Rigorous instruction for all students
Universal Design in Amplify ELA

Universal Design is at the center of the Amplify ELA approach to ELA instruction. This is because the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is essential for the teacher to provide equity and access to every student, but also because reading, writing, language, speaking, and listening skills are taught best in a community of learners in which participants are developing and comparing ideas about shared content.

The Amplify ELA curriculum and instruction are designed so that when at all possible, one very rich activity for the whole class serves the needs of every student, providing appropriate challenge and access. This section on Universal Design discusses how to use these common activities to reach the varying needs of students. Below this section on Universal Design, you will find a section on differentiation that explains how to use the alternate versions provided in the lessons (useful in times when the common activities prove inaccessible to students), and, when students experience considerable difficulty, how to provide interventions in the foundational skills they need to access the grade-level work. More information about how to provide deeper work on foundational skills is found in the section above on Skills, particularly in the sections on Vocabulary and Grammar.

There are two parts to the Amplify ELA implementation of Universal Design:

1. The structure of the curriculum establishes habits and routines that make it possible for the teacher to teach students at varying skill levels during the same activity, acquire data from formative assessments, and adjust instruction accordingly without having to provide different activities for different students. See below for a more detailed explanation for how to use this structure to serve the needs of all learners.
2. The particular Learning Experiences (described in Section II.A), which are repeated throughout the Amplify ELA Program, have been designed, as UDL suggests, to provide students with multiple means of acquiring skills and knowledge, multiple means of expressing their understandings, and multiple means of engaging with the content. See below for a more detailed explanation for how to use these Learning Experiences to serve the needs of all learners.

On the following pages find more in-depth descriptions of each of these parts of the Amplify ELA approach to Universal Design:

1. **The structure of the curriculum**

   A. **Routines and mindset established in the Get Started sub-unit:**

   The 10-day series of lessons that begin every year help every participant in the Amplify program develop the same expectations and assumptions about what is required for success in the program. The program takes nothing for granted—assuming that in each middle school student, at the beginning of every school year, there may be questions of motivation, beliefs in his or her capacity for success, how he or she will contribute to a community of learners, whether he or she has a growth mindset and can literally produce the work products necessary for success. So, these 10 days of lessons, in addition to actually beginning the teaching of some of the academic standards, work on the social and emotional skills essential to success in an ELA classroom. By the end of the Get Started sub-unit, the teacher has some very concrete measures about whether or not all students are on their way to achieving the social and emotional capacities they need. For example, there is a protocol for sharing and responding to work—and each student is expected to be able to participate in a certain way. Successful participation in the sharing protocol sets up a student for successful participation in whole-class and smaller-group discussions in later lessons. The structure of the sharing protocol makes it possible for the teacher to note who is not successful and to intervene to help those students achieve success.

   Another key measure of success in the Get Started sub-unit is the productivity formative assessment. More information can be found on this in the Assessment section that precedes this section. This key metric enables teachers to measure students' engagement in the common curriculum, and ability to work independently. The program provides clear expectations about how and when students' should develop this capacity. The skill is measured daily with an automated report, and teachers have truly functional and effective responses that can be implemented within the reality of their class structure and school day.

B. **Instruction designed to facilitate the teacher's ability to do strategic over-the-shoulder conferencing**

Over-the-shoulder conferences are a staple of the Amplify ELA program and enable teachers to provide nuanced feedback and subtle individualized direction while every student works on a common activity. Activities that facilitate teachers' ability to do over-the-shoulder conferences have certain characteristics in common. These are all activities in which:

- Students can follow the directions without intervention from the teacher, either because the activity is intuitive, has been carefully modeled by the teacher, or, in many cases, is part of a series of activities that builds gradually in complexity.
- Students' motivation to do the activity has been carefully considered—and each student thoroughly understands what he or she is gaining from doing the activity.
- Students' social capacities are scaffolded to either purposefully develop a social skill necessary to complete the activity or to provide necessary support for students without those social skills (for example, sentence frames, or a structure for taking turns.)
- Students have practiced the activity multiple times and know what range of performances are acceptable (for example, when mistakes are part of the process), when they should ask for help, and when it is perfectly okay to struggle.

Over-the-shoulder conferencing is such a key part of the Amplify lessons that a technical feature to support it has been built into the digital lesson structure. When teachers see the symbol 🪶 and click on it, they see 3-4 squares that describe characteristics of student behavior or student work, specific to this activity that teachers should look for. When teachers click on one of these squares, the system provides direction to the teacher about how to support students approaching the activity in different ways. These context-specific over-the-shoulder conferences always include an "on-track" example and a way to push the "on-track" student further.

