



Course Syllabus

Course Title: English Language Arts, Grade 8

School Year: 2024-2025

Semester(s): 1 and 2

Grade Level(s): Grade 8

Course Day(s) and Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm PST

Teacher Information

- **Name:** Anh Duong
- **Email:** anh.duong@brancheslearning.org
- **Office Hours:** By appointment only
- **Branches Learning Main Office Number:** (323) 955-0114

Class Materials: <https://brancheslearning.org/product/language-arts-grade-8/>

Course Description

This course will prioritize creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving as students take on a project-centered learning approach. They will analyze literature, craft arguments, and communicate effectively through listening, speaking, and writing. Students will explore a range of texts across genres, such as nonfiction, fiction, drama, and poetry, and be able to understand the historical context of those texts. To develop their writing, students will compose argumentative essays, personal narratives, and informational papers. Students will enhance their ability to communicate within class and group discussions, learning how to articulate not only the texts' main ideas, but also their own ideas as they refine their academic language. Students will also engage in peer review in order to strengthen editing and writing skills, refining their own unique writing style.

Course Units:

Unit 1: Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*

Below is a tentative schedule of the weeks planned:

Week 1 - Get to know the course! Students prepare for a successful academic school year by acquainting themselves with course expectations and procedures.

Week 2 - What are narratives? We will talk about stories! Students will equip themselves with the literary terms necessary in order to speak and write about literature. Practice using new vocabulary through exercises.

Week 3 - Learn about Ernest Hemingway and read some of his works, most notably *The Nick Adams* short stories. Examine the short story as a form of literature. Begin *The Old Man and the Sea*.

- Week 4** - Study composition lessons from *The Elements of Style* in order to enhance writing ability. Students will also learn how to differentiate between holistic and mechanical errors in writing. Read the short story *The Medicine Bag*.
- Week 5** - Write a personal narrative with strong thematic quality. Students will also conduct peer review for this creative writing.
- Week 6** - Continue Peer Review. Attend Study Hall and get individual help with writing.
- Week 7** - Finish reading for *The Old Man and the Sea*, and discuss its literary elements including theme and symbolism in groups and as a class. Plot narrative structure.
- Week 8** - Students present their personal narratives in the Classic Story Structure.

Unit 2: Ray Bradbury and *Fahrenheit 451*

Below is a tentative schedule of the weeks planned:

- Week 1** - Introduce yourself to Ray Bradbury and his works. We will read both fiction and nonfiction from this author.
- Week 2** - Begin reading *Fahrenheit 451*. Learn about the text's historical context and complete in-class writing.
- Week 3** - Identify the novel's characteristics and their impact on the story and review theme. Begin to form narrative structure for the novel by identifying its characters, plot, and setting.
- Week 4** - Study composition lessons from *The Elements of Style* in order to enhance writing ability. Further develop student ability to discern between holistic and mechanical errors.
- Week 5** - Read essays from *The Zen in the Art of Writing*. Examine the essay as a form. Ramble on about your writing in class for Self-Reflection paper.
- Week 6** - Exercise creative writing ability through a composition detailing a new invention.
- Week 7** - Attend Study Hall and get individual help on assigned writing.
- Week 8** - Students will present their new inventions to the class.

Unit 3: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Below is a tentative schedule of the weeks planned:

- Week 1** - Learn about Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Period and surrounding historical context in which Shakespeare wrote. Identify qualities and elements of theatre. Begin reading *Hamlet*. Discuss the play's exposition.
- Week 2** - Identify poetic devices in Shakespeare's verses in *Hamlet*. Become familiar with commonly used poetic devices such as alliteration, imagery, rhyme, repetition, etc.
- Week 3** - Introduce the unit project which is to write an original sonnet from the perspective of a chosen character. Read and annotate some of Shakespeare's other famous sonnets.
- Week 4** - Study composition lessons from *The Elements of Style* in order to enhance writing ability. Students will also learn how to differentiate between holistic and mechanical errors in writing.



Week 5 - Read as much of *Hamlet* in class as possible. Discuss characters, themes, and symbolism.

Week 6 - Finish reading *Hamlet*. Hold discussion of the play's characters and themes so far in the form of Socratic Seminar.

Week 7 - Final week for office hours before midterm. Attend Study Hall and get individual help with writing and upcoming performance.

Week 8 - Perform the original soliloquy in front of a live class audience for Presentations.

Unit 4: S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*

Below is a tentative schedule of the weeks planned:

Week 1 - Begin reading *The Outsiders*. If time allows, we may be able to watch scenes from the movie as we read the book.

Week 2 - Students will be introduced to the final research paper which is based on identity. They will research about a chosen field and/or career path in order to report on it. Learn about various multimedia and decide on a form of presentation for the final project.

Week 3 - Study the novel's exposition by examining its characters, setting, and plot within class and group discussions.

Week 4 - Study composition lessons from *The Elements of Style* in order to enhance writing ability. Students will also learn how to differentiate between holistic and mechanical errors in writing.

Week 5 - Compare and contrast the characters in partners or groups. Each group will turn in a short compare-and-contrast essay.

Week 6 - Finishing reading *The Outsiders*. Have final class discussion about the story's themes.

Week 7 - Students work on their visual presentations for the final. Attend Study Hall and get individual help with writing.

Week 8 - Present Future Identity Projects.

Course Expectations

Conduct

Students are expected to bring a positive attitude, energy, and an open mind to live classes. Being mindful of class conduct ensures that students are contributing to an inclusive environment where all students can collaborate, discuss, and work comfortably. Being punctual to class is also an important aspect of class conduct.

Plagiarism

Students are expected to maintain academic integrity as plagiarism is a serious offense. If students attempt to use someone else's words or ideas without properly citing and giving credit where it is due, they will risk a failing grade. Further disciplinary action may also be taken.



Preparation

Students are expected to complete all assigned reading homework before the next live class. This ensures that all students will be ready for class activities, discussions, and exercises. Preparation includes establishing a quiet environment that is conducive to learning.

Support

If a student is struggling in class, or with the overall course, it is up to the student to ask for extra help. Students can schedule office hours for clarity and one-on-one help. Tutoring is also available. Students must make HSTs, parents, and instructors aware of challenges and obstacles as they arise rather than at the last minute.

Grading Scale

Middle School, Grades 6-8

- A = 90% -100%
- B = 80%-89%
- C = 70%-79%
- D = 60%-69%
- F = 0%-59%

Final grades are determined by the quality and completion of assignments, attendance, and participation.

Important Branches Learning Policy Information

Camera Policy

Branches Learning requires students to keep their cameras on during live classes unless otherwise instructed by the teacher. Exceptions can be made in rare circumstances if the course teacher, supervising teacher (HST), and the parent all approve a camera waiver.

Headset Policy

Students attending live classes from a shared space must have a headset with a microphone to ensure the class is not disrupted by background noise.

Attendance Policy

Absences must be reported to the course instructor via email or sent to info@brancheslearning.org. Class recordings are available upon requests.

Attendance and participation are part of the final grade. Students who miss more than 40% of live classes may fail the course. Exceptions may be made if a pre-approved plan is in place.

Late Work: Assignments turned in after the due date will result in a lower grade unless pre-approved by the instructor.