



Teaching with the WIDA 2020 ELD Standards in a Second-Grade Literacy Block

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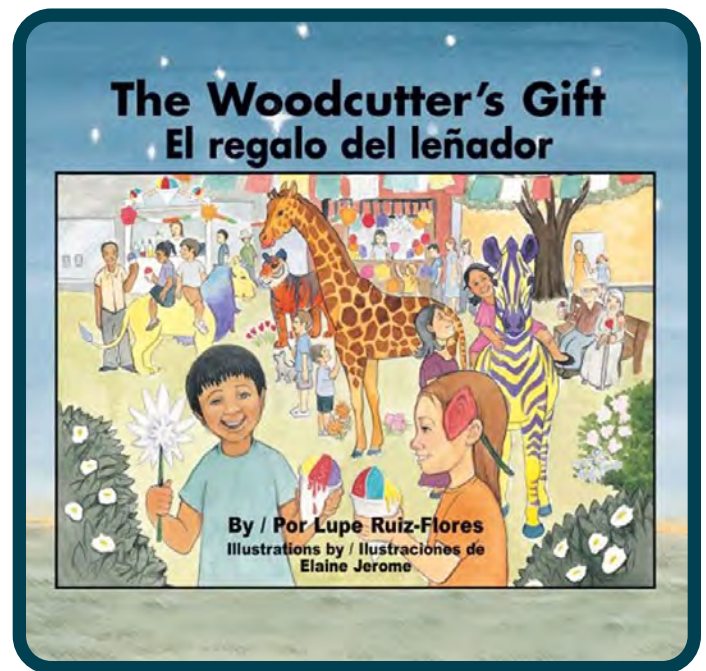
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In this Practice Snapshot, we invite you to come with us into a second-grade classroom, a morning literacy block where students are reading *The Woodcutter's Gift* story as part of the McGraw-Hill literacy curriculum. We illustrate how we can make the language of literacy visible using the recent edition of the WIDA 2020 ELD Standards Framework (henceforth, the WIDA Standards or Standards). Since the Standards came out in December of 2020, Wisconsin teachers have been seeking ways to apply the Standards to improve their practice, especially as it relates to literacy. We, at the Language and Culture Center at CESA 2, strive to offer teachers accessible classroom-ready resources and workshops for making the WIDA Standards come alive in our classrooms. This Practice Snapshot is one of these resources and highlights a teacher-friendly application of the WIDA Standards by addressing the following questions:

- 1 How can the WIDA ELD Standards connect with classroom materials used in a Literacy Block?
- 2 How can the WIDA ELD Standards help teachers focus on language in a regular classroom to intentionally plan for and teach the language of literacy?

To answer these questions, we will use *The Woodcutter's Gift* by Lupe Ruiz-Flore. In summary, *The Woodcutter's Gift* is a story of an old mesquite tree that fell down after a violent thunderstorm. After much discussion about what to do with the tree, the woodcutter carves it into animals creating a zoo for the community to enjoy.



Using this story as the context for teaching language, we are going to use the WIDA Standards to attend to the language in the story. To do so, we will draw on the knowledge that language, literacy, and learning, are three sides of the same prism, because language, learning, and literacy cannot be separated (Halliday, 1993; Fillmore & Fillmore, n.d.). In this view, to support students in engaging in literacy tasks such as finding the main idea, analyzing theme, tracing character development, or following the plot, we need to invite language to do the work of literacy. In other words, it is through the interdependency of language and content that students find the main idea and supporting details. The publisher's attention to language has been made through a few bolded words such as *rarely*, *enormous*, and *distance*. We use the WIDA Standards, Language for Language Arts, Key Language Use Narrate, grades 2-3 to expand that view of language and teach language beyond vocabulary that the standards provide. To begin, please reference the Language Expectations on page 90 of the [WIDA ELD Standards Framework](#) as shown in **Figure 1**.



GRADES
2-3

WIDA ELD STANDARD 2

Language for Language Arts

Narrate

Language Expectations: Multilingual learners will...

