Anchor Text Guidance: Grade 3, Module 1

Overcoming Learning Challenges Near and Far

Texts and authors

Waiting for the Biblioburro by Monica Brown
Lexile®: AD880

Rain School by James Rumford
Lexile®: AD420

Nasreen's Secret School by Jeanette Winter
Lexile®: AD630

My Librarian Is a Camel by Margriet Ruurs
Lexile®: 980

More Than Anything Else by Marie Bradby and illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet
Lexile®: 660

Thank You, Mr. Falker by Patricia Palocco
Lexile®: AD650

Text Overview

EL Education's Grade 3, Module 1 is designed to prompt consideration of these compelling questions:

- Why are education, books, and reading important?
- How can I overcome learning challenges?

Waiting for the Biblioburro, written by Peruvian-American author Monica Brown, is a story about the struggles a girl named Ana encounters with access to education in rural Colombia, South America. Ana is helped by the *biblioburro*, a librarian who travels around on a donkey to deliver books to children. This text is sprinkled with Spanish vocabulary and inspired by real-life librarian Luis Soriano Boorquez.

© 2021 EL Education Inc. Created with the support of Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools.
Except where otherwise noted, EL Education's Language Arts Curriculum is published under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) License. To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

Rain School was written by James Rumford, a Peace Corps volunteer who lived in Chad, Africa. The text tells the story of a school that children and their teacher have to physically build before learning can begin. Thomas is excited about his first day of school in Chad. When he arrives, he discovers that the children's first lesson will be learning how to build their school using mud, grass, and saplings. After nine productive months of learning, the school year ends. The rains come and the school returns to mud, but the learning the students did cannot be washed away. In September, the children will return to "their smiling teachers, ready to build their school again."

Nasreen's Secret School is a true story from Afghanistan. Nasreen is a young girl living in Afghanistan after the Taliban have seized control. After her father and mother go missing, Nasreen stops speaking and stops smiling. Although girls are now forbidden to attend school, Nasreen's grandmother enrolls her in a secret school, and her granddaughter slowly begins to speak and learns to smile again.

My Librarian Is a Camel describes the challenge of getting books to remote areas around the world and the unique and interesting ways some communities overcome that challenge. Written by Margriet Ruurs, this book provides examples of how access to books can be thoughtfully accomplished with the help of devoted librarians. In addition to the central text, each two-page spread includes photos, plus geographical and other information about the country in which the people receiving the books live. Students work only with carefully chosen sections of this text.

More Than Anything Else, written by Marie Bradby and illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet, tells the story of the early years in the life of Booker T. Washington. The story is set in the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War, when Washington was nine years old and was able to seize an opportunity to do what he wanted to do "more than anything else": learn to read.

Thank You, Mr. Falker, written by Patricia Palocco, is a personal story of how the author struggled with dyslexia and bullying as a child. When she met her fifth grade teacher, Mr. Falker, he encouraged her, supported her, and gave her the extra help and understanding she needed to face her challenges. This story allows students to understand that their struggles don't define them, as everyone is good at something, and highlights the importance of a good teacher in a student's life.

Text Rationale

EL Education is committed to promoting students' work to become effective learners as they develop mindsets and skills for success in college, career, and life by studying the power of literacy and how people around the world overcome learning challenges. Students read *Waiting for the Biblioburro* by Monica Brown, *Rain School* by James Rumford, and *Nasreen's Secret School* by Jeanette Winter to analyze the challenges the characters face with access to school and education, and to understand how people overcome those challenges. Specifically, *Waiting for the Biblioburro* highlights the challenge of geography in access to education, *Rain School* highlights the challenges faced at a school building, and *Nasreen's Secret School* highlights the challenge of war and laws preventing access to education. All of the texts in the module highlight the importance of education and learning, whether through school or books.

The basic storyline of *Rain School*, its chronological structure, and the simple language used in the text make it an excellent vehicle for introducing some of the more abstract content and skills central to the module. The idea of an "obstacle to learning" is introduced very concretely (there is no school building), and this obstacle is overcome physically (a school is built from mud, grass, and saplings). This tangible example helps students clearly understand what an obstacle is and builds a solid base for exploring more abstract obstacles and ways to overcome them later in the module. The narrative structure makes this an easy story to recount, and the book contains many possible central messages, accessible to students at a variety of levels. *Rain School* is also used to introduce how the characters' motivation to learn, optimism, and persistence drive the events of the story (building and going to school). This allows students to make clear connections with the habits of character woven throughout the module—becoming effective learners and ethical people who make a difference in their world.

