



SEL Helps Valued Outcomes to Happen: A Series of Examples...

How Can SEL Be Embedded in Language Arts?

There is an opportunity to embed Social-Emotional Learning and Character Development (SECD) authentically into all subject areas. Actually, SECD already is in each area! So it's more a matter of activating it. Language Arts is largely about characters' emotions, relationships, and actions. Success in this field involves students' being able to understand various social-emotional skills and character attributes and their implications in a developmental, age-appropriate way. As students move through the grade levels, the sophistication of the content increases... mirroring what happens in life. That's why the SECD-Language Arts connection is so powerful and essential—it helps prepare students for the tests of life.

The kinds of learning activities that provide opportunities for addressing SECD concepts in Language Arts include storytelling, reading, writing, and reflecting on all of the above. What follows is a list of possible lessons and activities for the Language Arts classrooms at the elementary and secondary level. These lists provide suggested activities that can be the starting point for additional learning experiences as appropriate to your students' abilities and interests. There are several resources listed at the end of this data sheet which can also be informative and helpful in bringing SECD into your Language Arts classrooms.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL

- For young children, emphasize “reading” the pictures before diving into the text. Point out the pictures of various characters and ask children how they might be feeling. Literally point to the signs of feelings that are depicted by the amazing illustrators: facial expressions, eyebrows, position of hands, posture, etc. Focus on expanding children's emotion vocabulary and their use of an increasing variety of emotion words in reading and writing. This process persists through all grade levels.
- Use a “book talk” format to delve deeper into a story. Ask children to think about how characters feel about the situations they are in and what the character might want to happen. This can expand children's emotional vocabulary as well as promote inferential thinking. Questions to ask students might include:
 - For each person or groups of people, what are some different decisions or solutions to the problem that might have helped them reach their goals?
 - Do you agree or disagree with their solution to the problem?
 - What would you have done in a similar situation? Why?
 - What questions do you have based on what you read? What would you like to be able to ask one of the characters?
- Storytelling - sharing, listening, and discussing personal experiences
- Use of emotion words in student writing

- Autobiographies of famous people often tell important stories about character traits and how these people have met challenges.
- Writing about goals and aspirations as well as challenges and opportunities

SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

- At the beginning and end of each lesson, explicitly state the social/emotional principle being addressed with each activity. Ask students such questions as:
 - What are the short-and long-term consequences of the literary character’s decisions?
 - Is there one character with whom you particularly related? Why?
 - Would you have taken the same course of action? Why or why not? What might you have done differently?
 - How does the theme of the literature fit into your own life?
 - How do you deal with your emotions when in a similar situation to that of the character?
- Use journals as a strategy for students to reflect on how the story may apply to their own lives or lessons they can learn from the story.
- Make use of peer evaluation to teach students to accept criticism and apply useful feedback.
- Literature can involve people showing their emotions through their actions. Have students reflect on the choices that characters make in the stories they read and to think about the SEL skills and the character traits that they exemplify.
- Use literature that addresses cultural, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and other aspects of diversity.
- Utilize group discussion to help students learn the skills of listening, patience, and tolerance while listening to others with different perspectives.

These are just some strategies that can be used to embed SECD skills in your Language Arts lessons. Use these as a starting point to help your students authentically build these skills for use in your classroom, in the school setting, and in their lives. Doing this will enhance their Language Arts learning as it prepares them for life beyond school.

Two great resources for embedding SEL in Language Arts in the Elementary Grades and in the High School Grades can be found using the following links from CASEL...

- <https://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/SEL-in-Elementary-ELA-8-20-17.pdf>
- <https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/SEL-in-High-School-ELA-8-20-17.pdf>

Another great resource is this concise information card about implementing SECD in various situations.

- Dunkelblau, E. *Social, Emotional, & Character Development (SECD) for Teachers, for Students, for Parents*. National Professional Resources, Port Chester, NY. (Available from www.NPRinc.com)

This information sheet was provided by SEL4NJ, the Social-Emotional Learning Alliance of NJ, a voluntary, grass-roots organization working with schools and communities to promote social-emotional and character development and supportive, engaging, inclusive, equitable classroom and school environments for learning. Prepared by Maurice Elias, SEL4NJ Trustee and Director, Rutgers Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab and William Trusheim, SEL4NJ Trustee and President of the NJ Alliance of Social, Emotional, and Character Development. You can reach us at info@sel4nj.org and join at www.SEL4NJ.org.