can feel to middle school students like you're interfering or even confusing them. And this IS the time to encourage students to take more responsibility and be more independent; helping them take charge of their learning is important.

This Family Guide provides parents and caregivers with the information and tools they need to support their children academically in English language arts, which is the building-block subject for everything else. With this Guide, families can engage more deeply in their junior high student's education, advocate for them, and build partnerships with their teachers – thus developing the strong bond between students, families, and teachers that ensures kids thrive.

<sup>1</sup>Harvard Graduate School of Education (2009). Hill: Parents need to link schoolwork to future goals. <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/09/05/hill-parents-need-link-schoolwork-future-goals>.

# JUNIOR HIGH

## English Language Arts



**Santa Barbara Unified**  
Every child, every chance, every day.

## THIS GUIDE INCLUDES

- **What Junior High Students Are Learning** – What experts say is the most important content (knowledge and skills) for students to learn in English language arts by the end of seventh and eighth grades.
- **Talking About Literacy with Your Junior High Student** – Ways families can talk with their junior high student about what they are learning in school, find related resources, and connect learnings to the world around them.
- **Tips for Talking with Teachers** – How you and your child's teachers can work together to help students grow.
- **Tools and Resources to Help** – We've chosen a few resources that best match each grade's content.



**STUDENT  
ACHIEVEMENT  
PARTNERS**



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## ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

### WHAT 7TH GRADERS ARE LEARNING



Throughout the school year, 7th grade students will spend the most time working on the following topics. They should understand them well by the end of the year.

#### Reading, writing, speaking, and listening:

- Citing textual evidence which supports an analysis of a text or a specific claim
- Determining theme(s) and/or central idea(s) and analyzing their development over the course of a text
- Analyzing how elements of stories interact (i.e. setting and conflict), and how the aspects of a text (language, treatment of facts, other key details) reveal an author's point of view or purpose
- Tracking an argument throughout a text, and assessing if the reasoning is sound and if evidence is relevant/sufficient to support a claim
- Engaging audiences using point of view, and a variety of narrative techniques, precise vocabulary and sensory language to convey experience or events in narrative writing
- Composing a claim, and organizing reasons and evidence clearly in argumentative writing
- Developing a topic with relevant facts, details, quotations, etc. and using transitions to create cohesion and clarity in expository writing
- Choosing appropriate sources to answer a research question
- Developing and strengthening writing with multiple steps (i.e. plan, draft, revise, edit) with specific audiences and purposes in mind
- Posing relevant questions in class discussions; and responding to, acknowledging, and building upon the ideas of others
- Using technology and multimedia dynamically to enhance communication and presentations.



### TALKING ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS WITH YOUR 7TH GRADER

- Encourage your student to choose a book they want to read on their own each day. Reading lots of books over time is more important than the type of text. Let your student pick based on their interests and what makes them excited to read.
- Ask what they learned in their reading. Have them present or share with you, with friends, or with other family members. Talk to your student about what you're reading for enjoyment, or what you read for work or in your day-to-day life.
- Turn on closed captioning while watching TV or watching videos to allow your student to read along with the dialogue.
- Pick a topic to learn about together. Read books, look online, or do short research projects together.
- Encourage regular writing: keeping a journal, writing letters or emails, and/or taking notes on what they are learning. Encourage your student to write to you, and then write back to them.
- Listen to podcasts together, or encourage your student to listen to podcasts of their choice and tell you about what they cover. There is a wide range of podcasts available. Consider the following sampling for a range of topics and types: "[But Why: A Podcast for Curious Kids](#)," "[Code Switch](#)," and "[The Unexplainable Disappearance of Mars Patel](#)."



## TIPS FOR TALKING WITH TEACHERS

### 7th Grade English Language Arts

- What are my student's strengths, and how do you use them in instruction?
- How do you select texts? Will my student see characters and topics that represent them, their background, and their identity? Will they learn new perspectives and about new and diverse characters through the texts you use in the classroom?
- What topics are students learning about through reading? What should my student be able to understand, write, and talk about as a result of what they have read?
- What opportunities does my student have to choose books that interest them? Are they limited to a specific reading level or encouraged to select texts based on their interest, topics under study, or to build their knowledge of the world? Do they have any reading challenges, either with grade level text or with texts that they read on their own?
- Is my student able to write in ways that show you they understand what they are reading and learning? Are they able to use evidence from the text, present their responses in detail, and write with sufficient depth? Do they use conventions (spelling, punctuation, capitalization) and grammar rules appropriately? If not, what challenges are they facing? How can I help?
- Is my student able to speak and listen in class discussions and conversations in ways that show you they understand what they are reading and learning? Do they use evidence from the text, present their responses in detail, and speak with sufficient depth? If not, what challenges are they facing?
- How can I support and encourage my student to build a strong relationship with you and take age-appropriate responsibility for their own learning?



## TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO HELP



### Literacy

Sources of fiction text for reading and writing:

- Great Short Stories to Teach in Middle School  
<https://www.weareteachers.com/best-short-stories-for-middle-schoolers/>
- Must Share Poems for Middle and High School  
<https://www.weareteachers.com/24-must-share-poems-for-middle-school-and-high-school/>

Sources of non-fiction text for reading, writing, and research:

- *The New York Times* Learning Network  
<https://www.nytimes.com/section/learning>
- *PBS NewsHour* Extra: Student Voices  
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/student-voices/>

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

## WHAT 8TH GRADERS ARE LEARNING



Throughout the school year, 8th grade students will spend the most time working on the following topics. They should understand them well by the end of the year.

### Reading, writing, speaking, and listening:

- Determining a theme or central idea of a text, and interpreting what a text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text
- Determining an author’s point of view or purpose in a text
- Identifying the main claim of a text and explaining how it develops throughout the text; explaining how supporting ideas are used to build a claim and how text features are used in a text
- Evaluating an argument based on the evidence provided
- Using the elements of narrative to analyze a text, and analyzing how particular sentences or paragraphs reveal aspects of character or develop or refine a key concept
- Determining worthwhile evidence that will most strongly support a thesis or claim
- Writing and supporting claims with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources in argumentative writing
- Developing and supporting a topic with facts, definitions, quotations, and other objective information in expository writing
- Using descriptive and sensory details with precision to relate experiences in narrative writing
- Revising and editing writing with a focus on purpose and audience
- Gathering relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assessing the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quoting or paraphrasing the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation
- Delineating a speaker’s argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and relevance and sufficiency of the evidence
- Integrating multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.



## TALKING ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS WITH YOUR 8TH GRADER

- Encourage your student to choose a book they want to read on their own each day. Reading lots of books over time is more important than the type of text. Let your student pick based on their interests and what makes them excited to read.
- Ask what they learned in their reading. Have them present or share with you, with friends, or with other family members. Talk to your student about what you’re reading for enjoyment, or what you read for work or in your day-to-day life.
- Turn on closed captioning while watching TV or watching videos to allow your student to read along with the dialogue.
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<https://www.nytimes.com/section/learning>
- *PBS NewsHour* Extra: Student Voices  
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/student-voices/>