

Station Activities

for English Language Arts

Grade 6–8



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Introduction

This book includes a collection of station-based activities to provide students with opportunities to practice and apply the English Language Arts skills and concepts they are learning. It contains five sets of activities for each of four strands: Comprehension and Interpretation; Making Connections and Evaluation; Composing; and Grammar and Language Usage.

- The Comprehension and Interpretation activities explore: pre-reading strategies; finding information in a text; reading strategies; reading for meaning; and story elements.
- The Making Connections and Evaluation activities explore: non-print texts; poetry; figurative language; imagery and symbolism; and connections between texts.
- The Composing activities explore: prewriting; types of writing; revising writing; proofreading; and using reference materials.
- The Grammar and Language Usage activities explore: parts of speech; sentences; and capitalization and punctuation.

Use these activities in addition to direct instruction lessons or instead of direct instruction in areas where students grasp the basic concepts but need practice. The debriefing discussions after each set of activities provide an important opportunity to help students reflect on their experiences and synthesize their thinking. They also provide an additional opportunity for ongoing, informal assessment to inform instructional planning.

Implementation Guide

The following guidelines will help you prepare for and use the activity sets in this section.

Setting Up the Stations

Each activity set consists of four stations. Set up each station at a desk, or at several desks pushed together, with enough chairs for a small group of students. Place a card with the number of the station on the desk. Each station should also contain the materials specified in the teacher's notes and a stack of student activity sheets (one copy per student in the class). Place the required materials (as listed) at each station.

When a group of students arrives at a station, each student should take one of the activity sheets to record the group's work. Although students should work together to develop one set of answers for the entire group, each student should record the answers on his or her own activity sheet. This helps keep students engaged in the activity and gives each student a record of the activity for future reference.

Introduction

Implementation Guide

Forming Groups of Students

The activity sets consist of four stations. You might divide the class into four groups by having students count off from 1 to 4. If you have a large class and want to have students working in small groups, you might set up two identical sets of stations, labeled A and B. In this way, the class can be divided into eight groups, with each group of students rotating through the A stations or the B stations.

Assigning Roles to Students

Students often work most productively in groups when each student has an assigned role. You may want to assign roles to students when they are assigned to groups and change the roles occasionally. Some possible roles are as follows:

Reader: reads the steps of the activity aloud

Facilitator: makes sure that each member of the group has a chance to speak and pose questions; also makes sure that each student agrees on each answer before it is written down

Materials Manager: handles the materials at the station and makes sure the materials are put back in place at the end of the activity

Timekeeper: tracks the group's progress to ensure that the activity is completed in the allotted time

Spokesperson: speaks for the group during the debriefing session after the activities

Timing the Activities

The activities in each section are designed to take approximately 20 minutes per station. Therefore, you might plan on having groups change stations every 20 minutes, with a 2-minute interval for moving from one station to the next. It is helpful to give students a “5-minute warning” before it is time to change stations.

Since the activity sets consist of four stations, the above time frame means that it will take about 1 hour and 30 minutes for groups to work through all stations. If this is followed by a 20-minute class discussion as described below, an entire activity set can be completed in about 2 hours.

Introduction

Implementation Guide

Guidelines for Students

Before starting the first activity set, you may want to review the following “ground rules” with students. You might also post the rules in the classroom.

- All students in a group should agree on each answer before it is written down. If there is a disagreement within the group, discuss it with one another.
- You can ask the teacher a question only if everyone in the group has the same question.
- If you finish early, work together to write problems of your own that are similar to the ones on the student activity sheet.
- Leave the station exactly as you found it. All materials should be in the same place and in the same condition as when you arrived.

Debriefing the Activities

After all groups have rotated through all stations, bring students together for a brief class discussion. At this time, you might have the groups’ spokespersons pose any questions they had about the activities. Before responding, ask if students in other groups encountered the same difficulty or if they have a response to the question. The class discussion is also a good time to draw out the essential ideas of the activities. The questions that are provided in the teacher’s notes for each activity set can serve as a guide to initiating this type of discussion.

