

Teachers explain: The Amplify ELA classroom

Implementing the Amplify ELA digital curriculum transforms student work and classroom culture. Here, teachers share examples of the kinds of results you can expect.

Higher-order thinking skills at their finest



Teacher: Lisa Doyle

Williston Middle School

New Hanover County School District, NC

Lisa Doyle, a middle school ELA teacher in New Hanover County, loves the platform that Amplify uses to bridge the gap between the “paper-based” world she grew up in and the “21st-century digital world” her students inhabit. “They’ve mimicked apps such as Twitter and Facebook so the students are finding themselves summarizing, characterizing, paraphrasing, and citing evidence” in an authentic, real-world way. As a result, her students are excelling at skills “they weren’t even aware they had.”

Ms. Doyle says that the Amplify ELA digital curriculum has also fundamentally changed the way she supports struggling students. She attributes this to the regular practice her students get with close reading, as they “repeatedly approach, highlight, and annotate the same small segments of complex text.” She’s found that “even the most reluctant learners have been eagerly engaged” in the kinds of challenging, high Lexile stories that “in the past have shut them out because of the difficult reading levels.”

The most striking growth Ms. Doyle has seen is in her students’ writing. “Over the years, my kids have become so programmed to function well in multiple choice settings, they really in some ways forget how to express themselves.” She appreciates the way Amplify ELA reinforces the basics of good argumentation, asking students to develop claims and substantiate them by explaining the “why” behind their thinking. She’s confident that these skills don’t just make her students good readers and writers; they’ve also prepared them to excel on high-stakes tests: “As a teacher, I’ve found myself moving into the mindset that if my students can explain in their own words why they feel a certain way about a character, they can easily translate that skill to choosing out of a list of four options on a standardized test.” Amplify’s focus on writing has provided her students ample opportunities to develop “higher-order thinking skills at their finest” and “a chance to seek answers and provide structure for their choices, which is where I feel the Common Core is leading our students.”

Raising the bar and celebrating success



Teacher: Tiffany McRae

SEED School
Washington, D.C.

Ms. McRae is a sixth-grade ELA teacher at the SEED School, a public boarding school in Washington, D.C. She's impressed that the Amplify ELA digital curriculum has gotten her students to successfully read texts that are "high skill but also high interest." She attributes this to the "read-aloud moments that have been incorporated into the lessons." Seeing her students so engaged in challenging literature drives her to keep raising the instructional bar. "When I see my students engaged, it motivates me to push on and dive into the skill instruction of the day, going in deeper to another level."

She also praises Amplify's writing program, which she says has vastly improved both her students' performance and her ability to support them. "I feel as if I have gotten to know my students as writers for the first time." Her students tell her that "they feel more free when they are writing, due to the fact that there is no paper or pencil involved in the writing process. They feel much more comfortable with technology than with traditional paper and pencil."

She appreciates how easy the Spotlight feature makes it to celebrate her students as they grow as writers. "What I love about Spotlight is that it gives value to the struggling writer because it shines a light on what they do well." She says that Spotlighting student work gives her students a sense of pride "because they now know they have successfully performed the writing skills taught during class."

Amplify's digital platform has also made it easier for her to differentiate her instruction to meet her students' varied needs. The digital gradebook lets her see at a glance what a range of writing her students produce, while the commenting tool makes it easy to provide personalized feedback. "Some kids struggled with basic sentence structure, while others were waiting for someone to push them into more complex writing. Amplify has helped me with differentiation, especially with its provided sentence starters. They help give struggling writers a more coherent voice, while helping me understand exactly where they are coming from. This helps me push them beyond their comfort zone and challenge them so that their writing can be enjoyed by a diverse audience as well."

21st-century skills for 21st-century kids



Teachers: Jhamilia Smith and Kammi Berry-McCray

Greenwood Lakes Middle School
Seminole County Public Schools, FL

Teachers at Greenwood Lakes Middle School in Seminole County say that the transition from paper- to tablet-based instruction was an important, if slightly daunting, shift. “Moving to a digital curriculum is a step towards preparing our students for college and the workplace,” Jhamilia Smith, a seventh- and eighth-grade ELA teacher tells us. “Prior to using Amplify, my students and I used laptops. We did not have access to the device we are using now. Depending on the activity, I permitted students to use their smart phones.” She says that Amplify’s onboarding and professional services were an “essential component to my smooth transition. I was able to explore and implement the curriculum more effectively.”

Ms. Berry-McCray, a seventh- and eighth-grade ELA teacher, is also glad that her school made the technological leap. “I embraced the idea of a digital curriculum,” she tells us. “There was a bit of a learning curve with the students in the transition since they were not used to having a digital ‘textbook,’” so her school provided opportunities for students without devices at home to use the school’s tablets after school. “I believe that the push for a digital curriculum is to allow learning to keep up with the ever-changing society. We are living in a digital age where students are engaged more with technology. What better way to enhance learning and make sure students are learning at the appropriate level than with technology. Students are using their creativity and critical thinking skills.”

Both teachers say that the effort has paid off. “I have truly enjoyed implementing this curriculum,” Ms. Smith tells us. “It is a framework that allows me to provide my students with engaging lessons. Amplify has done a great job of selecting pieces of text that my students enjoy reading and more than likely wouldn’t have selected on their own. My students have been presented with more opportunities to write and analyze text. They have built up a level of confidence that gives them the voice to stand in front of their peers and share their writing. My students are capable of actively listening to their peers share a piece of work and can effectively provide them with constructive feedback.” Ms. Berry-McCray agrees, citing the ways in which Amplify prepares students for high-stakes tests, despite not being a “test prep” curriculum. “Amplify provided the rigor the students need in order to be successful.”