Nasreen's Secret School explores the value of education on a deeper level than the previous texts. The unique perspective of the narrator as an educated woman who watches her granddaughter lose the right to go to school offers insight into many of the larger personal and cultural benefits of literacy and learning about the world. The story has a clear message: there is a connection between literacy and personal freedom and empowerment. It introduces new ideas about the value of learning to read and write for students to consider. This clear message makes the text a good vehicle for teaching about recounting stories and strong characters whose actions show their values and motivations.

My Librarian Is a Camel was chosen to provide students with a specific, concrete example of the value of books and reading by showing the effort and creativity that people around the world apply to the geographical problems of connecting readers with books. The book also offers opportunities to help students distinguish between informational text and literary text (on the same topic) read earlier in the unit, with a specific focus on how details in a text are used to support a clear and consistent main idea. In addition, photos and graphics clarify and extend student understanding of the central text, making this book an excellent vehicle for teaching the skill.

Waiting for the Biblioburro was chosen to support students' knowledge of geography. It highlights for students how education and learning are not just about schools and teachers, but can come solely from reading books. As students read about how Ana is helped by the *biblioburro*, they identify the gist and determine the message or lesson in the story.

More Than Anything Else and *Thank You, Mr. Falker* were chosen because they help students see that struggles with learning and access to education aren't just confined to other countries. In *More Than Anything Else*, a young Booker T. Washington overcomes the challenges of learning to read caused by the racism, segregation, and anti-literacy laws of the time. Like *Nasreen's Secret School*, this story tells how children of color were deliberately deprived of an education and often forced to work.

Thank You, Mr. Falker helps students with different abilities see their struggles represented. This text highlights the importance of developing empathy and compassion, as the main character, Trish, endures the pain of bullying throughout her journey to overcome her reading challenges.

As students move through these texts, they reflect on their own challenges and work to become ethical people by showing empathy, integrity, respect, and compassion. Through this deep study of the power of literacy, students develop a wide base of knowledge about the world and the words that help describe and make sense of it.

EL Education recommends that school leaders and teachers read the texts in advance, with their specific school community in mind, to become familiar with the issues presented so that they can discuss them with students and families as needed.

Examples of sensitive topics that teachers should be prepared to address are detailed on the following pages.

1. Access and Privilege

In the process of designing this module, EL Education researched the challenges that students from different cultures and countries face in accessing formal education and educational resources. Investigate the routines, practices, rituals, beliefs, norms, and experiences that are important to your students and their families. Integrate this background into the classroom as students explore the texts.

Because this module explores issues related to access and privilege, it is important to be particularly sensitive to students' personal experiences. Some may have experienced interrupted formal education due to illness, poverty, violence, or migration. Some may currently experience a lack of access to texts and educational resources in their home languages or cultures. Be aware that children often do not have choice in their access and privilege. Systems of oppression support access for some students but not for others. Sometimes it does not matter how hard students work or how much they persevere; the system is set up to deliberately prevent access. Foster inclusive action by creating space for students to express their feelings about sensitive issues, while being aware that these discussions may unearth trauma or social stigma. Consult with a guidance counselor, school social worker, or ESL teacher for further investigation of diversity and inclusion.

2. Single Narrative

Each of the anchor texts in this module depicts challenges in accessing formal education in a single moment of time and a specific geographical location within a specific political climate. Whether it is rural Colombia in *Waiting for the Biblioburro*, rural Chad in *Rain School*, Afghanistan in *Nasreen's Secret School*, or the various countries represented in *My Librarian Is a Camel*, it is important to avoid oversimplifying or generalizing other countries, cultures, or traditions.

These texts might unintentionally reinforce stereotypes or existing views students hold of cultures and peoples outside of the United States. There are also parallels between some of the stories and current issues in the United States, e.g., school buildings inadequate for student needs, students in rural areas not being able to go to school, or having to spend hours on school buses every day.

Be particularly sensitive to illustrations in the texts, and encourage students to use Conversation Cues and Discussion Norms to build meaning. Conversation Cues are questions teachers ask students to help achieve four goals: (Goal 1) encourage all students to talk and be understood, (Goal 2) listen carefully to one another and seek to understand, (Goal 3) deepen thinking, and (Goal 4) think with others to expand the conversation. Present a counter narrative to avoid students leaning into stereotypes by encouraging them to research the cultures and countries of the Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) represented in the stories. Finally, use the time provided in the lessons to allow students to locate the countries and continents on a globe and/or map. Encourage students to research more about schools and education in each country and continent.

