

## **A4L Curriculum & Instructional Design**

Arts for Learning Lessons (A4L) is an innovative, supplemental literacy program that has been proven to be effective in engaging students and helping them develop important reading and writing skills, as well as essential 21st century learning and life skills, by integrating the arts.

Young Audiences (YA), in collaboration with a committed community of teachers, artists, and researchers, has developed six units of A4L lessons, residencies, assessment tools and professional development. This shared expertise has led to the creation of a replicable national model for effective practice with a common design framework across all A4L components of the program. All parts of A4L are designed to promote "learning to learn" as a metacognitive process for developing students' skills as reflective thinkers and creative problem-solvers. Teachers and their students participate in iterative cycles of development, reflection, assessment and revision. The result is a proven program that engages students, raises their interest and achievement in literacy and the arts, and helps them build essential learning and life skills for school-to-work and life-long learning, such as creative problem-solving, critical and analytic thinking, collaboration and communication.

A4L is based on the elements of the How People Learn framework, led by learning scientist Dr. John Bransford from the University of Washington. To achieve reliably effective results, practitioners of A4L units and residencies must adhere to the essential components of A4L as aligned with the principles of the How People Learn framework and as guided by the Young Audiences' IDEA model.

**A4L is a uniquely-designed program that:**

**Focuses on important literacy and arts objectives that align with National Core Standards.**

Each A4L unit targets important literacy concepts and skills and uses artistic principles that expressly reinforce those literacy goals.

**Uses the arts to leverage learning of literacy concepts and skills.**

Many arts integration programs use the arts as the final or "capstone" activity in a unit. A4L, however, uses the arts throughout the units as motive and means to advance reading for meaning and writing thoughtfully. We call this reinforcement "leveraged learning," and it lies at the core of the A4L program.

Since both the art form and texts are ways of conveying meaning, we believe that one way to reach students who struggle with or are uninterested in reading or writing is to have them create art that aligns with and elaborates on textual meaning. In addition, by offering students opportunities to share this art with audiences of persons who are important to them, students experience the profound and rewarding work of grappling with the meaning of a text-often an otherwise internal,

private act. In the Teacher Guide, the LM icon indicates key moments where the arts are used to leverage learning of literacy (and vice versa).

**Uses an instructional sequence that helps students become more self-directed/independent learners.**

The design framework for all A4L units and professional development follows a four-part process that is prompted by the letters I D E A. Each unit begins by identifying the Intention and goals of the unit, an introduction to the key literacy and arts concepts, and anticipated student outcomes. This is followed by three parts of student instruction that progress from the teacher-led Definition of knowledge and skills with guided practice and instruction in cycles of creating, reflecting, assessing and revising. Students then engage in Exploration to expand new ideas and skills through increasingly independent practice in reflective cycles of creating, reflecting, assessing, revising and selecting their choice of solutions. A final authentic Assessment requires students to present or perform for an audience and inform them of what they have learned by connecting their learning to life. This transfer from teacher-led instruction and guided practice to students' assumption of responsibility for "learning to learn" uses the reflective metacognitive process that is critical to the effectiveness of the A4L program in raising students' achievement in literacy, life skills, and the arts.

The Teacher Guide for each A4L unit contains a common 3-part sequence for students' instruction:

- **Part 1: Definition of concepts and skills with explicit teacher-led instruction, scaffolding, and guided practice;**
- **Part 2: Exploration of ideas and solutions through guided practice, scaffolding, and increasingly independent practice by students;**
- **Part 3: Assessment in which students "Perform and Inform" in an authentic assessment, sharing what they have learned.**

In the initial lessons of each unit (Part 1), teachers guide instruction on the targeted literacy and arts objectives. In later lessons (Part 2) they release responsibility, offering students more opportunities for practice, both guided and independent. In the final lessons of each unit (Part 3) students take on most of the responsibility, culminating in an authentic assessment by engaging in final preparations for a performance to an audience (Perform) and a public reflection and articulation of their learning process (Inform).

This gradual hand-off, supported throughout by formative assessment and teacher guidance as needed, is a sequence that educational research suggests will help students become more self-directed, independent learners.

