

English for Young Minds

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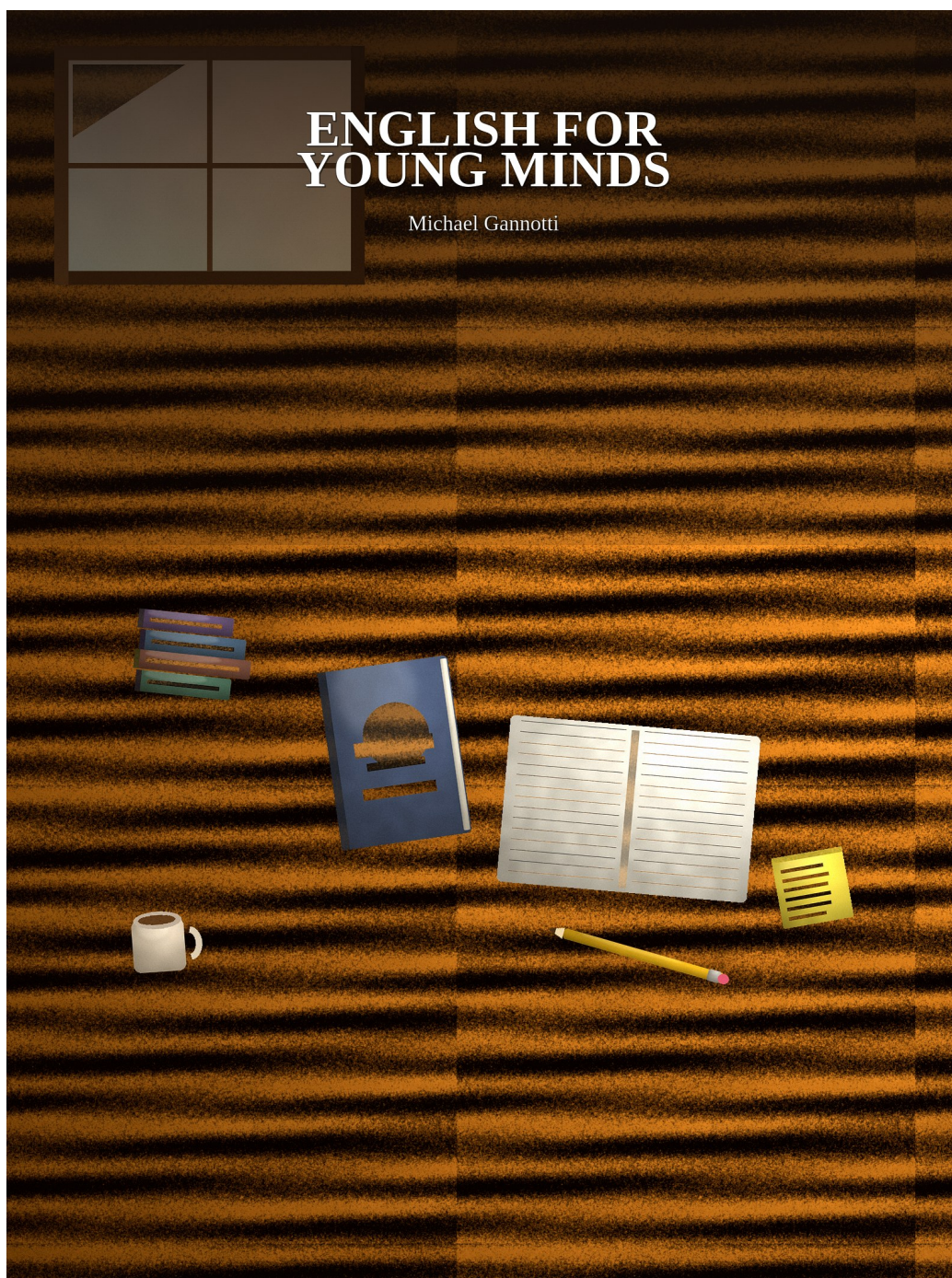


Figure 1: Cover

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This illustrated edition is the teaching-manual of 6 September 2026. Endnotes run in one series. Chapter-opening images are original still-lives, not portraits of persons or children. Documents still constrain the facts.

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Welcome

This book exists because the English hour at your table is the whole program. There is no literacy department down the hall and no reading specialist waiting after lunch. There is you, an eleven- to fourteen-year-old, and today's idea — a word stripped into parts, a rich page with one scaffold, a claim with evidence, a draft they revise for one named target. That is enough, if you know what to do with the hour.

I wrote this for a capable, busy, willing parent of an eleven- to fourteen-year-old. You may be teaching two ages at once, eleven-to-twelve and thirteen-to-fourteen, at one table. You may be fitting an English sit between a job, a younger sibling, and a grocery run. Many adults feel rusty on middle-grades English they last saw as a student, or never saw morphology named as word study. That feeling is common. It is not a verdict. This book will make you fluent enough in today's idea to hear a wrong turn and ask a good question — without taking the pencil or finishing the paragraph.

You do not need to be a reading specialist. You do need to hear a weekly spelling packet offered as the English program, an AR quiz offered as comprehension, three-cueing offered as word reading, a grammar pack offered as the writing program, “phonics is over” offered when decoding still collapses on multisyllabic words, and a blank page offered as “just write.” You need a session shape you can run on a Tuesday. You need a few sentences that actually help. That is the job. A path through middle-grades English — morphology, volume with scaffolds, academic vocabulary, text structure and strategies, literary and informational reading, writing to argue / explain / narrate, grammar in revision — is possible at a kitchen table. The path is not a personality trait and it is not a percentile. It is a small set of moves, practiced with you in the chair.

About 3.4 percent of U.S. students ages 5–17 were homeschooled in 2022–23 —

roughly 1.765 million children.¹ In grades 6–8 the cell is about 3.0 percent.² That figure is context, not a ranking. You are one of those tables. Many readers will be after-school or kitchen-table parents of enrolled adolescents; the moves still fit. Homeschooling is legal in all fifty states and D.C. The paperwork is not one load: Texas asks almost nothing; New York asks for a written plan and reports.³ There is no national diploma and no “Young Minds English I” credit.⁴ None of Texas, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, or New York requires a critical-thinking course. Reading, English, or language arts is the usual required or tested middle object.⁵ In the last federal tables that listed subjects taught at home, grades 6–8

¹Ellena Sempeles and Jiashan Cui, *Parent and Family Involvement in Education: 2023*, NCES 2024-113 (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, September 2024), Table A-6: 3.4 percent homeschooled, approximately 1,765,000 students, ages 5–17 with a K–12 grade equivalent, 2022–23; grades 6–8 cell 3.0 percent. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2024/2024113.pdf>. Access date for URLs in these notes: 6 September 2026. Latest federal count this book uses; not a 2026 national total. A neighboring 5.2 percent received instruction at home (homeschooled or full-time virtual) and is a different bucket.

²Ellena Sempeles and Jiashan Cui, *Parent and Family Involvement in Education: 2023*, NCES 2024-113 (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, September 2024), Table A-6: 3.4 percent homeschooled, approximately 1,765,000 students, ages 5–17 with a K–12 grade equivalent, 2022–23; grades 6–8 cell 3.0 percent. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2024/2024113.pdf>. Access date for URLs in these notes: 6 September 2026. Latest federal count this book uses; not a 2026 national total. A neighboring 5.2 percent received instruction at home (homeschooled or full-time virtual) and is a different bucket.

³Texas Education Agency, “Home Schooling,” <https://tea.texas.gov/families-and-students/finding-school-your-child/home-schooling>. New York State Education Department, “Home Instruction Questions and Answers,” <https://www.nysed.gov/nonpublic-schools/home-instruction-questions-and-answers>. Homeschooling is legal in all fifty states and D.C.; these two pages illustrate a light-process and a heavier-process pattern, not a national template. This book is not legal advice.

⁴Texas Education Agency, “Home Schooling”: the State of Texas does not award a diploma to students that are home schooled. New York State Education Department, “Home Instruction Questions and Answers”: a high school diploma may only be awarded to a student enrolled in a registered secondary school. North Carolina Division of Non-Public Education, “Home School Records Retention & Diplomas FAQs,” <https://www.doa.nc.gov/divisions/non-public-education/home-schools/faqs/records-retention-diplomas>: the State does not issue a diploma or a transcript; the home-school chief administrator does. “Young Minds English I” is not a credit in any opened statute.

⁵Texas Education Agency, “Alternative Schooling,” restating *Leeper*: bona fide instruction using a written curriculum of reading, spelling, grammar, math, and a course in good citizenship. North Carolina Division of Non-Public Education: annual nationally standardized test in English grammar, reading, spelling, and mathematics. Pennsylvania 24 P.S. § 13-1327.1: elementary and secondary subject lists include English. Virginia Department of Education, “Home Instruction”: the parent writes a list of subjects. New York 8 NYCRR 100.10: grades 7–8 require English (two

English rows were English or literature at 88 percent, spelling at 69 percent, and basic reading at 53 percent.⁶ The hour in front of you is the work.

This book is not a reprint. *English for Little Thinkers* owns ages 5–10 — phonics, early decodable honesty, talk → draw → label → sentence. One pointer, if you have a younger sibling at the table. Then we teach at eleven to fourteen. *English for Homeschooling* covers grades 1–12 — literature, composition toward college, Speech, NCAA, AP, CLEP. One pointer, if you need the later years later. Then we teach here. This book is not a sequel. *Critical Thinking for Young Minds* is the same house, a different subject — reasons, testimony, changing a mind. One pointer, then we teach this age’s English. Do not mash that book’s thinking moves with NAEP Grade 8 reading; the school average that year was 257, and about 34 percent of the Nation public sample scored below Basic — sobriety about scale difficulty, not a homeschool census.⁷

What a good English hour looks like

You sit down already knowing today’s idea. An object is on the table — a word stripped into parts, a glossary sticky, a news paragraph with a claim underlined, a dated notebook. The student warms up on a morphology family they already know, or rereads yesterday’s claim sentence. You model one move out loud, short. Then they try, and you wait. You ask one good question — not “did you get it?” but “what’s your claim — and which sentence supports it?” Three seconds feels long.

units) among other subjects. None of these five opened maps names a critical-thinking course. Reading, English, or language arts is the usual required or tested middle object. The parent reads their own statute.

⁶Jiashan Cui and Rachel Hanson, *Homeschooling in the United States: Results from the 2012 and 2016 Parent and Family Involvement Survey*, NCES 2020-001 (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), Table 9: among grades 6–8 homeschoolers that year, English or literature taught 88 percent; spelling 69 percent; basic reading 53 percent. Quote the middle English rows. Do not reuse the elementary basic-reading 92/83 or spelling 86/85 cells as this band. The 2023 First Look did not republish the subject-taught tables. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020001.pdf>.

⁷National Assessment of Educational Progress, Reading Grade 8, 2024: national average scale score 257; Nation (public) achievement-level split approximately 34 percent below Basic, 37 percent Basic, 25 percent Proficient, 4 percent Advanced. School population. Not a nationally representative homeschool census. NCES has never published a nationally representative homeschooled NAEP reading score. Use for sobriety about scale difficulty, not as a percentile target for a homeschooled adolescent. Do not mash with NAEP mathematics or with writing from another assessment. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>.

It is the work. Volume reading with purpose, or a discussion turn, or a writing-workshop attempt, sits in the middle. Practice mixes today with last week. The hour ends with an exit ticket or a short writing sample they do alone. You stop talking sooner than feels polite. The student talks, reads, and writes. You hold the key. That is the hour. *The English Hour* will teach it in full. Later chapters will not reinvent it.



Figure 2: A kitchen-table English hour

Students this age already read and write harder text than birthday myths allow. They do not become readers because a parent bought a points app, and they do not become writers because they filled a grammar pack. Volume, discussion, and making motivate. They do not replace morphology, strategy teaching, or composition.

What you will actually get

Each teaching chapter does eight jobs, always in the same order, so you are never hunting for the move.

You will learn why this week's idea is worth the struggle, understand it yourself with the wrong answers you should hear, and get a session you can run this week: exact wording, named try-its in and out of the home, and a talk box. Your student gets a section of their own. If it isn't clicking, three diagnostics and a next move. Tools, including AI, stay optional and adult-side. You get a plain checklist for "done enough," so you place by skill rather than by birthday.

The eight teaching chapters follow the work: morphology and word study; reading volume, rich text, and scaffolds; academic vocabulary in use; text structure and comprehension strategies; literary reading; informational reading and discussion turns; writing to argue, explain, and narrate; grammar and revision in service of meaning. Records and resources come last.

This week you can learn the session shape well enough to hear an AR quiz offered as comprehension. Today the student can strip a word, mark a claim with evidence, or write a paragraph with a plan.

What this book will not do

This book will not hand you 180 days of worksheets. A year of photocopies is not a teaching method, and I will not pretend it is. Coverage is a map. Depth is the hour.

It will not sell you a curriculum. Later, a short resources chapter names common programs by fit — parent load, style, how they place a student — so you can choose. Combining does not turn a brand into a course name. The transcript still says Reading, Language Arts, English, or Literature.

It will not treat a spelling packet as the English program, an AR quiz as comprehension, three-cueing as word reading, a grammar pack as the writing program, or "phonics is over at 11" as a finished story. It will not promise a score. There is no guaranteed percentile, no English diploma, and no certificate of fluency inside these pages. What this book can promise is a path: the ideas in order, at the skill the student actually has, until they can do the next one unaided.

It is not “Young Minds English I,” not a Science-of-Reading franchise, not an Accelerated Reader points kit, and not a sequel to *Autonomous AI and Education*. One English-hour AI box lives next; chapters point back.

It is not a culture-war pamphlet. Safe literacy objects only: a word stripped into parts, a glossary sticky, a news paragraph with a claim marked, a museum placard, a sports box score as a claim that needs evidence, a dated notebook. Live fights stay off this table. The student is a person, not a percentile. When this book speaks to them, it speaks with respect.

The promise

If you only remember one sentence, remember this: a path through middle-grades English is the promise. A diploma is not. A percentile is not.

The work is to take this student through English they can actually use — words taken apart and used again, rich text with honest scaffolds, strategies that land on the page, discussion that returns to the sentence, writing that claims something and then revises — without skipping word study because they are “already a reader,” and without parking them in a workbook that is too easy because a catalog printed a grade on the cover. Birthday is not placement.

Three things have to hold. You understand today’s idea well enough to hear a wrong turn. The student attempts first, on a named text, then in talk, then on the page. Any helper — including an AI tool — stays on your side of the table: a supplement you host and constrain, not a partner during the attempt, not a photo-to-key, not a write-the-student’s-essay, and not a secret friend.

You can do this. You do not have to know next year’s idea today. You have to know this week’s idea well enough to sit still while they struggle, then ask one good question. Start here. Read *How to Use This Book This Week*, then the five things, then *The English Hour*. After that, open the chapter that matches the skill in front of you. You will know more after one chapter than you know this morning. Your student will have something to try today. We can do this.

How to Use This Book This Week

Start at the skill in front of you, not on page one because a catalog, a birthday, or a well-meant relative said so.

This book is a handbook you open to this week's idea, not a novel you read cover to cover. The eight teaching chapters follow the work, not twelve thin grade labels. Records and resources come last. Age bands here are 11–12 and 13–14. They tell you the grain of the same ideas. They do not tell you where *this* student sits.

This book does not replace the program already on the shelf. If a literature curriculum, a library novel-and-discussion habit, a kitchen morphology hunt, or a writing workshop you already use is working, keep it. Use this book to hear a wrong turn, to run the hour, and to name the work a stranger can read. Combine honestly. The title is still Reading, Language Arts, English, or Literature. Never a brand. Never Young Minds English I.

Two ages at one table

You may be teaching an eleven-to-twelve-year-old and a thirteen-to-fourteen-year-old in the same sit. That is ordinary. The session shape in *The English Hour* still holds; the object on the table and the grain of the question change.

The younger student talks, strips, and writes. High-utility affixes, a connected page with one scaffold, a claim with evidence, a solid paragraph toward short multi-paragraph — that is enough. The older student can hold denser Latinate morphology, sustained volume, evaluate arguments, clearer multi-paragraph argue/explain, a light research note with two sources. You may run a thirty-minute morphology sit with one and a forty-five-minute writing workshop with the other. You need two first problems, not two personalities.

Pick the chapter by skill, not by birthday

Open the chapter you think is right. Skip to **What “done enough” looks like** at the end of the *previous* chapter, or to **If it isn’t clicking** in the one you opened. If the student can already do those checks unaided, you are too early. If the checks from two chapters back are still failing, drop back.

If they still guess from context or the first letter — if they can talk about the chapter and still fail to look through multisyllabic words — they are still in word study and volume-with-scaffolds work, whatever their age.⁸ A fourteen-year-old missing paragraph unity does eleven-to-twelve paragraph work without apology. Place by skill, not birthday. If they can already strip academic words, read rich text with meaning accountability, and write a short multi-paragraph piece with one revision pass, and they are still in a “grade 7 novel study” only because the cover says so, skip ahead. A publisher’s grade label is a scope, not a legal grade. Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts is a map, not a homeschool statute.⁹ Age-fourteen edges are labelled only.

How you use the parent half

Most of each teaching chapter is for you. Read it *before* the lesson, not over the student’s shoulder.

Why this matters tells you what this idea unlocks. **For the parent: understand it yourself** gives one everyday picture, one precise picture, and three to five wrong answers you should be able to hear. Sit with those.

⁸Michael L. Kamil et al., *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*, NCEE 2008-4027 (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, August 2008), Recommendation 5, strong evidence: intensive individualized interventions for struggling readers by trained specialists — the existence of the recommendation refuses “phonics is over at 11.” Access date for URLs in these notes: 6 September 2026. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/adlit_pg_082608.pdf. Placement follows skill, not birthday.

⁹Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (Washington, DC: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010): the Standards “define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach.” Foundational Skills (RF) stop at grade 5 on the map — that is not a licence to abandon decoding or morphology when multisyllabic reading still collapses. A map of typical U.S. public-school placement, not a homeschool statute. A “grade 7 novel study” is a publisher’s scope, not a legal grade.

How to teach it this week assumes the session shape from *The English Hour*. It will not rebuild the hour. It will give you this week's named try-its — at least one in the home and one outside it — the wording for *this* idea, and a talk box: an exact opening question, three to five follow-ups, how to wait, and what a stuck silence usually means. Age-band moves for 11–12 and 13–14 live inside that heading. Later chapters supply this week's questions. They do not reinvent the shape.

Practice that actually builds learning names the try-its with time, materials, safety, the fun, and the skill. The kitchen, the walk, the store, the library, and the sports sideline *are* the practice — and still land on word parts, the claim mark, and the written paragraph. Volume and discussion motivate; they do not replace morphological analysis, strategy teaching, or composition. **Tools, including AI** is optional, short, and for the adult. The rules live once in *The English Hour*. **What “done enough” looks like** is how you leave: unaided work, not a perfect Tuesday.

You do not have to read the whole chapter tonight. You do have to read the parent half of *this week's* idea before you sit down with the student.

“Lesson plans” in this book means this week's session shape. “Assessment” means a short skill check, an exit ticket, a short writing sample, a done-enough checklist, and optional publisher placement. Neither is a 180-day dump. Neither is a percentile battery. Neither is NAEP.

The five-minute parent warm-up

Five minutes. Student not yet in the chair. Phone face down.

1. Read today's idea until you can say it in one sentence.
2. Look at one object yourself — the word parts on scrap paper, the claim-marked paragraph, the outline. Ask, out loud, what would count as a check. Stay off any tool until you have looked.
3. Glance at the “wrong answers you should be able to hear.” Name the one you would have given at fourteen.
4. Write one sentence you will actually say. Not a speech. Example: “What parts do you see — and what does each part do?” Or: “What's your claim — and which sentence supports it?”
5. Close the book to the student page. You are ready.

If you are learning the idea *while* they are stuck, you will talk too much. Prepare

first. Then sit still.

How the student uses “For the student”

Every teaching chapter includes a short section written to the student, not about them. One or two pages. Warmer. Direct. What the idea is, a tiny worked example, two tries, an “explain it back” prompt, and one challenge. Hand it over after your short model, not instead of it. You stay in the room. The attempt is still theirs. You still hold the key.

In the home and outside it

Every teaching chapter names try-its at the table and outside it. Fridge morphology, news claim marks, library craft questions, and packaging claims motivate. They do not replace the word-study sit, the strategy mark, or the written paragraph. No live controversy in the examples.

When to skip ahead

Skip ahead when this chapter’s “done enough” checklist is already true *unaided*. Slow down when the same wrong turn repeats after a clear look. **If it isn’t clicking** will give you three likely causes and a next move. Hearing a wrong answer, then asking a better question, then naming a better move if needed, is teaching. Silence in the face of a claim-with-no-evidence habit is not kindness.

Point to *The English Hour* for session, talk-box, and AI. Point to records for transcript titles. Point to resources for fit, not rank.

For this week: pick the chapter by skill. Do the five-minute warm-up. Run the hour as *The English Hour* describes it. Let the student page be theirs. Stop talking sooner than you want to.

If You Only Remember Five Things

Keep this page. The chapters will add wording, objects, and this week's questions. They will not replace these.

1. Morphology and vocabulary belong in use. Strip a word into prefix–root–suffix and put it back into this week's sentence. Academic vocabulary lives in text-anchored cycles — definition plus context, multiple exposures, use in talk and writing — not a Friday list never seen in a book.¹⁰ A program that advertises only a spelling packet, or only a Latin crossword that never touches the history chapter, is selling a fragment.

2. Rich text with scaffolds — repair by skill. Daily connected reading needs a purpose and a meaning response. Scaffolds are honest: glossary stickies, partner read, oral rehearsal, a structure mark. Decodable repair is a contingency when decoding collapses on this week's page — not the default diet, and not “phonics is over at 11.”¹¹ Refuse three-cueing as word reading. Refuse permanent baby decodables as identity.

3. Strategies and discussion with evidence. Name what the paragraph is doing.

¹⁰Michael L. Kamil et al., *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*, NCEE 2008-4027 (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, August 2008), Recommendation 1, strong evidence: dedicate time to vocabulary; repeated exposures; definitional and contextual; independent word-learning strategies including morphology. Access date for URLs in these notes: 6 September 2026. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/adlit_pg_082608.pdf. Morphology is middle-grades word reading *and* vocabulary.

¹¹Kamil et al., Recommendation 4, moderate evidence (motivation and engagement tied to literacy); Recommendation 5, strong evidence (intensive intervention when needed). Decodable repair by skill is a contingency, then return toward rich text. What Works Clearinghouse, *Accelerated Reader* (August 2010, Adolescent Literacy): no discernible effects on fluency or comprehension for adolescent learners — school-labelled; do not launder quiz points into proven comprehension.

Model a comprehension move, guide it, then fade. Extended talk returns to the line: claim, then the sentence that supports it.¹² An AR quiz is not the comprehension program. Points are not meaning.

4. Writing is Model–Practice–Reflect — not a worksheet pack. Plan, draft, evaluate, revise, edit. Argue, explain, or narrate. Paragraph toward multi-paragraph. Grammar lives inside revision for a named target, not as a year of underlining parts of speech.¹³ A blank page with no plan is not kindness. “Just write” without a purpose is not the path.

5. A path through middle-grades English is the promise. AR points are not. A percentile is not. Place by skill, not birthday. If a stranger asks what you taught, the title is Reading, Language Arts, English, or Literature — not a brand, and not Young Minds English I.¹⁴ The dated notebook, the discussion check, and the short writing sample live inside that title. Everyday stakes. No live controversy on the table.

Volume reading, discussion, and making motivate. They do not replace morphological analysis, comprehension strategy teaching, or written composition. The library is a free English hour — start there when you need a book, not a kit.

The student talks, reads, and writes. You ask one good question and wait. You hold the key. If this week needs a compass, this is it. Five things. Then sit down and teach.

¹²Kamil et al., Recommendation 2, strong evidence: direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction; Recommendation 3, moderate evidence: extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation. Claim plus textual evidence is the bridge into writing.

¹³Steve Graham et al., *Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively*, NCEE 2017-4002 (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, November 2016), Recommendation 1, strong evidence: Model–Practice–Reflect for writing strategies (plan/goal-set, draft, evaluate, revise, edit). Recommendation 2, moderate evidence: integrate writing and reading. A grammar-worksheet pack alone is not that program. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/508_WWCPG_SecondaryWriting_122719.pdf.

¹⁴Ellena Sempeles and Jiashan Cui, *Parent and Family Involvement in Education: 2023*, NCES 2024-113; no national homeschool diploma. Transcript titles in this book are Reading, Language Arts, English, or Literature by content — never a brand, never “Young Minds English I.” Jiashan Cui and Rachel Hanson, *Homeschooling in the United States*, NCES 2020-001 (2019), Table 9 grades 6–8: English or literature 88 percent; spelling 69 percent; basic reading 53 percent that year. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2024/2024113.pdf>; <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020001.pdf>.

The English Hour

The hour has a shape. Learn it once. Later chapters will give you today's idea, today's try-it, and today's questions. They will not rebuild this hour. When a chapter says "run the session," it means this.

You do not need a school bell. You need a warm-up, a short word-study or strategy model, volume reading with purpose, a discussion turn or writing attempt, one good question then wait, and an unaided exit. Ages 11–12 may finish nearer thirty minutes; ages 13–14 may need fifty. The shape does not change.

Sit down having already done the five-minute parent warm-up from *How to Use This Book This Week*. You know today's idea well enough to hear an AR quiz offered as comprehension. The student talks, reads, and writes. You hold the key. Thirty to fifty minutes, most weekdays, plus one named try-it outside the home, is the right ambition.¹⁵ There is no national table of homeschool English minutes. Life of the habit, as a session rhythm, lives here: revisit yesterday's word family; mix last week's claim+evidence; stop.

¹⁵Session length in this chapter is pedagogical design for the kitchen table, not a national English-minutes study (none was found). Michael L. Kamil et al., *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*, NCEE 2008-4027 (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, August 2008); Steve Graham et al., *Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively*, NCEE 2017-4002 (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, November 2016). Access date for URLs in these notes: 6 September 2026. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/adlit_pg_082608.pdf; https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/508_WWCPG_SecondaryWriting_122719.pdf. North Carolina DNPE recommends (not law) five hours across all subjects; Pennsylvania statute names 180 days or whole-program hours. None of these is a national English block.

The daily menu (pick the pieces that fit)

One named move done well beats a rushed medley. Pick the pieces that fit.

Piece	Clock	What it is
Warm-up	3–5 min	Known morphology family, or reread yesterday's claim sentence
Word study / short model	5–10 min	Morphology, vocabulary, structure mark, or writing model — one focus
Volume reading with purpose	10–15 min	Rich text + scaffolds; one purpose question. Repair only if needed
Discussion or writing workshop	8–15 min	Alternate days: claim+evidence talk <i>or</i> plan/draft/revise
One good question, then wait	1–3 min	Clock time that feels longer; talk-box shape below
Exit ticket / short writing sample	3–5 min	2–4 items, one oral turn, or half-page with one starred claim

If a day only holds twenty-five minutes, keep word study *or* volume with purpose *or* the writing attempt. Federal guides name vocabulary, strategies, discussion, and Model–Practice–Reflect; they do not require a ninety-minute school block at your table.¹⁶

¹⁶Kamil et al., Recommendations 1–3; Graham et al., Recommendation 1. Dose honesty: pick the pieces that fit. Twenty-five minutes of one named move beats a rushed medley.

1. Warm-up

Three to five minutes. Known morphology family, or a reread of yesterday's claim sentence. Already-right material. This is retrieval, not a test of character.

Say: "We're going to start with things you already know."

Ages 11–12: strip a high-utility word from this week, or reread one claim sentence. Ages 13–14: a denser Latinate cousin, or one oral claim+evidence turn. Keep this short. The warm-up is not the lesson.

2. Word study sit or short model

Five to ten minutes. One focus per day: morphology / vocabulary *or* a text-structure mark *or* a writing-strategy model. One worked example, think-aloud, page visible. Then you stop.

Say: "I'm going to show this one short. Then you'll try." "Watch. *Un-predict-able*. *Un-* means not. *Predict* is the root. *-able* means can be."

On the second pass, leave a hole. When the idea is new, show one incorrect example — a spelling packet as the whole program, three-cueing, a blank page with no plan — and ask what went wrong. If you are still talking at minute eleven, close the model.

3. Volume reading with purpose

Ten to fifteen minutes. Rich connected text. One purpose question before they start: "Mark the claim," or "Who wanted what," or "What job is this paragraph doing?" Scaffolds when needed: sticky glossary of three to five load-bearing words; adult model of a hard paragraph then learner rereads; partner read; oral rehearsal before writing.¹⁷

Decodable repair sits here only when placement shows they cannot accurately decode this week's rich text even with scaffolds, or multisyllabic decoding collapses,

¹⁷Kamil et al., Recommendation 4, moderate evidence: motivation and engagement tied to literacy learning; Recommendation 5, strong evidence: intensive intervention when home moves are not enough. Scaffolds listed here are pedagogical design for the kitchen table. Decodable repair by skill is a contingency, then return toward rich text.

or guessing-from-context is the only strategy. Short planned block; immediate return toward rich text. Not years of baby decodables. Not “phonics is over.”

Say: “You’ll read this stretch. Your job is [purpose]. One scaffold if it gets hard: [sticky / partner / mark structure].”

4. Discussion turn or writing attempt

Eight to fifteen minutes. Alternate days so both strands live.

Discussion grain: Prepare one stimulating question. Claim (wait). Evidence — point to the text. Extend: “What would count against that?” Optional write: a paragraph seed.¹⁸ One speaker at a time. Do not stack five questions.

Writing-workshop grain: Purpose and audience. Short model. Student attempt — plan then draft; you do not hover-solve. Reflect/revise for one named target. Argue, explain, or narrate. Paragraph toward multi-paragraph by band.¹⁹

Say: “This one is yours. I’ll be quiet.” Then be quiet. If they stall: ask, wait, hint, then model — not the reverse. Hint: “Point to the sentence that supports that.” Keep your hands off their pencil. Do not finish the paragraph.

5. One good question, then wait

One to three minutes of clock time that feels longer. The talk around it can run using the talk-box shape below. Not “did you get it?”

An authentic question is one for which you have not already written the answer. “What is the vocabulary quiz word?” is recitation. Say: “What parts do you see — and what does each part do?” Or: “What’s your claim — and which sentence supports it?”

Then wait. A slow three after you ask. A slow three again after they stop. Robert Stahl called that silence *think-time*; that label is classroom-origin, not a literacy

¹⁸Kamil et al., Recommendation 3, moderate evidence: extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation — stimulating questions, follow-ups, discussion format.

¹⁹Graham et al., Recommendation 1, strong evidence: Model–Practice–Reflect (plan/goal-set, draft, evaluate, revise, edit). Recommendation 2, moderate evidence: integrate writing and reading. Workshop grain here is pedagogical design, not a franchise.

RCT. About three seconds is a convention, not a sacrament.²⁰ Mary Budd Rowe found the same pause in elementary science class — science class, not a reading trial.²¹ If they are mid-reason, do not cut them off. If the silence is hard, look at the page or the draft, not at the student. One question. Maybe a follow-up. Then stop.

6. Exit ticket or short writing sample

Three to five minutes. Two to four items, or one oral discussion turn, or a half-page with one starred claim. One of them yesterday's skill. Book closed. No hints. No chatbot. Say: "These few are yours. I won't help. That's the point." Done-enough is "right, or wrong-with-a-reason we can use tomorrow," not a percentage. Praise a clear strip of a word, a sentence pointed to as evidence, or a mind changed after a reread — not speed or points. If a wrong answer keeps coming, hear it, ask a better question, then name a better move if needed. Leaving a claim-with-no-evidence habit uncorrected is not kindness.

If the hour goes sideways

Use this as a debug, not a verdict.

- Spelling list as the English program → attach one word family to today's page.
- AR quiz offered as comprehension → ask for the sentence that supports the claim.
- Guesses from first letter or picture → point back at print and morphology.
- Multisyllabic decoding collapses → short repair by skill; return to rich text.
- Waits for rescue → count three; sit on your hands.

²⁰Robert J. Stahl, "Using 'Think-Time' and 'Wait-Time' Skillfully in the Classroom," ERIC Digest ED370885 (1994), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED370885.pdf>: eight categories of classroom silence; about three seconds as a convention. Classroom-origin. Not a finding that wait-time teaches reading, and not a homeschool randomized trial.

²¹Mary Budd Rowe, "Wait-Time and Rewards as Instructional Variables: Their Influence on Language, Logic, and Fate Control," NARST paper, ERIC ED061103 (1972), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED061103.pdf>: elementary science classes. Rowe is science class. This book does not cite Rowe 1972 as a literacy randomized trial or mash Rowe and Stahl as a reading RCT.

- Session is only worksheets → one word on scrap; one claim mark; one paragraph with a plan.
- Blank page with no plan → purpose first; three-bullet plan; then draft.
- Parent finishes the paragraph → put the pencil back; let them strip, mark, and write.²²

Revisit yesterday. Mix last week. Stop. That is the habit — not a diploma.

The talk-box shape, once

Later chapters will fill this week's opening. They will not reprint this shape.

Opening question. Authentic. About word parts and what each does, what to read and one scaffold, word meaning in this sentence, what job this paragraph is doing, who wanted what and how you know from the text, claim and supporting sentence, purpose and plan for writing, or revision target and why. No answer you have already written. Not “did you have fun” and not “what is the vocabulary quiz word.” Locked openings live in the teaching chapters.

Three to five follow-ups. Pick; you do not need all five every Tuesday. Meaning. Representation (strip the word / mark the structure / point to the sentence / underline the claim). Type or evidence. Check: Does that match the parts or the paragraph? Mind-change: You may change your mind.

How to wait. After you ask, a slow three. After they stop, wait again. If they are mid-reason, do not cut them off. Look at the page, the word parts, or the draft, not at the student, if the silence is hard.

What a stuck silence usually means. The question was vague. Wait-time was zero. They are hunting a picture cue or a first-letter grab. They offered a claim with no textual support. They think writing means fill a blank page with no plan, or revision means neat handwriting. Pose, wait, and point back at the print.

The in-home try-it shape, once

Later chapters will fill named types. They will not reprint this spine.

²²Hearing a wrong answer, then asking a better question, then naming a better move if needed, is teaching. Silence in the face of a claim-with-no-evidence habit is not kindness. “Never correct the student” is not this book's rule.

Time. A short sit, then stop. Ten minutes at the fridge. Fifteen with a news paragraph.

Materials. Fridge or package print, a news paragraph, a sibling for teach-back, a dated notebook, sticky notes. You do not need a kit.

Safety. Ordinary food hygiene. Tone: curious, not courtroom.

The fun / the skill. Finding *reheat*, *unopened*, *recyclable*. Marking a claim. Sibling teach-back. Steal-the-structure. One-target revision. Glossary stickies. Safe-stake argument. Errand narrative. Morphology in use; claim+evidence; paragraph with a plan.

Types: fridge/package morphology; news claim mark; sibling teach-back; steal-the-structure; one-target revision; glossary stickies; safe-stake argument; errand narrative. A package claim is print to evaluate — not a nutrition sermon.

The out-of-home try-it shape, once

“Outside” means the library, the museum, the store, the transit map, the sports sideline, the community newsletter. Later chapters fill named types; they will not reprint this spine.

Types: library craft question after a chapter; museum placard claim; store packaging claim versus evidence; transit or map brochure explain; sports sideline stats as a claim that needs more evidence; community newsletter structure. **Safety, once.** Roads, aisle courtesy. No tasting unknown things. No shoplifting a “test.” No lecture to a stranger’s adolescent. No public quiz of a cashier. No photographing strangers. A museum placard is a claim — not a culture-war syllabus. Sports stats are literacy objects.

The library is a free English hour. About 61 percent of grades 6–8 homeschool households used the library as a source of curriculum and books in the last federal tables that asked.²³ Start with a \$0 novel plus discussion plus short essay when

²³Jiashan Cui and Rachel Hanson, *Homeschooling in the United States: Results from the 2012 and 2016 Parent and Family Involvement Survey*, NCES 2020-001 (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), Table 6: 61 percent of grades 6–8 homeschool households used the library as a source of curriculum and books in 2016. The 2023 First Look did not republish that table. Ellena Semples and Jiashan Cui, *Parent and Family Involvement in Education: 2023*, NCES 2024-113, Table A-5: 53 percent of the Homeschool-total row visited a library in the past

you need a book.

This week, said plainly

One focus skill. Four or five English hours. Mixed review of last week inside every hour. One in-home try-it and one out-of-home try-it. Friday: look at exit tickets or the short writing sample; pick one diagnostic wrong answer or weak claim; decide whether next week repeats, narrows, or moves on. That is the honest answer to “lesson plans,” not 180 days written in advance.

A short skill check is three objects, not a battery: an exit ticket; one diagnostic wrong answer or short writing sample; a done-enough checklist by skill. Optional fourth: a publisher placement after a gap. Not NAEP. Not a percentile.

The AI rules, once

Later chapters will point here in one sentence. They will not reprint this box. The student talks to the parent. The parent may use a tool. The student does not sit alone with an open chat as the only partner. The English is on the table: word parts, a page, a claim mark, a draft. The student attempts first. The parent holds the key.

Ages 11–12 (COPPA under-13): parent holds the account. Scripts and parent–student talk. Not live open chat as the student’s partner. You may generate a four-line SCRIPT for after the attempt, and you may ask a tool to explain a named page to you. No student-facing open chat. No student account.

Ages 13–14 (COPPA off; still parent in the room): parent co-holds the account. Turning 13 is not a licence. The student may sit next to you while you use a tool. They may hear revision questions after they have drafted. They may not have an unsupervised companion account as the only partner. They may not be asked to “prompt the coach until it writes the paragraph.” Unaided first. SCRIPT after the try. Essay feedback **after** a try.

You may, on your account, after the student has tried:

month — a visit, not a curriculum-source percent.

- Explain this idea *to you* from a named lesson (title, page, or today's object: word parts, claim+evidence, outline→draft→revise, vocabulary in context). You still have to hear a wrong turn yourself.
- Extra isomorphic practice with the answer key held by you. The student never sees the key. Do not photograph tonight's worksheet to generate "practice."
- A labelled SCRIPT after the try — spoken lines for *you*, not a paragraph for the student to copy.
- Revision questions after a draft — named moves, **not a rewrite**. Essay feedback **after** a try.
- A hint after an attempt — a question or named idea, not the finished paragraph.
- Diagnose work already produced. You hear the diagnosis and decide. Crop to the paper. Do not upload the student's face.

You may not:

- Paste the worksheet and ask the tool to complete it.
- Ask the tool to **write the student's essay**, "fix this to an A," or produce a full rewrite that becomes their work.
- Photo-to-key. Point a camera at a packet or rubric so a filled key pops up. Photo-to-answer is the ban.
- Park an unsupervised chatbot as the student's only partner during the attempt — not at 11, not at 12, not at 14. No "writing friend" account.
- Detector-grade a student's essay and treat the number as honesty.
- Invent research or trust a fluent citation without opening the source.
- Print a certificate of fluency.
- Hand the student an agent (Hermes Agent, Grok Bot, or any cloud-computer worker) as a reading or writing partner.
- Use a voice-clone or deepfake toy as the "English teacher."
- Rewrite-on-demand of the reading passage so the student does not comprehend it.

In a high-school math trial (Bastani and colleagues), an unguarded chatbot made practice look better and left students worse on the test

with the window closed.²⁴ This is a useful study, not a promise that every home will see the same result. That is not an 11–14 literacy RCT — OFF-AGE for English; one cautionary mechanism sentence. The model may prepare the adult and the next prompt; it may not do the student’s reading, writing, or research. Writing is the easy subject to outsource — a language model’s native output is prose.

Federal adolescent-literacy and secondary-writing guides name vocabulary, strategies, discussion, and Model–Practice–Reflect. They do not name a chatbot as the English teacher.²⁵ Detectors mislabelled more than half of some human essays as machine-written.²⁶ Language models invent sources.²⁷ If you asked a tool for a paper, open the IES guide. Teach the student the same habit: open the source.

Names, in ordinary language. Hermes 4 is a model; Hermes Agent is an agent. Grok is a chat assistant; Grok Bot is a cloud-computer agent. Game artist makes pictures. None is an 11–14 English class. There is no Grok Bot education SKU. Agents are not chatbots. COPPA covers children under 13; ages 11–12 are under 13; the 22 April 2026 compliance date has passed.²⁸ Keep accounts, logs, and keys on the parent

²⁴Hamsa Bastani, Osbert Bastani, Alp Sungu, Haosen Ge, Özge Kabakcı, and Rei Mariman, “Generative AI without guardrails can harm learning: Evidence from high school mathematics,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 122, no. 26 (2025): e2422633122. Field experiment, nearly 1,000 Turkish high-school math students, grades 9–11: a ChatGPT-like tool raised assisted practice 48 percent relative to control, then cut unaided exam grades 17 percent; a guarded tutor that withheld the answer raised practice 127 percent and left the unaided exam about the same as control. This is a high-school math trial, not an 11–14 literacy trial. OFF-AGE for English. One cautionary mechanism sentence. The transferable caution is the crutch. The paper notes objective math scoring is “unavailable in creative subjects such as writing.”

²⁵Search of Kamil et al., NCEE 2008-4027, and Graham et al., NCEE 2017-4002, for a recommendation to sit an adolescent with a generative chatbot as the English teacher: it is not there. They name vocabulary, comprehension strategies, discussion, and Model–Practice–Reflect writing.

²⁶Weixin Liang, Mert Yuksekgonul, Yining Mao, Eric Wu, and James Zou, “GPT detectors are biased against non-native English writers,” *Patterns* 4, no. 7 (2023): 100779: average false-positive rate on human TOEFL essays 61.22 percent.

²⁷William H. Walters and Esther Isabelle Wilder, “Fabrication and errors in the bibliographic citations generated by ChatGPT,” *Scientific Reports* 13 (2023): 14045: 55 percent of GPT-3.5 citations and 18 percent of GPT-4 citations were fabricated in that study.

²⁸Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 6501 *et seq.*; 16 C.F.R. Part 312. Federal Register 90 FR 16918 (22 April 2025): amended Rule effective 23 June 2025; general compliance date 22 April 2026. Bright line: children under 13. Keep accounts on the parent side.

side.

Not a secret friend. A tool that talks in the first person is still a tool. It does not get a bedroom, a private channel, or a promise to keep secrets from the parent. You can teach this entire book with no AI. The hour still has the same shape.

A Tuesday, said plainly

Here is an illustration, not a reported family. A parent has spent five minutes looking at *un-predict-able* and a short informational paragraph. The student warms up by stripping *recyclable*. The parent shows the parts, uses the word in the sentence, then puts the pencil down. The student tries a cousin word. The parent asks, “What parts do you see — and what does each part do?” and waits. Volume with purpose: “mark the claim.” Discussion: “What’s your claim — and which sentence supports it?” Exit: “These two are yours. I won’t help.” On a thirteen-to-fourteen day the same shape holds, with a denser Latinate word and a multi-paragraph draft for one evidence target.

You can run that hour. You need today’s idea, a sentence you refuse to finish, and willingness to stop. Later chapters will say: run the session as in *The English Hour*

Chapter 1 — Morphology and word study

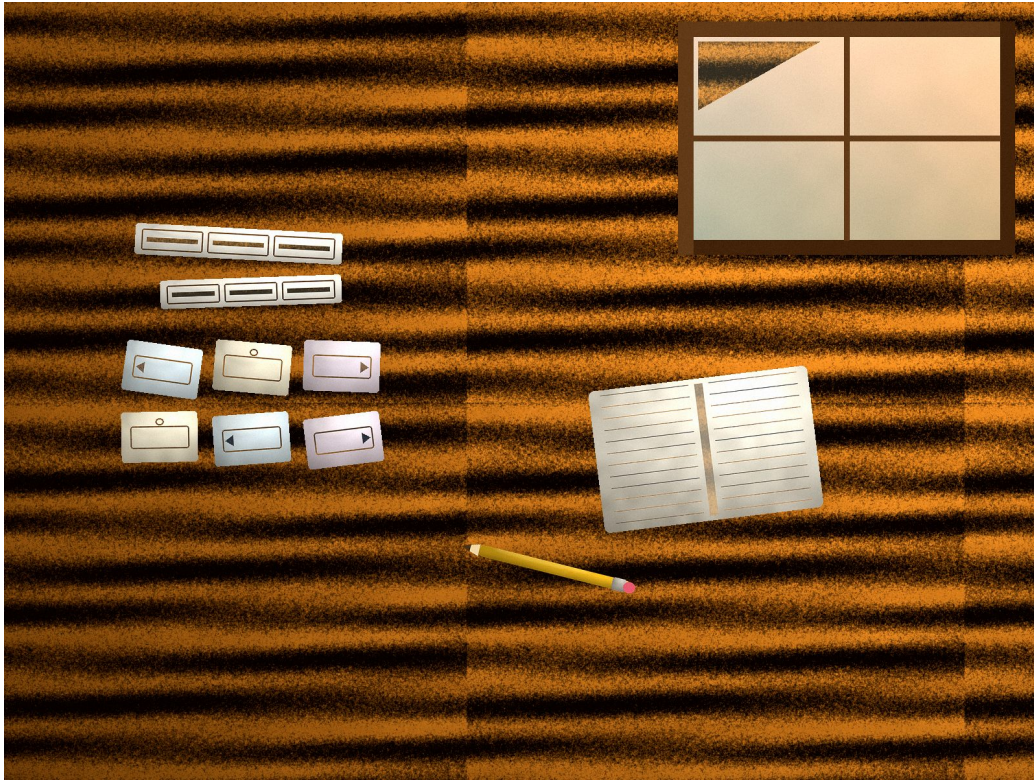


Figure 3: Word parts stripped on scrap paper beside an open informational page — still-life, no people, no logos.

Why this matters

Middle-grades English is full of long words. Many of them are built from parts that already carry meaning. When your eleven- to fourteen-year-old can see those parts and say what each one does, two hard jobs get easier at once: reading the word aloud with accuracy, and holding a working meaning while the sentence keeps going.

That is morphology. Prefix, root, suffix. Not a Latin hobby for Saturdays. Not a spelling packet that never returns to the history chapter. Word study attached to this week's pages.

A twelve-year-old who meets *unpredictable* in a science paragraph can freeze, guess from the first letter, or strip *un-* / *predict* / *-able* and check the sentence. The third move is teachable. It is also the move that keeps showing up in adolescent vocabulary research: word-learning strategies that include morphology sit inside the strong recommendation for explicit vocabulary work.²⁹ Bound Latin roots taught with academic words help secondary learners — especially when the roots ride with real text, not a disconnected root list.³⁰ This is a useful line of study, not a promise that every home will see the same result. Then teach.

You do not need to be a reading specialist to start. You need tonight's page, a pencil, and the habit of asking one clear question, then waiting. The struggle is worth it because every new academic word is no longer a one-off memorization chore. It becomes a family. *Predict, prediction, unpredictable. Innovate, novelty, renovate.* That generativity is what middle grades need when textbooks and articles dump Latinate vocabulary by the paragraph.

²⁹Michael L. Kamil et al., *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*, NCEE 2008-4027 (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, August 2008), Recommendation 1, strong evidence: provide explicit vocabulary instruction; dedicate time; repeated exposures; definitional and contextual information; independent word-learning strategies including morphology. Access date for URLs in these notes: 6 September 2026. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/adlit_pg_082608.pdf. Morphology is middle-grades word reading *and* vocabulary.

³⁰Amy C. Crosson and Debra Moore, "When to Take Up Roots: The Effects of Morphology Instruction for Middle School and High School English Learners," *Reading Psychology* 38, no. 3 (2017); ERIC ED598548 PDF opened 6 September 2026, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED598548.pdf>. Bound Latin roots instruction with academic words for English learners in grades 6–8 / 9–10 / 11–12 (n = 82): positive effects on academic word learning and morphological problem-solving, largest for the oldest band. Useful on-age morphology evidence, not a promise every kitchen will see the same result.

If you came from *English for Little Thinkers*, you already practiced friendly affixes with younger children. This book does not reprint that bank. Here the same idea grows into generative academic vocabulary for ages 11–14. If you came from a broad grades 1–12 English manual, one pointer is enough: this chapter owns middle-grades word study, not a high-school literature survey.

This chapter opens the English path for this age band. Later chapters will add volume with scaffolds, academic vocabulary cycles, text structure, literary and informational reading, and writing. Start here with parts. Meaning rides on parts. Volume without word study leaves long words opaque. Word study without return to the page becomes a crossword. Keep them together. A parent who felt rusty on word parts should finish this chapter able to hear a spelling packet offered as the whole program, hear a first-letter grab offered as reading, and ask for the parts and the sentence instead. Specific encouragement beats vague cheer: this week you can learn to strip three chapter words; today your student can strip one and use a cousin.

For the parent: understand it yourself

Everyday picture. Think of a Lego build. You need not invent every brick. You snap known pieces. *Unopened* on a fridge package is *un-* + *open* + *-ed*. Your child already knows *open*. The job is to notice the snaps and say what each snap does in that word, then check the sentence on the carton. Kitchen print is not a gimmick. It is practice with parts that show up again in the science chapter.

Precise picture. Morphology is the study of meaningful word parts. A *prefix* attaches at the front (*re-*, *un-*, *dis-*). A *suffix* attaches at the end (*-tion*, *-able*, *-ous*). A *root* carries the core meaning. Some roots stand alone in English (*predict*). Some are *bound* — they never stand alone as English words, but they still carry meaning (*nov* in *innovative*, “new”). Bound roots are middle-grades native ground. Teaching only friendly prefixes without roots leaves a reader stranded on *innovate*, *advocate*, *construct*.

Word study at this age is word reading *and* vocabulary. Stripping parts helps the reader decode a multisyllabic word instead of guessing. Naming what the parts do helps the reader build a working meaning. Then the sentence confirms or corrects. That loop — parts, meaning, sentence — is the lesson. A list memorized on Monday and forgotten by Wednesday is not the lesson.

A majority of challenging words in secondary texts are morphologically complex and Latinate. That is why this age band owns morphology as a daily sit, not an enrichment elective. Greek and Latin affixes and roots appear on the common standards map for grades 6–8 language work.³¹ Treat that map as a map of typical school placement, not as a statute that binds your kitchen. Use it to notice what “on-age” often looks like: word parts in service of reading and writing, not a classics drill disconnected from the chapter.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

1. **“I just memorize it.”** Usually means the word never returned in reading or writing. Choose words from this week’s pages. Reuse them in talk and in a short written sentence. Memory without use evaporates.
2. **“Re- always means again”** on a word where it does not (or where the learner invents a forced story). Means the family was taught as a slogan, not checked against the sentence. Ask: “What does *re-* seem to do *here*?” Allow a change of mind. Slogans that fight the sentence lose.
3. **First-letter grab** (“It starts with *p*, so maybe *people*?”) while ignoring the rest of the print. That is guessing instead of reading. Point back to the letters. Strip the parts. Do not reward the first-letter scoop as cleverness. Meaning checking *after* decoding is wise. Guessing *instead of* reading the word is not.³²
4. **Morphology as a crossword hobby** — parts named, no return to the sentence, no cousin used about today’s text. Fun without transfer. Always end with meaning in context and one use. The fridge hunt is practice, not a replacement for the history paragraph.
5. **“We already did phonics in elementary, so we’re done.”** Multisyllabic academic words still collapse for many eleven- to fourteen-year-olds. Morphology continues the print–sound path. If decoding still collapses even

³¹National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy* (2010), Language strand grades 6–8 (Greek or Latin affixes and roots as clues to meaning). A map of typical U.S. public-school placement, not a homeschool statute.

³²Print–sound and morphological pathways for word reading: meaning checking *after* decoding is comprehension monitoring; guessing from picture/first letter *instead of* reading the word is refused here as three-cueing-as-word-reading. Kamil et al., NCEE 2008-4027, Recommendations 1 and 5 (vocabulary strategies; intensive intervention when needed).

with scaffolds, Chapter 2’s repair contingency applies. “Phonics is over at 11” is not this book’s rule.³³

Five-minute parent warm-up before the lesson

Open tonight’s science or history page. Circle three multisyllabic words that carry the page (*transformation, unpredictable, renewable*). Strip each into parts on scrap paper. Write one plain line for each: what the parts seem to do. Notice one “sounds like” guess you might make yourself, and cross it out when the sentence corrects you. Say one word aloud in a complete sentence about the page so your mouth is ready to model. You are not preparing a lecture. You are preparing to hear your student and to model one strip if they stall.

Optional second minute: write one cousin you hope they might invent tomorrow (*predictable* beside *unpredictable*). Keep it in your pocket. Offer it only if they need a nudge after a real attempt.

How to teach it this week

Session shape (about 30–50 minutes total English hour; word-study sit 8–12 minutes most days — longer when a content text dumps specialized vocabulary)

1. **Warm-up (3–5 min).** Reread yesterday’s word family aloud. Or strip one known easy word for confidence (*reheat, unfinished*). Keep it brisk and successful.
2. **Short model (2–3 min).** You strip one word from today’s page while thinking aloud: “I see *un-*, then *predict*, then *-able*. *Un-* flips the meaning. *-able* means ‘able to be.’ In this sentence, the weather was hard to forecast — so *unpredictable* fits.”
3. **Student attempt (5–7 min).** Student strips the next one or two words. You ask the locked question. You wait.
4. **One good question, then wait.** Exact opening: “**What parts do you see — and what does each part do?**” Count a slow three after you ask.³⁴ Look

³³Kamil et al., NCEE 2008-4027, Recommendation 5, strong evidence: make available intensive and individualized interventions for struggling readers that can be provided by trained specialists. The existence of the recommendation refuses “phonics is over at 11.” Repair decoding and morphology by skill when multisyllabic reading still collapses.

³⁴Robert J. Stahl, “Using ‘Think-Time’ and ‘Wait-Time’ Skillfully in the Classroom,” ERIC

at the page, not at their face, if the silence is hard.

5. **Mixed practice (volume or short writing crumb).** Read the paragraph that holds the words. Or write one new sentence about the text using a cousin (*prediction*). Mouth, page, and pencil should all touch the word this week.
6. **Exit ticket (2–4 min).** Strip two words. Use one in a new sentence about today’s page. Or explain one word back to you in ten seconds.

A hypothetical week shape (labelled illustration, not a calendar mandate)

Focus skill: *un-* / *re-* / *dis-* plus two chapter words that use them.

- **Monday:** Warm-up known *un-* words. Model *unpredictable* from the science page. Student strips *reusable*. Volume read the section with two glossary stickies. Exit: strip *unopened* from a package photo or the real carton.
- **Tuesday:** Warm-up *re-*. Student strips *rebuild* and *reheat*. Discussion turn: “What does *unpredictable* do in yesterday’s sentence?” Wait. Short explain sentence using one target word.
- **Wednesday:** Mix *un-* and *re-*. Add *-able* on *recyclable*. Student writes one sentence that uses a cousin about the chapter. No long lecture.
- **Thursday:** Out-of-home or walk-sized transfer if you can — placard or library jacket — or a second fridge hunt. Friday diagnostic prep: notice one wrong *re-* slogan.
- **Friday:** Diagnostic wrong answer explained (see “If it isn’t clicking”). Done-enough checklist. Decide whether next week revisits the family or adds *-tion* nouns from the same chapter.

That is a lesson plan this book can defend: one focus, four or five English hours, one in-home and one out-of-home try-it, Friday check. It is not a 180-day worksheet dump.

Exact wording you can say

- “We’re taking words apart so we can put meanings back together.”
- “Show me the parts with your pencil. Then tell me what each part does.”
- “Check the sentence. You may change your mind.”
- “Where else have you seen this root this week?”
- “I’m not going to finish the strip for you. I’ll model one, then you do the

Digest ED370885 (1994), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED370885.pdf>: about three seconds as a convention; eight categories of silence. Classroom-origin. Not a finding that wait-time teaches morphology, and not a homeschool randomized trial.

next.”

- “First-letter guesses don’t count as reading the word. Eyes on all the parts.”
- “If the slogan and the sentence disagree, the sentence wins.”

First try-it for the student

Hand them one sentence from the page with a target word underlined. Ask the locked opening. After they answer, ask: “If we change the prefix, how does the meaning move?” Then: “Use a cousin of this word in a new sentence about this paragraph.” Keep the book open. Morphology without the sentence is half a lesson.

How to fade help

Day 1: you model one full strip and meaning check. Day 2: you start the strip; they finish. Day 3: they strip; you only ask the sentence check. Day 4–5: they strip, check, and invent a cousin use with almost no prompting. If they stall after a real attempt, model one think-aloud, then hand back a parallel word from the same family. Do not grab the pencil. Do not fill in the meaning at one second of silence. Rescue at one second teaches helplessness. Endless silence after a vague question teaches confusion. Clear question, real wait, then help.

When to stop talking

After a clear question. After they begin reasoning. After they offer a meaning — wait again before you correct, so they can hear their own sentence check. Correction belongs after the attempt, not instead of it. Name the better move if needed: “Look at the root again. Does *nov* still mean ‘new’ in *renovate*?” Then hand the next twin word back.

Age-band moves

11–12. High-utility affixes: *un-*, *re-*, *dis-*, *-tion*, *-able*, *-ous*. Introduce common bound roots only when they appear in this week’s informational text (*struct* in *structure* / *construct* / *infrastructure*). Build word families from shared pages. Content words that carry this week’s science or history chapter beat rare literary gems that never appear again. If a Romance-language home language is in play, notice cognates when they honestly help (*información* / *information*) — as a boost, not a separate course.

13–14. Denser Latinate roots and combining forms as they appear in real reading — not a disconnected classics drill. Morphological problem-solving on unfamiliar

academic words. Depth: multiple senses, careful spelling transfer, word choice in writing. Independent strategies: parts + context + a reference tool when stuck. Discipline jargon follows the same rule: importance to this week's text, not a giant list. Older students can often handle more root families in a week *if* the words return in reading and writing. Volume of roots without return is still a fake program.

Place by skill, not birthday. A fourteen-year-old who still freezes on *un-* families does the 11–12 work without apology. An eleven-year-old ready for *nov / voc / struct* families should not wait for a candle on a cake.

Micro-routine for a bound root (illustrative)

1. Pick one root tied to two or three words in this week's informational text.
2. Student circles the root in each word; states a working meaning; checks against glossary or sentence.
3. Generate one new derived form (even if imperfect) and use it in a sentence about the text.
4. Next day, encounter one of the words again in reading; require a ten-second morphology explanation.

Do not teach fifty roots in fifty days with no reading. Do not pretend every English word is transparently Latin. Do not skip decoding of the letter sequence while celebrating a root poster. Morphology joins print–sound repair and vocabulary; it does not replace either.

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home try-it — Fridge and package morphology hunt

- **Time:** 15–20 minutes.
- **Materials:** Fridge, pantry, or shipping box; sticky notes or scrap paper; pencil.
- **Safety:** Ordinary kitchen courtesy. No tasting unknown items. No climbing shelves. Wash hands after handling packages.
- **The fun:** Treasure hunt on real print you already own. Kids notice *reheat*, *unopened*, *recyclable*, *prewashed*, *discontinuous* as if the kitchen turned into a word lab.
- **The skill:** Strip high-utility affixes (and any obvious roots) in authentic packaging print; say what each part does; return meaning to the package

sentence or claim line.

How: Set a timer. Find five words with clear parts. For each: strip, explain, check against the package line. End by choosing one word and writing a cousin sentence about dinner or the errand (“We *reheated* leftover rice”). Photograph nothing that identifies a brand if you are saving samples — copy the word onto scrap paper. The skill is parts and meaning, not a brand scrapbook.

Variation for 13–14: Add one denser word from a shipping label or appliance manual (*disassembly, reconstruction, intermittent*). Same strip-and-check move. No sermon about the product. Print to analyze.

Out-of-home try-it — Museum or historic-site placard strip

- **Time:** 10–15 minutes on site (plus travel).
- **Materials:** One placard or wall text; phone note or pocket notebook; pencil.
- **Safety:** Stay with the family group. Do not block pathways. Do not touch exhibits. No photographing strangers. Follow site rules.
- **The fun:** The “serious” placard becomes a puzzle. One complex word, taken apart in public without making a scene.
- **The skill:** Transfer morphology to civic/informational print; parts → meaning → sentence on the placard.

How: Choose one multisyllabic academic word on a placard (*reconstruction, interdependent, colonization* — whatever is actually there). Ask the locked opening quietly. Strip on paper. Check the placard sentence. Optional: find a cousin word elsewhere in the exhibit. If no museum trip this week, a library display placard or a park interpretive sign works the same way.

Library mini-version (same skill, shorter trip): After choosing a nonfiction book, open to a glossary or a dense paragraph. Strip one word. Ask the locked opening. Wait. That still counts as out-of-home transfer.

Second in-home crumb — Sibling teach-back

- **Time:** 8–10 minutes.
- **Materials:** Today’s science or history page; scrap paper.
- **Safety:** Ordinary sibling courtesy. No forced public quiz of a reluctant younger child.
- **The fun:** Being the teacher for two minutes.

- **The skill:** Explain a stripped word and use it about the page — oral rehearsal of morphology + meaning.

Student teaches one word: parts, what each does, sentence from the book, cousin sentence. Listener asks one follow-up. Adult listens for whether the sentence check happened.

Talk box

Exact opening question: “What parts do you see — and what does each part do?”

Follow-ups (pick three to five across the week — one prompt per item is enough):

1. Meaning: “In this sentence, what does the whole word do?”
2. Representation: “Show me by stripping the word with your pencil.”
3. Type / family: “Where else have you seen this root or affix this week?”
4. Check: “Does that match the parts *and* the sentence?”
5. Revise: “You may change your mind. Try it another way.”

Extra prompts when useful (still one at a time): “If we change the prefix, how does the meaning move?” “Which words around it help?” “You can change your mind if a better meaning shows up.”

How to wait: After you ask, count a slow three (a classroom think-time habit — useful at the table). After they stop talking, wait again. If they are mid-reason, do not cut them off. Look at the word parts on the page if the silence is hard. Do not mash wait-time research into a literacy trial you are running at home. Use the pause because clear questions need air.

What a stuck silence usually means: The question was “what does it mean?” with no sentence in view; wait-time was zero; the word is outside today’s family; they are hunting a picture cue or a first-letter grab; they are guessing what you want; they think morphology is a game with no return to meaning. Your job is to pose, wait, and point back at the print — not to fill the silence with the right strip, and not to turn the table into a fight.

Blocked for a new move; mixed when ready

Blocked (early week): Same family only (*un-* / *re-* / *dis-* on known bases). Same text. You model, they copy the move on a twin word. Success should be frequent.

Mixed (later week): Two families in one exit ticket. One word from yesterday's science page, one from today's history paragraph. One strip without your starter. One cousin used in a claim sentence about the page. Mixing too early creates fake struggle. Mixing too late creates brittle learning. When strips are clean on one family, mix.

One incorrect example to diagnose

Incorrect shape: The English hour is only a weekly spelling packet — twenty unrelated words, written three times each, never seen again in a book.

What it usually means: Selection was safe or vendor-default; mouth, context, and writing use are missing; morphology never touched the chapter.

Better move: Three load-bearing words from this week's pages. Strip. Say. Use in a sentence about the text. Meet one of them again tomorrow in reading. Keep the spelling practice if you like — as a servant, not as the program. A packet can support English. A packet is not English.

Second incorrect shape to hear: Morphology as a separate “Latin class” that never opens the history chapter. Roots on a poster, zero transfer. Close the poster for a week. Open the chapter. Teach only the roots that appear. Return the poster later as a reference tool, not as the course.

What success sounds like this week (composite illustration)

A parent and an eleven-year-old sit with a weather chapter. The adult underlines *unpredictable*, models one strip, then asks the locked opening on *reusable* from a water-bottle label brought to the table. The student strips, checks the label sentence, and writes, “Our bottles are *reusable* after washing.” On Friday the adult offers *rebuild* where *re-* does not simply mean “again” in a forced story; the student revises after looking at the sentence. No points. No Latin poster. Parts, meaning, page.

A thirteen-year-old working in the denser band meets *infrastructure* in a local history article. They circle *struct*, connect *structure* and *construct*, and use *infrastructure* in an explain sentence about roads and bridges. The adult does not turn the hour into a lecture on every Latin root in the language. One family, used hard, beats twenty roots unused.

Connection to the rest of the book

Chapter 2 will ask what you will read and which scaffold you will use if it gets hard — including repair when decoding collapses. Chapter 3 will deepen academic vocabulary cycles (definitional + contextual + use). Morphology stays as a daily warm-up and as a word-learning strategy inside those chapters. Do not drop word study when volume season begins. Do not drop volume when word study feels clever. They serve each other.

Materials you actually need

You need this week's informational page or chapter, scrap paper, a pencil, and occasionally a package or placard. You do not need a morphology franchise to begin. A simple reference list of high-utility affixes on the fridge is enough for 11–12. For 13–14, a short root card for the week's family is enough. Library \$0 still wins: the words live in books you already borrow.

If a commercial vocabulary or spelling program is already on your shelf, keep it only if words return in reading and writing. Use Chapter 10 later for fit-not-rank notes. Today's rule is simpler: parts, meaning, page.

Spelling as morphology applied

When spelling is shaky on *prediction* or *recyclable*, teach the spelling from the parts you already stripped. That is morphology applied, not a separate subject that never meets English. Write the word once by parts, once in the sentence about the text, once from memory. Three honest reps beat twenty disconnected copy lines.

For the student

This week you practice taking words apart and putting meanings back together.

Hard words in science and history are often built from pieces. *Unpredictable* has *un-* (not), *predict* (say ahead), and *-able* (able to be). In a weather paragraph, that means “hard to say ahead of time.” You do not have to memorize every long word as a one-off blob. You can look for parts.

You are allowed to wait. You are allowed to change your mind when the sentence shows a better meaning. You are not supposed to guess from the first letter and

call it reading.

Tiny worked example

Word in the book: *recyclable*.

- Parts: *re-* + *cycle* + *-able*
- What each does: *re-* often means again; *cycle* is the round; *-able* means able to be.
- In the sentence on the bin: the bottle *can be put through the cycle again*.
- Cousin sentence about today's page: "Glass is often *recyclable* after you rinse it."

Second tiny example: *innovative*.

- Parts: *in-* + *nov* + *-ative* (your parent may help name *nov* as "new").
- Working meaning: bringing something new in.
- Check the sentence in the article. Adjust if needed.
- Cousin: *novelty* — "The *novelty* of the design surprised the class."

Try 1. Open your reading. Underline one long word. Ask yourself: "What parts do I see — and what does each part do?" Write the parts. Check the sentence. Change your mind if the sentence disagrees with your first guess.

Try 2. On a fridge package or a library book jacket, find *un-*, *re-*, or *-able*. Strip it. Tell someone at home what each part does. Use a cousin word in a new sentence about the package or the book.

Explain it back. Teach a sibling or a parent one word from today's page. You must strip it, say what each part does, and use it in a sentence about the page — not only define it. If they ask a follow-up, answer from the print.

Challenge. Find a bound root that hides inside two different words this week (*nov* in *innovative* and *novelty*, or *struct* in *structure* and *construct*). Explain how the root still helps even though it is not a standalone English word. Then use one of the words in a short written sentence about your reading.

You're done enough for this chapter's skill when you can strip a multisyllabic academic word, say what each part does in *this* sentence, and use a cousin about today's text. Perfect spelling of every cousin is not the gate. Clear parts-and-meaning is.

If it isn't clicking

Diagnostic 1 — Memorizes the list, blanks in reading.

Likely cause: no repeated exposure in connected text.

Next move: Retire the giant list for two weeks. Pick three words from the actual chapter. Meet each word on Monday in stripping, Tuesday in reading, Wednesday in a written sentence, Thursday in a cousin hunt. Near transfer first. Expect the word on the page before you expect it on a standardized vocabulary score.

Diagnostic 2 — Strips parts as a game, meaning never lands.

Likely cause: parts without sentence check.

Next move: Require the sentence every time. Script: "Parts first. Now point to the words around it that help. Now say the meaning in plain English." If they invent a clever story that fights the sentence, praise the attempt, then point to the print: "The sentence wins." Close the "root bingo" for a few days if it is crowding out meaning.

Diagnostic 3 — Multisyllabic decoding collapses; guessing from first letter or pictures.

Likely cause: print-sound path is shaky on long words; a look-and-guess habit may be in play.

Next move: Slow the strip. Finger under syllables. Say each part aloud. Refuse "look at the picture and guess" as the word-reading method. Meaning checking after reading the word is fine. Guessing instead of reading is not. If accuracy still collapses on this week's rich text even with glossary stickies and partner reading, use Chapter 2's short repair block on missing patterns — then return toward rich text. If home moves are not enough after honest tries, get a human tutor or specialist. That is not failure. Guidance for adolescent literacy includes intensive help for struggling readers for a reason. Parents are capable teachers; they are not automatically certified interventionists for every gap.

When to slow down: New family every day with no mastery. Confusion on what a prefix even is. Tears or shutdown when long words appear. Mixing three root families before one is clean.

When to go ahead: Clean strips on this week's family; cousin used about the text; transfer to a package or placard without the worksheet format; student begins to ask the locked question of themselves.

When to get a human tutor: Persistent multisyllabic decoding collapse; fluent-

sounding oral reading with almost no access to academic vocabulary; avoidance so strong that volume reading never starts. Seek skilled help. You can still do kitchen morphology while you arrange it.

Correct a wrong answer without crushing the attempt: “You noticed *re-*. Good eyes. In this word, check the root again — does ‘again’ still fit the sentence?” Hearing a wrong answer, asking a better question, and naming a better move is teaching. Silence in the face of a first-letter-grab habit is not kindness.

Tools, including AI

Keep this short. The English-hour AI box already holds the rules: for ages 11–12 the parent holds the account; for ages 13–14 the parent co-holds and stays in the room; unaided first; SCRIPT after the try; no photo-to-key; no write-the-student’s-essay; no unsupervised chatbot as the only partner during the attempt.

Allowed crumb after the student tried: On your account, ask a tool to explain *to you* how a named root works in two or three words from today’s page (*nov* in *innovative* / *novelty* / *renovate*). Use that explanation to prepare your next question or a four-line SCRIPT you will say — not a paragraph for them to copy as their work. Extra isomorphic practice is fine if you hold the answer key and the student never sees it.

Not allowed: Photograph the morphology worksheet for an answer key; ask the tool to strip the week’s list for the student during the attempt; park a chat window as their word-study partner; paste a machine-written “student explanation” into the notebook as theirs.

A pencil and this week’s page beat a fluent machine definition every time for learning. The model may prepare the adult. It may not do the student’s stripping.

What “done enough” looks like

Check by skill, not by birthday. A “grade 7 vocabulary unit” is a publisher’s scope, not a legal grade, and not a transcript line. Put the work under **Reading, Language Arts, or English**.³⁵ Never a brand name as the credit line.

³⁵Transcript titles in this book are Reading, Language Arts, English, or Literature by content — never a curriculum brand, never “Young Minds English I.” Ellena Sempeles and Jiashan Cui,

Done enough when the student can, most days this week:

1. Strip a multisyllabic academic word from this week's text into prefix / root / suffix (or the parts that are honestly there).
2. Say what each part does in *this* sentence — not only as a slogan.
3. Use a cousin word in a new sentence about today's text.
4. Change their mind when the sentence corrects a first guess.
5. Treat the spelling packet as a helper if you use one — not as the whole English hour.
6. Show the move once outside a worksheet format (package, placard, jacket, or sibling teach-back).

Not required to move on: Fifty roots memorized. A Latin course. Perfect spelling of every derived form. A points app score. A percentile. A diploma claim.

Placement note: If stripping is solid but volume reading with meaning is thin, keep light morphology warm-ups and shift the main load to Chapter 2. If stripping fails because the student cannot decode the letter sequence at all, repair decoding by skill while you keep morphology tied to meaning — do not replace English with permanent baby decodables as an identity. Code repair when needed; meaning always.

Revisit crumb: Next Tuesday, mix one word from this week's family into warm-up. Morphology is a habit inside the English hour, not a one-week festival. If Friday's checklist is mostly yes, move the main focus forward and keep a three-minute morphology warm-up. If Friday's checklist is mostly no, repeat the same family with new sentences from the same chapter before you add a new root. Mastery of a small set transfers cleanly. A parade of unmastered roots does not.

Keep the pencil moving.

Chapter 2 — Reading volume, rich text, and scaffolds



Figure 4: A library book with glossary sticky notes and a purpose slip — still-life, no people, no logos.