ELD-LA.2-3.Narrate.Interpretive

Interpret language arts narratives by

- Identifying a central message from key details
- Identifying how character attributes and actions contribute to event sequences
- Determining the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in texts, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language

ELD-LA.2-3.Narrate.Expressive

Construct language arts narratives that

- Orient audience to context
- Develop story with time and event sequences, complication, resolution, or ending
- Engage and adjust for audience

Figure 1. Grades 2-3. Language Expectations for Language Arts, Key Language Use Narrate. P. 90

As a quick refresher, the Language Expectations (**Figure 1**) are one of the main components in the WIDA Standards. There are two sets of them: Interpretive (on the left) which includes Reading, Listening, and Viewing, and Expressive (on the right) which includes Writing, Speaking, and Representing. Each set of Language Expectations is different for each Key Language Use (KLU), content area, and grade level cluster. This is an example from the KLU Narrate because we are reading a narrative as opposed to a persuasive text (KLU Argue) or an explanation (KLU Explain).

In the WIDA ELD Standards as well as the Common Core ELA Standards, there is a language expectation that students will learn how to **orient the audience to context**. Here's how the WIDA Standards can help students to orient the audience to context which includes a setting and introduces characters.

We look at two sentences at the beginning of the story to illustrate the process of how to find language for describing a setting.

“On a stormy night, a violent thunderstorm blew in and knocked down the giant mesquite tree that stood in the town square. After the storm, all the neighbors, who rarely spoke to each other, came out of their houses and gathered around the enormous tree that was blocking the main street.”

Figure 2. An excerpt from *The Woodcutter's Gift*

Using the WIDA standards as a resource, refer to the set of language functions and features on the second half of the page (**Figure 3**). **Figure 3** illustrates one language function “orient audience to context through

- Pictures, descriptive title, opening statements
- expanded noun groups to introduce characters,
- adverbial and prepositional phrases to establish time and location,
- statements to introduce problem or complication.”



Language Functions and Sample Language Features

Orient audience to context through...

- Pictures, descriptive title, opening statements (*It was a dark and stormy night; "What?!" exclaimed Mom*) to capture the reader's interest
- Expanded noun groups to introduce characters (*the old man on the block, the hungry little mouse*)
- Adverbials and prepositional phrases to establish time and location (*a hundred years ago, when I was six, on the playground, around the corner*)
- Statements to introduce problem or complication (*The boat began to leak. It all started when...*)

Figure 3. Language Function (Orient audience to context through...) and the corresponding sample Language Features. P. 90

Using these Language features in the bulleted list in **Figure 3**, we invite you to focus on the expanded noun groups **to introduce characters**.

Expanded noun groups, as defined in the WIDA Standards on p. 220, is a "noun group with the pre-modifiers (words before the noun) and post-modifiers (words after the noun) that add information about the noun."

In our story excerpt, we find several noun groups (they are in red):

"On a stormy night, **a violent thunderstorm** blew in and knocked down **the giant mesquite tree that stood in the town square**. After the storm, **all the neighbors, who rarely spoke to each other**, came out of their houses and gathered around **the enormous tree that was blocking the main street**."

We need to show our students how to expand a noun group for writing narratives. Please note, noun groups are different based on their uses (or more explicitly Key Language Uses). For example, Explanation noun groups include words from science worlds. To show students how noun groups

expand, we teach students to ask different kinds of questions such as "What? What like? What type? Which one?" and then to expand even further, ask students to "Tell me more." Remind students that the noun group can be expanded by adding words before and after the main noun. **Figure 4** demonstrates the process. The first step is to identify the main noun, in this case, TREE.

Tree (what?)
The giant **tree** (what like?)
The giant mesquite **tree** (what type?)
The giant mesquite **tree** that stood in the town square (which one?)

Figure 4. How to Expand a Noun Group in Narratives, main noun "Tree"

In the next example, we use the word **neighbors** in the story. A word of caution: focus this work in the context of this particular story to give students a chance to develop their comprehension and language resources for writing excellent narratives. Also, keep in mind the function or the why of noun groups; we need noun groups because adding details to the noun tells us a lot of what our readers will need to know about the characters.



Neighbors (who?)
 All the **neighbors** (how many?)
 All the grumpy **neighbors** (which ones?)
 All the grumpy **neighbors** who rarely spoke to each other (which ones?,
 tell me more)

Figure 5. *How to Expand a Noun Group in Narratives, main noun “Neighbors”*

In our final example, we identify activities to help students expand noun groups associated with an important character in the story, **the woodcutter**. Ask students to open their books and guide them in searching for language to describe the woodcutter and add this language to a shared list on the board or index cards on their desks, especially helpful to students learning English. This aids their comprehension as well as expands their language resources they can later use in writing. Remember to ask students questions to expand the noun group such as “What is his [the Woodcutter’s] name, what kind of person was he? Where did he live?” and then record their responses by adding words before and after the noun. Teach students the order of adjectives that come before the noun because, in English, there is a very special order.

Woodcutter
Woodcutter Tomas (who?)
 The caring **woodcutter** Tomas (what like?)
 The caring and talented **woodcutter** Tomas (what like?)
 The caring, talented and patient **woodcutter** Tomas (what was his character
 like?)
 The caring, talented and patient **woodcutter** Tomas who saw beauty in the
 old mesquite tree (what was he like?)
 The caring, talented and patient **woodcutter** Tomas who saw beauty in the
 old mesquite tree and was good at carving (tell me more, tell me more).

Figure 6. *How to Expand a Noun Group in Narratives, main noun “Woodcutter”.*

The three examples above demonstrate how to expand noun groups to support writing descriptions. Explore these approaches with your own students and texts.

Tips

1. When doing any language work in literacy, start with one or two key language features such as noun groups or prepositional phrases of time and place. Keep it manageable and build from there. The WIDA language functions and features have more choices for you to go back to when you continue addressing language in literacy.
2. Teach students how to expand noun groups and let them have fun with language. For example, what would happen if we added character language to informational texts such as **a super cute Alli the Alligator** when informational texts ask for technical descriptions like **a fresh-water crocodile with a long snout**? Ask why it is not okay to personify Alli the Alligator in informational texts? The reason for



Tips Continued

expanding noun groups is to add important information to the main thing or person or issue students are learning about. Because when we add details to talk about fresh-water crocodiles in a science explanation, we will not add details that turn them into cute or cuddly creatures because such language belongs in narratives. Through these activities of language play, students' awareness of language will grow and they'll begin to notice language in the texts around them.

3. **Simply asking students to add details** without teaching them where details live may contribute to the label "struggling writers". We hope that expanding noun groups using the WIDA Standards Language Functions and Features showed you how to teach students and lead them towards autonomy of adding important details on their own, after our excellent teaching.
4. **The entry point into any language activity should be standards, not classroom materials.** The standards frame the purpose for teaching language. In this Practice Snapshot, we demonstrated how to orient the audience to the setting and character by providing enough details about the setting and the character.
5. When working with students on noun groups, a key feature of narratives, **always work with language within a story.** Start with the main noun, and then add words before the noun and then add words after the noun. Draw students' attention that they may need who or that words to expand the noun group (e.g, the woodcutter who loved carving or the giant mesquite tree that stood in the town square).
6. For students new to English, start small and allow them to manipulate index cards by rearranging words written on the cards. Also, allow students to act out noun groups like "neighbors who rarely spoke to each other" or "a giant tree that stood in the town square". Acting out will help students ensure they develop the meaning of these words to avoid the mechanical nature of expanding noun groups without much meaning.



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2. Halliday, M.A.K. (1993). Towards a language-based theory of learning. *Linguistics and Education* 5, 93-116.
3. McGraw Hill. (2016). *Wonders*.
4. WIDA. (2020). WIDA English language development standards framework, 2020 edition: Kindergarten–grade 12. Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.

Resources for Further Learning:

1. Brisk, M. (2023). *Engaging students in academic literacies. SFL genre pedagogy for K-8 classrooms*. 2nd edition. Routledge.
2. de Oliveira, L. C. (2023). *Supporting multilingual learners' academic language development: a language-based approach to content instruction*. