

Accessible and Responsive Literacy Instruction: Grade-Specific Recommendations for Multilingual Learners in Illinois

Grades 3-5

Introduction

Students in grades 3-5 are beginning to leverage literacy skills to engage with more complex texts, using reading and writing more as tools for learning. For multilingual learners, this remains true, whether grade level English proficiency has yet been reached. For all students, it is vital to provide immediate, meaningful literacy instruction to become literate in English and the home language. It is equally important to provide accessible instruction that allows students to engage in content-area learning regardless of their level of English language proficiency. Though conversational fluency develops within 1–3 years, achieving Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in each content area can take 5–7 years and is dependent on each content area. Delaying academic engagement until full English proficiency is unrealistic and detrimental.

Key Developmental Characteristics for grade level 3-5

Cognitive/Academic

- Becoming more independent readers and writers; begin to engage with more complex texts and digital tools.
- Developing the ability to comprehend and produce language across content areas becomes increasingly important.
- Ability to think more critically, comparing perspectives, and making connections between home and school knowledge.
- Increasing the desire to engage in collaborative work and problem-solving

Social/Emotional

- Strong desire for peer and adult approval; begin forming a sense of identity, including cultural and linguistic identity.
- Sensitive to fairness, inclusion, and respect; want to see their own backgrounds valued.
- Increased ability to take another person's perspective, which supports empathy and cross-cultural understanding.

Linguistic

- Rapid vocabulary expansion; welcome multilingual input.
- Begin demonstrating their translanguaging skills more consciously between home language(s) and English.



- Benefit from seeing authentic uses of multiple languages in academic and social settings.
- Exhibit varied levels of proficiency across their languages
- Students transfer knowledge and skills across languages, using all of their linguistic resources to make meaning, decode text, and express themselves in writing and speech.

Age-Appropriate Teaching and Learning Practices for Grade Levels 3-5

Literacy development during these years is shaped by students' linguistic and cultural experiences at home, in the community, and at school. Educators must collaborate with families to understand each student's language background, including which languages are spoken, how they are used, and the contexts in which they are learned. Academic language development becomes especially critical during this period as students encounter content-specific vocabulary and language structures in reading and writing tasks.

Teaching Practices

- Incorporate culturally and linguistically responsive texts and materials that reflect students' backgrounds and connect to prior experiences.
- Encourage translanguaging practices, inviting students to use multiple languages as tools for learning.
- Provide systematic and frequent opportunities for oral language development through discussions, presentations, peer to peer interaction and collaborative learning.
- Engage students in reading and writing across genres and content areas, using scaffolds that support both language and literacy goals.
- Integrate visual, digital, and multimodal literacy tools to support comprehension and expression in meaningful ways.
- For newcomers who have not had literacy instruction in English, leverage literacy skills in home language to make connections while teaching foundational skills in English.
- Newcomer students should be viewed through an asset-based lens rather than a deficit-based one. Avoid defaulting to intensive interventions or "starting at zero" with kindergarten phonics; instead, provide foundational English support using age-appropriate materials that respect their cognitive maturity and prior knowledge.
- For long-term Multilingual Learners (MLs) or students with interrupted formal educational experiences (SIFE) who have not reached grade level academic proficiency in either language, continue to support and connect foundational literacy instruction in both languages. Tiered interventions should include layered ML supports and contextual instruction to ensure that interventions are meaningful.

Ecology/Learning Environment

- Provide affirming spaces that integrate multiple languages and cultural references.
- Involve families as partners and co-educators, honoring and integrating their linguistic/cultural resources into instruction.
- Use digital platforms and storytelling tools to invite children and families to present in multiple modalities (oral, written, visual, digital).
- Promote activities where students and families collaborate (Ex. connecting families by building on the wisdom of elders in the community and in families through multi-generational projects), fostering both academic and SEL growth.



Guidelines

Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Learning Environment

Social Emotional Well-Being

The journey of a multilingual learner is a unique one, filled with opportunities for growth and a specific set of social-emotional considerations. As students transition from third to fifth grade, their world expands, and so do the challenges of navigating their identity and relationships across cultures and languages.

In **third grade**, students are just beginning to develop a stronger sense of self and their place within the classroom community. For multilingual learners, this can be a vulnerable time. They may feel **self-conscious or anxious** about their language skills, impacting their willingness to participate in class or make friends. If English is the only mode of communication promoted in the classroom, this can make forming connections among all the students difficult. Multilingual learners can form friendships with peers who speak their home language as well as with English-speaking peers who have similar interests, strengths, life experiences and hobbies. Students are also learning to regulate their emotions but may still need to develop the vocabulary to express complex feelings like frustration or sadness in their new language, which can lead to withdrawal or acting out.

By **fourth grade**, the social world becomes much more complex. Friendships are deeper, and peer opinion gains significant importance. Multilingual learners are at a pivotal stage where they are actively exploring their identity and sense of belonging. They may struggle to **understand social cues** like sarcasm or nonverbal communication, leading to misunderstandings. Peer pressure can be intense, causing them to downplay or hide their home language and cultural identity to fit in. This can create an inner conflict as they navigate their bicultural identity. Academic demands also increase, and the **stress and anxiety** of keeping up while learning a new language can be mentally exhausting.

In **fifth grade**, students are more socially and cognitively sophisticated. They are more aware of social hierarchies and peer pressure, and their sense of identity becomes more complex. Multilingual learners may face **microaggressions or teasing** about their accent, which can significantly damage their self-esteem. The pressure to **keep up academically** while mastering a new language becomes even more intense. This is a critical time for students to continue to develop their bicultural identity, learning what it means to be part of both their home culture and their new school culture. As they are expected to make more independent and **responsible decisions**, they may face complex choices about how to navigate situations involving their language and cultural background.

In all these grades, building a **positive, trusting relationship** with the student is the most important factor. When a student feels safe and respected, they are more likely to take risks and thrive both socially and academically.

Key Concepts	Applications
Elevate and Represent Student Identities in the Classroom: Create a meaningful learning environment for all students by systematically integrating students' cultural backgrounds and literacies into teaching and	Diverse Texts and Resources Use culturally responsive diverse texts that reflect students' languages and cultural backgrounds and experiences that include fiction, literature, non-fiction and all different types of informational texts. Incorporate cultural artifacts that are relevant to students and their communities, multilingual digital media, and multilingual resources into lessons. Student Work Display multilingual student work on classroom and school walls. Enhance the learning environment by bringing in artwork and writing that is representative of students' cultures and identities. By



<p>learning, including instruction, materials, and assessments.</p>	<p>seeing representation from a wide range of cultures, countries and languages, all students will expand their understanding of what literature, poetry, artwork, and media are.</p> <p>Multilingual Print Display words, sentences, and posters in multiple languages and for cross-linguistic connections. Create visuals and charts that invite students to interact with the physical environment, labeling items and creating content for the walls in multiple languages.</p> <p>Accessible Assessment Include ample opportunities to showcase what students know at their level of proficiency in both of their languages in multimodal ways, allowing students to use individual strengths to demonstrate understanding.</p> <p>Strengths- Based Instruction Survey students about their interests, hobbies, travel, etc. early in the school year; support students in learning how to identify and use their personal strengths, in learning to advocate for themselves, and in reflecting on how to access individual and community support.</p> <p>Classroom Community Ensure opportunities for all students to contribute to class and community. Recognize and celebrate when students display appropriate behaviors, with high expectations for respect and group cooperation as they progress from 3rd to 5th grade.</p> <p>Choice & Authenticity Let students pick their preferred format for presentation: storyboards, videos, digital posters, animated slides, role-play, and language(s) they feel confident using.</p>
<p>Accessible Learning Environment: Provide a socially and emotionally safe learning environment by intentionally making meaningful and accessible opportunities for all students to connect to instruction.</p>	<p>Goal Setting Help students to set and monitor attainable academic and personal goals, break them into steps, and reflect on progress. Have students map personal goal steps, obstacles, and progress in LOTE + English (SEL Goal 1C).</p> <p>Grade Level Access Provide accessible entry points into literacy instruction so students can use their background knowledge and linguistic resources. In 3rd-5th grades, students should be provided opportunities to access grade level content even when they are not yet proficient in the English language. This includes visuals, home language support, thematic instruction, and scaffolded support.</p> <p>Multimodal Sharing Design activities that allow students to leverage their prior knowledge and personal experiences through multiple pathways of expression. By offering various formats—such as videos, posters, or digital presentations—you ensure that all students, regardless of English proficiency, have the opportunity to show what they know in ways that transcend language barriers.</p> <p>Interconnected Literacy Instruction Provide opportunities for students to engage with all four language domains (listening, speaking, reading & writing) and seven components of literacy (phonics, phonological awareness, oracy, vocabulary, fluency, reading comprehension, writing) in an integrated versus linear way. (ex: Students do not need to master phonics before engaging in comprehension work) Provide ample opportunities for students to make connections between languages.</p> <p>Active Engagement Elevate active engagement so all students are contributors to and co-constructors of their own learning. Provide ample opportunities for student talk.</p>



	<p>Visual Schedules Provide visual schedules in the room so that students can anticipate and prepare for what may be coming next.</p> <p>Temporary Scaffolds Provide scaffolds (ex. modeling, graphic organizers, illustrated bilingual word banks, visual prompts, partner work) that begin instruction and eventually move the students to small group work, partners and independent work. It's important to practice this gradual release of responsibility in each unit of study/content area topic so that students have the opportunity to work toward independence in each new topic/skill.</p>
<p>Explicit Instruction and Tools for Emotional Regulation: Provide students with language and tools to communicate and manage their feelings and needs</p>	<p>Visuals for Emotions and Behavior Explicitly teach students to recognize and articulate emotions and triggers, manage emotional responses via "I-statements" and strategies for calming themselves. Ensure that behavioral expectations are clearly communicated so that all students know expected and unexpected behaviors across school settings. Understand that there may be cultural differences in expectations and learn these from students and families. Teach students to use decision-making: weigh consequences, apply models to solve problems, stay on task, and manage distractions. (SEL Goal 1A)</p> <p>Communication Strategies Model how to use communication skills: role-play problem solving, model paraphrasing to peers, show care for others, and initiate cooperative interactions. Teach students how to be responsive to their own and their peer's emotions and respond appropriately.</p> <p>Emotional Regulation Strategies Explicitly teach tools for managing stress. This may include breathing techniques, use of calming sensory items, or other strategies to use when feeling elevated. Teach phrases to use when students are feeling frustrated, angry or overwhelmed. (Example of teacher-created book about breathing in English and Arabic)</p> <p>Pragmatics Explicitly teach students how language is used appropriately in certain contexts and how to convey the intended meaning in peer and adult interactions. Model and provide sentence stems for appropriate language. Provide opportunities for practice of social interactions. Consider fairness and ethics and instruct about physical and emotional safety.</p> <p>Reflection Provide opportunities to reflect on the consequences of actions. Model how to reflect on decisions and how to make amends when their actions or words hurt others; support students in discussing injustices that have been done to them, and who to safely talk to or report these experiences to.</p>
<p>Welcoming Routines: Provide consistent welcoming routines that help students transition into the academic environment and help them know that each student is essential to this learning space</p>	<p>Routine Greetings Have a song, poem, chant or handshake that welcomes all students to the classroom and gets them reading to learn. Singing or chanting together builds a shared sense of community while a special handshake honors students' individualism.</p> <p>Visual Connection Display a picture or multiple pictures for students to react to upon entering the classroom. Pictures may serve a dual purpose by providing a preview into the text/topic that will be studied that day as well as activating background knowledge and fostering personal connections. Visuals can be very useful in launching a topic, content area topic or skill that prompts students' oral language prior to reading or writing.</p> <p>Oracy-Based Community Time Begin the day with a time for community and sharing. Allow students to share with one another about recent experiences, thoughts about a class activity, or excitement about an upcoming event.</p>



