

# Welcome to Grade 8 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 8 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 8 lead students through an exploration of Latin American folklore, food choices, the Holocaust, and Japanese American internment. 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: *Summer of the Mariposas* by Guadalupe Garcia McCall**

*Summer of the Mariposas* is the story of the five Garza sisters and their adventures as they travel from their home in Texas to Mexico and back. After the girls find a dead body floating in a swimming hole near the Mexican border, they decide to set out to find the man's family and return his body to them. Meanwhile, they also plan to reunite with their grandmother, whom they haven't seen in many years. Along the way, the girls encounter supernatural beings; they must outsmart an evil witch, a sneaky warlock, ferocious half-human owls, and fabled monsters like the *chupacabras*. All the while, a magical earring, given to the oldest Garza sister, Odilia, by the ghost of the legendary La Llorona, keeps the girls safe and protected in their trying adventures. This modern retelling of *The Odyssey* celebrates maternal love and the bond among sisters as they navigate both magical and real-life challenges.

Work in this module helps students develop reading and writing skills and strategies they will apply throughout Grade 8 and beyond. Theme and point of view are introduced through the novel, as well as norms for carrying out a respectful and productive discussion, as students discuss their responses to the text. Students also analyze how differences in the characters' or reader's points of view create effects like suspense or humor. To build research and writing skills, students research and write a scene about a "monster" from Latin American folklore, and then apply analysis skills to their own writing with a compare and contrast essay about the scene they wrote.

**Module 2: *The Omnivore's Dilemma (Young Readers Edition)* by Michael Pollan**

In *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Michael Pollan sets out to make sense of the complicated food choices that modern Americans face today. Pollan presents research that examines the harsh realities of industrial food production and the contrasts between large- and small-scale organic food products, and tries his own hand at hunting and gathering food. He leaves the reader with simple but convincing arguments for which food choices are the most ethical, sustainable, and environmentally friendly.

Throughout the module, students read excerpts from *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and analyze video clips of the documentary *Nourish: Food and Community*. Students analyze purpose and point of view, consider how the authors convey key ideas, evaluate arguments and authors' motives for conveying information, and consider the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums. Students then carry out research and formulate their own opinions in an argument essay about which food choice would be the most beneficial for themselves and their community.

**Module 3: *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* by Art Spiegelman**

*Maus I* is a graphic novel that depicts the horrors of the Holocaust through the author's interviews with his father, Vladek, a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor. The book is a story within a story, a historical account of the Holocaust and an exploration of complicated family relationship. Vladek narrates the scenes that focus on the past and his experiences during the war, and Art narrates the present and the challenging relationship between father and son. Spiegelman portrays the characters as animals in his drawings, with Jews as mice and the Germans as cats, and explores themes of racism, identity, and memory.

The main work in this module supports students in developing both literacy skills and habits of character, with a particular focus on empathy. Through reading *Maus I*, students learn about a terrible time period in history while developing their ability to determine and track themes, understand the development of characters, and identify and track the development of central ideas. Students also read excerpts from memoirs written by victims and survivors of the Holocaust and honor their voices in a solemn, silent gallery walk. They then explore common traits of upstanders during the Holocaust through narrative accounts, before planning and writing a narrative of their own.

**Module 4: *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston**

*Farewell to Manzanar* depicts the experiences of Jeanne Wakatsuki and her family before, during, and after their imprisonment at Manzanar, a Japanese American internment camp during World War II. The story begins in California when the narrator, Jeanne, is age seven, at the time of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and ends when Jeanne returns to Manzanar years later, as an adult with her own family. Jeanne’s journey of self-discovery is one that includes difficult realizations about the dangers of fear and prejudice, but also the resilience of the human spirit.

This module centers on the lessons of Japanese American internment. As students read the text, they track connections and distinctions made among individuals, ideas, and events, and consider the authors’ methods and use of language in conveying the Wakatsukis’ experience. Students also watch the film adaptation of *Farewell to Manzanar* and write a literary argument essay to analyze the ways in which the film stays faithful to or departs from the text. In a final culmination of learning across the module, students carry out research and interviews to learn about how community organizations are applying the lessons of Japanese American internment today.