

GRADES 9-12 OVERVIEW

In Grades 9-12, a rigorous and successful high school English Language Arts program challenges students to integrate literacy skills in order to complete complex tasks and create sophisticated products. While life goals differ from one student to another, it remains incumbent upon high schools to provide instruction that enables all of them to develop the skills for meeting the demands of the twenty-first century. To that end, this course of study provides standards that address literacy as the integration of skills and allow the robust exchange and application of ideas.

Literacy involves the reception and expression of ideas in many contexts for many purposes. High school students are mature learners who can proficiently read and write individually and in group settings; they are mastering abstract thought, refining self-monitoring skills, and developing listening and speaking skills so they can receive and express ideas clearly, appropriately, and productively.

Engagement with digital resources and the creation of digital products are essential for high school students. Abstract thinking allows them to discern purpose and to draw conclusions about the value of the ideas expressed and the effectiveness of the media, rhetorical, and aesthetic techniques used. At this age, students are equipped to consider and generate opposing points of view, pose questions, and make decisions about the most effective ways to present ideas. They are capable of determining the quality and credibility of sources, synthesizing information, and giving appropriate credit. Accurately conveying the ideas of others in appropriate contexts and working with others to select and present information in the most effective way are the hallmarks of skilled communicators. While working with others, students learn to accept revision and augmentation of their ideas, respond constructively to the ideas of others, and accept that not all the ideas proposed will appear in a finished product. Students advocate for their own ideas while being receptive to those of others.

The high school standards are written to encourage student access to sophisticated ideas and techniques within complex and diverse literary works. The Alabama Course of Study standards emphasize the literature of varied times and places. Both ninth and tenth grade standards emphasize world literature to give students a broad and deep foundation for the primary focus on American literature in the eleventh grade and British literature in the twelfth grade. While standards for Grades 9 and 10 emphasize literature outside the United States and the British Isles, they do not preclude teaching American or British works. Local education agencies may choose to incorporate American or British works alongside those from other areas in order to create thematic units or to provide comparison and contrast among authors, literary genres and forms, subjects, points of view, purposes, or writing styles.

The literature of America before, during, and after European arrival warrants a year of specific attention because of literature's deep ties to all aspects of culture, and its study encourages a cross-curricular understanding and appreciation of qualities that distinguish

American literature specifically and American culture in general. A year of focus on the literature of the British Isles provides both a linguistic and cultural starting point that more fully contextualizes the eventual forming of the United States and informs a sophisticated understanding of the connections between American and British literature contrasted with the unique character of each.

Even though each grade level features a specific area of literary emphasis, the unequalled literary contributions of William Shakespeare justify the inclusion of study of a Shakespeare play in every year of high school. Shakespeare's dramatic works provide an unparalleled opportunity to see the interplay of sophisticated themes and masterful linguistic techniques. His plays further occupy a unique and important position as cultural and aesthetic touchstones. A Shakespeare play is required in Grade 12, and Shakespeare's poetry and plays are strongly recommended in Grades 9-11. It is also suggested that a work by another master playwright be included each year, drawing from a wide range of cultures and times from ancient Greece and Asia to the present.

Standards are designed to equip students to discern purpose (including recognizing irony and satire), understand the importance of aesthetic decisions by the author, and note how choices of syntax and diction shape and clarify meaning. Local school districts are encouraged to select a curriculum which includes challenging texts representing various time periods, places, and cultural and philosophical perspectives and to support students as they learn to adapt fluidly to multiple nonfiction, informational, and technical texts with varying degrees of complexity in order to determine purpose and use information effectively.

Finally, standards are organized under types of literacy (critical, digital, language, and research) to reflect the applications of literacy in a rapidly changing world. This format represents an effort to show that successful communication requires multifaceted receptive and expressive skills. The organizing groups are not to be construed as educational units, nor should standards only be taught within a particular focus area. Instead, the groupings illustrate the interconnected nature of all communication skills. Each heading is followed by an explanation of its overarching concept, which is the same in each grade.

Notes on instruction:

- When “including” appears in standards, it should be construed as “including but not limited to.” The items listed must be taught; others may also be included in instruction.
- Examples present options that might prove useful in instruction of the standard. They are not intended to be exhaustive lists and the suggestions listed are not required to be taught.
- When a standard specifies writing or speaking “suitable for an authentic audience,” it does not require that the writing or speech must actually be presented to such an audience.
- Some standards are very close in meaning in Grades 9 and 10 and in Grades 11 and 12. It is expected that rigor will be increased by selecting more challenging literature in successive grades.