Why this matters

Middle-grades English needs miles of connected text. Short packets alone will not build the vocabulary, knowledge, or stamina an eleven- to fourteen-year-old needs for science pages, history excerpts, novels, and articles. Volume reading matters. Motivation and engagement are tied to literacy outcomes in adolescent guidance for a reason.³⁶

Volume without teaching is not enough. A child who “just reads a lot” with no purpose, no response, and no help on hard paragraphs may skim, guess, or quietly quit. A child who only reads baby-easy decodable books long after they can decode will not grow. A child whose comprehension program is a points quiz is practicing quiz-taking, not deep reading. This chapter refuses those traps.

What you want is daily connected reading of rich text the student can access with honest scaffolds, plus one meaning response. When decoding collapses even with help, you run a short repair block on missing patterns — then return toward rich text. Repair is a contingency by skill.³⁷ It is not the default diet of middle-grades English, and it is not an identity.

If you used *English for Little Thinkers*, you already practiced early decoding and shared reading. This book does not reprint that bank. Here the question is different: what will you read this week that is worth reading, and what is one scaffold if it gets hard? One pointer to the younger book, then teach 11–14.

The struggle is worth it because success on hard-enough text with help builds readers. Chronic failure kills engagement. Chronic baby text kills growth. Your job this week is to name the book or chapter, name one scaffold, protect twenty honest minutes, and ask for meaning — not points.³⁸ A parent who felt rusty should finish

³⁶Kamil et al., NCEE 2008-4027, Recommendation 4, moderate evidence: increase student motivation and engagement in literacy learning. Volume and choice within a worthy set support engagement; they do not replace explicit vocabulary, strategies, or writing. Access date 6 September 2026. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/adlit_pg_082608.pdf.

³⁷Kamil et al., NCEE 2008-4027, Recommendation 5, strong evidence: intensive individualized interventions for struggling readers provided by trained specialists. Decodable or morphology-decoding repair by skill is a contingency, then return toward rich text — not a permanent baby-decodable identity for middle-grades English.

³⁸Jiashan Cui and Rachel Hanson, *Homeschooling in the United States*, NCES 2020-001 (2019), Table 6: library as a source of curriculum and books is common (6th–8th grade cell 61 percent). Ellena Sempeles and Jiashan Cui, NCES 2024-113, Table A-5: 53 percent of the Homeschool-total row visited a library in the past month — a visit measure, not a curriculum-source percent. Do not

this chapter able to hear an AR quiz offered as comprehension, hear three-cueing offered as word reading, hear “phonics is over” while long words still collapse, and hear permanent baby decodables offered as a middle-grades identity — and to ask a better question instead. Specific encouragement: this week you can prepare three stickies and one purpose slip; today your student can read with a scaffold and give one meaning response.

For the parent: understand it yourself

Everyday picture. Think of a hike with a daypack. The trail is real (rich text). The daypack holds water, a map, and a snack (scaffolds). You do not replace the mountain with a living-room treadmill forever (permanent baby decodables). You also do not shove a beginner up a cliff with no water (rich text with zero support). You pack what you need, walk, and talk about what you saw (meaning accountability).

Precise picture. *Volume* means amount of connected text read with understanding over days and weeks. *Rich text* means chapters, articles, and books that carry ideas — not only worksheets. *Scaffolds* are temporary supports that make hard text accessible: glossary sticky notes for a few load-bearing words; an adult or audio model of a hard paragraph then a student reread; partner or sibling reading; a simple graphic organizer for structure; oral rehearsal before writing about the text. *Decodable repair* is a short, planned practice block on missing decoding or morphology-decoding patterns when placement shows the student cannot accurately read this week’s rich text even with scaffolds — or when guessing-from-context is the only strategy. Then you return toward rich text.

Fluency at this age is accuracy and phrasing in service of meaning on longer text. If accuracy collapses on grade-band prose, return to decoding, morphology, and guided oral reading with feedback. Timed cold reads are not the first move for a guessing reader.³⁹ A stopwatch before accuracy teaches speed-without-print.

Accelerated Reader and similar quiz-and-points systems are commercial tools some families use. Federal reviews of Accelerated Reader for adolescent learners

swap the two. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020001.pdf>.

³⁹Fluency after accuracy: if accuracy collapses on grade-band prose, return to decoding, morphology, and guided oral reading with feedback before stopwatch-first rate goals. National Reading Panel (2000) guided repeated oral reading with feedback helps word recognition, fluency, and comprehension — cited here as the accuracy-first grain, not as an elementary reprint.

have found no discernible effects on fluency and comprehension in the reviewed studies — school settings, not a kitchen promise either way.⁴⁰ Copy that honestly. Do not launder quiz points into “proven comprehension.” Comprehension here means strategies, discussion, and written response tied to meaning — Chapters 4–6 will deepen those. This chapter owns access and volume.

Three-cueing as word reading is refused. Teaching adolescents to look at the picture, think what fits, and check the first letter as the primary way to read a word contradicts print–sound and morphological pathways. Meaning checking *after* decoding is comprehension monitoring. Guessing *instead of* reading the word is not reading.⁴¹

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

1. **“Just read for points.”** Means accountability drifted to a vendor total. Ask for a purpose and a meaning response instead: gist, structure mark, or claim with a supporting sentence.
2. **“Look at the picture and guess” / first-letter grab as the reading method.** Three-cueing habit. Point back to the letters. Strip parts (Chapter 1). Scaffold vocabulary. Do not praise the guess as reading.
3. **“Phonics is over.”** Said while multisyllabic words still collapse. Repair by skill. Morphology continues. Intensive help exists in adolescent literacy guidance for a reason.
4. **Permanent baby decodables** for a student who can already decode connected text. Contingency became identity. Return to rich text with scaffolds.
5. **SSR alone as the only program** — silent reading with no purpose, no response, no teaching for a weak reader. Books matter. Books-without-teaching is not enough when the reader is guessing or stuck.

⁴⁰What Works Clearinghouse, *Accelerated Reader*TM (August 2010), Adolescent Literacy intervention report: no discernible effects on reading fluency or comprehension for adolescent learners in the studies that met standards (with or without reservations) as summarized in that report. School-labelled. Do not launder quiz points into proven comprehension. Accessed 6 September 2026.

⁴¹Three-cueing as the primary word-reading method is refused: picture + what-fits + first letter instead of print–sound and morphological analysis. Meaning checking after the word is read is monitoring; guessing instead of reading is not. Aligned with the print–sound and intervention grain in Kamil et al., Recommendations 1 and 5.

6. **Stopwatch before accuracy.** Speed cult on a labored or guessing reader. Fix accuracy and phrasing first; rate follows meaning.

Five-minute parent warm-up before the lesson

Pick tomorrow's chapter page. Sticky-note three load-bearing words with plain meanings. Read the hardest paragraph aloud once yourself so your mouth knows the syntax. Write one purpose question on a slip: "Mark the claim," "Watch for cause and effect," or "What problem does this section set up?" That slip is your session spine. You are preparing access, not writing a quiz packet of ten questions.

How to teach it this week

Session shape for volume (12–20 minutes most days — the main meal when writing is light)

1. **Purpose (1 min).** One aim only. "Mark the claim." "Collect two words." "Read for the problem the character faces." "Watch for compare/contrast."
2. **Read (10–15 min).** Rich text the learner can access with scaffolds: novel chapter, news feature, science page, history excerpt. Oral reading with modelling and feedback when fluency or hard syntax needs it; silent or partner reading when accurate enough.
3. **One response (2–4 min).** Structure mark, claim-and-evidence oral, or two-sentence gist — not a packet of ten questions.

Fit this inside the English hour after a short morphology warm-up or word-study sit when those are active. Volume and word study motivate each other. Volume does not replace morphological analysis or strategy teaching.

Exact wording you can say

- "What will you read — and what's one scaffold if it gets hard?"
- "Your purpose today is on this slip. One purpose is enough."
- "If a paragraph is rocky, I'll read it once, then you read it back."
- "We're not guessing from the picture. We're reading the words."
- "Points are not the goal. Meaning is the goal."
- "We're going to practice the missing pattern for ten minutes on controllable text, then return to this chapter with stickies." (repair script)

First try-it for the student

Choose tonight's chapter. Name one scaffold together (three glossary stickies is a fine default). Set the purpose slip. Read. Write or say one meaning response. Done. Resist the urge to add a worksheet because the silence after reading feels empty. The response *is* the accountability.

How to fade help

Week of hard syntax: you model the hard paragraph daily, then they reread. Next week: they attempt first; you model only the stuck paragraph. Glossary stickies: you choose the three words early in the week; they choose two of three later; eventually they sticky their own load-bearing words before reading. Partner reading fades toward independent stretch reading with a meaning check at the end. Fade scaffolds when accuracy and meaning hold. Do not rip scaffolds away as a toughness test.

When to stop talking

After you set purpose. During the read, unless they ask for a word or you are in a planned oral-feedback stretch. After you ask for the meaning response — wait. Do not narrate your anxiety about “whether this book is grade-level.” Do not turn the response into five new questions. One good question beats a quiz pace that kills thinking.

Age-band moves

11–12. Daily connected reading with meaning accountability. Guided oral reading when accuracy slips. Glossary stickies and partner reading are normal, not embarrassing. Shorter chapters or article sections are fine if the text is rich and the response is real. Build stamina in honest minutes, not in shame about page counts.

13–14. Sustained independent reading with meaning checks. Longer stretches. Continue scaffolds on dense informational text without apology. Continue repair if multisyllabic decoding re-collapses — birthday does not grant immunity. More choice within a set of worthy texts can support engagement; choice of “nothing hard ever” does not.

Place by skill. A fourteen-year-old who cannot access this week's rich text even with scaffolds needs repair and support, not a lecture about age. An eleven-year-old devouring rich text with clean meaning responses should not be held to baby text for administrative neatness.

Decodable repair — contingency script

When: Placement check shows the learner cannot accurately decode the week’s rich text even with scaffolds; or multisyllabic decoding collapses; or guessing-from-context is the only strategy.

What: A short, planned decoding or morphology-decoding block on the missing patterns, using controllable text for practice, then immediate return toward rich text with stickies and purpose.

What not: Years of baby decodables for a student who can already decode; ideology that all middle-school reading must be leveled; ideology that all must be decodable; making repair the identity of English.

Honesty about help: If home moves are not enough after real tries, seek a trained tutor or specialist. Adolescent literacy guidance includes intensive individualized intervention for struggling readers.⁴² You can still run volume-with-scaffolds on accessible rich text while you arrange skilled help. You do not need to pretend you are a certified interventionist for every gap.

Hypothetical week shape (illustration)

Focus: volume with glossary stickies + purpose “mark the claim” on a short informational article series.

- **Mon–Thu:** 3-minute morphology warm-up; purpose slip; 12–15 minutes reading with stickies; oral claim + one supporting sentence; exit crumb.
- **In-home try-it:** glossary stickies prepared Tuesday night for Wednesday’s chapter.
- **Out-of-home try-it:** library craft question after one chapter (see below).
- **Friday:** meaning response sample + done-enough checklist. If decoding collapsed midweek, label the repair block you used and confirm return to rich text.

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home try-it — Glossary stickies for tomorrow’s chapter

- **Time:** 10–12 minutes the evening before; used during the next English hour.

⁴²Kamil et al., NCEE 2008-4027, Recommendation 5 (strong): when home scaffolds are not enough after honest tries, seek trained help. Parents remain capable teachers of volume-with-scaffolds on accessible rich text while arranging skilled intervention.

- **Materials:** Tomorrow's chapter or article; 3–5 sticky notes; pencil; student-friendly meanings (parent-drafted in plain language).
- **Safety:** Ordinary. No need to photograph copyrighted pages for a cloud folder — write meanings on stickies.
- **The fun:** The book arrives “already helped.” Stickies feel like a secret map.
- **The skill:** Kamil-shaped vocabulary selection and exposure — load-bearing words, ready before the read, reused in the meaning response.

How: Parent (11–12) or parent-with-student (13–14) skims tomorrow's pages. Chooses three words that carry the section. Writes a plain meaning on each sticky. Places stickies at first appearance. Next day, purpose + read + response must use at least one sticky word aloud.

In-home try-it — Volume read with purpose “mark the claim”

- **Time:** 15–20 minutes.
- **Materials:** Short news feature or informational page (safe household stake — weather, local sports summary, science explainer); pencil.
- **Safety:** Choose calm informational print. No live controversy as curriculum.
- **The fun:** Reading like a detective with one job.
- **The skill:** Connected reading + meaning accountability without a ten-question packet.

How: Set purpose: underline the claim; star one supporting sentence. Read. Say the claim in one sentence. Point to the star. Stop. That is enough for this try-it.

Out-of-home try-it — Library craft question after a chapter

- **Time:** 15–25 minutes at the library (plus travel).
- **Materials:** Library book in progress; notebook; pencil.
- **Safety:** Ordinary library courtesy. Quiet voices. No lecturing strangers' children. Follow library rules.
- **The fun:** The library becomes the classroom without a worksheet stack. Choice within a worthy set feels grown.
- **The skill:** Discussion of meaning after real reading; motivation through place and choice; wait after one craft or meaning question.

How: Read one chapter on site or arrive having read it. Adult asks one craft or

meaning question tied to the text (“What was the writer doing in this section — entertaining, explaining, or arguing?” or, for literary, a gentle craft ask that still returns to the line). Wait. Student answers with a finger on the page. Optional: borrow the next book in a series only after the response — motivation without points.

Out-of-home crumb — Transit or map brochure as rich short text

- **Time:** 10 minutes.
- **Materials:** Bus map, museum map, or park brochure.
- **Safety:** Stay with adult. Road awareness. Do not block doors.
- **The fun:** Real-world print that adults actually use.
- **The skill:** Sequence reading with a purpose (“How do we get from A to B?”) and a one-paragraph explain response later at home if you want Graham-shaped writing practice.

Talk box

Exact opening question: “What will you read — and what’s one scaffold if it gets hard?”

Follow-ups:

1. Meaning: “What was the writer doing in this section — entertaining, explaining, or arguing?”
2. Representation: “Show me the purpose slip and the sentence that answers it.”
3. Type / evidence: “Which sentence was hardest — and what made it hard?”
4. Check: “Does your response match the page, or did we drift into a guess?”
5. Revise: “What can we scaffold so tomorrow’s page is readable? You may change the scaffold.”

How to wait: Ask. Count a slow three. Hands off the book unless you are modelling a paragraph on purpose. After they answer, wait again before stacking a second question. Look at the page if silence is hard.

What a stuck silence usually means: The purpose was vague; wait-time was zero; they think reading means look-and-guess; they are ashamed to ask for a

scaffold; the text is far beyond reach even with stickies; they offered a gist with no textual anchor; they think the “right answer” is a points score. Pose, wait, point to print, name one scaffold — do not fill the silence with your summary of the chapter.

Blocked vs mixed

Blocked: Same book, same scaffold type, same response type for several days (stickies + two-sentence gist). Build success.

Mixed: Alternate literary and informational stretches across the week; vary response type (gist one day, claim mark another, structure mark when Chapter 4 is active); fade one scaffold while holding another.

One incorrect example to diagnose

Incorrect shape: The comprehension program is an AR-style points goal. The child races easy quizzes. Hard chapters are avoided because they slow the point total.

What it usually means: Accountability drifted from meaning to a vendor number. Engagement was outsourced to a scoreboard.

Better move: Retire points as the definition of done. Keep the library habit. Set purpose. Require one meaning response. If you still use a quiz tool as optional spice, it does not get to certify comprehension for this book. Federal adolescent ratings for Accelerated Reader showed no discernible fluency/comprehension effects in the reviewed evidence — labelled school, copied honestly, not crowned and not demonized as a person. The teaching move is meaning accountability.

Second incorrect shape: Years of permanent baby decodables after the student can decode, because the books feel “safe.” Safety became a ceiling. Repair if needed, then return to rich text with scaffolds.

Third incorrect shape: “Just look at the picture and think what fits.” Refuse. Teach print and morphology. Scaffold vocabulary. Check meaning after the word is read.

Scaffolds — the honest list in plain language

1. **Sticky-note glossary (3–5 words).** Load-bearing words only. Plain meanings. Placed at first appearance. Reused in talk.
2. **Adult or audio model, then learner reread.** You read the hard paragraph with phrasing; they read it back. Fluency support without a stopwatch cult.
3. **Partner or sibling read.** One page each, or choral on a tough paragraph. Follow with a discussion turn and wait.
4. **Graphic organizer for structure.** Boxes for compare/contrast, cause/effect, problem/solution, or claim+reasons — used during or after reading (Chapter 4 deepens this).
5. **Oral rehearsal before writing.** Say the gist or claim aloud once before pencil. Planning is part of writing later; here it protects meaning after volume.

Scaffolds are temporary and named. They are not a personality. They are not a secret. Students should be able to say which scaffold they are using today.

What rich text can be this week (safe objects)

A library novel chapter. A science explainer page. A history primary excerpt with glossary support. A local news feature on a safe civic topic (library hours, park cleanup, school garden). A museum brochure. A sports box-score paragraph used as literacy — what claim would need more evidence? — without turning sports into an identity fight. Volume and discussion motivate. They do not replace word study, strategy teaching, or written composition. Keep a morphology crumb and a meaning response in the week even when the book is exciting.

Engagement without a sticker curriculum

Success on hard-enough text with scaffolds. Choice within a worthy set. Series and nonfiction the student cares about. A library trip as a transfer check. What does not count as the program: pizza parties as the only motivator; “make it fun” replacing explicit teaching; points apps as the definition of reading. Motivation week still includes purpose, scaffolds, and a response.

Fluency without the stopwatch cult

Listen to a paragraph. If accuracy and phrasing show meaning, silent reading can carry more of the minutes. If oral reading is labored, do not pretend silent reading

is fine. Guided repeated oral reading with feedback helps; minimal-guidance “just read quietly” programs have long carried a caution for weak readers. Encourage books. Do not claim Drop Everything and Read is the intervention by itself.

Parent troubleshooting table (volume week)

Symptom	Likely cause	Move
Finishes pages, blank stare on gist	No purpose; skimming	Purpose slip + two-sentence gist before more pages
Chooses only tiny easy books	Avoidance or points incentive	Rich text one notch harder + scaffolds; retire points-as-done
Guesses from pictures / first letter	Three-cueing habit	Print first; morphology; scaffold meaning after decoding
Accurate but tiny stamina	Stretch too long too fast	Honest minutes; build by a few pages
Accurate oral, empty silent	Silent reading not really reading	Keep oral window; shorten silent; require pointed response
Meltdown on hard chapter	Cliff text or missing scaffolds	Downshift difficulty one notch; name scaffold; repair if decoding
Only reads for a quiz score	Accountability = vendor total	Meaning response is done; quiz optional spice only

How to choose “hard enough”

Hard enough means the student needs at least one scaffold some days and still produces a meaning response. Too easy means zero new vocabulary, zero syntax stretch, zero thought. Too hard means accuracy collapses even with stickies, partner read, and modelled paragraphs. When in doubt, pack scaffolds and shorten the stretch before you banish the book. Chronic baby text is not kindness. Chronic cliff text is not rigor.

Publisher grade bands and Lexile numbers can be clues. They are not laws. A “grade 7 novel study” is a publisher’s scope, not a legal grade. Place the reader by what they can do with scaffolds and meaning — not by birthday.

Twin tracks inside volume

Literary stretches and informational stretches both belong. A week can be mostly one track if a project demands it; a month should not erase the other. Informational volume builds academic vocabulary and structure awareness. Literary volume builds stamina for narrative and craft talk (Chapter 5). NAEP Grade 8 weights informational text heavily in school assessment — labelled school population, not a homeschool census — and still, both tracks deserve kitchen time.

Sibling partner-read protocol (10 minutes)

Sit side by side with the same page. Reader A reads a paragraph aloud. Reader B restates in one sentence. Switch. Adult asks one purpose question at the end and waits. Safety: no mocking miscues; help is strip-the-word or sticky meaning, not sarcasm. The fun is shared progress. The skill is fluency support plus meaning accountability. Fade to independent reading when accuracy holds.

Audio model boundaries

An audiobook chapter can model phrasing. The student should still follow print and produce a meaning response from the page. Audio as the only input with no print in view is listening practice, not reading volume. Use audio as a scaffold for a hard stretch, then return to print-first reading.

Exit ticket ideas for a volume day

- Say the purpose and point to the sentence that answers it.
- Two-sentence gist with one sticky word used accurately.
- Name the scaffold you used and whether you still need it tomorrow.
- Oral: “Which sentence was hardest, and what made it hard?”
- If repair happened: “What pattern did we practice, and which chapter paragraph did we return to?”

Keep exit tickets tiny. They exist so you know whether meaning landed. They are not a weekly high-stakes battery, not NAEP, and not a percentile promise.

For the student

This week you practice reading something worth reading, with a purpose, and saying or writing one thing that proves you got the meaning.

You will also name one scaffold if it gets hard. A scaffold is help that makes a hard page readable: sticky-note meanings, hearing a hard paragraph once then reading it back, reading a page with a sibling, or sketching the structure. Using a scaffold is not cheating. Guessing from a picture instead of reading the words is not a scaffold. That is a bypass.

Tiny worked example

Purpose slip: “Mark the claim.”

You read a short article about a town library expanding weekend hours. You underline: “Weekend hours will help more families use the library.” You star the sentence that says Saturday morning visits rose last year. Your response: “The claim is that weekend hours help families. The article supports it with last year’s Saturday visits.” One purpose. One response. Done.

Try 1. Before you read today, answer out loud: “What will I read — and what’s one scaffold if it gets hard?” Write the scaffold on a sticky. Read with your purpose. Give one meaning response.

Try 2. At the library or on a park brochure, read a short stretch with a purpose (“How do we get from the entrance to the exhibit?” or “What is this blurb trying to make me believe?”). Point to one sentence that answers your purpose.

Explain it back. Tell a parent which scaffold you used and why. Point to the hardest sentence and what made it hard — length, unknown word, or tricky structure.

Challenge. Read a page that felt too hard last month, this time with three glossary stickies you helped choose. Write a two-sentence gist. Notice what changed: the book, you, or the scaffold.

You’re done enough when you can name what you will read and one scaffold, read a stretch with a purpose, and produce one meaning response without a packet of

ten questions.

Composite week illustration (labelled)

A twelve-year-old starts a nonfiction book on rivers. Monday stickies: *tributary*, *sediment*, *erosion*. Purpose: “What problem does the first section set up?” They read twelve minutes, sticky words used once in talk. Response: two-sentence gist with *sediment* used accurately. Wednesday library visit: after Chapter 2, adult asks what the writer was doing in a diagram caption — explaining, not arguing. Wait. Friday checklist mostly yes. No points log. Notebook date + gist sample.

A fourteen-year-old can decode but skims. Adult shortens the stretch to eight dense paragraphs, requires claim underline + one star, and refuses the quiz app as “done.” Within a week, oral responses lengthen. Scaffold named: oral rehearsal before the written gist. Volume returns with accountability.

If it isn’t clicking

Diagnostic 1 — Reads “a lot” but cannot say what the section was about.

Likely cause: volume without meaning accountability; possible skimming or guessing.

Next move: Shorten the stretch. Add a purpose slip. Require a two-sentence gist or a pointed claim before any more pages. Oral reading of one paragraph as a window — if oral is labored, silent “reading” may be fake.

Diagnostic 2 — Refuses hard text; lives in easy books or points-friendly quizzes.

Likely cause: chronic failure history, or incentives that punish challenge.

Next move: Pick rich text one notch harder than comfort, not a cliff. Pack scaffolds. Celebrate the meaning response, not the Lexile brag or the point total. Retire points-as-done if they are driving avoidance of hard chapters.

Diagnostic 3 — Multisyllabic words collapse; picture/first-letter guessing; accuracy fails even with stickies.

Likely cause: decoding gap; three-cueing habit; or text far above reach.

Next move: Repair contingency — ten focused minutes on missing patterns with controllable text, then return to the chapter with stickies. Refuse guess-as-reading. If home repair does not move accuracy after honest weeks, get a human tutor. Keep

accessible rich text in the diet so English does not become only drills.

When to slow down: Tears, shutdown, or daily accuracy collapse. Scaffolds not yet named. Purpose always vague.

When to go ahead: Clean meaning responses on rich-enough text; scaffolds fading naturally; student chooses a sensible scaffold without prompting.

When to get a human tutor: Persistent decoding collapse; fluent-sounding reading with empty comprehension after scaffolds and strategy tries; avoidance so strong that volume never happens. Seek help early enough that middle grades still have time.

Correct without crushing: “You told me a guess from the picture. Show me the word’s letters. We’ll scaffold the meaning after we read it.”

Tools, including AI

Point back to the English-hour AI box. Ages 11–12: parent holds the account. Ages 13–14: co-hold, parent in the room. Unaided first.

Allowed after a try: Ask a tool to explain *to you* a hard paragraph’s syntax or to suggest three load-bearing words from a page you name — so you can write stickies. Ask for a four-line SCRIPT you will say after the student attempted a gist. Revision questions on a written response — questions, not a rewrite of their gist.

Not allowed: Rewrite-on-demand of the reading passage so the student does not have to comprehend it. Photo-to-key on a comprehension packet. Unsupervised chatbot as the reading partner. Paste a machine summary into the notebook as the student’s response.

In a high-school math study, an unguarded chatbot made practice look better and left students worse when the window closed — off-age for literacy, one caution for the kitchen: the model may prepare the adult; it may not do the student’s reading.

Mixing with yesterday’s morphology

Keep a three-minute warm-up from Chapter 1 even in a volume-heavy week. Strip one sticky word before reading. Volume without word study leaves Latinate words

opaque. Word study without volume never meets the words in the wild. The English hour holds both.

Records crumb

Date the notebook. Note title and pages read. Paste or write the purpose and the one response. That artifact is middle-grades **Reading** or **Language Arts**. It is not a brand name as the course title. It is not a percentile promise.

Revisit next Tuesday

If this week's scaffolds worked, fade one. If meaning responses were thin, shorten stretches and tighten purpose. If repair was needed, schedule the next repair block explicitly — then protect rich text minutes the same day. Life of the habit lives in the English-hour rhythm: revisit, mix, stop. Not a ninth teaching chapter.

What “done enough” looks like

Skill, not birthday. Credit the work as **Reading**, **Language Arts**, or **English** — never a points brand as the transcript line.

Done enough when the student can:

1. Name what will be read and one scaffold if it gets hard.
2. Read a stretch of rich text with a named purpose.
3. Produce one meaning response (structure mark, claim-and-evidence oral, or two-sentence gist) without a ten-question packet.
4. Use scaffolds without treating them as cheating — and without using picture-guessing as a scaffold.
5. If decoding collapsed, complete a labelled repair block and return toward rich text (not park forever in baby decodables).

Not required: A vendor point target. A stopwatch score. A guarantee of a national percentile. SSR with no response as a personality.

Placement note: If volume is strong but academic words still bounce off, keep volume and lean into Chapters 1 and 3. If volume fails because every page is undecodable, repair by skill while protecting some accessible rich text every week. Fluency and volume serve comprehension. Points do not.

Code repair when needed. Meaning always. Pack the daypack. Walk the real trail. Tomorrow, name the book and the scaffold before the first page. Protect the minutes. Ask for meaning. Refuse points-as-comprehension, three-cueing-as-reading, and permanent baby-decodable identity. That is enough of a north star for a volume week.

If you only change one habit after this chapter, change the end of the reading stretch: close the book only after a purpose-linked response. That single swap turns ‘reading time’ into English you can stand behind at the kitchen table, at the library, and in a dated notebook a stranger could understand as Reading or Language Arts. Start tomorrow with the purpose slip ready.

Chapter 3 — Academic vocabulary in use

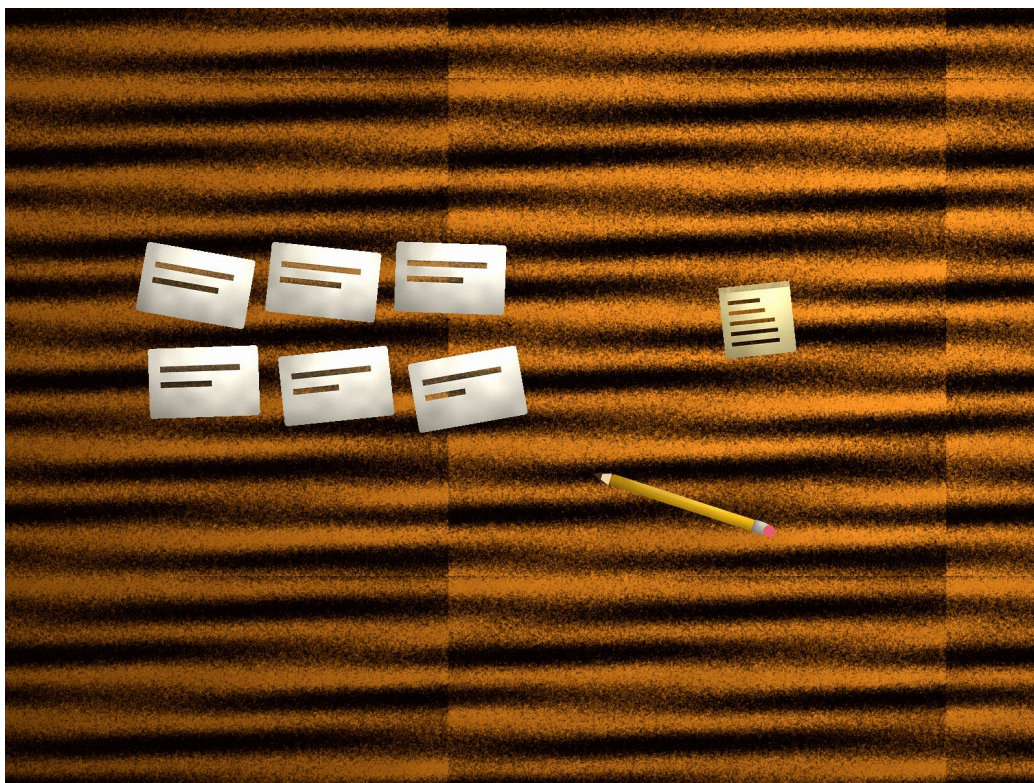


Figure 5: A dated notebook line with a chapter word, a context sentence, and a cousin use — still-life, no people, no logos.

Why this matters

Middle-grades pages do not fail only because a student cannot sound out words. They fail when the load-bearing academic words never become usable tools. *Analyze, significant, structure, evidence, interpret, factor, distribution* — words like these carry science, history, and arguments. If they live only on a Friday quiz list, they will not help Monday's chapter.

Academic vocabulary in use means text-anchored cycles: words chosen from this week's reading, taught with a friendly definition and a context sentence, stripped for parts when useful, reused in discussion and writing, and checked for depth — can the student use the word precisely about the passage?⁴³ Explicit vocabulary instruction for adolescents sits on a strong evidence recommendation: dedicate time, provide multiple exposures in multiple contexts, combine definitional and contextual approaches, and teach independent word-learning strategies (morphology, context, reference tools).⁴⁴

Text-based academic vocabulary programs that include morphology have shown clearer gains on taught words and morphological awareness than on far-away standardized vocabulary scores. That pattern should humble a kitchen manual: expect near transfer first.⁴⁵ This is a useful shape of study, not a promise that every home will see the same result. Do not sell a franchise. Steal the shape: text-anchored, morphology included, multiple exposures, practice in talk and writing.

⁴³Amy C. Crosson and Debra Moore, "When to Take Up Roots," *Reading Psychology* 38, no. 3 (2017); ERIC ED598548. Bound Latin roots with academic words support morphological problem-solving — use when Chapter 1 stripping rides inside this chapter's vocabulary cycle. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED598548.pdf>.

⁴⁴Michael L. Kamil et al., *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*, NCEE 2008-4027 (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, August 2008), Recommendation 1, strong evidence: explicit vocabulary instruction; dedicate time; multiple exposures; definitional and contextual information; independent word-learning strategies. Access date 6 September 2026. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/adlit_pg_082608.pdf.

⁴⁵Nonie K. Lesaux, Michael J. Kieffer, S. Elisabeth Faller, and Joan G. Kelley, "The Effectiveness and Ease of Implementation of an Academic Vocabulary Intervention for Linguistically Diverse Students in Urban Middle Schools," *Reading Research Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2010) (ALIAS). On-age grade 6 academic vocabulary intervention. Effects cited from opened abstract/secondary packaging: taught meanings and morphological awareness gains clearer than far transfer to norm-referenced vocabulary; full Wiley PDF page-level quotes UNVERIFIED this fetch. Steal the shape (text-anchored, morphology included, multiple exposures); do not sell ALIAS as a kitchen franchise.

Chapter 1 gave you stripping. Chapter 2 gave you volume and scaffolds. This chapter owns the cycle that turns chapter words into owned words. Volume reading, discussion, and making motivate. They do not replace teaching the words. A list in isolation is not the English program.⁴⁶

If you used a younger English manual, you may have practiced everyday word play. This book does not reprint that bank. Here the target is academic and content words that carry 11–14 reading and writing. One pointer, then teach this band.

For the parent: understand it yourself

Everyday picture. Think of tools on a workbench. A quiz list is tools locked in a display case. Academic vocabulary in use is handing the wrench during the actual repair — then asking the student to use the same wrench on tomorrow’s repair. The word has to do work on the page in front of you.

Precise picture. Academic vocabulary includes general academic words that appear across subjects (*analyze, consist, indicate*) and content words that carry a discipline this week (*erosion, amendment, variable*). Selection rule: importance to the text. Teach a student-friendly explanation, an example and a non-example when helpful, morphological analysis when parts are honest, oral use, written use, and recycling across days. Assess whether they can use the word about today’s passage — not only whether they can match a definition.

Independent word-learning strategies matter so you are not the only dictionary. Morphology (Chapter 1), context clues after the word is read, and reference tools when stuck. “Guess from context” alone is not enough when the student cannot decode the word or when the context is thin.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

1. **Friday list never seen in a book.** Selection floated free of reading. Choose from this week’s pages. Rehear in reading and writing.
2. **Dictionary-copy alone.** Copying definitions without oral use, morphology, or return to the passage. Add friendly explanation, parts, and a sentence about the text.

⁴⁶Kamil et al., Recommendation 1 how-to grain: select words carefully; provide definitional and contextual information; teach word-learning strategies (morphology, context clues, reference tools). A Friday quiz list never seen in a book is not that program.

3. **Tier-I-only selection** (“we picked easy words so they feel successful”). Kindness became a ceiling. Prefer load-bearing academic and discipline words.
4. **Word used as decoration** — sprinkled into a paragraph without meaning. Ask: “What is this word doing in your sentence?” Require precision about the passage.
5. **“We already know these words”** while the science chapter dumps specialized vocabulary. Familiarity with a spoken vibe is not ownership in print. Check use in context.

Five-minute parent warm-up

Choose one load-bearing word from this week’s informational text. Write a definitional sentence (“*Significant* means important enough to matter in this study.”). Write a contextual sentence from or about the page. Plan where it will reappear in writing (exit ticket or explain paragraph). Note any useful parts (*sign-* / *-ificant* only if honest — do not force fake morphology). You are preparing a cycle crumb, not a twenty-word packet.

How to teach it this week

Session crumb (inside the English hour, most days)

1. **Collect (1–2 min)**. One to three words from this week’s reading — already met or about to be.
2. **Parts when useful (2–4 min)**. Strip if morphology helps. Adult models one; learner does the next.
3. **Meaning in context (2–3 min)**. Definitional + contextual: “In this sentence, what does it do?”
4. **Use (2–3 min)**. New sentence about the text; paragraph plan; or cousin hunt for tomorrow.
5. **Volume or writing** that forces at least one target word back into the air or onto the page.
6. **Exit ticket**: meaning in this sentence + use in a new sentence about the passage.

Exact wording

- “What does this word mean in this sentence — and where else can we use it?”
- “Say it about today’s page, not about a generic example only.”
- “Show me the parts if they help — then check the sentence.”
- “Give me a non-example: a sentence where this word would be wrong.”
- “You may change your mind when we look back at the paragraph.”

First try-it

Pick one word from today’s page. Ask the locked opening. Student answers. Then: use it in a new sentence about the same passage. Then: find or make a cousin. Three beats. Short.

Fade help

Early week: you provide friendly definition and model the use sentence. Midweek: they draft the use sentence; you ask for precision. Late week: they collect a word themselves before reading, sticky it, and teach it back. Fade the adult dictionary. Keep the text anchor.

When to stop talking

After the locked question. After they attempt a use sentence — wait before you rewrite it for them. Do not stack five vocabulary quiz items. Depth on one or two words beats a parade.