3. Enslavement and Oppression

More Than Anything Else is set in the time period following the American Civil War. Therefore, it is important to note that Booker T. Washington's challenging conditions were a result of his years spent as an enslaved person and the challenges his family faced when the United States abolished slavery. The abolishment of slavery in the United States made it illegal to own another person; however, many of the injustices that enslaved people suffered under this inhumane practice continued after its abolishment. Abolishing enslavement did not abolish oppression or racism. Formerly enslaved people had no assets, no wealth, and no land, and most did not know how to read or write because education of enslaved people was against the law in many states.

While *More Than Anything Else* pays tribute to the perseverance of a young Booker T. Washington, this is not his entire story. Consider sharing additional details about the legacy of Washington to avoid students having only one perception of this historical figure. These additional details may include: His full name was Booker Taliaferro Washington. Between 1890 and 1915, Booker T. Washington was an important leader in the African American community. He was an accomplished educator, a published author, a skilled orator, and an adviser to multiple US presidents. It is important to note that Booker T. Washington's philosophy for the advancement of people of color was different from the philosophy held by W.E.B. DuBois, a statesman and contemporary of Booker T. Washington's. Washington's advocacy for self-help, racial solidarity, and accommodation is often viewed as an advocate for systems of oppression, while DuBois advocated for political action and a civil rights agenda.

This may be a sensitive issue for students, particularly those who are BIPOC and who might have a family connection to enslavement and/or its aftermath. Be aware that these connections may be personal and students are not required to share them. Consider explaining to families that this text will be read aloud so they can support their students and appropriately prepare children and discuss the text afterward.

4. Gender Bias and Political Oppression

Nasreen's Secret School is a story centered on the effects of oppression, particularly the oppression of women stemming from religious views and gender inequality. This story is set in Herat, Afghanistan, and focuses on the challenges a girl named Nasreen faces both at home and in trying to go to school. Be aware that students with family members who have lived in or are currently living in Afghanistan may be sensitive to this story or may have other stories about the country that they want to share. Some may have experienced interrupted formal education due to violence or religious and political laws.

The Author's Note at the beginning of the text explains the context of the story and will support teachers and students in building background knowledge. Compassion and empathy also are introduced in the lessons for the read-aloud because of the sensitive nature of the text. Consider explaining to families that this book will be read aloud to students so that they can appropriately prepare children and discuss the text afterward.

Like *Nasreen's Secret School*, the text *More Than Anything Else* tells the story of children who were deliberately deprived of an education and forced to work. The anti-literacy laws for people of color that existed before and after the Civil War were a part of life during this time, as was political oppression. Be aware that students with connections to interrupted formal education due to war and/or political oppression may be sensitive to this story or may have other stories

that they want to share. This may be a sensitive issue for students, particularly BIPOC who might have a family connection to political oppression and/or its aftermath. These connections may be personal, and students are not required to share them.

Tasks

Throughout the module, there are tasks that intentionally or incidentally serve to mitigate possible concerns and support students' enthusiastic, informed, and safe reading.

Unit 1

Lesson 1: In this lesson, students infer the topic of the module using resources from the texts they will be reading. It is important to be sensitive to students' and families' feelings and experiences with regard to education, books, and reading and to acknowledge that these feelings and experiences may differ greatly, from very positive to somewhat neutral to very negative. This issue is discussed more in subsequent lessons, but it is important to be prepared to handle it sensitively should it arise.

The main point students should understand by the end of the module is that education, books, and reading are important for college and career readiness. Encourage students to reflect on the module guiding questions at home with their families. Keeping a journal to write down emotions is a helpful method for some students to process their thoughts. Acknowledge that students may have strong feelings about education, books, and reading based on their own experiences and cultural background.

Lesson 1 also sets the expectations for student-to-student interactions for the remainder of the school year. During all interactions (discussion protocols, partner work, etc.), be aware that partnering with, looking at, talking with, or touching other genders may be uncomfortable or inappropriate for students from some cultures. In addition, some students may believe it is inappropriate to speak with other students at all during class, especially if they are from another country or culture. Let students know that speaking with a peer of any gender when the teacher gives the signal is appropriate, and it is one way that students can become independent learners and develop their knowledge and language ability. At the same time, tell students that you respect their needs, and if necessary, seek alternative arrangements for students according to their cultural traditions.

Finally, Lesson 1 (and subsequent lessons) uses cold calling (calling on students without them volunteering) as a total participation technique. Be aware that cold calling may be unfamiliar or embarrassing to some students. Prepare students and their families by telling them that cold calling is common in the United States as a practice to help ensure all student voices are heard and respected and that it also provides the teacher with a way to assess what students know.

Lesson 2: This lesson helps set the foundation for the practice of respect that will continue throughout the module and shape class discussion for the remainder of the school year. Respect may be an abstract concept for some students, and they may need multiple examples to grasp it. Provide opportunities for role-play and modeling, and make explicit connections to the Discussion Norms anchor chart. Ensure that you cover all of the cues and responses on the anchor chart, as these will support students in holding productive and equitable discussions to deepen their understanding.

Because students may be accustomed to different communication norms at home, help them explicitly connect the Think-Pair-Share protocol, Fishbowl protocol, and Discussion Norms anchor chart to the implicit value that many US classrooms place on each student sharing thoughts and being given an equal share of talk time.

Lesson 2 also provides students with the option to share their reflections about the module guiding questions. Again, it is important to be sensitive to students' and families' feelings and experiences with education, books, and reading and to acknowledge that these feelings and experiences may differ greatly, from very positive to somewhat neutral to very negative. Be prepared to handle this issue sensitively should it arise.

Lesson 3: Consider whether students may be sensitive to the issues that *Waiting for the Biblioburro* raises, based on their cultural background or family history. Consider explaining to families that this book will be read aloud to students so that they can appropriately prepare children and discuss the text afterward. Invite students to investigate how and why the author uses Spanish in the text: to celebrate bilingualism, to reflect Ana's home language, and to provide translation for English words, all with the goal of making the story more interesting and meaningful.

Ensure that students recognize that this story is about one child and that not every child in Colombia, South America, faces the same challenges. Explain that just because Ana's way of life may be different from theirs, that does not mean that it is any better or worse than the way they may live; it is simply a different way of life. Take a moment to acknowledge and celebrate Ana's joy of reading and the hard work she and the librarian do in the name of reading.

Lesson 4: This lesson is the second in a series of three that includes built-out instruction using Goal 1 Conversation Cues in order to promote productive, respectful, and equitable conversation. (As the modules progress, Goals 2, 3, and 4 Conversation Cues are gradually introduced.) Goal 1 Conversation Cues encourage all students to talk and be understood. Consider providing students with a thinking journal or scrap paper as they process sensitive topics. Encourage students who are motivated to engage in Chadian culture to research the country of Chad in books or on the internet.

The basic design of Lesson 4 supports opportunities to celebrate cultural, linguistic, and educational diversity. Support students in noticing and enjoying how James Rumford, the author of *Rain School*, sprinkles French sentences and words into the English narrative. Explain that in Chad, the official languages spoken are French and Arabic, not English. Build student excitement about the new text, and counter any stereotypes of other cultures by introducing information from multiple media sources about Chad. This can include representations of culture such as art, music, dance, or literature.

Lesson 10: In this lesson, students engage in their first peer critique of the module. Consider any additional guidelines you would like to establish for this routine, as it will be used throughout the year. Continue to reinforce the habits of character introduced in the module, since students may be sensitive to the content of *Nasreen's Secret School*.

English language learners (ELLs) may find peer critique culturally and linguistically challenging. They may come from a personal or cultural background that values the teacher, not another student, giving feedback and critique. Make space for students to share any hesitations they have, as well as to investigate why many classrooms in America value feedback from peers.

Unit 3

Lessons 1–3: In this series of lessons, students hear *More Than Anything Else* read aloud. Though the book is set after the Civil War, it is important to note that Booker T. Washington's challenging conditions were a result of his years spent as an enslaved person and the challenges his family faced when the United States abolished slavery. This may be a sensitive issue for students, particularly BIPOC who might have a family connection to enslavement. A time of silent reflection is built into these lessons to give students time to process the connections they may make with the story. Be aware that these connections may be personal and students are not required to share them. Consider explaining to families that this book will be read aloud so they can support their children and appropriately prepare children and discuss the text afterward.

Including Families

Families of students working through this module are invited to discuss any concerns they have about the texts with their children and the teacher. Teaching notes throughout the module recommend that teachers speak to families of students who may be particularly affected by the topics encountered. Notes in the homework materials distributed to families recommend that they reach out to teachers with questions or concerns about the texts. These materials also encourage families to talk with their children about the texts they are reading, particularly if any of the topics raised might be sensitive to a particular student.