

Welcome to Grade 7 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 7 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 7 take students on a journey through southern Sudan from a child’s point of view during and after civil war, across the globe and through history chasing epidemics, through Harlem in the 1920s and ’30s, and back around the globe in pursuit of plastic pollution and its solutions. 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: *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park

The story of *A Long Walk to Water* begins in southern Sudan in 2008, following Nya as she walks for hours under the hot sun, over a dusty, thorny path, to and from a muddy pond where she fetches water for her family every day. She does not go to school; she walks to fetch water. As Nya continues to walk, the story jumps back in time to 1985, when the civil war between the north and south of Sudan forces young Salva from his school, from his town, from his family, and on a journey that lasts almost two decades. During that time, Salva walks from Sudan to Ethiopia to Kenya, facing starvation, wild animals, and the violence of war. Still, he does not give up hope. He keeps walking and keeps working. Both Nya and Salva demonstrate curiosity and resilience, journeying toward a brighter future.

The main tasks of this module allow students to develop reading and writing skills and strategies that will help them throughout Grade 7 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. Students also develop their narrative writing skills to include dialogue, description, and pacing in a story about a Lost Boy or Girl of Sudan.

Module 2: *Patient Zero* by Marilee Peters

Students join epidemiologists, doctors who study diseases, from the past and present as they race to solve the mysteries of deadly epidemics across cities, continents, and history. Students, like epidemiologists, must become detectives, sifting through the information and misinformation and piecing together the story of each epidemic to find “patient zero,” the first person identified as a carrier at the start of a disease’s outbreak. The intriguing illustrations and different ways of presenting information keep students on their toes as they work to solve the epidemic mysteries and uncover deeper truths about how people and societies respond to challenging circumstances.

In this module, students focus on researching to build and present knowledge. Inspired by the research methods and mindsets of the scientists described in *Patient Zero*, students choose a social or medical epidemic for their own investigation. Research lessons across the module—searching for sources, deciding whether they are credible and useful, and paraphrasing and quoting them—help students become more effective investigators. Students build their informational writing skills as they work through the stages of the essay-writing process: crafting a focus statement, presenting evidence, using transitional words, and developing a conclusion that reflects on the essay.

Module 3: *One Last Word: Wisdom from the Harlem Renaissance* by Nikki Grimes

Can we “find fuel for the future in the past”? Poet Nikki Grimes asks this question in her poem “Emergency Measures,” the first in her collection *One Last Word: Wisdom from the Harlem Renaissance*. As Grimes does in her book, students spend the module pondering the wisdom in works created during the Harlem Renaissance. Students first explore poems, artwork, and scenes and songs from a play to experience the explosion of creativity from this time period, as well as ideas of collaboration and innovation. Students then examine political artwork and cartoons, informative articles, and short stories to understand the social and political context of the Harlem Renaissance. Finally, they consider the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance, turning back to Nikki Grimes and her collection of poems crafted with lines from Harlem Renaissance poets. Students ponder whether they and contemporary writers, singers, and musicians truly can “find fuel for the future in the past.”

The focus for this module is on analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating text, which students do through close study of the play, poems, and stories—first with guidance from the teacher, then in groups, and finally independently. This practice ends in learning to write a literary argument in a formal style, with persuasive language and claims, supported by evidence and reasoning.

Module 4: *Trash Vortex* by Danielle Smith-Llera

“It is past time that we tackle the plastic problem that blights our oceans. Plastic pollution is surfing onto Indonesian beaches, settling onto the ocean floor at the North Pole, and rising through the food chain onto our dinner tables.” So explains Erik Solheim, then executive director of UN Environment, quoted in Danielle Smith-Llera’s book *Trash Vortex*. Through this text, a documentary film, and additional articles, students spend the module learning about how plastic pollution became such a widespread problem—particularly in our oceans—and what can be done to reduce the pollution.

The main task of this module is researching to write and present arguments. Students conduct research about possible solutions to reducing plastic pollution at different points of the plastic life cycle. They develop a stance based on their learning and defend their position in a debate with classmates. Students then transform their understanding into their own personal action plans, which involve research and crafting narrative, informational, and argument pieces to communicate their personal actions, evidence, and message.