Age-band moves

11–12. Academic word families from shared texts. Content words that carry this week’s science or history chapter. High-utility morphology attached. Oral use before written use when writing is heavy that day. Multiple exposures across four or five English hours.

13–14. Cross-subject academic words. Morphology + context + reference tools. Independent word-learning strategies on harder articles. Depth: multiple senses, precise written use, refusal of decoration. Still text-anchored. Still not a giant disconnected list.

Place by skill. A fourteen-year-old who only matches definitions does the use-about-the-passage work without apology. An eleven-year-old ready for cross-subject academic words should not wait.

ALIAS-shaped practice without selling ALIAS (parent grain)

1. Select general academic or content words that matter to this week's text.
2. Anchor the cycle in a short informational text worth reading.
3. Teach student-friendly explanations plus examples/non-examples.
4. Include morphological analysis when useful.
5. Require oral and written use, not only recognition.
6. Recycle words across days and subjects.
7. Assess depth (precise use) not only matching.

Near transfer first. Do not promise a national score jump from a kitchen word cycle.

Hypothetical week (illustration)

Focus words from a science chapter: *variable*, *significant*, *distribution* (adjust to your actual page).

- **Mon:** Collect three. Friendly definitions. Strip *distribution* if parts help. Volume read with stickies. Exit: meaning in sentence.
- **Tue:** Oral use at dinner (see try-it). Written sentence about the experiment section.
- **Wed:** Sibling teach-back using two target words. Cousin hunt (*distribute*, *significantly*).
- **Thu:** Store packaging or article transfer — what does this word claim?
- **Fri:** Diagnostic: decoration sentence vs precise sentence. Done-enough checklist.

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home try-it — Word-of-the-day at dinner from today's page

- **Time:** 5–8 minutes at a meal or snack.
- **Materials:** Today's page or sticky; oral only is fine.
- **Safety:** Ordinary family courtesy. No humiliating quizzes of guests. No food fights framed as "vocabulary games."
- **The fun:** The academic word crashes the dinner table and has to earn its keep.
- **The skill:** Multiple exposures; oral use about a real passage; definitional + contextual talk.

How: Student states the word, what it means in today's sentence, and one new

sentence about the page. A sibling or parent asks one follow-up: “Where else could we use it this week?” Wait after the question.

In-home try-it — Sibling teach-back with two target words

- **Time:** 10 minutes.
- **Materials:** Science/history page; scrap paper.
- **Safety:** No forced teaching of a furious toddler. Choose a willing listener or the parent as listener.
- **The fun:** Expert for a moment.
- **The skill:** Precise use in explain talk; morphology optional; text anchor required.

How: Teach two words: meaning in sentence, parts if useful, one use sentence each about the page. Listener points to the sentence in the book for each word.

Out-of-home try-it — Store packaging claim vs word meaning

- **Time:** 10–15 minutes in an aisle (13–14 especially; 11–12 with parent leading).
- **Materials:** One package with an academic or persuasive word (*supports, essential, advanced, clinical* — whatever is actually printed); notebook.
- **Safety:** Aisle courtesy. No tasting. No shoplifting a “test.” No lecturing the cashier. No photographing strangers. This is print to evaluate, not a nutrition sermon or culture-war aisle.
- **The fun:** Marketing language becomes a vocabulary lab.
- **The skill:** What does this word mean on this package — and is it doing evidence work or advertisement work?

How: Ask the locked opening about one package word. Student answers from the print. Follow-up: “Where else have we used a careful version of this word in this week’s science page?” Optional for 13–14: note whether the package provides evidence or only a claim vibe.

Out-of-home crumb — Library jacket or display card

Find one academic word on a book jacket. Meaning in that blurb sentence. Use it in a sentence about whether you will borrow the book. Transfer without a worksheet format.

Talk box

Exact opening: “What does this word mean in this sentence — and where else can we use it?”

Follow-ups:

1. Meaning: “Say it in plain English about this paragraph.”
2. Representation: “Underline the word and the context words that help.”
3. Type / morphology: “What parts do you see — and do they help here?”
4. Check: “Does your use sentence match the passage meaning, or is it decoration?”
5. Revise: “Try another sentence. You may change your mind.”

How to wait: Ask. Slow three. Eyes on the sentence. Second wait after they finish. Do not supply the glossary definition at one second.

Stuck silence usually means: No sentence in view; wait-time zero; word outside today’s set; they are hunting a synonym vibe without the passage; they think vocabulary means quiz matching; they fear being wrong about a “smart” word. Point to print. Narrow the question. Model one use sentence, then hand back a parallel try.

Blocked vs mixed

Blocked: Same two words across three days — strip, talk, write, teach-back.

Mixed: Add a cousin; add a cross-subject encounter (*significant* in science Monday, history Thursday); require independent strategy (parts or reference) on a third word Friday.

Incorrect example to diagnose

Incorrect shape: Twenty unrelated spelling/vocabulary words, dictionary copied Friday, never in a book.

Means: Isolation; recognition without use; no morphology; no text anchor.

Better: Three words from the chapter. Cycle all week. Assess use about the passage. Keep any list only as a servant.

Second incorrect shape: “Guess from context” while the student cannot decode the word — or picture/first-letter guessing offered as reading. Decode/strip first. Then context. Then reference tool. Three-cueing is not the word-reading method. Permanent baby decodables are not the vocabulary program either; return to rich text with word cycles. Points quizzes are not proof the word is owned in use.

Worked parent–student dialogue (composite illustration)

Parent: “What does *variable* mean in this sentence — and where else can we use it?” Student: “It means something that can change... like weather?” Parent: (waits, points to lab paragraph) Student: “In this sentence it’s the thing we changed in the experiment — the amount of water.” Parent: “Show me by underlining. Now a new sentence about this page.” Student: “The variable we tested was water amount, not temperature.” Parent: “Where else can we use it this week?” Student: “In the graph section — each variable needs a label.”

Notice: wait happened. Print anchored. Use sentence earned its keep. No twenty-word list.

Second dialogue — decoration caught

Student writing: “The erosion was significant and the rocks were significant too.” Parent: “What is *significant* doing in each place?” Student: “Um. Making it sound smart?” Parent: “Try again. One precise use about the riverbank paragraph.” Student: “The loss of three feet of bank in a month was significant for the trail plan.” That correction is teaching. Silence would have trained decoration.

Materials

This week’s informational text, stickies, scrap paper, pencil, optional fridge parking strip. Library \$0 text is enough. A commercial vocab book can supplement if words return in reading — fit later in resources, not crowned today.

Cross-subject parking strip

Tape six index cards on the fridge: three from science, three from history or literature. Each card holds word, book sentence, student use sentence. Warm-up can

be “pick a card, teach it in twenty seconds.” Multiple exposures without a new packet.

For the student

This week you practice using hard words about the page in front of you — not only on a quiz.

Academic words are tools. If you only match them on a worksheet, they stay in the display case. If you use them to explain today’s science paragraph, they become yours.

Tiny worked example

Word: *significant*.

In the sentence: “The change in temperature was *significant*.”

Plain meaning here: big enough to matter for the results.

New sentence about the passage: “A one-degree change was *significant* because it altered the ice melt rate in the lab notes.”

Cousin: *significantly* — “Rainfall dropped *significantly* in the second week.”

Non-example: “My sandwich was significant.” (Decoration. Doesn’t fit careful meaning.)

Try 1. From today’s reading, answer: “What does this word mean in this sentence — and where else can we use it?” Write a new sentence about the same page.

Try 2. Teach a sibling or parent two target words with finger on the book sentences. Use each word once in explain talk.

Explain it back. Tell what made a use sentence precise instead of decorative.

Challenge. Find the same academic word in two subjects this week. Note whether the meaning shifted slightly. Write both sentences.

You’re done enough when you can say what the word means in this sentence, use it in a new sentence about today’s passage, find or make a cousin, and check meaning against context — not only a glossary.

Week sketch for 13–14 (illustration)

Focus: *interpret, evidence, structure* across an informational article and a short literary compare blurb.

Mon–Thu: collect from article; morphology on *structure*; discussion use; written explain sentence requiring one word; Thursday museum placard or packaging transfer. Friday: independent strategy on a new word from a harder paragraph — parts, context, then glossary. Done-enough includes precise written use and one transfer.

Common parent rescue habits to retire

Supplying the definition at half a second. Accepting a synonym that fights the passage. Moving to the next word before use happens. Praising “big word” decoration. Turning dinner into a rapid-fire quiz that kills wait-time. Replace with: ask, wait, point, use, recycle.

If it isn’t clicking

Diagnostic 1 — Matches definitions, cannot use about the passage.

Cause: recognition-only practice.

Move: Ban matching for one week. Require oral and written use about the page daily. Non-examples welcome.

Diagnostic 2 — Avoids informational text because “too many hard words.”

Cause: volume without vocabulary cycle; or cliff text.

Move: Three stickies + two taught words before reading (Chapter 2 scaffolds + this chapter’s cycle). Shorten stretch. Keep teaching words — do not only simplify forever.

Diagnostic 3 — Uses fancy words as decoration in writing.

Cause: word prestige without meaning accountability.

Move: One-target revision: replace or justify each academic word with a finger on the source idea. “What is this word doing?”

Slow down when: New list every day; tears; no return to text.

Go ahead when: Precise use in talk and writing; transfer to package/jacket; independent collect-and-sticky.

Tutor when: Extreme vocabulary thinness plus decoding issues; or language support needs beyond kitchen cycles — seek skilled help while you keep text-anchored practice.

Correct kindly: “You used a big word. Show me what it is doing for this paragraph. Let’s fix the sentence so the meaning is true.”

Tools, including AI

English-hour rules still hold. Parent holds (11–12) or co-holds (13–14). Unaided first.

Allowed after try: Explain *to the parent* a named word in a named sentence; suggest a non-example; draft a SCRIPT of questions for you to ask; isomorphic practice with parent-held key.

Not allowed: Generate the student’s use sentences during the attempt; photo-to-key a vocab packet; unsupervised chat as vocabulary partner; rewrite the passage to delete hard words so the student never learns them.

Point back. Keep this short.

What “done enough” looks like

Skill, not birthday. Credit **Reading / Language Arts / English**. Never a vocab brand as the transcript title.

Done enough when the student can:

1. Say what the target word means *in this sentence*.
2. Use it in a new sentence about today’s passage.
3. Find or make a cousin.
4. Check meaning against context, not only a glossary.
5. Show multiple exposures across the week (talk, reading, writing).
6. Avoid decoration — or revise it when called out.

Not required: Twenty-word Friday perfection. A purchased list finished. A standardized vocabulary leap as kitchen proof.

Placement: If words are owned but structure is invisible, move main focus to Chapter 4 while keeping a two-word cycle warm. If words fail because print cannot be read, repair decoding/morphology and keep vocabulary tied to accessible rich text.

Revisit: Next Tuesday, mix last week's word into warm-up. Academic vocabulary is a habit of use, not a quiz festival.

Keep the English hour honest: warm-up, word cycle or short model, volume with purpose, one good question with wait, exit ticket. Vocabulary cycles fit inside that shape without becoming a second subject that never opens a book.

When two siblings share English time, the older student can run a teach-back while the younger listens for one word. The adult still holds the locked opening and the wait. Parallel work is fine; unsupervised open chat is not.

If a co-op or library group meets, bring one sentence from the shared article and run the talk box for three minutes. Do not turn the group into a competitive spelling bee. Precision about the passage is the win.

Multilingual homes can notice cognates when they honestly help, then return to the English sentence. Morphology attached to academic vocabulary helps many learners; this chapter teaches the move for the whole band without inventing a separate EL course or a kitchen EL trial.

Content teachers at home — you, teaching science — should hear academic words as English work, not as 'not my job.' The science page is a perfect vocabulary text. Strip, define, use, read on.

Writing integration: require one target word in the day's explain or argue sentence.⁴⁷ Then ask whether the word earned its place. That bridge foreshadows later writing chapters without dumping a full workshop here.

A dated notebook line might read: word / sentence from book / my use sentence / cousin. That artifact is enough for records later. Keep titles stranger-readable: Reading, Language Arts, English.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Steve Graham et al., *Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively*, NCEE 2017-4002 (IES, November 2016), Recommendation 2, moderate evidence: integrate writing and reading so students learn features worth using. Requiring a target academic word in the day's explain or argue sentence is kitchen-grain integration, not a writing franchise. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/508_WWCPG_SecondaryWriting_122719.pdf.

⁴⁸Transcript titles remain Reading, Language Arts, or English by content — never a vocabulary

Refuse the popular story that a weekly list equals an English program. Refuse dictionary-copy as the only task. Refuse Tier-I-only kindness that never climbs. Teach the cycle instead.

If energy is low, shrink to one word done thoroughly rather than five words faked. Depth beats coverage theater. Tomorrow you can add the second word.

When the student asks ‘can I just look it up,’ say yes — after an attempt with parts and context.⁴⁹ Reference tools are independent strategies, not first-second rescue from thinking.

Photographing a vocab worksheet for an answer key is still banned. So is pasting a machine’s sample sentence as the student’s use sentence. The adult may prepare; the student must attempt.

Sports sideline stats can supply a word like average or significant in a calm literacy sense: what would you need to know to call a change significant? Keep it print-and-number talk, not identity talk.

Community newsletter blurbs often use words like community, support, and annual. Ask the locked opening on one blurb. Transfer lives outside worksheets.

For 11–12, celebrate oral precision before demanding polished writing. For 13–14, raise the writing bar on the same words. Same cycle, higher demand.

If last month’s words vanished, you skipped recycling. Build a ‘word parking strip’ on the fridge: six words from two weeks, reused in warm-ups. Multiple exposures are not optional garnish.

A parent warm-up failure mode: spending twenty minutes crafting perfect definitions and arriving tense. Five minutes is enough. Imperfect friendly definitions beat perfect unused ones.

When in doubt, open the book. The sentence is the boss of meaning this week. Slogans, quiz keys, and machine fluency rank lower than the page you are actually reading.

brand as the credit line. NCES 2024-113: no national homeschool diploma. Placement by skill, not birthday.

⁴⁹Robert J. Stahl, “Using ‘Think-Time’ and ‘Wait-Time’ Skillfully in the Classroom,” ERIC Digest ED370885 (1994). Classroom-origin think-time; about three seconds as a convention. Not a vocabulary RCT.

Done-enough is a doorway, not a diploma. Move on when use is precise most days. Revisit on Tuesdays. Keep English wider than vocabulary alone — volume, structure, and writing still need their weeks.

Chapter 4 — Text structure and comprehension strategies

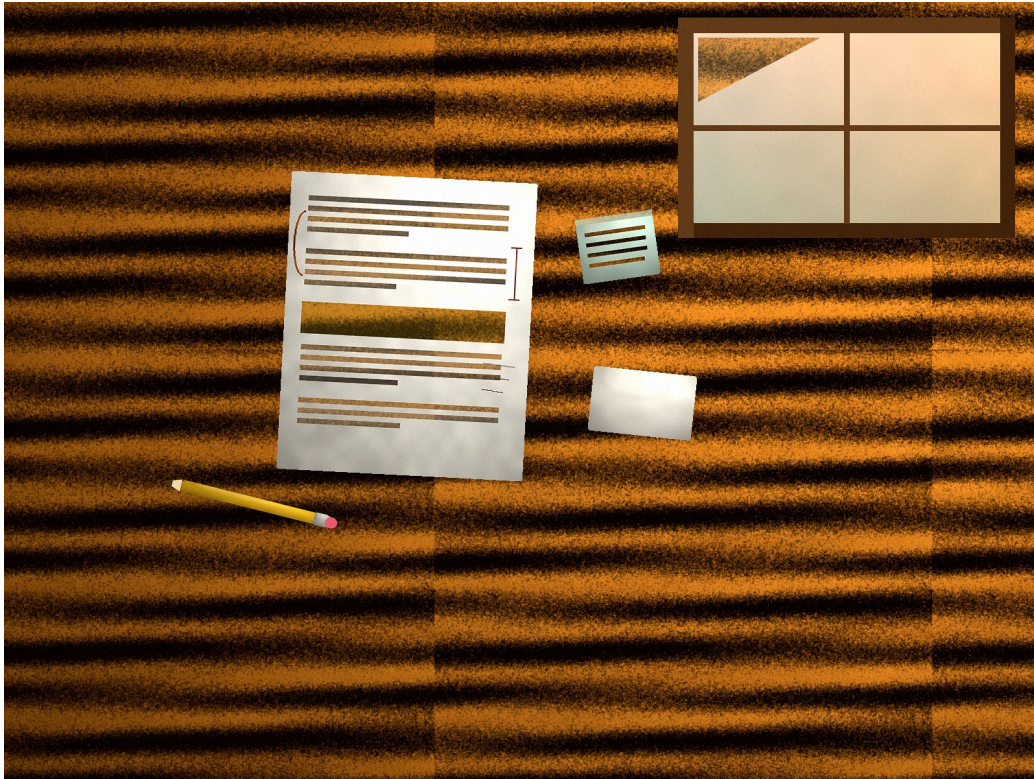


Figure 6: A mentor paragraph marked for paragraph job beside a short plan of bullets — still-life, no people, no logos.

Why this matters

A paragraph is not a random pile of sentences. It usually has a job in the whole piece: to sequence steps, to show cause and effect, to set a problem and a solution, to compare and contrast, to describe, or to state a claim with reasons. When an eleven- to fourteen-year-old can name that job, two things improve: they understand what they read, and they have a plan for what they write.

Text structure and a small set of comprehension strategies are teachable moves. They are not a poster on the fridge that nobody uses. Adolescent literacy guidance rates comprehension-strategy instruction as strong evidence: summarize, question, paraphrase, find the main idea; use organizers; move from teacher modeling to guided practice to independent use.⁵⁰ Reading and writing reinforce each other when students notice features in reading and use them in writing.⁵¹

This chapter owns naming structure and practicing strategies on texts worth reading. It refuses strategy posters without books, main-idea worksheets without a real passage, and any invented claim that a commercial “text structure kit” is federally proven for your kitchen.⁵² Portable moves, kitchen grain.

Chapter 1 stripped words. Chapter 2 built volume with scaffolds. Chapter 3 put academic words to work. Now you ask: what job is this paragraph doing in the whole piece?⁵³ Later chapters will deepen literary reading, informational claim talk, and writing workshop. Structure is the bridge.

⁵⁰Kamil et al., NCEE 2008-4027, Recommendation 2, strong evidence: provide direct and explicit comprehension-strategy instruction (summarize, question, paraphrase, find main idea; graphic organizers; model → guided → independent). Access date 6 September 2026. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/adlit_pg_082608.pdf.

⁵¹Graham et al., NCEE 2017-4002, Recommendation 2, moderate evidence: integrate writing and reading so students notice features in reading and use them in writing. Marking a mentor paragraph and “stealing” its job for a student paragraph is kitchen-grain integration.

⁵²Naming text structure (sequence, cause/effect, problem/solution, compare/contrast, claim+reasons) is a portable move inside Recommendation 2’s strategy instruction — not a separate federal rating for a commercial “text structure kit.” Refuse invented claims that a vendor kit is proven for the kitchen table.

⁵³Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (2010), Reading and Writing strands grades 6–8: analyze structure; cite evidence; write arguments, informative/explanatory, and narratives. A map of typical placement, not a homeschool statute.

For the parent: understand it yourself

Everyday picture. Think of furniture in a room. A chair, a table, and a lamp are not “stuff.” They have jobs. Paragraphs have jobs too. If you walk into a room and cannot tell the table from the floor pile, you bump into things. Readers who cannot tell sequence from claim+reasons bump into meaning.

Precise picture. Working set for 11–14 (not a sacred seven): sequence/chronology; cause/effect; problem/solution; compare/contrast; description/list; claim + reasons/evidence. Signal words often tip the structure (*however, because, first, in contrast, the problem is, therefore*) — and writers sometimes skip neat signals, so meaning still needs a paragraph-job question. Strategies to keep small: monitor understanding; ask questions; summarize; use text structure; infer with evidence. Model → guided practice → independent use. One strategy practiced across genres beats a Monday buffet of six names.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

1. **Strategy poster with no book.** Names without practice. Open a mentor paragraph today.
2. **Main-idea worksheet without a text worth reading.** Isolated items train worksheet habits. Use a real section from this week’s reading.
3. **“The structure is just the title.”** Titles help; paragraph jobs need marking inside the piece.
4. **Summarizing by copying the first sentence only.** First sentences are sometimes topic sentences and sometimes hooks. Objective summary needs the section’s actual load.
5. **Treating a commercial kit as proven for home** because it looks official.⁵⁴ Use the move; do not outsource judgment to packaging.

Five-minute parent warm-up

Mark the structure of one mentor paragraph (compare/contrast, cause/effect, problem/solution, sequence, or claim+reasons). List two signal words. Draft one sentence you might say while modelling: “This paragraph’s job is to compare two

⁵⁴What Works Clearinghouse Adolescent Literacy product ratings (school-labelled) are copied honestly in Chapter 10. A commercial kit that looks official is not automatically a WWC-positive program for home. Use the move; do not outsource judgment to packaging.

river clean-up plans.” Prepare a blank three-box organizer for the student. You are preparing a 5–8 minute crumb, not a unit binder.

How to teach it this week

Session crumb (5–8 minutes inside reading or writing)

1. Adult names or elicits the structure from a short mentor paragraph.
2. Learner marks signal words / paragraph jobs.
3. Learner uses the same structure to plan today’s writing (even a single paragraph).

Fit the crumb after volume or before writing. Strategies need a text. Writing plans need a structure. Keep them shaking hands.

Full English-hour sketch when structure is the focus

Warm-up: yesterday’s signal words. Model: think-aloud on mentor paragraph. Student attempt: mark a twin paragraph. One good question (locked opening) + wait. Volume: read next section hunting the same structure. Exit: name structure + plan three bullets for a paragraph that steals it.

Exact wording

- “What job is this paragraph doing in the whole piece?”
- “Is this mostly compare/contrast, cause/effect, or claim+evidence?”
- “What signal words tipped you off — and could the writer have skipped them?”
- “If we rebuilt this as problem/solution, what would change?”
- “Show me by numbering the steps / boxing the causes / underlining the claim.”
- “Summarize in three sentences without lifting a random first line as ‘the main idea.’ ”

First try-it

Hand a short mentor paragraph. Ask the locked opening. Student marks signals. Then steal the structure: plan one paragraph on a safe household topic using the same job (compare two lunch options; sequence an errand; problem/solution for a messy entryway). Write or oral-plan. Structure transfer is the point.

Fade help

Day 1: you name the structure. Day 2: they choose between two options you offer. Day 3: they name it; you only ask for signals. Day 4–5: they mark independently and plan writing from the structure. If stuck after a real try, model one think-aloud, then hand a parallel paragraph.

When to stop talking

After the locked question. During marking — do not hover-narrate every underline. After they propose a writing plan — wait before you rebuild it for them. Struggle before rescue.

Age-band moves

11–12. Name structures. Objective summary of a section. Cite textual evidence in talk (“which sentence shows the cause?”). Steal structure for a solid paragraph. Keep the strategy set small — master summarize + text structure before adding more.

13–14. Cite the evidence that most strongly supports. Compare structures across two short pieces. Sharper strategy choice (when to summarize vs when to track claim+reasons). Still no culture-war syllabus. Still kitchen stakes.

Place by skill. A fourteen-year-old who copies first sentences as summaries does 11–12 summary work without apology.

Hypothetical week (illustration)

Focus: compare/contrast.

- Mon: Mentor paragraph comparing two bridge designs. Mark signals (*however, both, unlike*).
- Tue: Volume section with same structure; organizer boxes.
- Wed: Steal-the-structure rewrite on comparing two library books.
- Thu: Community newsletter or brochure — what structure is this announcement?
- Fri: Diagnostic wrong summary (first-sentence lift). Done-enough checklist.

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home try-it — Mentor-paragraph “steal the structure” rewrite

- **Time:** 20–25 minutes.
- **Materials:** Mentor paragraph from this week’s reading; scrap paper; pencil; optional organizer.
- **Safety:** Ordinary. Choose a safe content topic for the rewrite (errands, hobbies, pets, sports rules as logistics — not live controversy).
- **The fun:** Legal stealing — take the skeleton, swap the meat.
- **The skill:** Notice features in reading; use them in writing (reading ↔ writing bridge).

How: Mark the mentor’s job and signals. Plan bullets that mirror the job. Write one paragraph. Read both aloud. Ask: “Did we keep the job?”

In-home try-it — Three-sentence objective summary

- **Time:** 10 minutes.
- **Materials:** Section just read; pencil.
- **Safety:** Ordinary.
- **The fun:** Beat-the-copy challenge — no lifting a random first sentence.
- **The skill:** Summarize strategy; main idea without worksheet theater.

How: Cover the first sentence. Say what the section taught. Write three sentences. Uncover and check whether you missed load-bearing content or merely skipped a hook.

Out-of-home try-it — Community newsletter or announcement structure

- **Time:** 10–15 minutes (family newsletter, library handout, park notice, place-of-worship bulletin from your own community).
- **Materials:** One short announcement; pencil.
- **Safety:** Use your family’s own community print or public handouts. No interrogating strangers. No photographing people. Courtesy in shared spaces.
- **The fun:** Civic print becomes a structure puzzle.

- **The skill:** Transfer structure naming to real-world announcements.

How: Ask the locked opening. Mark signals. Name the job (often problem/solution, sequence, or description). Optional: rebuild the announcement as a different structure and notice what changes.

Out-of-home crumb — Museum placard jobs

On a placard, ask what job the first paragraph does versus the second (description vs claim, sequence vs cause). Quiet voices. Finger on print. Same skill, civic setting.

Talk box

Exact opening: “What job is this paragraph doing in the whole piece?”

Follow-ups:

1. Meaning: “What should a reader take away after this paragraph?”
2. Representation: “Mark the signal words or box the parts of the structure.”
3. Type: “Which structure name fits best — and what is your second-place guess?”
4. Check: “Does that job match the whole section, or only one sentence?”
5. Revise: “Try naming it another way. You may change your mind.”

How to wait: Ask. Slow three. Look at the paragraph. Second wait. Do not supply the structure label at one second.

Stuck silence usually means: Vague question; zero wait; no mentor model yet; they think structure means “the title”; they are hunting what you want; strategy names were taught as a list with no book; they summarize by copying. Point to print. Offer two choices only if needed. Model one, then parallel try.

Blocked vs mixed

Blocked: One structure all week (e.g., cause/effect) across reading and writing.

Mixed: Friday compare two structures used in one article; or rebuild the same content as problem/solution vs compare/contrast.

Incorrect example to diagnose

Incorrect shape: A colorful strategy poster, six strategies named Monday, none practiced on a book. Friday main-idea worksheet with disconnected sentences.

Means: Labels without routines; worksheet as fake comprehension.

Better: One strategy + one structure + real paragraphs all week. Organizer used on the actual chapter. Steal structure once in writing.

Also refuse nearby wrong turns: quiz points as comprehension; three-cueing as word reading when a hard sentence appears; parking forever in baby-easy text so structure lessons never meet rich paragraphs. Strategies need real print the student can actually read — with scaffolds or repair when needed.

Strategy sequencing honesty (parent)

Week focus ideas, one at a time across weeks — not all Monday:

1. Main idea / gist of a paragraph.
2. Question generation (learner writes one good question; adult waits).
3. Summarize a section in three sentences without copying.
4. Parallel: name text structure and use it to plan writing.

Failure mode: naming six strategies and practicing none. Success mode: one strategy across genres.

Worked mark-up example (composite)

Mentor: “Oil and water both sit in the jar at first. However, oil floats after shaking stops, unlike water, which stays mixed with the food coloring.”

Student marks: *both / however / unlike*. Names compare/contrast. Steal plan about two backpacks: both carry books; however one has a chest strap; unlike the other, it stays put when running. That is enough grain for 11–12.

Organizer crumbs

Compare/contrast: two columns + “both” box. Cause/effect: left causes, right effects, arrows. Problem/solution: problem box, attempts, solution. Sequence:

numbered lines. Claim+reasons: claim sentence, two evidence bullets (foreshadows Chapter 6).

Use during reading or immediately after — not as busywork the next month.

For the student

This week you practice naming what job a paragraph is doing — and using that job when you write.

Writers build paragraphs on purpose. Sometimes they sequence steps. Sometimes they show why something happened. Sometimes they compare two things. Sometimes they state a claim and give reasons. Your job as a reader is to notice the job. Your job as a writer is to choose a job on purpose.

Tiny worked example

Paragraph: “First we measured the water. Next we added salt. Finally we recorded the temperature.”

Job: sequence.

Signals: first, next, finally.

Steal-the-structure plan for an errand: First I checked the list. Next I found the aisle. Finally I paid.

Summary check: A good summary of a longer section would not just copy the first sentence if the first sentence was only a hook.

Try 1. In today’s reading, ask: “What job is this paragraph doing in the whole piece?” Mark signals. Say the structure name.

Try 2. Steal that structure to plan one paragraph about a real errand, a hobby, or two books. Write it.

Explain it back. Teach a parent how you knew the structure — show the marks.

Challenge. Rebuild your paragraph as a different structure. What changes? What stays?

You’re done enough when you can name the structure of a short passage, mark signal words or paragraph jobs, use the same structure to plan one paragraph, and

summarize without lifting a random first sentence as the main idea.

Repair vs structure

If the student cannot read the words, structure lessons will look like comprehension failure. Check Chapter 2 repair. Teach structure on controllable rich text they can access with scaffolds. Do not diagnose “can’t comprehend” when they can’t decode.

Sibling teach-back for structure

Student teaches the week’s structure using the mentor paragraph and their stolen paragraph. Listener must point to one signal word. Ten minutes. Skill: explain + represent.

If it isn’t clicking

Diagnostic 1 — Names structures on a quiz, cannot mark a real paragraph.

Cause: labels without text practice.

Move: Retire the quiz. Mentor paragraph daily for a week. Marks required.

Diagnostic 2 — Summary is always the first sentence.

Cause: hook/topic-sentence confusion; strategy not modeled.

Move: Cover first sentence. Three-sentence summary routine. Compare.

Diagnostic 3 — Writing has no visible plan; paragraphs wander.

Cause: structure not transferred to writing.

Move: Steal-the-structure before every draft this week. Bullets first. One job per paragraph.

Slow down when: Six structures introduced in two days; tears; no book open.

Go ahead when: Clean marks; successful steal; summary without first-line lift; transfer to newsletter/placard.

Tutor when: Persistent inability to track meaning in connected text even after decoding check and vocabulary scaffolds — seek human help; structure teaching alone will not fix undecoded print.

Correct kindly: “You named compare/contrast. Show me the two things being compared in the lines — not only in the title.”

Tools, including AI

English-hour AI box still governs. Unaided first. Parent holds or co-holds.

Allowed after try: Ask a tool to explain *to you* signal words in a paragraph you paste; generate an isomorphic practice paragraph with parent-held structure key; SCRIPT questions for you to ask; feedback questions on a student’s structure plan — not a rewrite of their paragraph.

Not allowed: Machine-written student paragraph offered as theirs; photo-to-key on a structure worksheet; unsupervised chatbot as the comprehension partner; rewriting the reading passage to simplify away the need to comprehend.

Short pointer. Teach.

What “done enough” looks like

Skill, not birthday. Credit **Reading / Language Arts / English**. A “grade 7 text structure unit” is publisher scope, not law.

Done enough when the student can:

1. Name the structure of a short passage.
2. Mark signal words or paragraph jobs.
3. Use the same structure to plan one paragraph.
4. Summarize objectively without lifting a random first sentence as the main idea.
5. Practice at least one other strategy (question, monitor, infer with evidence) on real text this week.
6. Transfer once outside a worksheet (newsletter, placard, brochure).

Not required: All structures mastered in one week. A purchased kit finished. A poster recited.

Placement: If structure is clean but literary talk is thin, move toward Chapter 5. If informational claim talk is the gap, Chapter 6. Keep a structure warm-up alive either way.

Revisit: Next Tuesday, mix last week’s structure into a warm-up mark. Strategies are habits on books, not names on walls.

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Keep structure teaching tied to books you are already reading. A special binder of fake paragraphs can introduce a structure once; transfer dies if the week never returns to the chapter.

Organizers should stay simple: two columns for compare/contrast; arrows for cause/effect; boxes for problem and solution; numbered lines for sequence; claim on top with reason bullets under. Fancy graphics are optional. Thinking is not.

When signal words are missing, ask the job question harder. Writers are not obligated to say however. Readers are still obligated to notice function.

Monitoring understanding sounds abstract until you script it: ‘Stop at the end of this page. What just got explained? What is still confusing?’ That stop is a strategy. Skipping confusion is not grit.

Question generation by the student is powerful and easy to fake. Require the question to be answerable from the text, then wait while they attempt an answer with a finger on a line.

Inference with evidence means a guess that can point to print. ‘I feel like...’ without a sentence is not the move. ‘I infer X because line Y says Z’ is the move.

For families who already write a lot, this chapter still matters: wandering multi-paragraph drafts often fail at paragraph jobs. Steal structure before you add length.

For families who mostly discuss, add one written plan this week. Oral structure naming is good. Written bullets that mirror a mentor paragraph build the writing bridge.

Sports rules posted at a field can be sequence or problem/solution print. Ask the locked opening quietly on the sideline. Literacy object, not identity fight.

Transit maps and museum maps reward sequence talk. How do we get from A to B? That out-of-home explain later becomes writing practice without a franchise worksheet.

If two structures seem plausible, that can be honest. Ask for the best fit and a second-place guess. Changing your mind after marking more signals is success.

Avoid turning every dinner into a seminar. One crumb, one paragraph, one wait. Frequency across the week beats a single exhausting lecture.

Composite illustration: a thirteen-year-old marks a local park notice as problem/solution, then steals the structure to write about a messy garage. Friday

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summary no longer lifts the first sentence. Notebook dated. Done enough for the week's focus.

Composite illustration: an eleven-year-old confuses description with compare/contrast because both list details. Parent offers two choices, waits, asks what two things are being compared. Student revises to description. Correction without crushing.

Connection forward: Chapter 5 will ask who wanted what in literary reading. Chapter 6 will ask for a claim and a supporting sentence. Structure naming makes both questions easier because paragraph jobs become visible.

Connection back: glossary stickies from Chapter 2 often sit on signal-rich sentences. Academic words from Chapter 3 often carry structure (*therefore, contrast, significant difference*). Keep the strands together in the English hour.

Refuse the popular story that a poster equals strategy instruction. Refuse main-idea packets as the only comprehension diet. Refuse live controversy as the text set. Teach moves on ordinary worthy print.

Records crumb: keep the marked mentor paragraph and the stolen paragraph side by side in the dated notebook. That pair shows reading ↔ writing integration better than a quiz score.

If the student can name structures at the table but freezes on a newsletter, the done-enough list is not done. Out-of-home try-its are transfer checks, not enrichment fluff.

Parent energy tip: reuse one mentor paragraph across two days — mark on day one, steal on day two. You do not need a new perfect mentor every morning.

When accuracy collapses while marking, check decoding and vocabulary before assuming a 'comprehension disability.' Code repair when needed; meaning always; structure teaching on accessible text meanwhile.

A slow three after the locked opening is enough wait to start.⁵⁵ If they are mid-reason, let them finish. If silence is empty, narrow: 'Is this sequence or cause/effect?' then wait again.

⁵⁵Robert J. Stahl, ERIC Digest ED370885 (1994): think-time / wait-time classroom manners. Mary Budd Rowe, ERIC ED061103 (1972): wait-time origins in elementary science class. Use the pause; do not mash either into a literacy RCT.

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Mixed practice later in the week might include one literary paragraph and one informational paragraph with different jobs. Same question. Same pencil marks. Genre variety builds flexibility.

You do not need to be a reading specialist to mark *however* and ask what job a paragraph is doing. You do need to open the book and wait. That is the week's promise.

Done enough is placement by skill. Move on when marks and plans are mostly clean. Revisit next Tuesday. Keep English wider than structure alone — words, volume, and later writing still need their due.

Library \$0 remains first: any borrowed article with clear paragraph jobs beats an expensive kit you never open.⁵⁶ Fit-not-rank program notes live later. Today's object is the paragraph in front of you.

If you only change one habit after this chapter, change the moment before writing: name the paragraph job and jot three bullets that match it. That single swap turns blank-page panic into a plan.

Blank-page 'just write' will return as a temptation in later chapters. This chapter preempts it. Structure is a kindness to the writer, not a cage.

Teachers in you may want to cover every structure in the working set this week. Resist. One structure practiced deeply transfers. A parade of names does not.

End-of-week exit: student names the week's structure, marks a cold paragraph from the same book, and plans one steal. If two of three land, you can advance. If zero land, repeat with new sentences from the same chapter.

⁵⁶Placement by skill, not birthday. Transcript titles: Reading, Language Arts, or English — never a brand. Library \$0 first for mentor paragraphs (NCES library rows as in Chapter 2 notes).

Chapter 5

Literary reading



Figure 7: A kitchen-table still-life: an open paperback with two sentences underlined in pencil, a sticky note that says “who wanted what,” and a short handwritten paragraph beside the book. No people. No brand logos.

Who wanted what — and how do you know from the text?

That question is the whole literary-reading week in one breath. A story is not a quiz about the plot. A poem is not a hunt for the “right feeling.” Someone in the text wants something. Something gets in the way. The writer chose words, scenes, and structure on purpose. Your student’s job is to name the want, point to the lines that prove it, and say one true thing about what the writer did — without turning the English hour into a culture-war syllabus.

Why this matters

Literary reading at eleven to fourteen is where private pleasure and public evidence meet. The student already likes some stories. The work of this chapter is to keep the pleasure and add the discipline: *from the text*. Theme, character want, and craft grain are not Advanced Placement jargon. They are ordinary middle-grades moves. Who wanted what. How do you know. What did the writer do in this scene.

Many families already “do literature.” They read aloud. They visit the library. They finish a novel and feel proud — rightly. What often goes missing is the next layer: a claim about the story that can be checked against sentences on the page. Without that layer, literary reading collapses into either endless plot retell or floating opinion. With it, the same chapter becomes practice in attention, fairness to the author, and clear speech.

Kamil and colleagues, in the IES adolescent-literacy practice guide, put comprehension strategies and extended discussion of text meaning near the center of the work for older readers. Strategy teaching is a strong recommendation. Extended discussion is a moderate one. Literary reading uses both: a taught way to find meaning, and talk that returns to the line.⁵⁷ This is a useful study map for schools, not a promise that every kitchen table will see the same result. Steal the implication: model a move, ask one good question, wait, and send them back to the page.

⁵⁷Michael L. Kamil et al., *Improving Adolescent Literacy*, NCEE 2008-4027 (IES, August 2008), Recommendation 2, strong evidence (direct and explicit comprehension-strategy instruction); Recommendation 3, moderate evidence (extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation). Literary reading uses both. School practice-guide map, not a kitchen franchise. Access date 6 September 2026. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/adlit_pg_082608.pdf.

Why teach this *now*? Because the common map for grades 6–8 already asks students to cite textual evidence, determine a theme, summarize objectively, and notice craft and structure.⁵⁸ That map is a map, not a statute, and not your state’s attendance rule. It still names the work. Because silent packets alone do not teach discussion. Because plot summary forever never becomes theme. Because “that’s just my opinion” with no sentence under it is not literary reading yet. Because NAEP Grade 8 still includes literary texts even though informational text takes a larger share than it did at Grade 4 — teach both tracks; do not abandon stories.⁵⁹

Safe stakes only. A short story’s theme. How a poem’s speaker differs from the author. What a character wanted and what blocked them. What the writer did with a scene — a repeated image, a sudden cut, a quiet last line. Not live controversy as the novel list. Not graphic harm as “rigor.” Not a high-school literature survey dumped into age twelve. One pointer to *English for Little Thinkers* for younger story-sense; one pointer to *English for Homeschooling* if you later want the wider high-school path. Then teach 11–14 literary reading here.

You do not need to be an English professor. You do need to hear plot-summary-only as a missing-evidence move, “my opinion” with no page as a missing-anchor move, and a silent packet offered as “discussion,” and to ask who wanted what — without finishing the answer for them.

This week you can learn to hear a summary that never lands on want or theme. Today the student can state who wanted what in one sentence (11–12) or compare wants or craft moves across two short works (13–14), and point to the text.

What success feels like at the table is quiet confidence, not a finished canon. The parent hears a plot-only answer and knows the next question. The student expects to be asked for a line. The notebook shows dated claims that got sharper across the week. That is middle-grades literary reading in a home: small, repeatable, evidence-bound, and still pleasurable.

If a purchased literature guide helps you pick worthy texts and discussion prompts, use it as a servant. The credit line is still Literature or English. The skill is still

⁵⁸Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (2010), Reading Literature strand grades 6–8: cite textual evidence; determine a theme; summarize objectively; analyze craft and structure. A map of typical U.S. public-school placement, not a homeschool statute.

⁵⁹National Assessment of Educational Progress, Reading Grade 8, 2024: the assessment includes literary texts even as informational text takes a larger share than at Grade 4 — teach both tracks; do not abandon stories. NAEP is a school population. Not a nationally representative homeschool census. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>.

who wanted what from the text. Guides do not replace the finger on the page.

For the parent: understand it yourself

Many adults remember literature class as either a feelings circle or a vocabulary of terms they never used again. That is ordinary. Five minutes of this section, then the warm-up, is enough for tomorrow. The student still finds the lines.

Everyday picture. Two people watch the same short film clip of a kid trying to join a game at recess. One says, “It was about recess.” The other says, “She wanted in, the older kids kept turning away, and the last shot stays on her empty hands.” The second answer names a want, an obstacle, and a craft choice. Literary reading is that second answer, on a page.

A second kitchen picture. You and your student finish a chapter. You ask what happened. They retell every beat. Useful — and unfinished. Ask: “Who wanted what in this chapter — and how do you know from the text?” Now they must choose. Choosing is the skill. Retelling is the warm-up for choosing.

A third picture, still ordinary. A poem about a storm. The student says, “The poet was scared of storms.” Maybe. Or maybe the *speaker* is scared, and the poet is inventing a voice. Asking “speaker or author?” is not pedantry. It is fairness to the page.

Precise picture. *Character want* is what a character tries to get, keep, change, or avoid. *Obstacle* is what stands in the way — another person, a rule, a fear, weather, time, a secret. *Theme* is a transferable idea the work develops through scenes — not a one-word poster (“friendship”) and not a moral sticker slapped on after the fact. A workable theme sentence sounds like: “The story shows that belonging can cost honesty,” then points to scenes. *Craft grain* at this age is small and concrete: what the writer did with a scene, a line, a repeated detail, a point of view, a cut from one moment to the next. You do not need the full toolkit of college criticism. You need one named move tied to one place in the text.

Cite evidence means point to words on the page, then explain how those words support the claim. Quotation marks help when they copy a phrase. A clear paraphrase with a page number also counts. Opinion can arrive after evidence, not instead of it. “I think Maya is reckless” becomes literary reading when followed by “because she brings the key she wasn’t supposed to have (p. 42).”

A short objective summary helps as a runway. It names main events without judging characters as “nice” or “mean,” and without copying the first sentence as if it were the whole story. Then the interpretive work begins: want, theme, craft.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

1. *Plot summary only, forever.* “First this, then this, then this.” Ask: “Who wanted what?” Require one sentence before the retell continues.
2. *“That’s just my opinion,” with no line from the text.* Say: “Opinion is allowed after evidence. Point to the sentence that made you think that.”
3. *Theme as a single abstract word with no development.* “The theme is friendship.” Ask: “What does the story show about friendship — and where?”
4. *Treating the speaker of a poem as automatically the author.* Ask: “What in the poem makes you say that — and what would make you pause?”
5. *Live controversy offered as the literature curriculum* — choosing texts primarily to rehearse a current public fight. Choose worthy literary texts. Teach want, theme, and craft. Keep the English hour on the page, not on the news cycle as syllabus.

A sixth you will also hear: silent packets as the whole “discussion program,” or craft talk that dumps advanced jargon with no return to a concrete scene. Name one craft move in ordinary words. Point to the scene. A seventh: confusing *what happened* with *what it means*, or treating a movie version as the text. Return to the book in hand.

Five-minute parent warm-up

Do this before the lesson, on scrap paper, no student required in the room.

Minute 1. Read tonight’s chapter or short story stretch yourself.

Minute 2. Write one sentence: who wanted what.

Minute 3. Underline two evidence sentences. Star the stronger one.

Minute 4. Note one craft move in plain words: “The writer ends on the empty room,” or “The narrator only tells us what Maya sees.”

Minute 5. Write the opening question on a sticky: “Who wanted what — and how do you know from the text?” Put the sticky on the book. Say your claim aloud once so your mouth knows the shape.

How to teach it this week

Session shape (about 30–50 minutes, most weekdays this focus week). Warm-up → short model → student attempt → one good question and wait → mixed practice or discussion → exit ticket. You already have the English-hour rhythm. This week the focus skill is literary reading with text evidence. Four or five English hours on this focus, plus one in-home and one out-of-home try-it, is a honest week — not a 180-day novel unit dumped on Monday.

Warm-up (3–5 min). Yesterday’s word family from Chapter 1, or one sentence from yesterday’s chapter: “Who wanted something yesterday?” One sentence. No lecture. If they blank, open to yesterday’s starred line and ask again.

Short model (5–8 min). Think aloud on a short stretch you both can see. Say: “I’m looking for who wanted what. Here — ‘He kept walking toward the closed gate even after they told him to stop.’ He wants through. The closed gate and the warning are the obstacle. I’m not guessing from the cover. I’m using this sentence.” Write your one-sentence claim. Underline the evidence. Optionally name one craft move: “The writer keeps repeating *closed*. That makes the obstacle feel stuck.” Keep the model short enough that they still have energy to try.

Student attempt (10–15 min). They read a stretch (or reread). They write who wanted what in one sentence. They mark two evidence places. At 11–12, one solid paragraph response is enough. At 13–14, they may compare two wants, or want versus theme, or two craft moves across two short works. Struggle before rescue. If they stall, hint with a question (“Who is moving toward something?”), not with your finished claim.

One good question, then wait. Use the locked opening: “Who wanted what — and how do you know from the text?” After you ask, wait. A slow three is a convention, not a sacrament. After they stop talking, wait again. Look at the page if the silence is hard. Do not fill the blank with your essay. Do not stack five questions because quiet feels awkward.

Discussion or written response (8–12 min). Extended discussion of meaning is part of the content, not a reward after the packet. One speaker at a time. Every claim returns to a line. If a sibling joins, same rule. Optional: turn the talk into a short written response with at least one textual anchor. Writing seals what talk started.

Exit ticket (2–4 min). One sentence claim + page or paragraph number for ev-

idence. Or: “One craft move I noticed today was ____ because ____.” Date the notebook. That dated line is already record material for Chapter 9.

Age-band moves

11–12. Who wanted what; point to evidence on the page; short discussion that returns to the line; brief written response (one solid paragraph). Theme can be stated in a full sentence with one example. Craft stays concrete: repeated word, surprise ending, who is telling the story. Prefer shorter works or chapter stretches over sprawling projects.

13–14. Denser theme and craft talk; compare structures or themes across two short works; cite the evidence that *most strongly* supports the claim, not only the first sentence they spotted. Still no culture-war syllabus. They may write a short multi-paragraph response: claim, two anchors, one craft or theme sentence. They may track a want across several chapters and revise an earlier claim when new evidence appears.

Exact wording you can say

- “Who wanted what — and how do you know from the text?”
- “Point to the sentence. Read it aloud. Then tell me how it supports your claim.”
- “You may change your mind when better evidence shows up.”
- “Summary first, then want, then theme — not theme floating in the air.”
- “What did the writer *do* in this scene? One concrete move.”
- “Is that the strongest line, or a convenient line?”

First try-it for the student (in-home)

Name: Who-Wanted-What Chapter Card

Time: 20–25 minutes

Materials: Tonight’s chapter or a short story; pencil; index card or notebook

Safety: Ordinary reading posture; no device rabbit holes during the try

The fun: They get to “catch” the character mid-want, like spotting a play on the field

The skill: State want + obstacle in one sentence; mark two evidence lines; speak them aloud

Steps: Read the stretch. Write “___ wanted ___ but ___.” Underline two sentences. Read the claim and one evidence sentence to you. You ask only the locked question and one follow-up. Stop. Do not rewrite their card. If the card is thin, send them back to the page once — then stop again.

How to fade help

Day 1: you model the full card. Day 2: they draft; you ask which evidence is stronger. Day 3: they discuss with a sibling or with you using the talk box; you mostly wait. Day 4–5: written paragraph with a textual anchor; you comment on evidence quality, not handwriting first. By next week, the card can shrink to a sticky while discussion and writing carry more of the load.

When to stop talking

After the question. After they answer. After they revise. Your job is not a lecture on symbolism. If you hear yourself explaining the theme for them, stop. Ask them to point. If the discussion is rich at minute ten, you may extend to twelve. If it is you monologuing at minute four, end early and put the energy into their written claim instead.

Practice that actually builds learning

Named try-its beat vague “talk about the book.” Library, walk, and kitchen *motivate*. They do not replace pointing to lines and writing a short response. Volume reading from Chapter 2 still matters this week — literary skill grows on actual pages, not on a poster about theme.

In-home try-it: Shared chapter + who-wanted-what paragraph

Time: 25–35 minutes

Materials: Shared novel or short story; notebook; pencil

Safety: Screens off for the discussion stretch unless the text is digital and shared on one screen

The fun: Family detective work — same chapter, different evidence stars

The skill: Oral claim with text return, then one written paragraph with at least one quotation or clear paraphrase tied to a page

Read the same stretch. Each person stars one evidence sentence for “who wanted what.” Compare stars. Disagreement is welcome if both point to text. Then the student writes one paragraph: claim, evidence, one sentence of explanation. You do not dictate the paragraph. If they copy your oral answer, close your notebook and have them rebuild from their stars only.

In-home try-it (alternate): Poem speaker card

Time: 15–20 minutes

Materials: One short poem; two index cards labelled SPEAKER and AUTHOR

Safety: None special

The fun: Sorting voices like sorting mail

The skill: Distinguish speaker from author; cite a line that supports the speaker claim

Read the poem twice. On SPEAKER, write what the voice seems to want or notice. On AUTHOR, write only what you can truly know from outside the poem (often: almost nothing required for this try). Force one evidence line under SPEAKER. This try-it prevents automatic “the poet feels...” talk.

Out-of-home try-it: Library craft question after a chapter

Time: 15–20 minutes at the library (plus the chapter read at home)

Materials: Library book already in progress; scrap paper

Safety: Library voice; no quizzing strangers; leave shelves as you found them

The fun: The building becomes a lab for “what did the writer do?”

The skill: Name one craft move in ordinary words and support it with a line

After a chapter, sit with the book open. Ask: “What did the writer do in the last scene — and which sentence shows it?” They write one craft claim on scrap paper and copy the supporting line. Optional at 13–14: find a second short work in the same genre on the shelf and ask whether a similar craft move appears — still no syllabus of controversy. Card before cart: the library is the \$0 literature path for a reason.⁶⁰

⁶⁰Jiashan Cui and Rachel Hanson, NCES 2020-001, Table 6: library as a curriculum/book source is common among homeschoolers (6th–8th 61 percent). NCES 2024-113, Table A-5: library visit in the past month differs by question. Library \$0 is the first literature path this book names.

Out-of-home try-it (alternate): Historic-site or museum story placard

Time: 10–15 minutes on site

Materials: A narrative placard (a person’s story, not a policy fight); phone note or paper

Safety: Hands off artifacts; aisle courtesy; no photographing people without permission

The fun: Treating a wall text like a tiny short story

The skill: Who wanted what in this historical vignette — and which sentence on the placard supports it?

This is literacy on a wall, not a culture-war tour. Stay with the printed narrative. One claim. One sentence from the placard. Leave.

Mixed practice when the move is warm

- Poem day: “Who is speaking — and how is that different from ‘the author wants’?”
- Two-character day: two wants on one card; whose want drives the scene?
- Theme day: full-sentence theme + one scene that develops it.
- Objective summary day: five sentences max, no judgment words, then want.
- Craft-only day: list three writer choices in ordinary verbs (*repeats, cuts, hides, slows*).
- Across-chapters day (13–14): “Did the want change? Prove it with an old line and a new line.”

Blocked practice for a new move

Spend two days only on want + evidence before you add theme. Spend one day only on craft grain before you ask for theme-and-craft together. New move first. Mix later. Blocked practice installs the move; mixed practice teaches when to use it.

One incorrect example to diagnose

A student finishes a chapter packet of ten multiple-choice questions, scores well, and cannot answer “Who wanted what?” without flipping randomly. Or a family

treats quiz points as proof of literary understanding. Points and packets can motivate volume. They do not replace discussion that returns to the line, or a short written response with evidence.⁶¹ Hear the miss: comprehension-as-points, or silent-packet-as-discussion. Pivot: one claim, two stars, one paragraph. Another miss: choosing next month's novels primarily to rehearse a live public fight. Pivot: worthy text, want/theme/craft, evidence on the page.

Talk box

Opening (locked): "Who wanted what — and how do you know from the text?"

Follow-ups (3–5): 1. *Meaning*: "What stood in the way — and where does the text show that?" 2. *Representation*: "Show me by pointing to the sentence. Underline it." 3. *Type / evidence*: "Is that the strongest line, or just the first one you found?" 4. *Check*: "Does your one-sentence claim match those lines — or did we drift into retell?" 5. *Revise allowed*: "You may change your mind. Try the claim another way."

How to wait: After you ask, a slow three. After they stop, wait again. If they are mid-retell toward a want, do not cut them off. Look at the page, not at their face, if silence is hard. Stahl's think-time is a classroom-origin pause habit; it is not a literacy RCT. Rowe's wait-time work began in science class — useful manners for pausing, not a reading experiment to mash into Kamil.⁶² Use the pause as kitchen manners for thinking.

Stuck silence usually means: the question was "what happened?" too vague; wait-time was zero; they are hunting what you want to hear; they offered a feeling with no textual support; they think reading means look-and-guess from the cover; they think "theme" means a poster word; they are overwhelmed by a book that is too hard without scaffolds. Pose, wait, point at the print. Add a glossary sticky if load-bearing words are the real wall. Do not fill silence with your interpretation.

⁶¹What Works Clearinghouse, *Accelerated Reader*™ (August 2010), Adolescent Literacy: no discernible effects on fluency or comprehension for adolescent learners in the opened summary. Points and packets can motivate volume; they do not replace discussion that returns to the line or a short written response with evidence.

⁶²Robert J. Stahl, ERIC Digest ED370885 (1994): think-time / wait-time. Mary Budd Rowe, ERIC ED061103 (1972): wait-time work began in elementary science class. Useful kitchen manners for pausing; not a literacy RCT to mash into Kamil.

A sample week shape (illustration, not a mandate)

Monday. Model who-wanted-what on two pages. Student card. Exit: one claim + page number.

Tuesday. Reread; add second evidence; short discussion with talk box only. Exit: which evidence is stronger, and why.

Wednesday. Craft grain day — one ordinary-verb craft claim. Out-of-home library craft question if you have a library hour.

Thursday. Written paragraph with textual anchor. You comment on evidence, not commas first.

Friday. Theme sentence or revise Monday's claim with new chapter evidence. Diagnostic wrong: catch one plot-only answer and rebuild it. Done-enough checklist glance.

Mix last week's morphology or vocabulary warm-up for three minutes so word study does not vanish. Literary reading sits on volume and word knowledge; it does not replace them.

Connection to writing (preview of Chapter 7)

A who-wanted-what claim is already a seed for a short literary argument: claim, evidence, explanation. When Chapter 7 asks for purpose and plan, literary response is one honest purpose. Do not wait for a "writing unit" to begin sentences about stories. One paragraph this week beats a vague promise of an essay next month.

Connection to informational reading (preview of Chapter 6)

Literary and informational tracks are twins. This chapter owns stories and poems. Next chapter owns central idea, arguments, and discussion protocol on informational print. Same family habit: claim plus sentence on the page. Different objects. Keep both alive across a month.

Materials that usually suffice

One worthy novel or a handful of short stories; a poem or two; pencil; sticky notes; a dated notebook. Optional: a literature guide used as a prompt servant, not

as the transcript title. You do not need a full anthology course, an AP preview, or a points app to teach this chapter. You need pages, a question, wait, and a short written return to the line.

If reading volume is thin this month, fix volume first with Chapter 2's scaffolds, then return here. Literary moves on zero pages are posters. Literary moves on real pages are English.

For the student

You already know how to follow a story. This chapter asks for something sharper — and more fair to the writer.

What this idea is. In a story or poem, someone wants something. The text shows it. Your job is to say who wanted what in one clear sentence, then prove it with words from the page. You can also notice one thing the writer *did* — not magic, just a choice, like ending on a quiet image, repeating a word, or letting you hear only one character's thoughts. Theme is a full idea the story builds, not a single poster word.

Tiny worked example. Story line: "Maya stood outside the clubhouse with the key she wasn't supposed to have."

Claim: Maya wanted inside the clubhouse even though she wasn't allowed.

Evidence: "key she wasn't supposed to have" + standing outside.

Craft crumb: the sentence puts the forbidden key in the same breath as the doorway, so the want and the rule collide in one line.

Theme crumb (later): The scene nudges an idea about broken rules and belonging — but only if later scenes develop it. One line is not yet a theme.

Try 1. In your current chapter, write: "___ wanted ___ but ___." Underline two sentences that support it. Star the stronger underline.

Try 2. Tell a partner or parent your claim. Read one evidence sentence aloud. Then answer: "Is there a stronger sentence on the next page?" If yes, change your mind on purpose.

Explain it back. In your own words: What is the difference between retelling the plot and saying who wanted what? What is the difference between a theme sentence and a one-word poster?

Challenge. Write a short paragraph: claim, one quotation or close paraphrase with a page number, one sentence explaining how the evidence supports the claim. At 13–14, add a second paragraph: either a craft move or a theme sentence with a second anchor. Optional boss level: compare two characters’ wants in the same scene. You may change your mind when better evidence shows up. That is strength, not failure.

If it isn’t clicking

Diagnostic 1 — Retell never becomes claim.

They can summarize for five minutes and never name a want.

Next move: Ban the long retell for one day. Require the template sentence first (“___ wanted ___ but ___”). Then two underlines. Only then may they tell what happened. Praise the short claim more than the long summary.

Diagnostic 2 — Claims float with no page.

“He’s brave.” “It’s about hope.”

Next move: “Brave where? Finger on the sentence.” If they cannot find it, the claim is not ready. Help them search, then rewrite the claim to match the text. Teach them the difference between a feeling about the book and a claim from the book.

Diagnostic 3 — Discussion dies or becomes a lecture.

Either silence, or you explaining the theme while they nod.

Next move: Use the talk box only. One question. Wait. One follow-up. Stop at twelve minutes. Put a sticky on the exact line under discussion so eyes have a place to land. If you are the one talking most, switch to written claim for two days, then return to talk.

Extra diagnostic — Craft talk turns into jargon fog.

They say “symbolism” and cannot point.

Next move: Ban the fancy word for a day. Require an ordinary verb: repeats, hides, cuts, slows, surprises. Point to the place.

When to slow down. If decoding collapses on the novel, do a skill repair block, then return with glossary stickies — do not make baby decodables the identity of literature time. If every answer is plot-only, stay on want+evidence for a week before theme. If the book is emotionally huge for your family, choose another worthy text; safe stakes still teach the skill.

When to go ahead. If they reliably state want with evidence, add craft, then theme, then (13–14) compare two short works. If written paragraphs already carry two anchors cleanly, shorten the oral warm-up and give more time to revision of the literary response.

When to get a human tutor. If reading accuracy is still badly broken after honest repair tries, or written responses stay stuck at copy-the-sentence with no idea across weeks, seek a trained reading teacher. You are a capable parent teacher. You are not automatically a specialist interventionist.

Correct a wrong answer without crushing the attempt: “I hear a theme word. I don’t yet hear the scene that develops it. Let’s find the scene together.” Hearing the miss and asking a better question is teaching. Silence in the face of opinion-with-no-page is not kindness.

Tools, including AI

Keep this short. The English-hour AI box still rules the house.

After the student has tried who-wanted-what on their own, you may use a parent-held tool (11–12: you hold the account; 13–14: you co-hold, still in the room) to explain *to you* how evidence citation works on a named page, or to generate a four-line SCRIPT of questions for *you* to ask — not a paragraph for them to copy as their essay. Revision questions after a draft are fine. A full rewrite of their literary response is not. Do not photograph a literature packet for an answer key. Do not park a chatbot as their only discussion partner during the attempt. Do not ask a tool to “fix this response to an A.”

Unaided first. Tool second. Their words on the page. A fluent machine paragraph about theme is performance, not their literary reading.

What “done enough” looks like

You can move on when most of these are true on more than one day:

1. States who wanted what in one sentence.
2. Points to text evidence (underlines, reads aloud, or cites a clear location).

3. Joins discussion that returns to the line — not only silent packets.
4. Writes a short response with at least one textual anchor.
5. Can separate objective summary from interpretation when asked.
6. At 13–14: can compare wants, themes, or craft moves across two short works without abandoning evidence.
7. Does not treat plot summary alone, points apps, or live controversy as the literature program.

Placement by skill, not birthday. A fourteen-year-old who still cannot land a want claim does 11–12 want+evidence work without apology. An eleven-year-old ready for craft comparison may try a light 13–14 move with a short second text. A “grade 7 novel study” is a publisher’s scope, not a legal grade, and not a transcript line. Put the work under **Literature** or **English** or **Reading**. Never under a brand name as the credit.

Done enough is not “finished every classic.” It is a student who can answer the locked question with a finger on the page — and who expects stories to repay careful looking. Revisit next week with a new chapter of the same book. Mix a claim-and-evidence warm-up even when the focus skill shifts to informational reading or writing. The habit is the point. The bookshelf will take care of itself if the habit is alive.

When in doubt, open the book, ask the locked question, and wait. The page will do more teaching than a longer lecture ever will. That is enough for today.

Chapter 6

Informational reading and discussion turns



Figure 8: A kitchen-table still-life: a short news feature with one claim underlined and two evidence sentences starred; a timer set beside the page; scrap paper with “claim → evidence → extend.” No people. No logos.

What's your claim — and which sentence supports it?

That question is the informational-reading week in one breath. A science page, a museum placard, a community newsletter, a sports box score, a store package panel — each one makes claims. Your student's job is to name a claim in one sentence, point to the supporting sentence on the page, and take a discussion turn without turning the table into a free-for-all or a culture-war debate club.

Why this matters

Informational reading is not the enemy of novels. It is the twin track. Middle-grades students meet denser explanations, arguments, and reports every week — in science, history, health articles written for youth, how-to print, and public placards. If literary reading asks who wanted what, informational reading asks what the piece is claiming and whether the sentences on the page actually support it.

Discussion is not a personality trait. It is a taught protocol. Kamil and colleagues rate extended discussion of text meaning as a moderate recommendation: prepare stimulating questions, ask follow-ups that extend thinking, and give a format so talk is not shapeless.⁶³ That is classroom-origin guidance. Steal the portable grain for home: one good question, claim, wait, evidence from the text, extend, optional write. This is a useful practice-guide map, not a promise that every home will see the same result.

Why teach this *now*? Because the common map for grades 6–8 climbs toward evaluating arguments and citing evidence in informational text.⁶⁴ Because claim-without-anchor is already a common adolescent habit — and an adult one. Because quiz pace kills discussion. Because opinion-without-a-page is not yet reading. Because claim+evidence talk is the bridge between discussion (this chapter) and written argument (Chapter 7).⁶⁵

⁶³Michael L. Kamil et al., *Improving Adolescent Literacy*, NCEE 2008-4027 (IES, August 2008), Recommendation 3, moderate evidence: provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation — stimulating questions, follow-ups that extend thinking, and a discussion format. Classroom-origin guidance; steal the portable protocol. Access date 6 September 2026. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/adlit_pg_082608.pdf.

⁶⁴Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (2010), Reading Informational Text grades 6–8: determine central idea; cite textual evidence; trace and evaluate arguments and specific claims. A map of typical placement, not a homeschool statute.

⁶⁵Kamil et al., Recommendation 2, strong evidence: direct and explicit comprehension-strategy

Safe stakes only. A news feature about a library renovation. A museum placard about how a bridge was built. A store package that claims “longer lasting” — print to evaluate, not a nutrition sermon. Sports sideline stats as a claim that might need more evidence. Community newsletter structure. Not elections as curriculum. Not identity fights as the weekly article. Not graphic harm as rigor.

You do not need to be a debate coach. You do need to hear a claim with no textual support, evidence that is only a restatement of the claim, and five questions stacked before anyone answers — and to ask for the sentence that supports it, without answering for them.

This week you can learn to run an eight-to-twelve-minute discussion protocol. Today the student can state a claim with one or two supporting sentences (11–12) or delineate an argument and acknowledge a limitation (13–14).

What this unlocks is practical power. A student who can pin claims to sentences can read a science chapter without drowning, talk in a co-op without bluffing, and later write arguments that do not float. A student who only skims headlines practices speed without judgment. Speed has a place. Judgment needs the slow mark.

Homeschool life already hands you informational print: curricula pages, park signs, recipes as procedures, league rules, library database blurbs. You do not need a special “informational unit kit” to start. You need a paragraph on the table and a protocol that protects thinking time.

Volume still matters. Chapter 2’s rich-text habit supplies the pages. Chapter 4’s text-structure work helps students see whether a piece is mainly problem/solution, cause/effect, or claim+reasons. This chapter adds the social and evaluative layer: talk that returns to evidence, and the habit of asking what would count against a claim.

If a purchased program gives useful articles and questions, use it as a servant. The skill remains claim plus sentence. The transcript line remains Reading or English, never a brand.

Parents sometimes worry informational reading will feel dry compared with novels. It does not have to. Curiosity about how a bridge stands, why a trail was routed, or what a box score can and cannot prove is real curiosity. The dryness

instruction supports informational reading (main idea, paraphrase, organizers) alongside Recommendation 3’s discussion. Claim+evidence talk is the bridge into written argument (Chapter 7).

appears when worksheets multiply and discussion dies. Keep the page interesting and the protocol human.

Another worry: “We already talk at dinner.” Dinner talk is precious. It is not automatically text-based discussion. This chapter asks for a different object: sentences under shared eyes. Protect dinner. Add a short English-hour protocol. Both can live.

For the parent: understand it yourself

Many adults read informational text quickly for the gist and call it done. That is ordinary for life. For teaching, you need one slower gear: mark the claim, mark the support, notice what is missing.

Everyday picture. A cereal box says “helps support healthy bones.” Your student shrugs: “So it makes bones healthy.” Slow down. What is the actual claim on the panel? Which sentences or tiny print support it? What would count against a strong version of that claim? The box is print to evaluate. It is not a sermon about food systems. Kitchen and aisle motivate. The mark on the page still happens.

A second picture. A short article says a town will open a new trail. Your student says, “Trails are good.” That may be their opinion. It is not yet a claim from the article. Ask: “What’s *this article*’s claim — and which sentence supports it?” Now they must return to print.

A third picture. Family discussion after reading. Everyone talks at once. Or you ask seven questions in a row. Or the loudest voice wins. Protocol fixes shape: one speaker; claim; point to text; wait; one extend question.

Precise picture. A *claim* is a statement the text asserts or that the student asserts *about the text*. *Evidence* is words, data, examples, or reasons on the page that support the claim. *Restatement* repeats the claim in new clothes without adding support (“Trails are good because trails are beneficial”). *Central idea* is what the piece is mainly explaining or arguing across paragraphs — cousin to theme, but for informational text. *Argument evaluation* at this age means: What is the author claiming? What support is offered? What is assumed? What is missing? At 13–14, add: What would count against this? What limitation should we acknowledge?

Discussion protocol (8–12 minutes): 1. Prepare one stimulating question tied to today’s text. 2. Student states a claim (you wait). 3. Student points to evidence on

the page. 4. Extend: “What would count against that?” or “Who adds, challenges, or clarifies?” 5. Optional: write a paragraph seed from the oral claim+evidence.

One speaker at a time. Model wait after the adolescent answers. Do not stack five questions. Do not turn every dinner into a seminar.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

1. *Claim with no textual support.* “It’s obvious.” Ask for the sentence. Finger on the page.
2. *Evidence that only restates the claim.* “The trail helps the town because it helps people.” Ask: “What fact, example, or reason on the page is new information beyond the claim?”
3. *Free-for-all with no protocol.* Interruptions, pile-ons, no return to text. Reset: one speaker, one claim, one sentence.
4. *Stacking questions.* You ask five things before they answer one. Ask one. Wait.
5. *Opinion-without-anchor, or culture-war debate topics as the curriculum.* Keep stakes safe. Keep eyes on informational print worth reading.

A sixth: quiz pace that kills discussion — ten rapid questions, no wait, no extend. A seventh: treating a headline as sufficient evidence without reading the paragraph.

Five-minute parent warm-up

Minute 1. Find a short informational paragraph (news feature, science sidebar, museum printout).

Minute 2. Underline the claim. Star two evidence sentences.

Minute 3. Write one follow-up that extends thinking — not a quiz (“What would someone who disagrees still have to admit from this paragraph?”).

Minute 4. Say aloud the locked opening and practice waiting three beats after an imaginary answer.

Minute 5. Note one place where “evidence” might actually be restatement, so you can hear it tomorrow.

Why protocol beats vibes

Warm encouragement matters. It is not a substitute for structure. Kamil's discussion recommendation is moderate partly because discussion quality varies wildly when there is no format.⁶⁶ Your kitchen needs a format more than it needs a personality makeover. Eight to twelve minutes of clean protocol teaches more than forty minutes of wandering opinion.

Parents sometimes fear that protocol will feel cold. Students usually experience it as relief. They know when it is their turn. They know what counts as an answer. They know they may change their mind. That is kindness with a spine.

Materials that usually suffice

Short articles, science pages, printed placard photos you took yourselves, packaging, box scores, community newsletters, pencil, stickies, timer, notebook. Library card before cart. You do not need a debate curriculum franchise for ages 11–14 to teach this chapter.

How to teach it this week

Session shape (30–50 minutes). Warm-up → short model on a shared paragraph → student mark and claim → discussion protocol (8–12 min) → optional write → exit ticket. Four or five English hours this focus week, plus one in-home and one out-of-home try-it.

Warm-up (3–5 min). Yesterday's literary claim in one sentence, or a morphology cousin from the science page. Keep it short. Then open today's informational print.

Short model (5–8 min). Think aloud: "I'm looking for what this paragraph claims. Here — 'The new trail will cut walk time to the river by half.' That's a claim about time. Support: the measured distances in the next two sentences. I'm starring those. I'm not using my feelings about trails yet." Show the underline and stars.

⁶⁶Michael L. Kamil et al., *Improving Adolescent Literacy*, NCEE 2008-4027 (IES, August 2008), Recommendation 3, moderate evidence: provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation — stimulating questions, follow-ups that extend thinking, and a discussion format. Classroom-origin guidance; steal the portable protocol. Access date 6 September 2026. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/adlit_pg_082608.pdf.

Student attempt (8–12 min). They read. They underline a claim. They star one or two supporting sentences. They write the claim in their own words in one sentence. At 11–12, oral claim + one/two pieces of evidence is the core. At 13–14, they also note a limitation or a missing kind of evidence.

Discussion protocol (8–12 min). One stimulating question — often the locked opening. Claim. Wait. Evidence (point). Extend. Stop. One speaker. Siblings welcome under the same rules.

Optional write (3–6 min). Turn oral claim+evidence into a paragraph seed.⁶⁷ This bridges to Chapter 7 without stealing the whole hour.

Exit ticket (2–3 min). “Claim: ____ / Support sentence: ____ / Is my support a restatement? yes/no.”

Age-band moves

11–12. Oral claim + one or two pieces of evidence; prepared discussion of a shared text; distinguish evidence from restatement with help; short paragraph seed.

13–14. Delineate a writer’s argument (claim, support, assumption); present findings with relevant evidence; acknowledge a limitation; evaluate whether support is sufficient for a strong claim; still safe stakes.

Exact wording you can say

- “What’s your claim — and which sentence supports it?”
- “Point to it. Read it. Then tell me how it supports the claim.”
- “Is that evidence, or a restatement in new words?”
- “What would count against that claim — using this page or naming what’s missing?”
- “I hear you — and I’m waiting. Who adds or challenges with text?”
- “You may change your mind when we look again.”

⁶⁷Steve Graham et al., *Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively*, NCEE 2017-4002 (IES, November 2016), Recommendation 2, moderate evidence: integrate writing and reading. Turning oral claim+evidence into a paragraph seed is kitchen-grain integration, not a franchise. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/508_WWCPG_SecondaryWriting_122719.pdf.