You may want to collect the student activity sheets before beginning the class discussion. However, it can be beneficial to collect the sheets afterward so that students can refer to them during the discussion. This also gives students a chance to revisit and refine their work based on the debriefing session.

Introduction

Materials Lists

Composing Materials List

Class Sets

- sample of a former student's writing that includes few or no details
- sample of a former student's writing with text that needs to be rearranged for clarity
- sample of a former student's writing that includes too many details or unrelated information
- sample of a former student's writing that includes text that needs to be replaced for clarity

(Note: Remove student names from writing samples before duplicating.)

Station Sets

- four sets of teacher-assigned topics to use in prewriting activities (different topics for each station)
- highlighters (one per student)
- opinion piece from a newspaper or online news source
- Internet-connected computers (one for each student at this station) with several Web sites bookmarked for students to review
- assorted reference materials (include at least one each of the following: book; encyclopedia volume; magazine, newspaper, or journal article; video or film; printout of Web site home page) for two stations
- 2–3 short samples of each student's own writing from past assignments

Ongoing Use

- pens or pencils
- notebook paper
- drawing paper

Composing

Set 1: Prewriting

Instruction

Goal: To discuss the importance of writing and identify the writing process

IRA/NCTE Standard 5

Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

McREL Content Standard, Grades 6–8

Writing

Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Student Activities Overview and Answer Key

Station 1

Students brainstorm a list of at least 30 ideas related to a topic.

Answers: Answers will vary depending upon the topic. Accept any reasonable responses.

Station 2

Students use a mind map to organize ideas around a main topic.

Answers: Answers will vary depending upon the topic. Accept any reasonable responses.

Station 3

Students use freewriting to generate ideas about a main topic.

Answers: Answers will vary upon the topic. Accept any reasonable responses.

Station 4

Students answer questions designed to identify the intended audience and purpose for an assigned topic.

Answers: Answers will vary depending upon the writing samples provided. Accept any reasonable responses.

Materials List/Set Up

- Station 1** teacher-assigned topic for brainstorming, two sheets of notebook paper for each student

- Station 2** teacher-assigned topic for clustering, one sheet of drawing paper for each student

- Station 3** teacher-assigned topic for freewriting, one sheet of notebook paper, and one highlighter for each student

- Station 4** teacher-assigned writing topic

Discussion Guide

To support students in reflecting on the activities and to gather some formative information about student learning, use the following prompts to facilitate a class discussion to “debrief” the station activities.

Prompts/Questions

1. Discuss why the length of a brainstorming list can be important when you prewrite.
2. Compare and contrast using a mind map with making a brainstorming list.
3. Explain why you need to highlight ideas after you freewrite.
4. Analyze how knowing your audience and purpose affects what you write.

Think, Pair, Share

Have students jot down their own responses to questions, then discuss with a partner (who was not in their station group), and then discuss as a whole class.

Suggested Appropriate Responses

1. Short brainstorming lists tend to include just the obvious ideas. Longer lists encourage more creative thinking.
2. Mind mapping encourages you to start thinking right away in terms of subtopics and supporting information. In brainstorming, subtopics and supporting information are not organized in any particular way until after the list is completed.
3. When you freewrite, you are supposed to put down anything that comes to mind without doing any editing. Highlighting helps you begin to see ways you can organize your ideas.
4. When you think your only reading audience is a teacher and your purpose for writing is a grade, you will write just to please the teacher. However, when you write for other readers, you also need to take their skills and interests into account before you write.

Possible Misunderstandings/Mistakes

- Thinking there is just one effective strategy for prewriting
- Self-editing while freewriting
- Thinking that the teacher is their sole writing audience

Composing

Set 1: Prewriting

Station 1: Brainstorming

Your teacher will assign a topic to use to complete this station’s brainstorming activity. Use the topic, two sheets of writing paper, and this activity sheet to complete the station activity.