Resources

SEL Goal & Standard	Project Type	Sample Activity
Goal 1A (Self-Awareness)	Digital storytelling, visual poster	Narrative in English and Languages Other Than English (LOTE) about managing a strong feeling via “I-statements”
Goal 1C (Goal-Setting)	Digital planner, bilingual slideshow	Student maps personal goal steps, obstacles, and progress in LOTE + English
Goal 2A–C (Empathy & Skills)	Role-play, comic strip, digital board, sentence stems	Simulations requiring paraphrasing, listening, empathy, and collaborative bilingual group work
Goal 2D (Conflict Resolution)	Choose-your-adventure, video skit	Scenarios in bilingual format where choices resolve conflict constructively
Goal 3A–B (Ethics & Decisions)	Interactive storytelling, group projects	Students propose solutions to school/community issues, and reflect on societal/safety factors
Goal 3C (Contribution)	Video, poster, multi/bilingual presentation	Team project where students highlight ways to support their school community in both languages

Family and Community Connections

Engage families in biliteracy and multiliteracy development. By recognizing 3rd–5th graders’ growing independence, identity formation, and capacity for cross-cultural understanding, family literacy events, educational workshops, and cultural sharing become powerful ways to bridge home and school, affirm multilingualism, and strengthen community ties in a linguistically and culturally responsive way.

Family literacy events align developmentally with 3rd-5th grade students by supporting children’s growing independence in reading/writing and their interest in sharing with peers and adults. For example, highlighting student-created digital dual language books at a family event also creates opportunities for students to demonstrate their multilingual literacy skills in authentic, celebratory ways.

Educational Workshops for Families align developmentally with 3rd-5th grade students by allowing families to gain tools to reinforce growing literacy skills and navigate the balance between home language and English. Students are also able to see that their home literacy practices are valuable and recognized.

Providing opportunities for **Cultural Sharing** aligns developmentally with 3rd-5th grade students by meeting students’ need for identity affirmation and recognition of their cultural heritage. These opportunities also strengthen empathy, perspective-taking, and cross-cultural appreciation. Cross-generational oral storytelling can serve as a prompt for students to author a class anthology of cultural stories from their families.

Key Concepts	Applications
Family Literacy Events:	Multilingual Reading Nights Organize family events during which families read stories in their home language, then students respond in writing or digitally (recorded summaries, illustrations, bilingual captions). Provide digital



<p>Organize family literacy events that incorporate digital tools and multilingual resources.</p>	<p>literacy stations (e.g., e-books in multiple languages, audio-recording booths) so families and children can co-create bilingual books or podcasts.</p> <p>Educational Workshops Offer workshops on strategies like dialogic reading, using dual-language texts, or leveraging translation apps responsibly. Provide hands-on sessions where families learn how to use school digital platforms in multiple languages to access resources.</p> <p>Family Tech Corners Create “Family Tech Corners” where children teach parents about school-used apps, building reciprocal learning.</p>
<p>Cultural Sharing: Encourage parents to share stories, cultural traditions, and experiences through digital tools, fostering community ties.</p>	<p>Community Story Archive Create a “Community Story Archive” where parents record stories in home languages and students provide bilingual captions or illustrations.</p> <p>Invite Family Participation Invite families to contribute cultural artifacts, stories, or holiday traditions via digital storytelling platforms (videos, slideshows, Padlet walls).</p> <p>Cultural Family Projects Pair cultural sharing with classroom projects so students can present family traditions in multiple formats (oral storytelling, skits, visual displays, digital narratives).</p>
<p>Community Involvement: Engaging with community organizations and agencies and creating community partnerships</p>	<p>Partnering for Multicultural/Multilingual Support Partner with local community organizations such as the local library, park district, or cultural/arts organizations to provide resources or information for use at family events or in the classroom</p> <p>Community Connections - Learning in Context Bridge the gap between school and home by hosting community-based learning nights at local landmarks like grocery stores or laundromats. By practicing math and reading in these everyday settings, students apply their skills to real-world contexts, reinforcing that learning happens everywhere, not just within the four walls of a classroom.</p>

Classroom Physical Space and Routines

Facilitate a collaborative, bilingual, and multimodal learning environment. Classroom environments that are reflective of their student population contribute positively to students’ learning. Collaborative learning environments and consistent structures allow students to access help, self-advocate, and to become independent learners. For students in 3rd-5th grade, the opportunity to interact and participate in frequent oral communication with one another motivates students and builds a low-risk environment in which they may learn from one another.

Key Concepts	Applications
<p>Flexible Seating Arrangements: Allow students to group and regroup to provide opportunities to interact with students of different linguistic backgrounds</p>	<p>Collaborative Seating Arrange the classroom for interaction using multiple languages and formats, allowing for flexible seating and collaboration. Create designated spaces for collaborative projects and small-group instruction utilizing both digital and traditional resources</p> <p>Choice Allow choice and variance in seating so that students may engage in English and the home language to make meaning of learning</p>



<p>Representative Displays and Texts: Set up the physical learning environment in a way that honors the linguistic and cultural diversity of the classroom while providing windows into other cultures</p>	<p>Student Work Display student work prominently in all of the students’ languages, regardless of language proficiency level</p> <p>Honor Diversity Display text and multicultural materials in languages that are representative of the classroom and school, honoring and celebrating diversity</p> <p>Representative Text Ensure that the classroom library houses representative texts that include the students’ cultures and languages and resources displayed on walls are representative of languages and cultures of the class</p> <p>Visual Organizers on Display Make visual organizers available in the classroom for skills such as main idea & details, compare/contrast, cause/effect, CER (Claim–Evidence–Reasoning), and vocabulary concept mapping</p> <p>Illustrated Vocabulary Supports Provide visuals for reinforcing vocabulary and concepts including vocabulary cards with images, definitions, and cognates, anchor charts with visuals, examples, and sentence frames, visual math models (tape diagrams, arrays, fraction strips) and science diagrams (life cycles, systems, processes)</p>
<p>Diverse Classroom Library: Develop a classroom library with books, digital texts, and multimedia resources in multiple languages.</p>	<p>Multilingual and Multicultural Texts Include bilingual books (English and home languages), books entirely in students’ home languages, multicultural literature featuring characters from diverse cultures, informational texts in multiple languages, folktales, myths, and legends from around the world</p> <p>Varied Formats for All Readers Include graphic novels, picture books, chapter books at different levels, poetry collections, magazines, high-interest nonfiction (sports, animals, STEAM topics)</p> <p>Digital & Multimedia Resources Provide access to eBooks with audio narration, audiobooks in English and home languages, QR codes linking to videos, vocabulary, or read-alouds, digital picture books created by students</p> <p>Be Wary of Translated Texts A poor translation can “flatten” a story, stripping away the unique humor, local slang, and emotional depth of the original culture. This often happens when a translator tries to make a book feel “easier” for English speakers by removing anything unfamiliar. To keep your library authentic, look for cultural integrity—stories that keep their original “heartbeat” rather than feeling generic or watered down.</p>
<p>Routines and Structures: Classrooms that include predictable and easily understood routines allow students to focus on new learning within an accessible format.</p>	<p>Predictable Routines and Practices Incorporate predictable routines as much as possible so that students can apply new learning within familiar contexts. Chants, songs, and repetition help bring context to new skills.</p> <p>Centers Design literacy (reading, writing and listening) centers that offer hands-on activities, digital tools, and resources in both English and their Languages Other Than English (LOTE)</p>



Oracy Development and Linguistic Interaction

Relationship between Oral Language and Literacy

There is a strong connection between students’ oral language development and their reading and writing skills. Teachers can use students’ oral language skills as a springboard for literacy instruction. When students have in-depth discussions, they can develop academic vocabulary and longer, more complex oral utterances. This more complex oral language in English and their languages other than English (LOTE) supports their reading and writing development.

As students engage more in content-area learning in 3rd-5th grade, opportunities for discourse in the classroom remain vital to the development of vocabulary, content knowledge, and the ability to read and write about each topic.

Key Concepts	Applications
<p>Develop oral language skills across languages and modes of communication to nurture the emergent relationship between oracy and text.</p>	<p>Storytelling and Dramatization Encourage students to share oral stories, songs, and perform dramatizations in both English and their Languages Other Than English (LOTE).</p> <p>Oral Reflection Time Incorporate intentional time throughout the literacy block for oral reflection/processing time with peers.</p> <p>Multimedia/Digital Resources Use multimedia resources like audio recordings and videos to enhance listening and speaking skills and/or to allow students to participate in comprehension activities with grade level text. Incorporate digital storytelling tools, voice-to-text devices that allow students to narrate, inform, and discuss using visuals and audio in multiple languages.</p> <p>Oracy Scaffolds Encourage discourse in English and their LOTE by providing scaffolds such as word banks and sentence starters that model proper syntax (the order of words and phrases)</p> <p>Cooperative Learning Engage students in structured talk activities through cooperative learning structures, promoting language use in collaborative settings.</p> <p>Peer Dialogues Use structured peer-to-peer dialogues to practice speaking and listening skills, focusing on language structures that develop oracy. Facilitate discussions that allow students to use different languages and formats to convey their thoughts.</p> <p>Facilitated Whole Class Discussions Create discussion frameworks that allow for whole group discussions in which students are able to use different languages and communication formats to convey their thoughts effectively.</p>
<p>Connect oracy to reading and writing by promoting activities that utilize multiple languages and communication modes, building students’</p>	<p>Written and Oral Projects Provide opportunities for students to present projects in various formats (e.g., oral, visual, digital) in both English and Language(s) Other Than English (LOTE)</p> <p>Digital Tools Use tools, like video presentations and digital portfolios, to capture student talk in multiple languages.</p>



	<p>Literacy-Based Discussions Facilitate discussions that allow students to use different languages and formats to convey their thoughts in relation to text that they have read. Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) engages students in discussing content area reading in a structured and collaborative way (https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/csr/cresource/q3/p11/#content)</p> <p>Spoken Paragraphs Support students in orally composing sentences or paragraphs before writing them.</p> <p>Language Experience Approach Facilitate a shared writing piece by having students orally dictate sentences that the teacher writes in front of the class. Students may then practice reading the shared writing piece.</p>
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Engagement and Interaction

Students learn new concepts more easily if they have time to be introduced to their new learning in a relevant and authentic way. Giving students time to explore topics and how they relate to their own background is a way to incorporate diverse experiences in the classroom and create authentic curiosity about the topic. Thematic/concept-based teaching gives students opportunities to make connections between content areas and to their home culture, language, interests, and life experiences. In 3rd-5th grade, student interest drives their motivation in learning. Make sure that texts are meaningful and relevant to students.

Key Concepts	Applications
<p>Integrate thematic/concept-based teaching into literacy instruction by organizing literacy units around common ideas and vocabulary</p>	<p>Thematic Instruction Organize stories and informational text into units that have a common theme or concept so that vocabulary and ideas are repeated throughout the lessons and unit. Connect science and social studies concepts to literacy time when possible so that students revisit similar concepts and vocabulary throughout the day.</p> <p>Connected, Not Translated Instruction Teach the same concepts and themes across languages while avoiding direct translation or utilization of the same text in both languages. Utilizing the same vocabulary, themes, and ideas allows students to make connections without encouraging them to wait for a translation into their more proficient language.</p> <p>Pre-teach, Teach, Re-teach Connect instruction by teaching a skill in one language, and pre-teaching or re-teaching in a different way in another language. This fosters student understanding without providing translation. Applying concepts learned in one language in another facilitates transfer of skills.</p> <p>Visual Support Use visual aids, digital story maps, and multimedia presentations to clarify and enhance understanding of read materials.</p>
<p>Interactive Activities: Implement activities that encourage students to express their ideas verbally, visually, and digitally, fostering engagement.</p>	<p>Opportunities for Inquiry and Exploration While explicit instruction is important for foundational skills, it is important to incorporate these skills at every opportunity students are interacting meaningfully with new content knowledge. In 3rd-5th grade, students should be encouraged to think deeply about what they are learning, ask questions, and make their own connections to the material. Provide opportunities for students to inquire individually or in groups about the topics of learning.</p>



	<p>Manipulatives and other visuals Provide manipulatives for students to interact with the concepts they are learning. This could include maps and diagrams to contextualize social studies or science topics, visual models to set up math word problems, matching vocabulary cards and pictures, writing about realia, dice games to take turns reading words/text, creating posters of the content or other hands-on activities.</p> <p>Role Playing/Reader’s Theatre Provide opportunities for students to role play or act out stories. Students may turn stories or non-fiction texts into plays and act out the text as a reader’s theatre piece. Designing costumes and sets enhances comprehension of the text or topic.</p> <p>Music Incorporate songs or raps to reinforce concepts and practice fluency.</p> <p>Inclusive Read-Alouds Conduct read-aloud sessions using digital books, videos, and bilingual texts to support comprehension. Students in 3rd-5th grade benefit greatly from hearing the teacher model fluent and expressive reading.</p>
<p>Incorporate student agency by providing choice within the literacy block</p>	<p>Choice of Texts Provide students with choice in activities in how to practice reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Provide choice of reading texts and writing topics. Incorporating a reading passage sampling day where students are exposed to portions of texts from many different books helps to garner interest in new topics and authors.</p> <p>Research Writing Invite students to pick topics to research and write about. Students may research in any language and present in the target language. This helps foster the reading-writing connection by engaging students in an authentic practice of research.</p> <p>Flexible Grouping Allow students to group in flexible ways when possible. Allowing flexibility in grouping increases motivation while allowing for students to learn from one another in different ways (same-language peers, English proficient peers, peers with expertise on certain topics, etc.)</p> <p>Literacy Stations/Centers Design multilingual literacy stations with hands-on activities that are accessible to multiple literacy levels in English and students’ LOTE. Allow a level of student choice in the centers. Consider including a vocabulary/word study center with vocabulary cards, morphology work, vocabulary sorts, bilingual matching vocabulary cards, and digital tools such as bilingual card decks and online glossaries. Student choices could include: creating a vocabulary map, building sentences using frames, translating and illustrating 3-4 key terms, or creating vocabulary mini videos.</p>
<p>Provide reflection/processing time for students to practice metacognition and solidify learning</p>	<p>Intentional Thinking Time Incorporate time throughout the day to pause and reflect on learning, individually and in small groups (“What’s one thing I learned? What makes sense now? What went well? What do I need help with? What will I do differently?”)</p> <p>Drawing or Journaling Provide time for students to respond to text through writing in journals and/or Learning Logs. Encourage students to represent their learning in whatever way feels most comfortable to them: in their home language, English or through visual representation.</p> <p>Student-Created Summaries Encourage students to create digital storyboards or visual summaries to demonstrate their understanding across multiple languages.</p>



<p>Technological Tools Use tools like video presentations and digital portfolios to capture and showcase student expressions in multiple languages.</p>	<p>Video Recording Utilize video recording apps/software to allow students to practice reading fluently and listening to the recordings.</p> <p>Digital Portfolios Capture student writing and other work in a digital portfolio so students can see their progress throughout the year. This also provides a space for students to look back at previous work for future ideas.</p>
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Translanguaging Practices

Supporting translanguaging in the classroom means that students can utilize all their linguistic resources to learn and apply new content. When students switch between languages, or choose to utilize their home language, it is not a signal of low proficiency in English. Oftentimes, students can masterfully maneuver between the vocabulary and grammatical structures of the two languages, showing a competency that could not be fully displayed if limited to one language. Students in grades 3-5 are also becoming more aware of their identities at this time and should be encouraged to embrace both languages as essential components of learning.