First try-it for the student (in-home)

Name: News Paragraph Claim Mark

Time: 15–20 minutes

Materials: One short youth-appropriate news or feature paragraph; pencil

Safety: Parent chooses the paragraph; no live controversy as the object

The fun: Marking the page like a coach marking a play

The skill: Claim underline + two evidence stars + oral statement

Steps: Read once for gist. Read again to underline the claim. Star two supports. Say the locked-opening answer aloud. Parent asks one follow-up only. Stop.

How to fade help

Day 1: you mark a mentor paragraph first. Day 2: they mark; you check for restatement. Day 3: full discussion protocol; you mostly facilitate turns. Day 4: paragraph seed from the talk. Day 5: mixed — one literary warm-up claim, one informational claim, notice the same habit on both tracks.

When to stop talking

After the stimulating question. After their claim. After evidence. After one extend. If you are explaining the article's argument for them, stop. Hand them the pencil to star a line instead.

Community newsletter structure (out-of-home / porch-mail hybrid)

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: A community newsletter or library events flyer

Safety: Ordinary; no doorstep arguments with strangers about content

The fun: Everyday mail becomes a text-structure + claim hunt

The skill: What is this announcement claiming will happen — and where is the support (time, place, who)?

Mark the claim of the lead announcement. Star the details that make it usable (when/where). Notice what is missing (cost? rain plan?). Missing details are a gentle 13–14 limitation practice.

Transit or map brochure explain (bridge toward Chapter 7)

Time: 12–15 minutes on a bus map, trail map, or transit brochure

Materials: Map/brochure; scrap paper

Safety: Road awareness if standing near streets; don't block doors

The fun: Getting from A to B as an explain-claim

The skill: “This route gets you from A to B because ____” with brochure evidence

This try-it foreshadows explanatory writing. Keep it informational today: claim about the route, support from the print.

Practice hygiene

- Prefer one rich paragraph over five thin worksheets.
- Prefer return-to-text over “what do you feel about the topic.”
- Prefer timed protocol over open-ended sparring.
- Prefer safe stakes over rehearsing live public fights.
- Prefer student words over adult summary of the article.

Blocked installs the mark. Mixed teaches transfer: news, placard, package, stats, science page. Transfer is the goal.

Micro-scripts for common stalls

If they say “I don't know”: “Show me the sentence that surprised you. We'll build a claim from that.”

If they quote the whole paragraph: “Pick the one sentence that does the most work.”

If a sibling interrupts: “Hold your challenge — write it on a sticky — your turn after evidence.”

If you feel yourself stacking questions: look at your sticky with the single opening question and stop.

How this week fits the English hour

Word study warm-up still opens some days. Volume reading can be the informational article itself. Discussion is the focus block. Writing is a seed, not a full essay yet unless they are ready. Exit ticket closes. You are not behind if you did not also finish a novel chapter the same day. Focus weeks focus.

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home try-it: News paragraph claim+evidence mark

Time: 15–25 minutes

Materials: Printed or library-borrowed short article; notebook

Safety: Parent selects safe informational topics; no comment-section scrolling as “research”

The fun: Family “spot the claim” contest — same paragraph, compare stars

The skill: Claim, evidence, restatement check, optional paragraph seed

Each person stars evidence independently, then compares. Disagreement is useful if both cite sentences. End with: “Is anyone’s ‘evidence’ only a restatement?” Write one improved claim sentence.

In-home try-it (alternate): Sibling teach-back of a science page

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Science textbook or library science page; timer

Safety: Ordinary

The fun: Student becomes the explainer for four minutes

The skill: Central idea + one supporting sentence taught aloud with wait

Student prepares one claim about the page. Teaches a sibling or parent for four minutes max, must include a pointed sentence. Listener may ask only: “Which sentence supports that?” Then switch if you want — still protocol, still text.

Out-of-home try-it: Museum or historic-site placard claim

Time: 10–15 minutes on site

Materials: Placard; scrap paper or phone note

Safety: Hands off exhibits; no lecturing other visitors' children; courtesy in aisles

The fun: Wall text as a mini-article

The skill: Claim from placard + supporting sentence copied accurately

Write: claim in own words; copy one supporting sentence; note one thing the placard does *not* tell you (13–14 limitation muscle).

Out-of-home try-it: Store packaging claim vs evidence

Time: 10 minutes in an aisle

Materials: One package with a front claim; willingness to flip to the panel

Safety: Aisle courtesy; no tasting unknown products; no shoplifting a “test”; no quizzing staff as theater

The fun: Front-of-box vs fine print as a literacy puzzle

The skill: Separate marketing claim from supporting detail; notice missing evidence

Ask: “What’s the claim — and which words on the package support it? What’s missing if someone wanted a strong proof?” This is print evaluation. It is not a nutrition-as-moral-war lesson.

Out-of-home try-it (alternate): Sports sideline stats

Time: 8–12 minutes at a game, on a broadcast box score, or with a newspaper sports brief

Materials: Box score or stat line

Safety: Ordinary event manners

The fun: Numbers as claims waiting for warrants

The skill: “What claim would need more evidence than this number?”

Example: “She scored 18” supports a narrow claim about points. It does not by itself support “best player in the league.” Students practice limiting claims to what the evidence can bear.

Mixed practice when warm

- Central idea day: one sentence for the whole piece, then two supports from different paragraphs.

- Signal-word day: therefore, however, for example — how do they mark claim vs support?
- Weak support day: find a sentence that sounds like evidence but doesn't add facts.
- Two-source day (light preview of Chapter 8): same question, two short sources, what agrees?

Blocked practice for a new move

Two days: only claim underline + one star. One day: restatement vs evidence sorting with index cards. One day: extend questions only (“what would count against”). Then mix into full protocol.

One incorrect example to diagnose

A dinner “discussion” about a headline from a heated public fight, no article opened, voices rising, no protocol, no sentence on the table. Hear the miss: opinion-without-anchor plus live controversy as curriculum.⁶⁸ Pivot: choose a safe informational paragraph, run the eight-minute protocol, require a pointed sentence. Another miss: ten worksheet questions marked correct, student still cannot state the article's claim in one sentence. Pivot: delete nine questions; keep claim+evidence+extend.

Talk box

Opening (locked): “What's your claim — and which sentence supports it?”

Follow-ups (3–5): 1. *Meaning*: “What is the article mainly claiming in this section?” 2. *Representation*: “Show me by underlining the claim and starring the support.” 3. *Type / evidence*: “Is that a fact, an example, a reason — or a restatement?” 4. *Check*: “Does your support actually make the claim more believable?” 5. *Revise allowed*: “You may change your claim. What would count against it?”

How to wait: Ask. Slow three. After they answer, wait again before you speak. If they are mid-reason, do not cut them off. Look at the paragraph. Stahl's post-

⁶⁸Safe stakes only: no live controversy as curriculum (architecture lock). News paragraphs used as literacy objects stay calm print claims — museum placards, store packaging, sports stats as literacy — not a culture-war syllabus.

response wait is classroom-origin think-time; Rowe's classic wait work began in science class — use the pause, do not mash them into a literacy RCT.⁶⁹

Stuck silence usually means: vague question; wait-time zero; claim with no evidence habit; they are guessing what you want; they skimmed the headline only; they think discussion means “say opinions fast”; they fear being wrong in front of a sibling. Pose, wait, point at the print. Do not fill silence with your claim.

A sample week shape (illustration)

Monday. Model claim mark. Student marks a second paragraph. Exit ticket.

Tuesday. Restatement vs evidence card sort using sentences from yesterday's article.

Wednesday. Full discussion protocol 10 minutes. Optional paragraph seed.

Thursday. Out-of-home placard or packaging try-it.

Friday. 13–14 limitation sentence; 11–12 stronger second evidence star. Diagnostic: catch one claim-with-no-page and rebuild.

Keep a three-minute morphology or vocabulary warm-up so word study continues. Informational pages are full of academic words Chapter 3 trained you to catch.

Bridge to literary reading and writing

Same family move as Chapter 5: claim + sentence on the page. Different object. When Chapter 7 asks for argue/explain, this week's paragraph seeds are already planning material. Do not wait for a separate “debate unit.”

Discussion manners that help thinking

1. One speaker.
2. Point before you pile on.

⁶⁹Robert J. Stahl, ERIC Digest ED370885 (1994): think-time / wait-time classroom manners. Mary Budd Rowe, ERIC ED061103 (1972): wait-time work began in elementary science class. Use the pause; do not mash them into a literacy RCT.

3. “I add...” / “I challenge...” / “I clarify...” — pick one.
4. You may say “I need a minute to find the sentence.”
5. Changing your mind after looking is a win.

You are not on trial. The claim is on trial — against the page.

Tiny second example (sports)

Stat line: “Jordan scored 18 points.”

Narrow claim supported: Jordan scored 18 in that game.

Overclaim not supported: Jordan is the best player in the state.

Your extend move: “What other evidence would that bigger claim need?”

Connecting claim+evidence to listening

Speaking and listening at 11–14 are not a separate toastmasters elective unless you want enrichment. They live here: discussion turns inside the English hour. The adult models “I hear you, and I’m waiting.” The student practices pointing before performing. That is enough speech work for this chapter’s job.

If you join a co-op, carry the same protocol. One stimulating question. Claim. Text. Extend. You will look oddly calm in a room that stacks questions. Odd calm is useful.

A note on “bias” without a culture-war syllabus

Older students may notice that a piece emphasizes some facts and soft-pedals others. You can name that as *selection of evidence* on safe topics: a trail article that never mentions maintenance cost; a product panel that highlights protein and hides sugar placement. Stay descriptive. Stay on the page. You are teaching attention, not recruiting for a faction.

Friday diagnostic wrong (use once)

Offer a short paragraph. Student states a claim. You deliberately praise a restatement as if it were evidence, then stop and say: “I just accepted a restatement. Catch me. Fix it.” Humor helps the miss stick without shame.

For the student

Informational text is everywhere: science pages, news features, museum walls, package panels, sports stats. This chapter teaches you to slow down and pin claims to sentences.

What this idea is. A claim is what someone is saying is true. Evidence is the sentence (or data) that backs it up. Restatement just repeats the claim. Your job in discussion is to make a claim, point to support, then add, challenge, or clarify — not only to repeat what you already said.

Tiny worked example. Paragraph: “The new trail will cut walk time to the river by half. The old path was 2.0 miles. The new path is 1.0 mile on the measured map.”

Claim: The new trail shortens the walk to the river.

Evidence: measured 2.0 vs 1.0 miles.

Not evidence: “Because shorter trails are better” (that’s a new opinion).

Extend: The paragraph doesn’t tell us about safety or mud — a limitation.

Try 1. On today’s page, underline one claim. Star one support. Say them aloud.

Try 2. Trade with a partner: they try to turn your evidence into a mere restatement on purpose; you fix it back into real support.

Explain it back. What is the difference between evidence and restatement? What is one job of an “extend” question in discussion?

Challenge. Write a paragraph seed: claim, two supporting sentences in your own words, one limitation (especially at 13–14). Then run a five-minute discussion with a parent using only the talk-box opening and one follow-up. You may change your mind when the page makes you.

Diagnostic 4 — Central idea collapse

They can star a detail and miss what the whole piece is doing.

Next move: After marking local claim+evidence, ask: “If you had to tell a friend what this whole page is mainly about in one sentence, what would you say?” Then check that the sentence is not just the first line copied. Use Chapter 4’s structure marks if the page is compare/contrast or problem/solution.

Diagnostic 5 — Fear of being challenged

They whisper claims or refuse extends.

Next move: Practice “friendly challenge” scripts: “I hear you. Could this sentence count against that?” Adult models being wrong on purpose once. Keep protocol short. Never mock.

Parent self-check

If most of the talk time is your voice, the protocol failed upward into lecture. Reset tomorrow with a sticky that says YOUR ONLY LINES and list three allowed parent sentences. Stick to them.

If it isn’t clicking

Diagnostic 1 — Claims without pages.

They argue from memory or vibes.

Next move: Physical rule — pencil must touch a sentence before a claim counts. For two days, no discussion without an open paragraph.

Diagnostic 2 — Restatement masquerading as evidence.

“It works because it is effective.”

Next move: Card sort: CLAIM / EVIDENCE / RESTATEMENT. Build the sort from their own sentences so the miss feels real, not abstract.

Diagnostic 3 — Discussion chaos or discussion death.

Either interruptions and stacked questions, or dead silence while you lecture.

Next move: Timer for 8 minutes. One question on a sticky. Talking stick or simple turn list. You speak only to enforce protocol and ask one extend. If silence persists, switch to written claim marks for two days, then return to oral with the same paragraph.

Extra diagnostic — Topic hijack.

Safe article becomes a leap into a live public fight.

Next move: “We’re staying with sentences on this page today.” Park the larger issue for a different family conversation if you choose — not as the English curriculum object.

When to slow down. If they cannot find a claim in a paragraph, teach signal

phrases and topic sentences on short mentor paragraphs before full articles. If reading accuracy collapses, scaffold or repair, then return.

When to go ahead. If claim+evidence is fluent, add limitation language, two-paragraph central idea, and light comparison of two sources.

When to get a human tutor. If after several weeks they still cannot distinguish claim from example on grade-appropriate print, or anxiety about discussion is extreme, a literacy tutor or speech-language professional (when language processing is the wall) can help. Ordinary awkwardness is not a disorder — it is a reason to keep protocol short and kind.

Correct without crushing: “I hear a claim. I don’t yet hear which sentence supports it. Point to it.” That is teaching.

If you use a tool to generate isomorphic practice paragraphs for claim-marking, keep the answer key on your side of the table. The student should not see a filled key while attempting. Do not invent citations for “articles” a model fabricates — open a real page from a library book, textbook, or printed news feature. Teach the same open-the-source habit you will need in Chapter 8.

Parent fluency checklist (two minutes)

Before you teach tomorrow, can you: - Underline a claim in a strange paragraph you have not taught yet? - Star a support that is not a restatement? - Ask one extend question that is not a quiz? - Wait three beats without jumping in? - Stop the discussion at twelve minutes even if it feels “productive” for you to keep talking?

If yes, you are ready. If not, do the five-minute warm-up again. Parent fluency is the quiet engine of this chapter.

Student confidence checklist

Before calling the week done, has the student at least twice: - Said a claim in one sentence without reading the whole paragraph aloud as “the answer”? - Pointed to a support sentence with a finger or underline? - Survived an extend question without shutting down? - Written a claim+evidence seed once?

Those four are enough to move forward and keep mixing practice.

Tools, including AI

Short pointer only. English-hour AI rules still hold.

After the student marks a claim unaided, you may ask a parent-held tool to explain *to you* how claim/evidence structure works on a named paragraph, or to draft a SCRIPT of extend questions for you to ask. Do not let a tool write their discussion notes as their work. Do not photo-to-key a reading packet. Do not use a chatbot as the only discussion partner. At 11–12 you hold the account; at 13–14 you co-hold, still in the room. Unaided first.

Sample exit tickets you can rotate

- Claim / Support / Restatement? (yes-no)
- Central idea in one sentence + one support from paragraph two
- “One limitation of this argument is ____ because the text never says ____.”
- Discussion self-check: I pointed to text at least once today (yes/no)

Placement notes

An eleven-year-old ready for limitation language may try it. A fourteen-year-old who still restates should stay on evidence-vs-restatement without apology. Skill beats birthday.

Revisit next Tuesday with a new paragraph. Mix last week’s literary who-wanted-what as a three-minute warm-up so both tracks stay warm. The life of the habit is short revisits — not a diploma, not a ninth chapter with a slogan title.

Done enough is ordinary and powerful: a student who looks at informational print and asks, without being poked every time, what’s the claim — and which sentence supports it?

What “done enough” looks like

Most of these true on more than one day:

1. States a claim in one sentence.
2. Points to supporting sentence(s) on the page.
3. Distinguishes evidence from restatement of the claim.
4. Takes turns / waits in a short discussion protocol.
5. Optional: turns oral claim+evidence into a paragraph seed.
6. At 13–14: acknowledges a limitation or missing evidence without abandoning the text.
7. Does not treat free-for-all opinion, quiz pace, or live controversy topics as the informational program.

Placement by skill, not birthday. Put the work under **Reading, Language Arts, or English**. A museum placard try-it counts. A packaging claim mark counts. Points apps do not replace pointed sentences.

Done enough is a student who expects informational print to answer: What's your claim — and which sentence supports it?

When the week ends, keep one marked paragraph in the notebook. Next month, pull it out and ask the locked question again on a new article. The protocol should feel familiar enough to run in ten minutes without a pep talk. Familiar is the goal. Flashy is optional.

If nothing else sticks, tape one sticky to the fridge: claim → sentence → wait → extend. That sticky is an English program fragment worth more than a pile of unread packets.

Chapter 7

Writing to argue, explain, and narrate



Figure 9: A kitchen-table still-life: a planning card with “purpose / audience / three bullets,” a draft paragraph with one revision arrow, and a mentor paragraph beside them. No people. No logos.

What's your purpose — argue, explain, or narrate — and what's the plan?

That question is the writing week in one breath. Blank-page “just write” is not a program. A year of underlining parts of speech is not a writing program either. Writing at eleven to fourteen is purpose, plan, draft in the student's words, then one revision pass that helps the reader. Argue. Explain. Narrate. Paragraph toward multi-paragraph. Model, practice, reflect.

Why this matters

Reading without writing leaves meaning half-built. Talk without writing lets ideas evaporate. Writing forces a choice: What am I doing for a reader? Am I arguing a claim, explaining how something works, or narrating an experience so someone else can see it? Middle-grades English needs all three purposes on purpose.

Graham and colleagues, in the IES guide for teaching secondary students to write effectively (grades 6–12), give a strong recommendation: explicitly teach writing strategies using a Model–Practice–Reflect cycle — plan and goal-set, draft, evaluate, revise, edit.⁷⁰ Integrate writing and reading so students notice features worth stealing (moderate).⁷¹ Use writing itself to inform feedback (minimal evidence tier, still practical as exit tickets and short samples).⁷² This is a useful school practice guide, not a promise that every home will see the same result. Steal the grain: short model, student attempt, reflection on one target.

Why teach this *now*? Because ages 11–14 are ready for reliable paragraphs and early multi-paragraph pieces. Because “five-paragraph religion as literature” helps some organizers and harms others when worshipped. Because adult hover-solving

⁷⁰Steve Graham et al., *Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively*, NCEE 2017-4002 (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, November 2016), Recommendation 1, strong evidence: explicitly teach writing strategies using a Model–Practice–Reflect cycle (plan/goal-set, draft, evaluate, revise, edit). Access date 6 September 2026. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/508_WWCPG_SecondaryWriting_122719.pdf. Useful school practice guide, not a kitchen franchise.

⁷¹Graham et al., Recommendation 2, moderate evidence: integrate writing and reading instruction so students learn about features of written language by noticing them in reading and using them in writing.

⁷²Graham et al., Recommendation 3, minimal evidence: use writing itself (assessments of student writing) to inform instruction and feedback. Still practical as exit tickets and short samples; do not invent a stronger evidence tier.

teaches dependence. Because revision-as-handwriting-only never improves evidence. Because claim+evidence from Chapters 5–6 wants a home on the page.

Families sometimes pick a favorite genre — always stories, or always opinion. Range matters. Argue builds claim discipline. Explain builds text structures from Chapter 4. Narrate keeps observation alive. Rotate across a month. Depth can grow inside each purpose without pretending one genre is all of English.

Safe stakes. Argue whether the family should keep a shared Saturday hike. Explain how to get from the library entrance to juvenile nonfiction. Narrate a real errand with reflection. Not live controversy research papers. Not twenty-page thesis mills. Not peer-conference bureaucracy as a required home form.

One pointer to *English for Little Thinkers* for younger sentence-to-paragraph work; one pointer to *English for Homeschooling* for later high-school composition paths. Then teach 11–14 workshop grain here.

You do not need to be a novelist. You do need to hear blank-page panic, grammar-pack-as-writing-program, and “just write how you feel” with no purpose — and to ask for purpose and plan, without taking the pencil.

This week you can learn a fifteen-to-twenty-five-minute workshop grain. Today the student can produce a purposeful paragraph with a visible plan (11–12) or a clearer multi-paragraph argue/explain with warrants when ready (13–14).

What success feels like: a sticky with a purpose line, three bullets that match it, a draft in the student’s voice, and one visible revision that helps a reader. Not a perfect essay. A repeatable cycle.

What Model–Practice–Reflect looks like without a brand

Model. You think aloud for three to six minutes on a piece the same size as theirs. You show the messy middle: crossing out a weak bullet, choosing a clearer claim, saying “this evidence is thin.” Students need to see a writer work, not only a finished sample.

Practice. They try the same strategy on their own topic. Struggle is expected. Hovering with a better sentence ready teaches them to wait for rescue.

Reflect. They look back: Did the plan match the purpose? Did the draft help the reader? What one change would help most? Reflection is short and concrete. It is not a journal about feelings about writing unless narrative purpose asks for that.

Graham's strong recommendation is about teaching strategies this way across secondary grades.⁷³ Your home version can be smaller and still honest. A useful study map is not a kitchen guarantee. It is permission to stop pretending that blank-page hope is instruction.

Audience is a kindness

"Audience: my notebook" produces fog. "Audience: my brother who missed the hike" produces detail. Write the audience on the sticky beside purpose. When drafts go vague, ask what that named audience would misunderstand.

How writing feeds records

Dated plans and drafts are already Chapter 9 material. You do not need a special portfolio product. Keep chronological samples. Prefer a revised argue/explain piece over a stack of untouched worksheets when someone asks what English looked like this month.

Time honesty

A focus writing week might use 20–25 minutes of the English hour for workshop grain, with short warm-ups for words and reading. Other weeks, writing shrinks to a paragraph seed after discussion. Both count. Daily five-hour writing marathons do not make stronger middle-grades writers; steady cycles do.

For the parent: understand it yourself

Many adults were taught writing as either creative freedom with no tools or five-paragraph obedience with no meaning. Both leave scars. This chapter offers tools in service of meaning.

⁷³Steve Graham et al., *Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively*, NCEE 2017-4002 (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, November 2016), Recommendation 1, strong evidence: explicitly teach writing strategies using a Model–Practice–Reflect cycle (plan/goal-set, draft, evaluate, revise, edit). Access date 6 September 2026. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/508_WWCPG_SecondaryWriting_122719.pdf. Useful school practice guide, not a kitchen franchise.

Everyday picture. Before a family trip, someone scribbles: destination, three stops, who brings snacks. That is a plan. Without it, the car fills with “where are we going?” Writing needs the same mercy: purpose and a few bullets before sentences.

A second picture. A coach shows a free-throw once, slowly, narrating elbow and eyes. Players try. Coach names one fix. That is Model–Practice–Reflect. Writing workshop at home can be that small. It does not need a franchise name to be real.

A third picture. A student fills a grammar packet for weeks and still cannot write a claim paragraph. Conventions matter — in revision (Chapter 8). They are not the drafting program.

Precise picture. *Purpose:* argue/persuade (claim, reasons, evidence, opposing view when ready); explain/inform (clear sequence or structure, definitions, examples); narrate/convey experience (sequence, detail, reflection). *Plan:* brief visible prewriting — bullets, boxes, or a quick outline matched to purpose. *Draft:* student sentences. *Evaluate/reflect:* compare draft to purpose and plan. *Revise:* change meaning, evidence, structure, clarity. *Edit:* conventions last.

Workshop grain (15–25 minutes, 3–5 days/week in a focus stretch): 1. Purpose + audience in one line. 2. Short model (think-aloud on a mentor or a solved plan). 3. Student attempt — plan then draft; adult does not hover-solve. 4. Reflect/revise crumb — one named target. 5. Optional exit crumb.

Paragraph → multi-paragraph by band. 11–12: reliable paragraph; simple 2–3 paragraph explain or argue with two evidence pieces; narrative with sequence and detail. 13–14: multi-paragraph argue/explain with clearer warrants and sources; counteracknowledgment when ready; more independent strategy choice.

Reading ↔ writing belongs in the same hour when possible. After reading, steal one feature — how a writer opened with a claim, ordered steps, or slowed a moment — then write a tiny piece using it. Mentor features beat inspirational posters.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

1. *Blank page with no plan.* “Just write.” Ask purpose and three bullets first.
2. *Five-paragraph religion as literature* — template worshipped even when the idea needs two paragraphs or four. Templates can help; meaning leads.
3. *Grammar pack as the writing program.* Packets may support conventions. They do not replace drafted claims and explanations.

4. *Adult hover-solves the draft* — rewriting sentences while the student watches. Pencil stays with the student. Your mouth asks questions.
5. *Revision = handwriting only / “just write how you feel” with no purpose.* Name a meaning target. Feelings can live inside narrative purpose; they still need a plan.

A sixth: peer-conference bureaucracy as required home form. A seventh: out-sourcing the draft to a machine.

Five-minute parent warm-up

Minute 1. Choose tomorrow’s purpose: argue, explain, or narrate. Write audience in one line.

Minute 2. Model a plan on scrap: claim + two evidence bullets, *or* explain outline, *or* narrative sequence with a reflection beat.

Minute 3. Draft three mentor sentences aloud, slowly, showing one move (topic sentence, evidence weave, or transition).

Minute 4. Name one revision target you will ask for later.

Minute 5. Write the locked opening on a sticky and put it on the notebook.

Argue, explain, narrate — quick parent cues

Argue. Look for a debatable claim (safe stake), reasons, evidence, and later a warrant. “We should...” or “This is better because...” needs support beyond volume of feeling.

Explain. Look for order, definitions of unfamiliar terms, and examples. A reader should be able to do or understand something afterward.

Narrate. Look for time order, sensory or concrete detail, and reflection. Narrate is taught, not a break from real English.

If a piece mixes purposes, name the primary job. A narrative with a moral stuck on at the end is often a narrate piece wearing a weak argue hat. Choose one primary purpose for the day’s target.

Fading the mentor

Early in the week, mentors stay open. Midweek, mentors close after structure is marked. Late week, students plan from memory of features. That fade is teaching independence, not withholding help randomly.

What to comment on first

Comment order: purpose alignment → evidence/clarity/structure → only then a single convention if it blocks reading. If you circle twenty commas on a first draft, you taught that writing equals fear of commas. Chapter 8 will give conventions a proper home inside revision.

Co-op and sibling adjustments

One speaker when sharing drafts aloud. Listeners must point to a strength tied to purpose before a suggestion. Suggestions capped at one. Home is not obliged to run elaborate peer-conference role sheets.

How to teach it this week

Session shape. Warm-up → short model → student plan → student draft → one-target reflect/revise → exit. Not every day includes a full essay. Some days are plan-only or revise-only. That is still writing. Four or five English hours this focus week, plus in-home and out-of-home try-its.

Warm-up (3–5 min). Steal one sentence pattern from yesterday’s reading. Or restate yesterday’s purpose in one line.

Short model (3–6 min). Think aloud. “Purpose: explain how to find juvenile nonfiction. Audience: a cousin new to our library. Plan: entrance → desk landmark → shelf label → check. First sentence: ‘Start at the main desk, then face the green banner.’ I’m not fancy. I’m clear.”

Student plan (4–8 min). Bullets matched to purpose. Check alignment. If arguing, where is the claim? If explaining, where is the order? If narrating, where is the reflection?

Student draft (8–15 min). Silence is allowed. You may sit nearby. You do not dictate. If stuck, ask a planning question, not a sentence donation.

Reflect/revise crumb (4–8 min). One target only. Edit later.

Exit (2 min). “Purpose today: . *One thing I revised:* .”

Age-band moves

11–12. Reliable paragraph unity. Simple multi-paragraph (2–3) for explain or argue with two evidence pieces. Narrative with sequence, concrete detail, short reflection. Heavy modeling early in the week. Oral rehearsal before writing when freeze is high: speak it, then write from their own words.

13–14. Multi-paragraph argue/explain with clearer warrants (“this evidence matters because...”). Sources named lightly when used. Counteracknowledgment when ready. More independent plan shapes. Still safe stakes.

Exact wording you can say

- “What’s your purpose — argue, explain, or narrate — and what’s the plan?”
- “Show me the bullets before the sentences.”
- “Where is your claim — and where are two supports?”
- “What order will a reader need?”
- “What moment will you slow down on — and what did you figure out?”
- “We’re revising for ___ today, not for everything.”
- “I’ll ask questions; I won’t donate sentences.”

First try-it for the student (in-home)

Name: Purpose-Plan-Draft Card

Time: 25–35 minutes

Materials: Index card; notebook; pencil

Safety: Ordinary

The fun: Choosing a purpose like choosing a tool

The skill: Name purpose; three bullets; draft one paragraph without adult sentences

Argue: Should we keep the Saturday hike? Explain: How to make a known snack.

Narrate: Returning library books — one sticky moment + reflection.

How to fade help

Day 1: model full cycle. Day 2: shared plan, solo draft. Day 3: solo plan and draft; locked question mid-way only. Day 4: multi-paragraph if ready. Day 5: revise for evidence or structure.

When to stop talking

After purpose/plan. During draft. After one revision target. If you compose their conclusion, stop.

Micro-scripts when they ask you to “just tell me what to write”

“What’s your purpose?”

“What are three bullets?”

“Which bullet is hardest — start there.”

“You may change the plan after two sentences.”

Materials that usually suffice

Paper, pencil, mentor paragraphs, timer, dated folder. Optional programs by fit (Chapter 10) — run one primary writing approach; keep purpose/plan/revise as spine. Credit line stays English.

More named try-its**In-home: Two-source explain seed (light bridge to ch08).**

Time 25 min. Materials: two short safe sources on how a simple machine or park feature works. Skill: explain using one fact from each source with attribution (“According to the placard...”, “The library book says...”). Safety: open real pages; no invented citations.

In-home: Claim upgrade.

Take yesterday’s argue paragraph. Highlight the claim. Rewrite claim once to be narrower and more defensible. Keep evidence; trim overclaim.

Out-of-home: Store return-policy explain.

Time 10–12 min. Read a posted return policy (print). Explain in one paragraph

how a customer returns an item. Check steps against the posted text. Aisle courtesy; no staff quiz theater.

Out-of-home: Sports letter to the coach (safe).

Time 15 min after a practice. Narrate one drill moment + explain one thing learned OR argue for one practice habit with evidence from the session. Keep kind and specific. Not a complaint spectacle.

Practice that looks like writing but isn't yet

Copywork alone, grammar underlining alone, and rewriting a model word-for-word are not the same as purpose-plan-draft-revise. They may support mechanics or fluency. Label them honestly. Then return to student-generated pieces with a job to do.

Motivation without points apps

Choice among worthy prompts; a real audience once a week; visible before/after revision; finishing a short piece. Kamil's motivation recommendation is moderate for literacy learning broadly.⁷⁴ Choice still lives inside limits: argue/explain/narrate this week, not "anything forever."

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home: Short argument on a safe household stake

Time: 30–40 minutes across two days

Materials: Notebook; two evidence bullets from real home life

Safety: Low, kind stakes — not identity fights

The fun: Persuasion that might change a Saturday

The skill: Claim, two supports, revise for evidence

Day A plan/draft. Day B warrant or detail; optional 13–14 counteracknowledgment.

⁷⁴Kamil et al., NCEE 2008-4027, Recommendation 4, moderate evidence: increase motivation and engagement in literacy learning. Choice, visible goals, and finishing a short piece support engagement; they do not replace Model–Practice–Reflect.

In-home: Sibling teach-back explain paragraph

Time: 20–25 minutes

Materials: Known process

Safety: No dangerous experiments

The fun: Teaching makes holes obvious

The skill: Explain with order; revise after a real attempt to follow

In-home: Narrative of a real errand

Time: 25 minutes

Materials: Today's errand memory; notebook

The fun: Boring errand → tiny true story

The skill: Sequence, detail, reflection

Out-of-home: Transit/map brochure — explain A to B

Time: 15–20 minutes

Materials: Map/brochure; notebook

Safety: Street awareness; don't block doors

The fun: Writing that could guide a real person

The skill: Ordered explain checked against print

Out-of-home: Library steal-the-structure rewrite

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Mentor paragraph in a library book

Safety: Library manners

The fun: Borrow a pro's skeleton

The skill: Notice features; write new content in same structure without copying wording

Strong vs weak exemplar habit

Once a week, two short paragraphs on the same safe prompt — clearer vs vaguer. "Which helps the reader more?" Steal one feature. Pictures of quality beat rubric fog.

Mixed / blocked

Mixed: purpose sorting; warrant inserts; timed draft then revise; multi-paragraph unity check.

Blocked: plan-only days; unity-only days; revise-only on old drafts; then remix purposes.

One incorrect example to diagnose

“Just write a page,” thirty minutes of staring, shame — or a semester of grammar underlining called writing — or a parent overnight rewrite into “good English.”
Pivot: purpose sticky, three bullets, student pencil, one meaning revision.

Talk box

Opening (locked): “What’s your purpose — argue, explain, or narrate — and what’s the plan?”

Follow-ups: 1. *Meaning:* “What should the reader think, know, or see by the end?” 2. *Representation:* “Show me the plan — bullets, boxes, or outline.” 3. *Type / evidence:* “Argue: two supports? Explain: step two? Narrate: reflection?” 4. *Check:* “Does the draft still match the purpose?” 5. *Revise:* “You may change the plan. What will you revise for today?”

How to wait: After opening, wait. During planning, tolerate slow thought. During drafting, do not narrate anxiety onto their page. One revision target, then wait again. Classroom-origin think-time manners help; they are not a writing RCT.⁷⁵

Stuck silence usually means: no purpose; no plan; fear; writing-as-fill-space; revision-as-handwriting; waiting for adult dictation. Require bullets. Keep the pencil theirs.

Sample week

Mon explain; Tue revise/teach-back; Wed argue; Thu narrate; Fri expand or one-target revise + done-enough. Keep morphology/volume warm-ups so writing doesn’t erase the rest of English.

⁷⁵Robert J. Stahl, ERIC Digest ED370885 (1994): think-time / wait-time. Classroom-origin manners for pausing during planning and revision talk; not a writing RCT.

Multi-paragraph without mythology

Two paragraphs can be enough. Three are not holier. Each paragraph one job. When one paragraph does three jobs poorly, split or cut.

A longer worked example (explain)

Purpose: explain how to find the juvenile nonfiction shelf. Audience: cousin, first visit.

Plan: (1) enter and find main desk (2) face the green banner (3) walk to shelves labelled J 000–J 999 (4) ask librarian if numbers confuse you.

Draft: “When you walk in, stop at the main desk so you know where you are. Turn until you see the green banner over the kids’ area. The juvenile nonfiction shelves stand under that banner with call numbers starting with J. If you cannot match your topic to a number, ask the librarian rather than wandering every aisle.”

Reflect: Step 3 might need an example topic → number.

Revise target: add one example (“space books often near J 520”).

Habits that help

- Write the purpose line first every time for a month.
- Plans can be ugly. Ugly plans still guide.
- Read your draft aloud once before you call it done.
- One revision target beats five guilt targets.
- You may ask for a mentor look; you may not ask someone to write it for you.

Challenge ladder

1. One paragraph, any purpose, with plan.
2. Same purpose, two paragraphs, unity check.

3. Argue with two evidence pieces and one warrant.
 4. Explain a process someone else can follow without asking you questions.
 5. Narrate with reflection that is earned by the details, not slapped on.
- Climb by skill. Skip rungs you already own. Repeat rungs you don't.

A second sample week (argue-heavy)

Monday. Model claim + two evidence bullets from a shared household decision already made in the past (retell as argue practice). Student plans a new safe stake.

Tuesday. Draft argue paragraph. Talk box mid-draft once only.

Wednesday. Out-of-home map explain as a palate cleanser — different purpose, same cycle.

Thursday. Return to argue piece; add warrant; 13–14 adds counteracknowledgment.

Friday. Student reads aloud; parent asks only: purpose? plan match? strongest evidence? Done-enough checklist. Archive dated copy.

A third sample week (narrate + explain balance)

Monday. Errand narrative plan/draft.

Tuesday. Revise narrative reflection so it connects to details.

Wednesday. Sibling teach-back explain.

Thursday. Library steal-the-structure.

Friday. Student chooses which piece to take to “best draft” folder after one more micro-revise.

Integration with discussion

After Chapter 6's protocol, the paragraph seed is not busywork. It is Day 1 of writing. Oral claim+evidence becomes written argue. Oral central idea becomes written explain. Do not make them reinvent the thinking on a cold blank page the next morning — open yesterday's seed and grow it.

Integration with literary reading

Who-wanted-what paragraphs are literary argue/explain hybrids. Treat them as writing practice with a text audience. Require a plan even for short literary responses: claim bullet, evidence bullets, craft or theme bullet.