The writing process consists of several steps. Before you actually begin to write a story or essay, you need to spend some time planning what you will write about. This is called **prewriting**. One prewriting strategy is called **brainstorming**, which means creating a list of ideas about a topic.

1. On a separate sheet of paper, write a list of at least 30 ideas related to the assigned topic. Spend at least 10 minutes creating your list. Write down every idea you have, no matter how small or silly it seems.
2. Use another sheet of paper to organize your brainstorming ideas into categories that make sense to you.
3. Give each category a title. List each title below and write a sentence about it.

After you’ve written your sentences, discuss the process with your group. What strategies did you use to come up with 30 ideas? Compare and contrast the categories you created with the categories created by other members of your group.

Composing

Set 1: Prewriting

Station 2: Organizing Ideas

Your teacher will assign a topic to use to complete this station’s activity on organizing ideas. Use the topic, one sheet of drawing paper, and this activity sheet to complete the station activity.

The writing process consists of several steps. Before you actually begin to write a story or essay, you need to spend time planning what you will write about. This is called **prewriting**. Organizing your ideas is an important prewriting task. Mind maps or idea maps are one way to get organized.

1. Take one sheet of drawing paper. Write the assigned topic in the center of the paper and draw a circle around it.
2. Think of ideas related to this topic. These are called subtopics. Write each subtopic on the drawing paper. Circle each one and draw a line to link each subtopic to the main topic.
3. Think of ideas related to each subtopic. Write these ideas on the drawing paper, circle each one, and connect them to their subtopics.
4. Your mind map should look like a web. Which of the subtopics are most interesting to you? Write your answer below along with a sentence explaining why you chose these subtopics.

Exchange your mind map with another group member. Read that person’s map. Does it make sense to you? Do you have any questions or suggestions? Do you see ideas you’d like to add to your mind map? Discuss your thoughts with this group member.

Composing

Set 1: Prewriting

Station 3: Freewriting

Your teacher will assign a topic to use to complete this station's activity on freewriting. Use the topic, one sheet of notebook paper, and this activity sheet to complete the station activity.

Prewriting is an important first step in the writing process because it helps you think about what you want to write about. One prewriting strategy is called **freewriting**. This strategy is helpful because you need to think of a lot of ideas about your topic in a short period of time.

When you freewrite, you write for 10 minutes without stopping. Even if you run out of ideas, you need to keep writing—new ideas will come to you. Focus on ideas and do not worry about grammar or spelling.

1. Take one sheet of notebook paper. Write the assigned topic at the top of the paper.
2. Freewrite about the assigned topic for 10 minutes.
3. When 10 minutes have passed, read over what you have written. Use a highlighter to mark the most interesting or important ideas.

Share your highlighted ideas with your group. Listen carefully as your group members share what they highlighted. Many ideas may be the same, but there will also be ideas just one person highlighted. Discuss these different ideas as a group. How could they be used to write an interesting story or essay?

Composing**Set 1: Prewriting****Station 4: Audience and Purpose**

Use the topic assigned by your teacher to complete this station activity.

Identifying your reading audience and the purpose for the writing is an important prewriting task. Knowing this information can change what you write or how you write it. For example, when writing thank-you notes for birthday gifts, the note you write to your grandparents will probably be very different from the note you send to your best friend.

Answer the questions below and on the next page to identify the audience and purpose for the writing topic assigned by your teacher. When you are finished, exchange papers with another group member and read his or her answers. Although you are writing about the same topic, you may have answered several questions differently. Discuss these differences to understand how a writer's point of view affects his or her work.

Audience Questions	My Answers
1. Who will be reading this piece of writing? (List all possible readers.)	
2. What information do I want to share with my reader(s)?	
3. How will my audience use this information?	
4. What do my readers already think about the topic I am writing about?	

continued

NAME: _____

Composing

Set 1: Prewriting

Purpose Questions	My Answers
1. How much information do I need to share?	
2. What are the most important ideas to include?	
3. How will I organize my information?	
4. What tone or writing style do I need to use?	