**Provides multiple opportunities for students to improve their learning through reflection and revision.**

All A4L units share a structure that helps students learn how true artists exemplify the discipline of revising and reworking a particular art form over time, countering the misconception that artists always create their work in one great "burst." At the same time, students learn that artists often

change and revise their thinking about the real meaning of the message they are conveying to the viewer or listener and about the best way to convey it.

In A4L, students participate in activities that typically take place "behind the scenes" - activities such as the ongoing cycles of creation, reflection, and revision that underlie writing, practicing for performances, and creating new works that can be shared with others. The process of formative assessment is embedded in each phase of creating new works in literacy and the arts. Each A4L unit includes many, many opportunities for reflection and revision, some of which are formally marked as points for teachers and students to reflect on learning. These TRAIL Markers are noted in the teacher materials with the hiker icon.

Upon reaching a **TRAIL Marker**, students stop and perform a reflective activity connected to what they are learning with respect to reading, writing, and the arts, and they consider what they need to do next. Sharing and discussing **TRAIL Marker** responses help students think about what they are learning and help teachers monitor student progress. Based on what the teachers observe, they can then re-teach or extend the lesson.

Learning research shows that having students engage in ongoing reflection and revision enhances learning and helps develop reflective activities into metacognitive "habits of mind" that the students then use in other learning situations.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS: A4L LITERACY UNITS**

According to a national study conducted over four years, Arts for Learning Lessons significantly improve student literacy learning.

















- External evaluators at WestEd, a nonprofit research and development agency, report that students who receive the A4L Lessons progress predictably and measurably toward reaching targeted literacy standards and objectives when teachers in the classroom implement the lessons with professional development and with fidelity of delivery.
- Strongest gains occurred when an A4L unit is reinforced with a related artist residency or when students experience two or more units.
- During 2009-2010, the pattern of improvement was evident across different grade levels, implementation patterns, geographic locations, and school districts, including extended learning time and after-school applications.
- Gains of students using the A4L Lessons exceeded the gains of students using more traditional methods of instruction.
- Students showed positive attitudes, engagement, and interest in the A4L Lessons.

The most significant literacy improvement was displayed by students reading below level, including Title 1 and English Language Learners.

The lessons promote literacy skills as well as learning and life skills, such as curiosity, collaboration, and confidence.

Students reported utilizing concepts and strategies from A4L in other subjects.

## A4L Lessons/SIOP Chart

A4L Unit	PART 1: Instruction & Guided Practice	PART 2: Guided & Independent	PART 3: Perform & Inform
The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) <sup>1</sup> Instructional Elements		<b>1. Lesson Preparation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content and language objectives</li> <li>Adaptation of content</li> <li>Supplementary materials</li> <li>Language practice integration</li> </ul>	
		<b>2. Building Background</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activation of prior knowledge by linking students' background and experiences</li> </ul>	
		<b>3. Comprehensible Input</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use of appropriate techniques to explain student assignments/tasks. Including teacher use of speech and pace of instruction.</li> </ul>	
		<b>4. Strategies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase use of various scaffolding techniques as well as higher-order-thinking questioning strategies.</li> </ul>	
		<b>5. Interaction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide active interaction among students and between students and teacher</li> <li>Use of structured language development collaborate activities</li> </ul>	
		<b>6. Practice Application</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer hands-on materials, integrating language skills, that allow students to apply learned content and language knowledge</li> </ul>	
		<b>7. Lesson Delivery</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistent and well pace instruction that supports content and language objectives as well as student engagement</li> </ul>	
		<b>8. Review/Assessment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Structured review of key vocabulary and concepts</li> <li>Systematic feedback to students by teacher addressing language output</li> <li>Student assessment with emphasis on comprehension and language proficiency</li> </ul>	

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: A4L LITERACY UNITS**

Working with a design team from the University of Washington, Young Audiences has developed six units of Arts for Learning Lessons for use by grade 3–6 classroom teachers. The initial A4L Online version went live in 2013 as part of a collaborative Investing in Innovation (i3) development grant from the U.S. Department of Education. During the first three years of this project the original five A4L units were revised and the sixth unit was created to meet the needs of the i3 school partner, the Beaverton School District (BSD) in Oregon. The 2013 version includes research-based enhancements to better support the needs of Title 1 and ELL students, promote more in- and out-of-school reading, promote writing, and align with the BSD curriculum.

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