What “hover-solving” sounds like

“Start with this sentence...”

“A better word is...”

“Here, let me just fix it...”

Replace with: “What’s your first bullet as a sentence?” “Which word on your page already says it?” “Show me where the claim went.”

Parent encouragement that helps

Specific beats vague praise. “You added a second evidence sentence that names Tuesday’s muddy trail” beats “Great job!” Specific praise teaches what to repeat.

When a purchased writing program is in the house

Use it if it helps you model and sequence. Still ask the locked question. Still require student words. Still revise for meaning. If the program’s day is only grammar underlining, add a short purpose-plan draft twice that week so writing remains writing.

For the student

Writing is choosing a job for your words.

What this idea is. Argue = claim + support. Explain = help someone understand how/why. Narrate = experience + meaning. Plan before sentences. Revise for one reader-helping target. Neat copy $\neq$ revision.

Tiny worked example (argue). Purpose: keep Saturday hikes. Plan: claim; energy after last hike; better science talk outdoors. Draft start: “We should keep the Saturday hike because it leaves us clearer for afternoon work.” Revise: add concrete detail from last Saturday.

Try 1. Purpose + three bullets + one paragraph.

Try 2. Partner guesses your purpose from the paragraph; revise opening if wrong.

Explain it back. Model–Practice–Reflect in your words; why plan first?

Challenge. 2–3 paragraphs; revise once for evidence/structure. 13–14: add warrant; optional counteracknowledgment.

Diagnostic 5 — Template trance

They fill five blanks forever and cannot write when the worksheet is gone.

Next move: Keep a simple scaffold for one more week, then remove boxes but keep the questions (purpose? bullets? claim?). Move from paper template to oral checklist.

Diagnostic 6 — Endless drafting, zero finishing

Many starts, no revised end.

Next move: Finish rate becomes the goal. One short piece taken through revise each week beats four abandoned beginnings. Use a “done desk” folder.

Diagnostic 7 — Audience fear

They refuse to let anyone read.

Next move: Audience is parent only for two weeks. Then sibling. Then optional co-op share. Never force public performance as the price of learning to write.

Energy and handwriting walls

If the hand tires before the mind does, shorter sessions, keyboard if that is already your family’s tool, or oral rehearsal first. If keyboard becomes avoidance of all spelling/thinking, mix modes. Judge by thinking quality, not tool purity.

Frequently heard parent worries

“We write every day in workbooks.” Workbooks can practice mechanics. Check whether a purposeful draft with revision appears at least a few times a week. If not, add the workshop grain.

“My student hates writing.” Often they hate blank pages, public embarrassment, or red-pen floods. Shrink the piece, name purpose, model imperfectly, revise one target, protect privacy while skill grows.

“Isn’t narration less academic?” Narration taught with sequence, detail, and reflection builds control of time and significance — skills argue and explain also need. Rotate; don’t exile.

“How long until multi-paragraph?” When single paragraphs reliably do one job and plans show two jobs, add a second paragraph. Skill, not birthday.

“What about creative fiction?” Fiction can be narrate practice. Still ask purpose and plan. Still revise. A story without reflection or control can wait until the spine habits are steadier — or run as optional enrichment beside the spine.

If it isn’t clicking

1 — Stare-at-blank. Purpose sticky + three bullets; sentence-per-bullet; tiny quantity goal.

2 — Fluent but purposeless. Reader test; rewrite opening; cut ornament.

3 — Parent voice on the page. Margin questions only; oral memo then write from their words.

4 — Revision = neat copy. Require visible meaning/structure change first.

Slow down: paragraph unity; return to claim+evidence; oral rehearsal.

Go ahead: multi-paragraph; warrants; light sources with Chapter 8.

Tutor: persistent huge gap between oral and written, or pain blocking production — seek fitting help. Ordinary struggle is the reason for short cycles.

Correct without crushing: “I see sentences. I don’t yet see the purpose line. Let’s add it and keep your best lines.”

What “revision questions” sound like

Allowed after a draft: “Where could a second piece of evidence go?” “Which sentence should open?” “What would a skeptical sibling say?” Forbidden: pasting their draft and asking for a polished replacement paragraph to submit as theirs.

If a tool invents a “source” for them to cite, delete it. Open a real page. Chapter 8 will insist on that habit.

Detectors that claim to catch machine writing fail often enough that you should not treat a score as honesty.⁷⁶ Judge process: plan present, voice familiar, revision history visible.

Sentence-level help without stealing the draft

Sometimes the wall is not purpose but sentence construction: run-ons, fragments that confuse, or three choppy sentences that want combining. Offer a two-minute mini-lesson on *one* pattern using a mentor sentence, then send them back to find one place in *their* draft to try it. That is grammar in service of writing — Chapter 8’s mindset — without turning today into a worksheet pack.

Spelling during draft

Invent a family rule: draft fast; circle doubtful spellings; keep going. Fix circled words in the edit pass. Stopping for a dictionary hunt on every line kills argument momentum. Accuracy matters; timing matters too.

Keyboard vs pencil

Either can produce real writing. Choose what lets thinking show. If typing becomes endless tinkering with fonts, switch to pencil for a week. If pencil pain blocks output, type. The done-enough checklist cares about purpose, plan, student words, and revision — not about romanticizing one tool.

Publishing without performance pressure

Optional: clean copy on Friday for the fridge, a family email, or a grandparent letter — when the student agrees. Publishing can motivate. It is not required for learning. Forced performance can freeze writers who were doing fine in the notebook.

⁷⁶Weixin Liang, Mert Yuksekgonul, Yining Mao, Eric Wu, and James Zou, “GPT detectors are biased against non-native English writers,” *Patterns* 4, no. 7 (2023): 100779: average false-positive rate on human TOEFL essays about 61 percent in that study. Do not treat a detector score as honesty; judge process (plan present, voice familiar, revision visible).

Cross-check with Chapters 5 and 6

If argue pieces lack evidence, return to informational claim marks for two days. If literary responses wander into plot only, return to who-wanted-what cards. Writing problems are often reading-discussion problems in disguise.

A word about “voice”

Voice grows from saying true things clearly about real stakes and texts. It rarely grows from “add more adjectives” pep talks. Prefer concrete nouns and exact verbs from the student’s world and week. Morphology and vocabulary chapters feed those words; writing week spends them.

Closing encouragement for the parent

If you feel rusty, model a short plain paragraph of your own once this week on scrap paper — purpose, plan, five sentences, one revise. Let them see an adult write imperfectly on purpose. Courage is contagious. Perfectionism is too.

You can teach this. Purpose, plan, attempt, one target. Ask the locked question. Wait. Keep their pencil theirs.

Tools, including AI

English-hour AI rules hold. Writing is easy to outsource because models output prose.

After plan+draft, parent-held tool may offer revision questions or SCRIPTs — not full rewrites, not “fix to an A,” not write-their-essay. 11–12 parent holds account; 13–14 co-holds, still in room. Unaided first. No photo-to-key. No writing-friend chatbot as only partner.

Off-age caution: a high-school math chatbot trial made practice look better and unaided performance worse.⁷⁷ Not an 11–14 literacy RCT — one mechanism

⁷⁷Hamsa Bastani, Osbert Bastani, Alp Sungu, Haosen Ge, Özge Kabakcı, and Rei Mariman, “Generative AI without guardrails can harm learning: Evidence from high school mathematics,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 122, no. 26 (2025): e2422633122. High-school math field experiment (~1,000 students, grades 9–11): unguarded chatbot raised assisted practice and cut unaided exam performance; guarded tutor that withheld answers did not harm the unaided

warning. Models prepare adults; they do not do student writing.

Exit tickets for writing weeks

- Purpose / audience / one-line plan check
- “I revised for ____ so the reader could ____.”
- For argue: claim boxed; evidence numbered
- For explain: steps numbered; partner confusion note
- For narrate: reflection sentence underlined

Life-of-the-habit crumb (full tips live in ch08)

Revisit a finished piece next Tuesday and improve one sentence of evidence. Mix purposes across the month. Stop before burnout. Writing identity grows from finished short cycles.

Transcript language

Materials may name a program. The subject line does not. **English / Language Arts** holds the dated drafts. Never “Young Minds English I.” Never a brand as the credit.

Done enough is ordinary courage: purpose named, plan visible, student words, one real revision — repeated until it feels like how writing works in your house.

What “done enough” looks like

1. Names purpose (argue/explain/narrate).
2. Shows plan before draft.

exam the same way. OFF-AGE for 11–14 literacy — one cautionary mechanism sentence about the crutch. The paper notes objective math scoring is unavailable in creative subjects such as writing.

3. Draft in student's words.
4. One revision for meaning/evidence/structure — not handwriting-only.
5. Argue pieces show claim + evidence.
6. 13–14: multi-paragraph with warrants or counteracknowledgment when ready.
7. Refuses blank-page-only, grammar-pack-only, and machine-draft as the program.

Placement by skill, not birthday. Dated notebook under **English** or **Language Arts**. Publisher “grade 7 workshop” is not a legal grade.

Revisit next week with a new purpose. Mix last week's claim+evidence as a warm-up. Done enough is a student who can answer the locked question and make a plan before sentences — weekly, not once for show.

Final parent checklist before you move on

- I can name Model–Practice–Reflect in kitchen language.
- I asked the locked opening at least three times this week.
- I saw a plan before a draft at least twice.
- I kept my pencil off their page during drafting.
- We completed one revision that changed meaning or structure.
- We refused blank-page-only and grammar-pack-only as the week's writing program.
- Pieces are dated and filed under English or Language Arts.

If six of seven are true, you are done enough to mix this habit into future weeks while Chapter 8 teaches revision and light research edges more deeply. If fewer are true, repeat a short focus week — shorter pieces, clearer models — without calling it failure. Cycles teach. Single heroic essays rarely do.

When in doubt, shrink the task and keep the cycle: one purpose, three bullets, six sentences, one revise. Small finished writing beats large abandoned writing. Ask it again tomorrow: What's your purpose — argue, explain, or narrate — and what's the plan?

That is the writing week.

Chapter 8

Grammar and revision in service of meaning



Figure 10: A kitchen-table still-life: a draft with one revision target circled at the top (“add second evidence”), arrows moving a sentence, and two source cards with titles and page notes. No people. No logos.

What will you revise for today — and why that target?

That question is the revision week in one breath. Grammar worksheets alone are not a writing program. Neat handwriting alone is not revision. A twenty-page research paper is not the middle-grades default. This chapter puts conventions inside the revision cycle, teaches one-target passes that change meaning, and adds light research and citation edges: two sources, open the page, simple attribution. Life-of-the-habit tips live here in “done enough” — not in a ninth teaching chapter with a slogan title.

Why this matters

Chapter 7 got words on the page with purpose and plan. This chapter teaches what happens next for writers who want readers to understand them. Revision is where evidence gets stronger, structure gets clearer, sentences start working harder, and — last — commas and capitals stop tripping the reader. Grammar earns its keep when it serves meaning.

Graham and colleagues include editing strategies inside the Model–Practice–Reflect writing cycle. The strong recommendation is not “buy a thicker worksheet pack.” It is teach strategies for evaluating, revising, and editing as part of writing.⁷⁸ The common language map for middle grades also asks students to grow command of conventions, to make choices for effect, and to run short research projects that gather information from multiple sources and draw evidence from texts.⁷⁹ That map is a map, not a statute. Steal the kitchen version: one named target; edit after meaning works; two sources you can open; notes that show who said what.

Why teach this *now*? Because students who only copy neatly never learn to improve ideas. Because invented citations are an adult problem machines make easy — and a student habit you can prevent early by opening the page.⁸⁰ Because de-

⁷⁸Graham et al., NCEE 2017-4002, Recommendation 1, strong evidence: Model–Practice–Reflect includes evaluate, revise, and edit as parts of writing strategy instruction — not a thicker grammar-worksheet pack as the program. Access date 6 September 2026.

⁷⁹Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (2010), Language and Writing strands grades 6–8: conventions in writing; language choices for effect; short research projects gathering information from multiple sources and drawing evidence from texts. A map, not a statute.

⁸⁰William H. Walters and Esther Isabelle Wilder, “Fabrication and errors in the bibliographic citations generated by ChatGPT,” *Scientific Reports* 13 (2023): 14045: 55 percent of GPT-3.5

tectors that claim to catch machine prose fail often enough that scores are not honesty.⁸¹ Because families need a way to keep English alive after the “unit” ends: revisit, mix, stop — the life of the habit.

Safe stakes for research edges. How does a local bridge type work? What does a library book and a museum placard both say about a historical craft? How do two sports rule summaries define a foul? Not live controversy research topics. Not identity fights as inquiry. Not graphic harm as rigor.

You do not need to be a copy editor or a librarian-scholar. You do need to hear revision-as-handwriting, year-of-diagramming-with-no-paragraph, and invented citations — and to ask what target they will revise for today, and why.

This week you can learn to name one revision target before any red pen. Today the student can complete a meaning-changing revision (11–12) and, when ready, fill two source cards from pages they actually open (11–12 starting; 13–14 denser inquiry notes).

What this unlocks is independence. A student who can choose a target, revise, then edit, and who knows to open a source, can keep improving work when you are not hovering. That is middle-grades English maturing — not a diploma, not a percentile.

Why “edit last” feels wrong to tidy adults

If you love clean pages, editing first feels virtuous. For developing writers, it often freezes idea work. They learn that the dangerous part of writing is being wrong about commas. Then they write timid short sentences forever. Flip the virtue: bravery about ideas first, then care about conventions. Readers need both. Sequence teaches both.

Citation without college theater

Middle-grades citation can look like: - According to the museum placard, ... - In *Bridge Book* (p. 14), ... - The library article “Trail Openings” says ...

citations and 18 percent of GPT-4 citations were fabricated in that study. Open the page; do not trust fluent invented sources.

⁸¹Liang et al., *Patterns* 4, no. 7 (2023): GPT detectors biased against non-native English writers; high false-positive rates on human prose in that study. Detector percentages are not honesty grades.

A simple bibliography line under the piece can list title and where you found it (library shelf, museum wall, book page). You are training honesty and findability, not MLA perfection. High-school manuals can deepen formats later — one pointer to *English for Homeschooling* if needed; teach open-the-page honesty here.

How this chapter refuses two popular stories

Popular story one: grammar packets *are* the English program. Refused. Popular story two: if they read a lot, revision will magically appear. Refused. Volume helps. Explicit one-target revision teaches. Both belong.

For the parent: understand it yourself

Many adults remember grammar as diagramming that never returned to their essays, or as red ink that arrived after the thinking was done. Many remember “research” as copying encyclopedia sentences. That is ordinary history. This section installs a better sequence: meaning target first, conventions second, sources you can touch.

Everyday picture. A cook tastes the soup before salting. Revision is tasting for meaning — needs more evidence, claim in the wrong place, repeated idea, vague word. Editing is salting — capitals, commas, spelling — after the recipe is basically right. Salt first makes over-salted weak soup. Red pen first makes over-corrected weak thinking.

A second picture. Two index cards at the library. On each: title, author or site name, page or section, one quote with quotation marks, one paraphrase in the student’s words, one “this helps me because...” line. That is light research. Not a thesis committee. Not a citation religion. Open-the-page honesty.

A third picture. Yesterday’s argue draft. Top line in student handwriting: “Target today: add second evidence from the trail notes.” Then the draft changes. Then, later, a three-minute capital/comma pass. The order is the lesson.

Precise picture. *Revision* changes ideas, evidence, organization, word choice for clarity and effect. *Editing* fixes conventions. *One-target revision* names a single job before marking: add second piece of text evidence; move the claim; cut repetition / combine sentences; replace vague word with a precise word from this week’s word study; add a counter or limitation sentence. *Light research*: two sources on

a safe informational question; note who said what; quote with quotation marks; paraphrase with attribution; simple bibliography line. Age-14 may label longer inquiry notes — not a twenty-page paper.

Wrong order to refuse: conventions first every day; research without opening sources; “revision” that only rewrites neat; detector scores as moral judgment.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

1. *Revision = neat handwriting.* Ask what meaning, evidence, or structure will change before any recopying.
2. *Year of diagramming / worksheets with no paragraph return.* Mini-lesson on a pattern, then find it in their draft. Worksheet packs are not the writing program.
3. *Invented citations / fluent fake sources.* Open the page. If a tool invented a citation, delete it. Teach the student the same habit.
4. *Detector-grade as honesty.* Process beats score: plan, voice, revision history.
5. *Twenty-page research paper as the year / live controversy research topic.* Short inquiry; safe stakes; two sources done well.

A sixth: editing during the first draft so heavily that ideas die. A seventh: parent corrects every error overnight so the student never practices editing.

Five-minute parent warm-up

Minute 1. Take yesterday’s student draft (or write a five-sentence sample yourself).

Minute 2. Name one revision target that is *not* commas. Write it at the top.

Minute 3. Make that change visibly.

Minute 4. Only then fix two conventions that block reading.

Minute 5. Draft two blank source card templates for tomorrow’s library edge: Title / Who / Page / Quote / Paraphrase / Why it helps.

Menu teaching vs mystery teaching

Post a short target menu. Mystery teaching (“revise this”) produces neatness or panic. Menu teaching produces choice with scaffolding. Remove the menu later once they can invent sensible targets alone.

What “why that target” does

The second half of the locked question forces judgment. “Because you told me to” is not enough. “Because I only have one evidence sentence and my claim is strong” is enough. Judgment is the skill inside revision.

Pairing with Chapter 7 workshop grain

On heavy writing weeks, revision is Day 2 of the same piece. On mixed weeks, revision can be a fifteen-minute block on an older piece while new reading happens. Do not only revise brand-new drafts; older drafts teach detachment.

When conventions truly block meaning

If a draft is unreadable due to missing spaces or no end punctuation, do a five-minute emergency edit so you can even discuss meaning — then return to a meaning target. Emergency clarity is not the same as making editing the identity of the week.

Why light research belongs beside revision

Revision asks, “Is this true enough and clear enough for a reader?” Research edges supply better raw material for that question. A student who revises an argue piece by swapping a guess for an attributed fact from an open page has learned both skills at once. Keeping research in a separate “May project” often produces panic copying. Keeping it as occasional cards beside ordinary revision produces honesty.

Connection to informational and literary tracks

Informational inquiry uses placards, articles, and explainers. Literary inquiry uses the novel or poem as the source — cite lines, attribute the author, revise for stronger textual evidence. Same honesty rule: the page must say what you claim it says.

Materials that usually suffice

Drafts folder, colored pencil, target menu sticky, index cards, library card, pencil, short edit checklist on the fridge. Optional grammar programs used as mini-lesson servants that return to drafts. Optional research guides later — not required for two honest cards.

A note on speech and composition labels

Some jurisdictions name speech and composition inside secondary English. Discussion turns (Chapter 6) and revised writing (Chapters 7–8) already feed those objects without a separate toastmasters course unless you want enrichment. Keep transcript titles ordinary: English, Language Arts, Literature, Reading.

Friday diagnostic wrong (use once)

Show a neat paragraph with a fake citation. Ask the student to catch it. Then open real pages and rebuild one honest card together. Humor plus verification beats lecture.

Parent fluency checklist

Before tomorrow, can you: - Name a meaning target on a sample paragraph? - Resist editing first? - Build one source card from an open page? - Ask “why that target?” and wait? - Plan a ten-minute Tuesday revisit?

If yes, teach. If not, repeat the five-minute warm-up.

How to teach it this week

Session shape. Warm-up → name the target → revise pass → (optional) mini grammar-in-context lesson tied to the target → edit pass last → light research edge on one day → exit. Four or five English hours. One in-home one-target revision try-it. One out-of-home two-source library try-it.

Warm-up (3–5 min). Reread the draft aloud. Student states purpose from Chapter 7. Circle one place that feels weak.

Name the target (2–3 min). Use the locked opening: “What will you revise for today — and why that target?” They write the target at the top. You may suggest options from a short menu; they choose.

Revise pass (8–15 min). Only the target. If the target is evidence, they add or swap evidence. If sentence combining, they combine two marked sentences. No simultaneous spelling hunt.

Optional mini-lesson (3–6 min). If the target involves sentence patterns, show one mentor sentence, try one pattern, return to draft. Grammar serves the target.

Edit pass (3–6 min). Capitals, end punctuation, a few spellings. Checklist short. Stop before exhaustion.

Research edge day (20–35 min once this week). Safe question. Two sources. Two cards. Open pages. Attribute.

Exit (2 min). “Target was . *Change I made:* . Edit fix: ____.”

Age-band moves

11–12. Grammar-in-revision mini-lessons; one-target passes on their own paragraphs; two sources with “who said this?” notes; quote marks for copied phrases; paraphrase in their words with attribution.

13–14. Vary sentence patterns; maintain consistency of tense/person where it matters; short inquiry with multiple sources; simple citations (author, title, page); evidence from literary or informational texts; limitation/counter sentences when revising arguments.

Exact wording you can say

- “What will you revise for today — and why that target?”
- “Show me the change that helps the reader.”
- “We’ll edit after the meaning move.”
- “Open the page — where does it say that?”
- “Put quotation marks around words you borrowed.”
- “Paraphrase means your words, still tied to their idea — and you still say who.”
- “You may change the target if you discover a bigger meaning problem.”

First try-it (in-home)

Name: One-Target Revision Pass

Time: 20–25 minutes

Materials: Yesterday’s draft; pencil; target menu sticky

Safety: Ordinary

The fun: Before/after — they can see the thinking improve

The skill: Name target; change meaning/evidence/structure; edit last

Target menu examples: add second evidence; move claim; combine two choppy sentences; replace three vague words; add limitation sentence (13–14).

How to fade help

Day 1: you help choose target from menu. Day 2: they choose; you confirm it’s meaning-level. Day 3: revise + short edit independently. Day 4: library two sources. Day 5: revise a piece using a fact from a source card with attribution.

When to stop talking

After they name the target. During the revise pass. After one clarifying question if stuck. Do not expand into five new targets mid-pass. One target is the mercy.

Grammar mini-lesson bank (use one, then return to draft)

- Combining sentences with *because* / *when* / *although*
- Replacing *thing* / *stuff* / *a lot* with precise words from this week’s reading
- Checking pronoun reference (“Who is *they*?”)
- Keeping past tense consistent in a narrative paragraph
- Using commas in a short list after meaning is clear

Each mini-lesson ends with: find one place in *your* piece to apply it.

Additional try-it: Community newsletter fact-check light

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: Newsletter claim about an event; phone/calendar or second flyer if available

Safety: Ordinary; no confrontations

The fun: Everyday print gets tested

The skill: Does a second source agree on time/place? Note agreement on cards

Additional try-it: Sports rule two-source

Time: 15–20 minutes

Materials: League handout + a rulebook page or official printed summary

Safety: Ordinary

The fun: Argue less at the dinner table about rules

The skill: Quote definitions; paraphrase; attribute; revise an explain paragraph about the rule

Practice hygiene for research edges

- Two sources done carefully beat five sources skimmed.
- Parent opens the page at least once per card this month.
- Quotes stay short.
- Paraphrase checked against the open page.
- Safe questions only.
- No comment-section “sources.”

Incorrect example #2

A family runs Fix-It-style daily editing as the *only* writing work all year and never returns improvements into the student’s own argue/explain pieces. Daily editing in context can be useful fit for some homes. It still needs the student’s purposeful

drafts and named revision targets. Label helpers honestly; keep meaning revision in the center.

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home try-it: One-target revision on yesterday's draft

Time: 20–30 minutes

Materials: Draft; colored pencil for changes; target line at top

Safety: Ordinary

The fun: Draft becomes visibly smarter

The skill: Meaning-level revise; edit last

Photograph or keep both versions if helpful — not for social media, for the notebook record.

In-home try-it: Sentence combining garage

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: Three choppy sentences from their draft copied onto scrap

The fun: LEGO feeling — snap sentences together

The skill: Combine without losing meaning; then put the best version back into the draft

In-home try-it: Precise-word swap from word study

Time: 12–15 minutes

Materials: This week's morphology/vocabulary list; draft

The fun: Upgrade words like upgrading tools

The skill: Replace vague words with words earned in Chapters 1 and 3

Out-of-home try-it: Library two-source cards

Time: 25–40 minutes at the library

Materials: Two source cards; pencil; safe question sticky

Safety: Library voice; reshelve or leave for staff as required; no photographing strangers

The fun: Treasure hunt with proof

The skill: Open two real sources; quote + paraphrase + attribution; parent can check pages

Parent verifies: cards match open pages. If a card cites a page that doesn't say that, fix it on the spot. That correction is the research curriculum.

Out-of-home try-it: Museum placard + book match

Time: On-site placard note + later library/book note

Materials: Two cards

Safety: Hands off artifacts; courtesy

The fun: Wall text vs book text on the same object

The skill: Compare two sources; note agreement/difference without a culture-war frame

Mixed practice

- Target-choice day: given a weak paragraph, pick the best target from a menu and say why.
- Edit-only day on a meaning-stable piece.
- Quote vs paraphrase sorting.
- Attribution sentence frames: *According to...* / *The placard states...* / **In ___'s chapter...**
- Literary evidence day: revise a Chapter 5 response by swapping in stronger textual evidence.

Blocked practice

Two days: evidence targets only. One day: sentence combining only. One day: source cards only. Then mix: revise an argue piece using a newly gathered source fact.

One incorrect example to diagnose

A student recopies an essay neatly, parent beams, no meaning changed — or a week of grammar packets with zero return to drafts — or a “research” paragraph with three citations nobody can open, possibly tool-invented. Hear the miss: revision-as-handwriting; grammar-worksheet-as-program; invented citations. Pivot: target line, visible meaning change, open-the-page cards.

Talk box

Opening (locked): “What will you revise for today — and why that target?”

Follow-ups: 1. *Meaning:* “How will this change help the reader understand or believe you?” 2. *Representation:* “Show me the sentence you’ll change — mark it before rewriting.” 3. *Type / evidence:* “Is this a meaning target or an edit target? If edit, is meaning already solid?” 4. *Check:* “Read before and after. Did we actually improve the target — or only the neatness?” 5. *Revise allowed:* “You may switch targets if you found a bigger meaning problem.”

How to wait: After they name a target, wait. Let them justify. During revising, quiet. After before/after read, wait before adding new targets. Think-time manners help; they are not a grammar RCT.⁸²

Stuck silence usually means: they think the only target is spelling; they fear choosing wrong; wait-time was zero; they want you to mark everything; research feels like “find answers online fast” without pages; they confuse paraphrase with copy-and-tweak slightly. Pose the menu. Require a meaning target first most days. Point at the draft and at open sources.

Sample week

Mon one-target evidence revise + short edit.

Tue sentence combining mini-lesson into draft.

Wed library two-source cards.

Thu weave one attributed fact into explain/argue piece; revise for attribution clarity.

Fri edit pass + done-enough + life-of-habit plan for next Tuesday revisit.

⁸²Robert J. Stahl, ERIC Digest ED370885 (1994): think-time / wait-time. Useful manners during revision talk; not a grammar RCT.

Before/after challenge script

1. Read your old paragraph aloud.
2. Say the target.
3. Change it in a different color.
4. Read again.
5. Ask a listener: “What got clearer?”
If they cannot name an improvement, the target didn’t land — try again or pick a sharper target.

Quote mechanics without fear

- Copy exactly inside quotation marks.
- Keep quotes short — a phrase or one sentence usually.
- Your sentence still needs your words around the quote.
- After the quote, say how it helps your point.

Paraphrase mechanics without fear

- Close the book.
- Say the idea in words you’d use talking to a friend.
- Open the book. Check you didn’t change the meaning into something false.
- Write who the idea came from.

You are allowed to be wrong in drafts

Revision exists because first thoughts are drafts. Changing your mind when evidence is weak is strength. Inventing a source to look finished is the opposite.

Sample edit checklist (three items only)

1. Every sentence starts with a capital and ends with . ? or !
2. I circled spellings I'm unsure of and checked three.
3. Names of people/places that need capitals are fixed.

When the piece is longer, still keep the daily edit short. Deep proofreading can wait for a “best draft” Friday. Exhaustive edit every day trains dread.

Sample source card template (copy onto index cards)

- Question:
- Title / placard name:
- Who wrote or posted it:
- Page / section:
- Quote (short):
- Paraphrase (my words):
- This helps my piece because:
- Parent opened page: ____ (initial)

For the student

Revision is how writing gets kinder to readers.

What this idea is. First you pick one target that improves meaning — evidence, order, clarity, precise words, or a fair limitation. You change the draft on purpose. Then you edit capitals and commas. For research, you open real sources, write who said what, and never invent a book or page.

Tiny worked example.

Draft claim: “The trail is better.”

Target: add second evidence.

Revised: “The trail is better for our Saturdays because we got home by noon last time and everyone still had energy for afternoon reading.”

Edit later: check *Saturdays* capital if it starts a sentence; fix spelling of *afternoon* if circled.

Research crumb. Source card: Title *Bridge Book*; page 14; Quote: “arch bridges push weight outward to the sides”; Paraphrase: An arch sends the load out toward the ends; Why it helps: explains why the river bridge shape works.

Try 1. Write a target on yesterday’s draft. Change three or more words of meaning (not just neatness). Read before/after aloud.

Try 2. Make one source card from an open book page. Parent checks the page.

Explain it back. Difference between revise and edit? Difference between quote and paraphrase? Why open the page?

Challenge. Take one piece through: meaning revise → weave one attributed source fact (if informational) → edit pass. At 13–14, add a limitation sentence and a second source card. You may change your target if a bigger meaning problem shows up — say why.

Student target menu (keep on a sticky)

- Add second evidence
- Move claim higher
- Cut repetition
- Combine two choppy sentences
- Swap vague words for precise words
- Add limitation / counter (when ready)
- Clarify order of steps (explain)

- Strengthen reflection link to details (narrate)

Pick one. Finish it. Then edit.

Diagnostic 6 — Over-research, under-writing

They gather eight cards and never revise a paragraph.

Next move: Cap at two cards. Require a paragraph that uses one attributed fact the same day.

Diagnostic 7 — Perfection loop

They revise forever and never call a piece done enough.

Next move: Timer for revise pass. One target. Edit checklist. Date and file. Revisit next Tuesday instead of endless same-day polishing.

Family language swaps

Replace “This is a mess” with “What’s our target?”

Replace “Fix your grammar” with “Meaning first — then a three-item edit.”

Replace “Where’d you get that?” said as accusation with “Let’s open the page together.”

If it isn’t clicking

Diagnostic 1 — Only neatness changes.

Next move: Forbid recopy until a meaning change is visible in a different color. Use before/after read-aloud.

Diagnostic 2 — Conventions flood.

They cannot revise ideas because every session becomes comma fear.

Next move: Separate days: meaning day vs edit day. Short edit checklist (three items). Save deep grammar mini-lessons for after meaning stabilizes.

Diagnostic 3 — Research without pages.

Facts appear with no openable source.

Next move: Physical rule — book or placard on the table while writing the card.

Parent initial the card after seeing the page. Delete any tool-invented citation without shame theater; replace with a real page.

Diagnostic 4 — Target paralysis.

They won't choose.

Next move: Offer two options only. Or diagnose one weakness yourself once: "I see only one evidence piece — try adding a second." Then return choice to them next day.

Diagnostic 5 — Paraphrase plagiarism-by-accident.

Copy with a few words swapped.

Next move: Cover the source; write from memory of the idea; uncover to check accuracy; add attribution. Practice on two sentences only.

Slow down: meaning targets on short paragraphs; delay multi-source until one-source cards are honest.

Go ahead: varied sentence targets; two-source comparison notes; literary and informational evidence in the same inquiry when ready.

Tutor: persistent convention issues that block readers after months of contextual practice may need a specialist; persistent language processing walls deserve trained help. Ordinary messy drafts are normal.

Correct without crushing: "I see a neat copy. I don't yet see a stronger evidence move. Let's pick that target and mark it in blue."

Parent self-check

If you corrected twenty errors overnight, give the pencil back. If you accepted a citation you didn't open, open it now. If every mini-lesson never returns to their draft, stop the packet and walk back to the notebook.

SCRIPT examples for after a revise attempt (parent says these)

- "Read the sentence you changed. What did the reader gain?"
- "Where could a second source disagree with this fact?"
- "Which vague word is left — and what precise cousin from this week could replace it?"

- “If we edited only three things, which three matter most for reading aloud?”

SCRIPTs are for your mouth. They are not paragraphs for the student to paste.

Tools, including AI

Short pointer. English-hour rules still govern.

After the student revises unaided, you may ask a parent-held tool for revision *questions* or to explain a grammar pattern *to you* from a named lesson — not to rewrite their essay, not to “fix to an A,” not to generate a bibliography of unopened sources. 11–12: you hold the account. 13–14: co-hold, still in the room. Unaided first.

Fabricated citations are common in fluent tools.⁸³ Open the IES writing guide or the library book yourself when you need a source. Teach the student the same habit. Detectors fail often enough that you should not treat a percentage as honesty.⁸⁴ Judge process.

Photo-to-key remains banned. Unsupervised writing companions remain banned. Agents are not writing partners.

A monthly habit rhythm (illustration)

Week A: emphasize one-target revise on argue/explain.

Week B: emphasize two-source cards + attribution weave.

Week C: emphasize sentence combining / precise words.

Week D: mixed revisit + records sampling for Chapter 9.

English hour warm-ups still revisit word families and claim+evidence. Mixed practice beats novelty-only. The habit is cumulative and light — not a second full curriculum bolted on.

⁸³William H. Walters and Esther Isabelle Wilder, “Fabrication and errors in the bibliographic citations generated by ChatGPT,” *Scientific Reports* 13 (2023): 14045: 55 percent of GPT-3.5 citations and 18 percent of GPT-4 citations were fabricated in that study. Open the page; do not trust fluent invented sources.

⁸⁴Liang et al., *Patterns* 4, no. 7 (2023): GPT detectors biased against non-native English writers; high false-positive rates on human prose in that study. Detector percentages are not honesty grades.

Encouragement

If this chapter feels like a lot, shrink it: one target on one paragraph three days this week, and one library card on Thursday. That still beats a worksheet mountain with no revised meaning.

You can teach conventions without making them the enemy of thought. You can teach research without a thesis mill. Ask the locked question. Wait. Make the change. Open the page. Revisit Tuesday. Stop. That is enough for a life of middle-grades English.

What “done enough” looks like

Most of these true on more than one piece:

1. Names a revision target and why.
2. Changes meaning, evidence, or structure — not only neatness.
3. Completes an edit pass after meaning works.
4. Research edge: opens a named source; fills a source card; quotes or paraphrases with attribution.
5. At 13–14: varies some sentence patterns; maintains consistency; uses simple citations; can add limitation language when revising arguments.
6. Refuses grammar-worksheet-as-the-whole-program, invented citations, and detector scores as the honesty system.

Placement by skill, not birthday. Put work under **English / Language Arts / Reading**. Materials may name a grammar or writing program; credit lines do not.

Life-of-the-habit tips (this chapter’s home for them)

Do not invent a ninth teaching chapter titled “life of the habit.” Keep the habit alive here, in the English hour, and in records:

1. **Revisit next Tuesday.** Pull one finished piece. Improve one evidence

sentence or one attribution. Ten minutes counts.

2. **Mix last week's claim+evidence.** Warm up with a Chapter 5 or 6 oral claim before revising. Tracks stay warm together.
3. **Morphology Monday crumb.** One word family from the draft — strip it, use a cousin in the revise pass.
4. **Stop.** End sessions before hate. Finished short cycles beat heroic burnout.
5. **Not a diploma.** A path through middle-grades English is the promise. A percentile is not. A brand name is not a transcript subject.
6. **Library rhythm.** Card before cart. Two sources now and then beat a single panicked “research week” in May.
7. **Talk box stays.** Even on revision days, ask the locked question and wait.
8. **Records catch the life.** Dated notebook + discussion check + short writing sample (Chapter 9). The file is how the habit becomes visible without turning into a franchise.

Exit tickets to rotate

- Target / why / one sentence that changed
- Edit checklist three-box score
- Source card parent-verified (initial)
- “One thing I will revisit next Tuesday: ____”

Closing

Grammar serves meaning. Research opens pages. Revision names a target. The habit is small and repeatable: ask what you will revise for today — and why that target — then make the change your reader can feel.

Final word

The red pen is not the villain. The red pen as the *first* move is the villain. Worksheets are not the villain. Worksheets as the *only* writing program are the villain. Research is not the villain. Research without open pages is the villain.

Name the target. Change the meaning. Edit after. Open the source. Revisit next Tuesday. Mix last week's claim and evidence. Stop before the hour turns bitter. File the dated page under English.

