

# Welcome to Grade 6 Language Arts (for Families)

At the heart of the EL Education Language Arts Curriculum is a commitment to literacy instruction through engaging, authentic books. Each of the four modules in the Grade 6 curriculum is built around a fiction or nonfiction book that guides the learning and helps students connect to the module topic. These books act as portals, giving students access to the perspectives of diverse characters and to the academic challenges required for grade-level success.

The books selected for Grade 6 take students on a journey to a mythical training camp, the true story of a village in Malawi, a 1930s boarding school in Oklahoma, and the busy offices of NASA in the years before the moon landing. Despite the variety of their content, the central texts have this in common: rich, complex language; important and compelling themes; exciting plots with meaningful conflicts; and thoughtful characters or historical figures who, in their own ways, aim to be ethical people who contribute to a better world. By the end of the school year, through work with these books and related texts, students will be more effective, more strategic, and more joyful readers.

## **Module 1: *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan**

*The Lightning Thief* introduces students to Percy, the trouble-prone antihero who doesn't seem to fit in anywhere. His teachers don't understand him, his stepfather treats him poorly, and his classmates find him pretty strange. Percy feels strange indeed, and finally, he learns why: he is the son of a Greek god—and the other gods think he's a thief! Tasked with a seemingly impossible quest to recover a stolen lightning bolt and prove his innocence, Percy begins his journey to find the bolt and ends up finding himself instead.

The main tasks of this module help students develop reading and writing skills that will help them throughout Grade 6 and beyond. Students learn strategies for figuring out the meanings of unfamiliar words. They determine the central ideas and important details of early chapters in the book and write summaries of shorter texts related to topics in the book. After reading one scene in the text and watching the same scene come to life in the movie version, students examine similarities and differences between the scenes in a compare and contrast essay. Finally, borrowing from the clever techniques used in *The Lightning Thief*, students try their hand at narrative writing by rewriting a scene from the book.

**Module 2: *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* (Young Readers Edition) by William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer**

*The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* tells the true story of a curious and bright young scientist, William. Whether making a broken radio buzz again or figuring out how a “dynamo” works, William loves a good challenge. When his beloved Malawian village is hit by a devastating drought and famine, William’s challenges, for the first time, seem impossible to overcome. With perseverance and patience, William constructs his most important invention yet: a windmill that brings electricity—and with it, stability and protection against future droughts—to his home and community.

The main tasks of this module reflect William’s questioning spirit. Students break down the book’s structure and examine its individual pieces. They analyze the way that William is introduced in the book and interpret the authors’ use of figurative language. With William’s creativity as inspiration, students research other innovators’ solutions to critical problems in communities around the world. Lessons focused on building students’ research skills—searching for sources, deciding whether they are credible and useful, and paraphrasing and quoting them—help students become more effective investigators. Students write a problem-solution essay based on their findings, then share their research at a presentation and discussion, during a “Solution Symposium.” This symposium both highlights the inventiveness of students’ research subjects and celebrates students’ own learning.

**Module 3: *Two Roads* by Joseph Bruchac**

*Two Roads* follows Cal, a young boy growing up in the 1930s who loves his Pop and the life they share, hopping trains and sleeping under the stars as “Knights of the Road.” Cal’s path changes, however, when he learns that he is half Creek Indian and on his way to an American Indian boarding school. Troubled by stories he’s heard about the school, and dealing with challenging questions of identity and belonging, Cal feels nervous and alone—that is, until his new best friends step in and become family.

The main tasks of this module are based on important elements of *Two Roads*: its vibrant use of language; its clear messages about identity, friendship, and responsibility; and the complex choices that its characters face. Students analyze the language of *Two Roads*, looking closely at sentence length, pronoun use, and the English-language varieties spoken by Cal’s friends. Over the course of the module, students identify major themes in the book and relate these themes to the guiding questions and big ideas of the module. When the key characters make tough decisions, students write argument essays that support or challenge these decisions.

**Module 4: *Hidden Figures* (Young Readers' Edition) by Margot Lee Shetterly**

*Hidden Figures* celebrates the work of the “West Computers” of NACA (now NASA). These talented mathematicians solved problems and performed calculations that would transform air travel and eventually help human beings land on the moon for the first time. As the first black women hired by NASA, the West Computers faced additional challenges beyond the mathematical and scientific. *Hidden Figures* follows the lives and friendships of the West Computers at a time of overt racism and discrimination and describes their achievements in science and beyond.

The main tasks of this module allow students to dive deeply into the lives of West Computers Dorothy, Mary, and Katherine. First, students read a series of short articles and other texts to build context for the module topic. Then, students look closely at the way the author describes key events in *Hidden Figures* and compare it to how those same events are described by other authors. Finally, having gathered many examples of the West Computers’ remarkable accomplishments, students write essays that make an argument about why these accomplishments deserve attention.