Key Concepts	Applications
<p>Leverage students’ full linguistic and multimodal abilities by making explicit connections between languages.</p>	<p>Welcome All Languages Invite students to use all their languages and literacy skills fluidly in various communication modes. Implement translanguaging strategies in classroom discussions and activities, encouraging students to communicate and express using both (all) of their languages.</p> <p>Explicit Connections Explicitly teach the similarities and differences between English and the LOTE (Language other than English). Teach cognates and false cognates as well as sound, morphological and syntactic similarities and differences between their languages.</p> <p>Translanguaging Implement translanguaging practices in classroom discussions, activities, and projects across multiple formats. Encourage students to read and write in either language or in a combination of multiple languages (Ex. Authoring bilingual and culturally relevant writing pieces, pre-writing in one language and composing in another language; preview vocabulary in the LOTE before reading in English, etc.)</p> <p>Collaborate with ML Staff Collaborate with Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE), Dual Language, and Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI) programs to support multilingual and multiliteracy practices</p>

Literacy Instructional Practices, Curriculum, and Assessment

Connect literacy with engaging content across multiple communication modes. In 3rd-5th grade, there is a wider variance in the backgrounds and the English proficiency of students. Whether brand new to the English language, long term MLs, or with just a few years of instruction, all Multilingual Learners need access to grade level content instruction. Providing accessible opportunities within the Tier 1 Core classroom setting is essential for students to progress with content and learn to read and write while simultaneously acquiring the English language. Students in 3rd-5th grade need learning to be presented in meaningful ways that are relevant to who they are and what they care about. When learning is relevant and meaningful, students are better able to engage. Instruction should focus on building meaning and not be



remedial in nature or slow down. Increasing meaningfulness, comprehensibility, engagement, interest and context are more useful to ML readers and writers than going slower and breaking things down so much that they lose their meaning and authenticity.

Key Concepts	Applications
<p>Interdisciplinary Integration: Help students connect literacy instruction with subjects like science, social studies, and math using bilingual and multimedia materials.</p>	<p>Text-Based Language Routines Preview → Read → Respond using bilingual scaffolds. Engage in Close Reading with Color Coding. Use different highlighter colors to identify claim, evidence, vocabulary, or cause/effect. Close reading means asking students to take their time with text to make meaning and reflect on what they have read.</p> <p>Relevant Themes/Concepts Choose themes with high-interest, real-world relevance, and cross-curricular potential (e.g., ecosystems, migration, water, inventions, community change).</p> <p>Background Knowledge To support students at early proficiency levels, consider implementing a front loading strategy by assigning bilingual activators as homework. Provide videos or introduce materials in the students' home language, this in turn allows students to build the necessary background knowledge and conceptual hooks before the lesson, ensuring they can engage more meaningfully in English instruction.</p> <p>Inquiry Questions Use inquiry questions that connect to other content areas (e.g., <i>How do living things depend on each other?</i>). Select deep, thought-provoking essential questions that cross cultural boundaries (e.g. What does it mean to have courage?)</p>
<p>Project-Based Learning: Encourage students to create projects using a mix of languages and formats, such as posters, infographics, murals, graphic novels, bilingual videos and digital reports. Incorporate multiple modes: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, building, and creating.</p>	<p>Bilingual Videos Students create mini-documentaries explaining a science process, historical event, or math strategy. Use English narration mixed with home language subtitles OR vice versa. Students may create storyboards before recording to plan out their thinking.</p> <p>Diagrams/Infographics (Digital or Print) Have students design bilingual explanations of a concept with visuals, diagrams, and short text.</p> <p>Visual Art Have students create art in response to text. The universal accessibility of art allows students to react in deep ways to text or content when they may not yet have the language. Students may explain their art orally or in writing in English or their home language. Consider having students create graphic novels which allow for expression through art but with limited written language.</p> <p>Service Learning Community service-learning functions as a “Language Experience Approach” by providing authentic, real-world contexts that generate meaningful content for language development. For example, if students read a story about forest animals, they may take action to protect the local forest preserves by organizing a clean-up campaign. If students read about kindness, they may start a kindness project at their school. Students can make posters about the projects or write letters to representatives about their work. Writing tasks become more purposeful if students respond through taking action.</p> <p>When students are engaged in a Service Learning or other Project based unit, they are highly motivated to read and write for the purpose of fulfilling the goals of the project.</p>