That is grammar and revision in service of meaning — and a life of the habit without a ninth chapter's slogan. Ask it again: What will you revise for today — and why that target?

Keep the cards. Keep the drafts. Keep the habit small enough to repeat. Middle-grades English becomes a life when Tuesday's revisit is normal — not when a single giant project tries to prove everything at once.

That is enough for this chapter — and enough to begin again next week. Open the book. Name the target. Begin. Then wait. Good. Yes.

Chapter 9

Records

The English *work* can be as ordinary as a library novel and as serious as any classroom hour. The *credit* is a family claim until a stranger can use it — a receiving seventh-grade teacher, a Pennsylvania evaluator, a New York quarterly reader, a later high-school transcript the family will someday write. That stranger will not have sat at your table. They will have a page.

This chapter is how you make that page at ages 11–14. Lawful, honest, and readable to a stranger are three jobs. Keep them in view.

This week you can date one discussion check and one short essay in a notebook so a stranger could almost read them. Today the student tries the page. You write the line, or they write the essay.



Figure 11: An open notebook, a dated discussion note and a short essay, a pencil, a library book closed with the spine title unreadable. No diploma seal. No grade. No brand. No adolescent.

What you are making

You are making a **dated notebook of Reading / Language Arts / English / Literature**, with the task named, plus an **oral or discussion check**, plus a **short essay**, plus optional publisher placement to start a purchased program or restart after a gap. You are not making a national diploma. You are not making Young Minds English I.

There is often **no** middle-grades transcript. When a stranger asks, the title is **Reading, Language Arts, English, or Literature**. Never a brand. Never IEW Level B. Never Brave Writer Arrow. Never Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind. Never Fix It! Robin Hood. Never Lightning Lit Storm. Never Wordly Wise Book 8.

Never Lost Tools Level I. Never Memoria Press Eighth Grade Literature. Never **Young Minds English I**. The dated notebook, the discussion check, and the short essay live *inside* Reading, Language Arts, English, or Literature.

There is no federal homeschool diploma and no national English credit at this age.⁸⁵ Texas, North Carolina, and New York do not issue one. Pennsylvania’s supervisor or approved-organization diploma after listed graduation courses is a high-school object, not a twelve-year-old’s file. Virginia’s list of subjects is a list, not a transcript. A parent-issued diploma can be a real piece of paper later. It is not a registrar’s national English credit now.

Two readers, if anyone outside the kitchen asks. The **state**, in a thick jurisdiction: an IHIP, an affidavit, a portfolio, a test in reading and language arts — Pennsylvania’s grade-8 sitting and North Carolina’s annual battery are inside this band. A **later stranger**: a public school on transfer; a private school; a future high-school transcript. State compliance is not an English diploma. A thick Pennsylvania portfolio can be in statutory compliance with reading and writing samples and no franchise score. A silent Texas year can be lawful with no file at all, provided bona fide written reading, spelling, and grammar are happening. Neither fact is a reason to skip the moves. Both facts are a reason not to fake a credit.

A family that invents “Young Minds English I, 1.0, A” for a twelve-year-old has created a slogan. A receiving teacher cannot map it. Athletic eligibility, AP, CLEP, and college exams are the wrong object for this book. They belong to *English for Homeschooling*. A parent of a twelve-year-old already anxious about core-course worksheets has the wrong timeline.

The national survey of homeschool subjects offered **basic reading / reading skills, spelling, and English or literature** checkboxes. In 2016, among grades 6–8-equivalent homeschoolers, English or literature was taught that year to **88 percent**; spelling to **69 percent**; basic reading to **53 percent**.⁸⁶ Basic reading as a named

⁸⁵No national homeschool diploma: Texas Education Agency Home Schooling and Alternative Schooling pages (state does not award a homeschool diploma); North Carolina DNPE (the home school issues any later diploma; the State does not); Pennsylvania 24 P.S. § 13-1327.1(d.1) diploma is a high-school object; New York 8 NYCRR 100.10 (home instruction does not yield a local or Regents diploma); Virginia list of subjects is a list, not a transcript. Access date for URLs in these notes: 6 September 2026.

⁸⁶Jiashan Cui and Rachel Hanson, *Homeschooling in the United States: Results from the 2012 and 2016 Parent and Family Involvement Survey*, NCES 2020-001, Table 9: grades 6–8 that year — English or literature 88 percent; spelling 69 percent; basic reading/reading skills 53 percent. Quote those middle-grades rows. Do not paste elementary reading 92 / 83 or spelling 86 / 85 into

flag falls; English or literature rises. That is middle-grades grain, not a finding that word study vanishes. Informal learning does not arrive as “Language Arts, 1.0, B+.” If a thick state later wants a log, the translation is: name the task, date it, keep a sample.

Titles a stranger can read

Print these and only these as middle-grades names, if a name is needed at all:

Reading / Language Arts / English / Literature. Mathematics / Pre-Algebra / Algebra I (if taught). **Science. Social Studies / History** (if taught). **Art, Music, Physical Education.**

Those names travel. They are the names public middle-school reports already use. They are the names homeschool files, when they exist, already follow.

Never a brand. Never Young Minds English I.

The brand, if used at all, sits in a parenthetical or in a description: “English (library novels; short essays; Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind as the material; discussion notes dated).” Combining objects is allowed. Combining does not mint a new title. Library novel plus one purchased writing course plus a grammar habit is still English or Literature.

A publisher’s “grade 7 novel study” is a scope, not a legal grade, and not a transcript line. Placement is by skill, not birthday.

Here is an illustration, labelled as such, not a reported family:

6 September 2026. Discussion: *The Lightning Thief*, chapters 1–3.
Claim: Percy wants belonging more than adventure. Evidence: [two sentences the student marked]. Short essay: one page, argue that claim; revised once for paragraph unity.

That is a record a parent, a Pennsylvania evaluator, or a New York quarterly narrative can actually use. It is not a credit. It is not a sitting on a college inventory. It is not a diploma.

a Young Minds sentence. Arithmetic, computer science, history, inquiry, and foreign-language percents from the same table are other subjects. The 2023 First Look (NCES 2024-113) did not republish subject-taught tables.

The law is a pattern, not one form

U.S. homeschooling is state law. There is no federal English office. Dates and subject lists change. Read your current department page and the statute it cites. A color-coded chart on a membership site is not your statute. Five official-page examples show the range. **None of them requires “Young Minds English I.”** Reading, English, language arts, or literature is the usual required or tested middle object.⁸⁷

Texas. The Agency does not regulate home-school programs. Parents follow a bona fide written curriculum: **reading, spelling, grammar**, math, and good citizenship. *Leeper*, restated on TEA’s Alternative Schooling page, names reading, spelling, and grammar. The state does not award a homeschool diploma. At 11–14 there may be no external reader at all. The kitchen still benefits from a dated notebook if the family later transfers. Transfer is treated like an unaccredited private school. “We did IEW Level B” is not, by itself, a public-school credit. A district may test for placement.

North Carolina. Notice of Intent. Nine calendar months. Each year, a nationally standardized test in **English grammar, reading, spelling**, and mathematics — not a franchise. The home school, not the State, issues any later diploma. A five-hour day is a recommendation, not the statute, and not an English-minutes table. DNPE tells the family not to name the homeschool after a curriculum brand. A literature notebook is extra. It is not the annual test. The annual battery is compliance. It is not this book’s teaching check, not NAEP, and not a percentile promise.

Pennsylvania. Elementary **shall include English (spelling, reading, writing)**. Secondary **shall include English (language, literature, speech and composi-**

⁸⁷Texas *Leeper*, restated on TEA Alternative Schooling: **reading, spelling, grammar**, math, good citizenship. North Carolina DNPE: annual nationally standardized test includes **English grammar, reading, spelling**, and mathematics; do not name the homeschool after a curriculum brand. Pennsylvania 24 P.S. § 13-1327.1: elementary shall include **English (spelling, reading, writing)**; secondary shall include **English (language, literature, speech and composition)**; portfolio tests in grades 3, 5, and 8 in reading/language arts and mathematics; 990 secondary hours. New York 8 NYCRR 100.10: grades 1–6 require **reading, spelling, writing, English language**; grades 7–8 require **English (two units)** cumulative, plus library skills on a regular basis; a unit is 6,480 minutes; 990 hours grades 7–12; quarterly reports; annual assessment named tests or narrative. Virginia § 22.1-254.1: parent writes a list of subjects; evidence of progress by composite stanine, SAT/ACT/PSAT equivalent, or evaluation. None of the five requires “Young Minds English I,” IEW, Brave Writer, Memoria Press, Lightning Literature, or Wordly Wise as a course title. This chapter is not legal advice. The parent reads their own statute.

tion). Portfolio tests in grades 3, 5, and **8** are in **reading/language arts** and mathematics. Grade 8 sits inside this age band for many families. Drop samples into the log of materials. A parallel “Young Minds” portfolio is not needed. 180 days or 900 hours elementary / **990** hours secondary are whole-program hours, not an English-minutes table. A supervisor diploma is Pennsylvania’s, and it is high school. Portfolio grain already looks like a dated notebook, a reading log by title, and writing samples.

Virginia. Notice, a parent-written **list of subjects**, and evidence of progress: a composite score at or above the fourth stanine, or an equivalent SAT, ACT, or PSAT score, or an evaluation or college transcript the superintendent accepts. English is not named as required because no subject is named as required; the parent writes the list. Reading, Language Arts, English, or Literature is the ordinary word to write. Those sittings are not this book’s short check. A publisher writing placement test does not, by itself, satisfy Virginia’s fourth-stanine object unless the parent has chosen a nationally normed battery.

New York. Letter of intent, an Individualized Home Instruction Plan, quarterly reports, and an annual assessment. Grades 1–6 required subjects include **reading, spelling, writing, English language**. Grades 7–8 require **English (two units)** cumulative for both grades, plus history and geography, science, mathematics, physical education, health, art, music, practical arts, and **library skills on a regular basis**. A unit is 6,480 minutes. Put literature discussion and the short essay under **English**. Home instruction does not yield a local or Regents diploma. Annual assessment: named commercially published tests or, in some grades, a written narrative. Keep the IHIP subject line ordinary: **English**.

If you live in none of those states, you still have a department page. Open it.

What a short check is

Four objects, not a battery.

1. **A dated notebook.** Date, task named, what the student read or wrote, one sentence of what happened in discussion. Under **Reading, Language Arts, English, or Literature** if a title is needed. Titles of books actually opened belong in the log when a thick state wants reading materials listed.
2. **An oral or discussion check.** The student talks about a text — what hap-

pened, who wanted what, what a word means in this sentence, what claim the paragraph makes and which sentence supports it. Write one line: date, title, “discussed X; still unclear Y.” This is meaning accountability, not a franchise quiz. Five minutes can be enough.

3. **A short essay.** Continuous prose with a clear job — recount, explain, argue a small claim, compare two characters or two sources, or respond to a question about a text. About half a page to two pages for most of this band. Sentences that connect. Revised once when you can. Kept in the notebook. Not a five-chapter thesis. Not a blank page with no plan.
4. **Optional publisher placement** (the organization sells the test or progression guidance). IEW year and level guidance; Brave Writer stage and book choice; Writing With Ease diagnostics at the edge; Writing With Skill readiness; Fix It! samples; Lightning Lit Storm/Tempest labels; Wordly Wise book selection; Lost Tools Level I readiness (grammar and writing experience). Use to start a purchased program, or to restart after a gap. IES does not certify them as randomised trials. They place by skill. They do not license a national percentile. They do not satisfy North Carolina unless the chosen test is a nationally standardized achievement test covering English grammar, reading, spelling, *and* mathematics. They do not satisfy Virginia’s fourth-stanine object by themselves.

A parent who feels rusty on middle-grades English they last saw as a student can turn the check into a performance with a tight jaw. The useful move is still: date the work, keep one claim-without-evidence habit you can reteach, and leave the pencil in the student’s hand while they try.

What a short check is not

NAEP. A percentile promise. A homemade high-stakes middle-school battery. Homeschooling was 3.4 percent of K–12 students in 2022–23 (~1.765 million); the 6th–8th cell was 3.0 percent. Instruction at home at 5.2 percent is a different bucket. NAEP Grade 8 reading 2024 average 257, with about 34 percent below Basic, is a school-population figure, not a homeschool census and not this kitchen’s score.⁸⁸ CLEP as a middle-grades diploma. AP as this band’s default check. SAT

⁸⁸NCES 2024-113: 3.4 percent homeschooled in 2022–23, about 1,765,000; 6th–8th grade equivalent 3.0 percent. Instruction-at-home 5.2 percent is a different bucket (homeschool or full-

Subject Tests — discontinued; U.S. sittings ended January 2021, last international administrations May and June 2021.⁸⁹ This book does not reprint that fight.

Dual enrollment, AP, and credit-by-exam are not this chapter. Scores help a stranger believe a *high-school* transcript. They do not replace a dated discussion check and a short essay at twelve. One pointer to *English for Homeschooling* for later NCAA, AP, and CLEP — then stop.

If they transfer

Transfer is a local placement problem. A brand in the title column will not be read as Reading, Language Arts, English, or Literature. Another reason the title should already look like one of those four.

A receiving teacher who sees “Young Minds English I, A” has been given a slogan. A teacher who sees “English — dated notebook; discussion of *The Lightning Thief* ch. 1–3 with claim and two marked sentences; one-page short essay revised for paragraph unity” has been given a year they can place.

Place by skill, not birthday

Can the student strip a high-utility word into parts and say what each part does? If not, they are still in morphology, whatever their age. Can they read connected text with a scaffold and answer a meaning question? If not, they are still in volume-with-support. Can they name the job a paragraph is doing? If not, they are still in text structure. Can they state a claim and point to a supporting sentence? If not, they are still before argument writing. Can they write a solid paragraph before anyone asks for multi-paragraph? If not, paragraph work comes first. High-sounding *titles* cannot skip those moves. A fourteen-year-old may still need paragraph unity. An eleven-year-old may already write a clear short argument. Skill first. Publishers opened for this book say the same in their own placement language: reading

time virtual). NAEP 2024 Grade 8 reading: national average 257; about 34 percent below Basic — NAEP school population, not a homeschool census. NCES has never published a nationally representative homeschool NAEP reading score.

⁸⁹College Board, 19 January 2021 announcement: SAT Subject Tests discontinued; U.S. sittings ended immediately; last international administrations May and June 2021. No CLEP for middle grades as a diploma. No AP as this band’s default. Those objects belong to *English for Homeschooling*.

level and readiness beat birthday; “don’t be governed by age range” appears in Brave Writer house style; IEW Level B tracks reading level, not a cake.⁹⁰

What to keep in the file

1. A dated notebook: date, task named, what the student read or wrote, one discussion note, one short essay sample. Under **Reading, Language Arts, English, or Literature**.
2. Discussion checks from the week, not a crate of every worksheet.
3. Short essays — a few honest pages across a term, not every draft.
4. Optional publisher placement, if you used one to start or restart a program — as a placement, not as a yearly IQ.
5. State objects that actually apply: a North Carolina annual English-grammar-reading-spelling-inclusive battery if you are in North Carolina; a Pennsylvania grade 8 reading/language arts portfolio sample if you are in Pennsylvania; a New York quarterly under English if you are in New York; a Virginia list that includes Reading, Language Arts, English, or Literature if you write the list. Compliance stays in its lane.

Life of the habit, as the file you keep, lives here: date the work; name the skill; keep one claim without evidence you can reteach. Revisit next Tuesday is a move in Chapter 8. The notebook is how Tuesday leaves a trace.

A path through middle-grades English / language arts is the promise. A diploma is not. A percentile is not.

⁹⁰IEW Structure and Style for Students Level B pages, accessed 6 September 2026: aimed at students reading at a 6th–8th grade level; Year 2 for 7th–9th reading level after Year 1. Brave Writer Middle School Writers / Arrow (ages 11–12) / Boomerang (ages 13–14) pages, accessed 6 September 2026: choose by book titles, reading/comprehension, and interest; age bands are vendor labels. Well-Trained Mind “Where do I start with grammar?” FAQ, accessed 6 September 2026: Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind most success from a 6th-grade start; pair Writing With Skill Level 1. Placement tests and progression notes are tools the organizations sell. IES / WWC does not certify them as randomised trials.

Chapter 10

Resources

This chapter names programs families actually meet. It does not rank them. It does not sell them. It is a fit list so you can match an object to the table you already have: how much of the teaching you will carry, whether a kitchen can use it tonight, what it costs in money and in minutes, and whether the student will still talk, read for meaning, and write.

A “grade 7 novel study” is a publisher’s scope, not a legal grade. Placement is by skill. The record, as Chapter 9 said, still says **Reading, Language Arts, English,** or **Literature**. Combining two honest objects does not mint a new title. Library novel plus discussion plus one lesson from a purchased writing course is still English.

Independent trials of these programs *in homeschool* remain scarce. Ratings from the What Works Clearinghouse, where they exist for adolescent literacy, are school-side. They are not a kitchen bake-off. Choose by fit: parent load, writing method, grammar path, literature method, age or reading-level label, and whether the student will generate the work.

This week you can name *why* tonight’s object fits this student — usually a library novel, a discussion question, and a short dated essay. Today the student tries that page. They are not on a shopping task.



Figure 12: A library card, a novel with spine title unreadable, a dated short essay, a pencil. No logos. No portraits.

How to read a program

Four questions do the work.

Parent load. Are you discussing a library novel you already have? Sitting with a video writing course every day? Learning a classical grammar script well enough to hear a weak sentence? Booking a rhetoric method as a second mouth?

Style. Video-led structural units and dress-ups? Literature-tied copywork and coaching voice? Classical scripted grammar plus intermediate writing? Daily passage editing? Literature workbooks with comprehension and composition? Vocabulary lists as a supplement? Persuasive rhetoric from about twelve up?

Cost shape. Nothing tonight. A book you already own. A print or video set whose

dollars sat on a page this access day and will stale. Fees this book did not verify. Confirm a current price on the seller's page before you buy; this chapter does not lock list prices.

Age or reading-level label. An eleven-year-old is not a Lost Tools Level I default. A fourteen-year-old may still need paragraph work if unity is the skill. Birthday is a weak prior. Reading level and readiness beat the cake.

Library table, nothing spent

A public-library card. A novel, or two short works. A parent's voice for discussion. A scrap of lined paper or a dated notebook. A short written response — a paragraph to a page. That is tonight.

Fit. One student, low purchase cost, high discussion quality. At ages 11–14 the free hour is literature and a short essay, not storytime. Take out a book, talk about what happened and why a character chose something, and the student writes a short dated response. That sequence already is English. No vendor required.

In 2016, **61 percent** of grades 6–8-equivalent homeschool households used the library as a source of curriculum and books. In 2022–23, **53 percent** of the Homeschool-total row had visited a library in the past month, against **24 percent** of all K–12 students in the 6th–8th band.⁹¹ Those are different questions in different years. Both are a free hour. Public-library mission language is mission, not a kit.

A literature discussion hour is not a transcript line by itself. The dated notebook entry, the discussion note, and the short essay are the record objects. Title: still **English** or **Literature**. **Transcript.** English or Literature if a log is needed: “library novels, titles listed; discussion notes; short essays.” Never Young Minds English I. Never “Library Hour 1.”

The teaching chapters of this book are written for this object first. A purchased program is a fit, not a requirement.

⁹¹NCES 2020-001, Table 6: library as a source of curriculum and books, 61 percent at 6th–8th (total K–12 66; 9th–12th 58). NCES 2024-113, Table A-5: Homeschool-total 53 percent visited a library in the past month versus 29 percent of all K–12; all-student 6th–8th library visit 24 percent. Do not swap 53 for 66. Different questions, different years. Access date for URLs in these notes: 6 September 2026.

IEW — Structure and Style, Level B

Structure and Style for Students **Level B** is aimed at students reading at a **6th–8th grade level**, as the organization describes it.⁹² Year 1 Level B: video instruction with clear daily assignments, vocabulary words, grammar and literature suggestions, lesson plans for teachers. Year 2 Level B: for students reading at a **7th–9th grade level** who completed Year 1. Year 3 Level B refines prior units and includes weeks on poetry. Premier packages point to **Fix It! Grammar** as a companion.

Fit. High structure; video reduces some parent prep; parent still coaches and grades. Works for families who want incremental structural units and stylistic techniques named by the vendor. Not a literature anthology by itself — literature suggestions are adjacent. Not a WWC adolescent-literacy intervention. Placement: skill and reading level beat birthday; the organization does not recommend SSS-1B before sixth grade.

Transcript. Materials may say “IEW Structure and Style for Students Year 1 Level B.” Credit: **English** or **Language Arts** — never “IEW I.”

Brave Writer — Arrow, Boomerang, Building Confidence

Middle School Writers is framed for ages **11–12** building confidence, as the organization describes it.⁹³ The bundle combines **Arrow** (nine month-long literature handbooks; copywork and dictation; grammar and punctuation in context; literary devices; books not provided), **Building Confidence** (twelve writing projects for ages 11–12 — summary, research, notetaking, citing sources, book review, poetry; vendor notes it can last more than one year and adapt for ages 10–15), and **Growing Brave Writers** (parent coaching manual). Separate product language: **Arrow ages 11–12; Boomerang ages 13–14**. Vendor copy emphasizes

⁹²Institute for Excellence in Writing middle-school / Structure and Style for Students Level B pages, accessed 6 September 2026. Level B aimed at 6th–8th grade reading level; Year 2 Level B for 7th–9th reading level after Year 1; Year 3 Level B; Premier packages point to Fix It! Grammar. List price omitted; confirm before you buy.

⁹³Brave Writer Middle School Writers, Arrow, Boomerang, Building Confidence, and Growing Brave Writers product pages, accessed 6 September 2026. Arrow ages 11–12; Boomerang ages 13–14; Building Confidence ages 11–12 adaptable; parent-as-coach. Reach copy on opened pages is vendor, not NCES. List price omitted.

copywork/dictation, playful grammar, and parent as coach — not red-pen first.

Fit. Lower “worksheet” feel; higher parent presence as writing coach; literature-tied mechanics. Good for a student who resists formulaic outlining; heavier if the parent wanted open-and-go video like IEW SSS. Not a WWC product. Placement: choose Arrow vs Boomerang by book titles, reading/comprehension, and interest — age bands are vendor labels.

Transcript. Materials may name Arrow / Boomerang / Building Confidence; credit remains **English / Language Arts**.

Well-Trained Mind — Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind; Writing With Ease / Writing With Skill

First Language Lessons is elementary. **Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind** is the middle-to-high-school grammar program: scripted; cyclical; students can start as early as fifth grade, but the opened FAQ finds most success from a **sixth-grade start**.⁹⁴ GftWTM does not cover composition — pair a writing curriculum. The organization recommends **Writing With Skill** Level 1 alongside GftWTM; a typical sixth-grader should be able to start Writing With Skill Level 1. **Writing With Ease** is the elementary narration/copywork/dictation sequence with diagnostics for placement; some students move to Writing With Skill after mastering WWE Level 3; some need a bridge.

Fit. Classical, scripted, parent-taught; high verbal load; strong for families already in *The Well-Trained Mind* orbit. Writing With Ease at the **edge** of this band (still consolidating dictation) is honest for an eleven-year-old who needs fundamentals — do not shame that placement. Writing With Skill is the in-band intermediate writing object. GftWTM is grammar, not literature and not a full ELA program. Not WWC-certified.

Transcript. **English / Language Arts**, with grammar named in the materials clause — not “Well-Trained Mind I.”

⁹⁴Well-Trained Mind Press “Where do I start with grammar?” and related Writing With Ease / Writing With Skill support pages, accessed 6 September 2026. Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind: most success from a 6th-grade start; pair Writing With Skill Level 1; Writing With Ease diagnostics for elementary/edge placement. List price omitted.

Fix It! Grammar and Rod & Staff — as fit

Fix It! Grammar (IEW; fourth edition): six levels; daily passage editing (Learn It / Read It / Mark It / Fix It / Rewrite It); vocabulary integrated; short daily time claim in reviewer consensus.⁹⁵ Grade labels in opened review consensus: Levels 1–2 roughly grades 4–5; Level 3 **Robin Hood** and Level 4 **Mowgli and Shere Khan** roughly **grades 6–8**; Levels 5–6 higher. Designed to integrate with IEW Structure and Style. Placement: start at Level 1 or use samples; older students may begin mid-series if prior grammar exists — still vendor, not a statute.

Rod & Staff / Building Christian English. Conservative Mennonite traditional grammar-and-composition series, commonly used through middle grades in Christian homeschool communities (catalogue consensus roughly grades 2–10). Diagramming-heavy; integrated composition in many levels; Christian worldview in examples. Open a level page before a specific scope claim. Fit: families wanting rigorous traditional grammar with an explicit Christian frame; high parent teaching load; not a secular default.

Choose Fix It! vs Rod & Staff vs GftWTM by worldview, daily minutes, diagramming appetite, and whether composition is separate. Do not rank them. A student may use Fix It! with Brave Writer literature or Rod & Staff with library novels. The credit line does not change.

Transcript. English, not “Fix It! Robin Hood,” not “Rod & Staff 7.”

Literature guides — Lightning Literature; Memoria Press

Lightning Literature (Hewitt Learning): middle-school path **Level Storm** labelled **grades 6–8**; **Level Tempest** labelled **grades 7–9**.⁹⁶ Updated format: reusable Teacher’s Guide plus two semester Student Workbooks (36 weeks).

⁹⁵Fix It! Grammar fourth-edition descriptions via Cathy Duffy review page and Rainbow Resource consensus, accessed 6 September 2026. Level 3 Robin Hood and Level 4 Mowgli roughly grades 6–8. Rod & Staff / Building Christian English: catalogue/review consensus for Christian traditional grammar through middle grades; specific 2026 kit SKUs not locked here — open a level page. List prices omitted.

⁹⁶Hewitt Learning Lightning Literature pages, accessed 6 September 2026. Level Storm grades 6–8; Level Tempest grades 7–9; readers may be borrowed from the library. List price omitted.

Readers may be borrowed from the library — the vendor explicitly says so. Fit: literature-rich ELA with comprehension, vocabulary, grammar/mechanics, and composition tied to books. Parent load moderate with a teacher guide. Not WWC.

Memoria Press grade-labelled literature guide sets (for example, an Eighth Grade Literature Guide Set on an opened page): reading notes, vocabulary, comprehension questions aimed at clear concise answers, composition skills; novels often sold separately.⁹⁷ Publisher copy: active reading; challenge slightly above comfort. Memoria Press also sells broader classical packages — this book names **literature guides as an ELA fit object**, not the whole classical package as mandatory. Fit: classical Christian literature sequence; higher structure.

Transcript. Materials may name Storm/Tempest or the guide set and novels; credit **Literature** or **English**.

A library novel + discussion + short essay remains the \$0 control. Other guide families exist; open a page before crowning one.

Wordly Wise — vocabulary as supplement

Wordly Wise 3000 grade-labelled vocabulary workbooks (and digital variants) used as a **supplement**, not a full ELA program.⁹⁸ Typical pattern: weekly word lists, exercises, a passage. Confirm the specific book's grade band on an opened publisher or seller page before you buy. Placement advice varies by seller; treat as vendor. Fit: families wanting explicit academic vocabulary without replacing literature or writing. Parent load low for independent workers. Not a substitute for reading volume. Vocabulary also happens inside IEW word lists, Brave Writer passage work, literature-guide word study, and wide reading. A separate vocabulary program is optional fit, not a law.

Transcript. Vocabulary may appear in the course description; credit remains **English / Language Arts**, not “Wordly Wise I.”

⁹⁷Memoria Press Eighth Grade Literature Guide Set and related literature-guide pages, accessed 6 September 2026. Grade-labelled guides; novels often separate. List price omitted.

⁹⁸Wordly Wise 3000 seller and review consensus via search, accessed 6 September 2026. Grade-labelled vocabulary supplement; confirm the specific book's band on an opened page. List price omitted.

Lost Tools of Writing — Level I

The Lost Tools of Writing (CiRCE) trains classical rhetoric; vendor: ideal for students in **seventh through tenth grade**; Level I recommended for age **12+**; covers primarily the **persuasive essay**; one or two years depending on age and pace.⁹⁹ Fit: classical rhetoric; thinking-heavy; ready writers with solid grammar — not a first writing program for a blocked eleven-year-old. Overlaps the top of this band (12–14) and early high school. Not WWC. Not Memoria Press Classical Composition (different product — keep them separate).

Transcript. Materials “Lost Tools of Writing Level I”; credit **English / Composition** inside English.

Combining pieces without inventing a franchise

Real kitchens combine. Common honest combinations: library novels + Fix It! daily editing; IEW SSS Level B + library literature; Brave Writer Arrow + a separate vocabulary book; GftWTM + Writing With Skill + Memoria or Lightning literature guides; Lightning Lit Storm as the literature/composition spine with no separate writing video.

Do not run IEW Structure and Style, Brave Writer Building Confidence, Writing With Skill, *and* Lost Tools Level I as four parallel “writing credits” in one year. That is brand hoarding. Pick one writing spine, one grammar habit if needed, one literature path (guide or library), optional vocabulary. The stranger still sees one **English** line.

Co-ops and tutors may deliver a writing or literature seminar; the home record still titles the subject **English**. Worldview is a fit question, not a federal finding. The transcript title stays stranger-readable: **English / Literature**.

⁹⁹CiRCE Institute Lost Tools of Writing page, accessed 6 September 2026. Level I recommended age 12+; persuasive essay; ideal seventh through tenth grade in vendor copy. List price omitted.

School programs you will see named — WWC adolescent literacy

These are school-side What Works Clearinghouse ratings, labelled school, copied not rounded, not a reason to sell a franchise at the table.¹⁰⁰ A kitchen may steal a *move* (teach words on purpose; teach how to make sense of a hard paragraph; talk longer about the book; show a writing strategy). A kitchen may not honestly say “we use a WWC-proven program” about IEW, Brave Writer, Memoria Press, Lightning Literature, or Wordly Wise — this book opened no WWC intervention report for those kitchen brands.

READ 180 (updated November 2016) — blended learning for struggling readers reading two or more years below grade level; school rotations with adaptive software, teacher-led small group, independent reading. **Positive** effects on **comprehension**; **positive** effects on **general literacy achievement**; **potentially positive** effects on **reading fluency**; **no discernible** effects on **alphabetics**. Copy those four domain ratings carefully. Do not upgrade fluency to “positive.” There is no alphabetics win in that report. School intervention package, not a kitchen curriculum. The alphabetics null matters when the student still cannot decode.

Achieve3000 (February 2018) — **potentially positive** effects on **comprehension** and **general literacy achievement**. School digital differentiated nonfiction path. Not a homeschool literature program. Not “a Lexile app replaces teaching.”

SuccessMaker (November 2015) — adaptive computerized reading instruction. **No discernible** effects on **comprehension** and **reading fluency** for adolescent readers. A software brand with a WWC report is still not a kitchen crown — and this one did not show discernible positive effects in the rated domains.

¹⁰⁰What Works Clearinghouse Adolescent Literacy intervention reports, accessed 6 September 2026: READ 180 (updated November 2016) — positive comprehension; positive general literacy achievement; potentially positive fluency; no discernible alphabetics; nine studies meeting standards. Achieve3000 (February 2018) — potentially positive comprehension and general literacy. SuccessMaker (November 2015) — no discernible comprehension and fluency. Corrective Reading (2010) — no discernible alphabetics, fluency, comprehension for adolescent learners. Accelerated Reader (2010) — no discernible comprehension for adolescent learners in the opened summary. Michael L. Kamil et al., *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*, NCEE 2008-4027 (IES, 2008). Steve Graham et al., *Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively*, NCEE 2017-4002 (IES, 2016/2017). All school-side. Do not launder into kitchen franchises.

Corrective Reading (2010) — Direct Instruction decoding and comprehension components for students below grade level. **No discernible** effects on **alphabetics**, **reading fluency**, and **comprehension** for adolescent learners. Placement tests inside the program are vendor/program tools, not this book’s family assessment.

Accelerated Reader (2010 adolescent-literacy report pattern) — quiz-after-reading software ecosystem. **No discernible** effects on **comprehension** for adolescent learners in the opened effectiveness summary. Popularity in schools is not a WWC win. Do not launder quiz points into “WWC-proven comprehension.” A homeschooler who uses AR quizzes at a library or co-op still titles the course **English / Reading**, not “Accelerated Reader I.”

IES practice guides are maps, not franchise licenses. *Improving Adolescent Literacy* (NCEE 2008-4027): vocabulary **strong**; comprehension strategies **strong**; discussion **moderate**; motivation **moderate**; intensive intervention by specialists **strong**. *Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively* (NCEE 2017-4002): Model–Practice–Reflect **strong**; integrate writing/reading **moderate**; assess writing to inform instruction **minimal**. Steal the moves. Do not pretend the guides evaluated Brave Writer or IEW.

None of these school products is a parent-at-home randomised trial. None is a kitchen winner.

Placement tests are tools, not percentiles

IEW progression guidance; Brave Writer stage and book choice; Writing With Ease diagnostics; Fix It! samples; Lightning Lit level labels; Wordly Wise book selection; Lost Tools readiness. IES does not certify them as randomised trials. They place by skill. They do not license NAEP. They do not write Young Minds English I. Use one to start a purchased program or to restart after a gap, as Chapter 9 said. Re-place if the student is miserable or bored after several weeks — skill placement, not failure. Do not re-test weekly “for data.”

Start where the student can succeed, then add.

A short chooser, not a ranking

- If you want nothing spent tonight: a library card, a novel, discussion, a short dated essay. Title: English or Literature.
- If you want video-led structured writing at a 6th–8th reading level: IEW Structure and Style Level B. Title: English.
- If you want literature-tied copywork and a coaching voice: Brave Writer Arrow (11–12) / Boomerang (13–14). Title: English.
- If you want classical scripted grammar plus intermediate writing: Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind + Writing With Skill (Writing With Ease at the edge if needed). Title: English / Language Arts.
- If you want daily editing in context: Fix It! Grammar (roughly Levels 3–4 for grades 6–8). Title: English.
- If you want traditional Christian grammar/composition: Rod & Staff (open a level page). Title: English.
- If you want a literature-rich year with workbooks: Lightning Lit Storm (6–8) / Tempest (7–9). Title: Literature or English.
- If you want classical literature guides: Memoria Press grade-labelled guides. Title: Literature or English.
- If you want vocabulary as a supplement only: Wordly Wise (confirm the book). Title still English.
- If you want persuasive rhetoric from about twelve up, with solid grammar already in place: Lost Tools Level I. Title: English.
- If you meet a school WWC name in a conversation: READ 180 (positive comprehension and general literacy; potentially positive fluency; no discernible alphabetics); Achieve3000 (potentially positive comprehension and general literacy); SuccessMaker (no discernible comprehension and fluency); Corrective Reading (no discernible alphabetics, fluency, comprehension); Accelerated Reader (no discernible comprehension for adolescent learners). Label school. None of those names crowns a kitchen franchise. Quiz points are not proven comprehension.

None of those bullets is “best.” Fit is whether you can hear a wrong turn in that program’s pictures, and whether the student will generate the work. Combining is ordinary; it does not authorize a Franken-course title. When decoding or paragraph unity is unfinished, go back. When you are the ceiling, buy a tutor, co-op, or video as a second mouth — and you still date the notebook. Title the year Reading, Language Arts, English, or Literature — the English, not the franchise.

A path through middle-grades English / language arts is the promise. A diploma is not. A percentile is not. A catalogue star is not a finding.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹Cathy Duffy Reviews is a catalogue with disclosed review copies and affiliate links; Rainbow Resource is a retailer catalogue. Neither is a trial. No homeschool-curriculum randomised trial comparing IEW, Brave Writer, Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind, Fix It!, Lightning Literature, Memoria Press, Wordly Wise, or Lost Tools was opened for this book. NCES 2020-001, Table 3 (grades 6–8): mother as main provider 82 percent; any tutor 29; any co-op 29; formal curriculum 75. 2023 First Look did not republish these tables.

A Note on Sources

Studies named in the chapters are listed in Notes, in one series at the back. That is where the full citations live, so the teaching pages can stay a teaching voice.

Some items the research behind this book did not open stay out of the teaching voice. I did not invent a coefficient, a statute, or a product feature to fill a hole. If a study is in the chapter, it is in the notes. If we could not open it, it is not used as a finding here.

Program hours, credit claims, and product descriptions in the resources chapter are taken from the companies' own pages. WWC adolescent-literacy ratings stay school-labelled. Access date 6 September 2026.