2. The Learning Experiences, repeated throughout the ycle of Amplify ELA lessons, have been designed with UDL principles in mind to provide students with multiple means of acquiring skills and knowledge, multiple means of expressing their understandings, and multiple means of engaging with the content. These activities are described above in the section on pedagogy in much more detail in terms of how they show up in the lessons, and how they work to meet the five themes of ELA instruction as described in the CA ELA/ELD Framework. Here, we revisit them again, to remind the teacher of the ways in which teachers can understand these Learning Experiences as a key element of Amplify's Universal Design and thus, through teaching them, reach all students. As teachers work with the particular activities in each of these categories, they will notice for themselves, the ways in which they can use the activities' richness to reach all students. Below are some suggestions to get started with certain groups such as students with disabilities, readers below grade level, English Learners (ELs) and advanced students.

Working With Text Out Loud

Many lessons begin by working with the text out loud—either through dramatic video presentations of a text or audio readings done by actors and actresses. Students watch or listen and follow along while a professional actor reads out loud expressively to them, uncovering the meaning behind the words. For any student who has trouble accessing the text, because he or she is either a student with disabilities, a reader below grade level or an English Learner, this is an essential activity to make sure that these students can access some part of the text that will be the basis for the class activity. But more important, this experience of listening to an expert reader while following along word for word is foundational fluency training, appropriate for both readers below grade level and for students with disabilities around reading. For advanced students, listening to an expert reader is an opportunity to consider alternate interpretations of the text — often a discussion that all students are brought into will follow from this early activity. Importantly, all students are supported while they confront the text on their own, without this scaffold, through their Solo assignments so that they can continue to make progress in their ability to access complex text independently.

Working Visually

These activities are opportunities for all readers to show their interpretation of a text without being held back entirely by language. Any student, such as a student who is reading below grade level and is not fully accessing the text independently, once he or she has had some insight into the text, or in order to have an insight into the text, can use these activities in which he or she is working visually, to fully express his or her insights on equal grounds with every other student in the class. Advanced students use these activities to find patterns in the text that they could never see without reorganizing the material this way.

Working with Text as Theater

Activities in which students have to practice particular lines over and over again in order to present them or act them out embed another element of foundational fluency practice in Amplify ELA's regular lesson activities. For students reading below grade level, and for students with particular reading disabilities, this regular fluency practice is essential practice necessary to become grade-level readers. For other students, the practice of speaking the lines of text out loud enables them to refine their interpretations of a given text and to build confidence as presenters and actors in front of their peers.

Choosing the Best Evidence

Students often compare the evidence that they found with their peers in class—wondering whether one example is more convincing, more telling or maybe just more beautiful than another. By having these structured opportunities to compare their choices of evidence, students who have had different levels of success in understanding a particular passage have another chance to clarify what the author meant. Such opportunities are as rich for an advanced student as they are for a student reading below grade level.

Using the Text as Referee

Amplify lessons frame activities like paraphrasing or locating the correct piece of data in the text as a chance to go up against a partner in a game refereed by the text. Of course, once each partner weighs in with a paraphrase or with an opinion about the correct piece of data, the partners then have to come together to help the text referee; the text isn't animate, after all. So, what are so often exercises that students' dread because they are so easy to get incorrect become exercises in which the challenge is as much to help figure out whether or not one's answer and a partner's answers are correct, according to a neutral referee: the text. This structure brings students, who are inclined to see the text in a wide variety of ways because of a variety of capacities and backgrounds, together into intensely purposeful and dynamic discussions about what the author really means.

Writing for an Authentic Audience

Much has been written above about how the lessons are structured so that all students are successful during the time when students have to produce writing—or, when a student is not successful, it is easy for a teacher to intervene with over-the-shoulder conferencing in the moment, as well as with written feedback, Revision Assignments, and other longer term action plans after the fact. It is also a key point that every session in which students produce a piece of writing is followed by a short session in which students share their work—reading it aloud and calling on two students to say specifically which part of the piece got their attention and how that particular piece of writing had an impact on them. So, when students are writing for an authentic audience, they don't have to use their imaginations. They really are writing for a real audience.

Revising

In most middle school classes, there is nothing like a lesson in which students are revising their work to expose the differences in students' capacities, and often make teachers' throw their hands up in frustration. The Amplify ELA curriculum solves this problem by carefully building students' revising skills, giving everyone enough practice in small chunks so that when they come to the challenge of actually revising an essay, they are able to manage the multistep process independently. Like when students participate in other Amplify instructional activities, teachers can observe students working and strategically perform over-the-shoulder conferences to push each one to his or her potential. This scaffolded revision process is described above in the feedback section.

Debating

Amplify engages students in formal debating only after they have had the opportunity to participate in the other activities described above and thus become fully familiar with the language and content of the texts on which the debate depends. There is plenty of discussion and airing of opinions leading up to the debate, but, by the time students actually get into a situation in which they are trying to "prove" something, they can all feel they are on solid ground when supporting their claim, regardless of reading level.