<p>Instruction Differentiation: Differentiate instruction to meet the varied linguistic, academic, and multimodal needs of students.</p>	<p>Visuals to Support Comprehension Utilize graphic organizers, illustrated vocabulary, infographics and color-coded text analysis; model use of each of these for students</p> <p>Auditory Resources Incorporate read-alouds and audio texts, oral retells, collaborative discussions, digital recordings.</p> <p>Kinesthetic or Hands-On Resources Support kinesthetic learning with manipulatives (math, science tools), movement-based vocabulary routines, opportunities for building models or simulations, and interactive notebooks</p> <p>Digital/Multimodal Learners Utilize digital books, multimedia research, videos with captions, and interactive images</p>
<p>Integrate Students’ Cultural Backgrounds and multiple literacy forms into instruction.</p>	<p>Culturally Responsive Writing Offer personal narrative prompts connected to culture, identity, or community. Encourage students to publish bilingual writing. Invite students to gather ideas through oral storytelling first.</p> <p>Culturally Responsive Reading Use read-alouds from a range of cultures. Provide bilingual reading choices. Use culturally familiar topics as “first reads” before moving into more abstract English texts. Incorporate multicultural literature featuring protagonists from students’ backgrounds, including folktales and legends from various cultures.</p> <p><i>Please see the Book Awards reference in the Materials section of this document.</i> Utilize contemporary stories reflecting immigrant, multilingual, or bicultural experiences. Informational texts should be centered on global perspectives (e.g., community helpers in different countries, science topics across cultures)</p>
<p>Develop literacy skills in multiple languages and formats by providing opportunities to practice in each language and make connections.</p>	<p>Multilingual Reading Provide bilingual text sets for content units (e.g., ecosystems, migration, inventions). Encourage students to preview or review texts in their home language. Teach students how to identify cognates and compare text structures across languages. Use bilingual read-alouds and shared reading.</p> <p>Writing in Flexible Languages Allow students to draft in their home language and publish in English. Incorporate bilingual writing (headings in one language, content in another). Use bilingual graphic organizers and word banks. Encourage translanguaging during brainstorming, note-taking, and revision.</p> <p>Oral Language in Multiple Languages Invite students to discuss texts or solve problems using their home language. Record bilingual oral explanations of math strategies, science observations, or book responses. Use bilingual conversation stems and talk protocols.</p>
<p>Provide age-appropriate beginning literacy instruction for newcomers using print, digital tools, and multimedia resources.</p>	<p>Contextual Phonics Instruction Students who are new to the English language in 3rd-5th grade will need to be instructed in foundational skills in English. This instruction should be explicit, yet rooted in meaning, using vocabulary and contexts that are familiar to the student. Phonics instruction should not be a prerequisite for engaging in instruction in other literacy components (comprehension, oracy, vocabulary, etc.) and should not replace scaffolded grade-level literacy instruction.</p>



	<p>Connection to Home Language Students who can already read in their home language will learn to read more quickly in English. To facilitate this transfer, make explicit connections between letter sounds in English and in the home language. Instruct on the differences between the languages.</p>
<p>Opportunities to Create and Authentically Share: Design activities for students to create and share content in multiple formats and languages. Structure sharing opportunities to build community.</p>	<p>Classroom Sharing Foster an environment in which students are able to share their creations openly and receive feedback from peers. This could include gallery walks (digital or physical), partner or small-group presentations, academic “showcases” where students explain their work, peer feedback using kid-friendly sentence starters.</p> <p>Family & Community Sharing Include family members and the community as a whole in celebrating the progress of students. Upload videos and projects to digital viewing platforms, provide bilingual descriptions for families to access, and host multilingual celebration days or unit showcases.</p> <p>Collaborative Digital Spaces Extend the learning beyond the classroom walls by providing digital spaces to publish work. Post writing, slideshows, iMovies, and videos for students to build on together. These platforms allow students to publish and view one another’s work safely.</p>
<p>Diverse Assessment Methods: Use various assessments that measure skills in multiple languages and formats, considering language proficiency and content understanding.</p>	<p>Bilingual Reading Assessments Conduct running records in either or both languages to track fluency and comprehension. Assess comprehension through discussions using sentence stems. Have students make annotations of bilingual or leveled texts. Digital tools can also assist in making comprehension checks more equitable (multiple choice, drag-and-drop, short written response)</p> <p>Oral Language Assessments Use sentence stems and academic talk protocols to gauge vocabulary use, complexity of ideas, ability to explain reasoning. Audio-record short discussions about readings, science investigations, or group projects. Use bilingual writing rubrics (Ex. <i>Literacy Squared writing rubric</i>, Escamilla, et. al., 2022)</p>

Materials

When choosing materials for 3rd-5th grade, educators will want to choose appropriately leveled/accessible text that is still engaging for students who are beginning to have stronger opinions about what they enjoy reading. While students at this grade level may need instruction on foundational skills, materials should be age-appropriate for older students. This age student will not engage well with kindergarten developed materials, even if that is the level of accessible text they may need. Below is a list of sample strategies/materials that can make grade level content and instruction more accessible to students.

Key Materials	Applications
Close Reading Graphic Organizers	Students should focus on thoughtful reflection of text and making meaning of what they are reading. Provide strategies for students to slow down and consider what they have read. https://www.colorincolorado.org/blog/background-knowledge-key-close-reading-ells
Sentence Frames & Mentor Sentences	Students who are still acquiring English will be better able to respond in writing or orally if they are given examples of how to begin an appropriate response. Mentor sentences in English and students’



	LOTE provide excellent models for students to emulate and these examples expose them to a wide variety of sentence types. Leverage the WIDA standard as they provide examples by grade/content and English proficiency levels.
Flexible Materials for Simultaneous, not Sequential Literacy Development	Materials should be flexible to be able to be used with students who are not yet proficient in English. Students should be able to engage in meaningful comprehension work while still acquiring the English Language and not yet knowing all their letters and sounds in English. Find low-level, high-interest readers. Provide books in the home language as well as audio books or simplified text.
Thematic, Inquiry-Based Materials	Texts and materials for units of study should center around concepts or themes and be rooted in students' curiosity and questions. Real-life pictures as well as realia that students can manipulate will spark curiosity and conversation.
Multilingual Texts, Environmental Print, and Student-Created Materials	Literacy classrooms should have texts in multiple languages as well as print displayed on the walls in all the students' languages. Realia (magazine clippings, food wrappers, etc.) and student work make this meaningful for young learners. Many materials displayed on the walls can be student generated to increase interest and ownership.
Various Kinds of Books	Student texts should include rich, engaging picture books as well as decodable readers. Students may also engage with wordless books or videos, creating the stories orally or in writing to go with the visuals.
Materials to Promote Student Agency	Students at these grade levels have an increasing need to make choices about their learning and to see their identities reflected in these options. Engaging students in authoring their own <i>Identity Texts</i> (Cummins & Early, 2011) that connect personal experiences to content area topics are ideal projects for multilingual learners.

Materials Resources

Book Awards

American Indian Youth Literature Award <https://ailanet.org/activities/american-indian-youth-literature-award/>

Asian Pacific American Award for Literature (APAAL) <https://www.apalaweb.org/awards/literature-awards/>

Coretta Scott King Book Awards for African American authors and illustrators
<https://www.ala.org/awards/books-media/coretta-scott-king-book-awards>

The International Literacy Association (ILA) Children's and Young Adult Book Awards
<https://www.literacyworldwide.org/get-involved/awards-recognition/awards-grants/ila-children's-and-young-adults'-book-awards>

Pura Belpre Award (Latin American authors and illustrators)
<https://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpre>

Walter Dean Myers Award Outstanding Children's Literature
<https://www.diversebooks.org/programs/walterawards>



Materials to Enhance Biliteracy Development and Crosslinguistic Connections

Key Materials	Applications
Cognate Board	Explicitly teach cognates and allow students to post cognates as they discover them in texts.
Multilingual Reflection Journals	Provide opportunities for reflection for students to think about and connect what they have learned between languages.
Representative Classroom Materials	Ensure that texts and visuals are representative of the cultures and languages present in the class/school.
Multilingual Curricular Resources to Build Strong Foundation in Both Languages	Build literacy skills in both English and the home language to the greatest extent possible. Make sure that the literacy curricula in both languages meets the requirements set forth by the state for research-based literacy instruction. Ensure that students do not miss literacy instruction for other supports.
Materials Rooted in research on Language Acquisition	Provide ample opportunities to develop comprehension and oracy in both languages. Avoid intervening in ways that isolate and decontextualize skills for students who are still developing language.

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What Are Some Dos and Don'ts of Teaching 3rd-5th Grade Multilingual Learners?

✓ Do's: Building a Language-Rich Learning Ecology	⊗ Don'ts: Avoid Common Literacy Pitfalls
<p>Do recognize and leverage students' full linguistic repertoire. Build on skills from all of students' languages, and encourage knowledge transfer across languages to decode and express ideas effectively.</p> <p>Do collaborate with families to understand language backgrounds. Ask about which languages are spoken at home, in what contexts, and how they're learned to inform responsive instruction.</p> <p>Do integrate explicit language development with literacy instruction. Teach vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and comprehension in meaningful, content-rich contexts.</p> <p>Do include culturally and linguistically responsive texts and materials. Use mentor texts that reflect students' experiences and home languages to create authentic connections.</p> <p>Do encourage translanguaging practices in lessons. Allow students to move fluidly between languages to construct meaning and express complex ideas.</p> <p>Do provide rich oral language opportunities. Use discussions, shared reading, collaborative talk, and explicit oral language instruction to strengthen literacy.</p> <p>Do implement multimodal literacy tools. Incorporate digital, visual, and audio supports—videos, story maps, interactive media—to enhance comprehension and expression.</p> <p>Do offer reading and writing across genres and content areas every day. Provide scaffolding—graphic organizers, sentence frames, guided reading—to support academic language in context.</p> <p>Do use bilingual library sets. Include side-by-side texts and age-appropriate bilingual books to promote biliteracy and support translanguaging.</p> <p>Do assess and differentiate literacies across languages. Use oral, written, visual, and multimodal formats in both English and home languages to inform instruction and growth.</p>	<p>Don't view literacy purely through an English-only lens. Avoid limiting literacy to English-only reading and writing; embrace home languages as critical resources.</p> <p>Don't teach skills in isolation. Phonics and vocabulary should be taught in meaningful contexts, not disconnected drills.</p> <p>Don't ignore oral language development. Neglecting speaking and listening limits comprehension—both are foundational to reading and writing.</p> <p>Don't expect monolingual norms. Discouraging language mixing or penalizing home language use fails to support authentic multilingual development.</p> <p>Don't use non-diverse texts. Teaching with texts that don't reflect students' backgrounds misses opportunities for engagement and relevance.</p> <p>Don't overlook language-specific instructional needs. Students may need extra support for features unique to each language—provide targeted support in all languages.</p> <p>Don't rely on English-only assessments. Evaluating only in English risks missing students' literacy strengths in their home languages.</p>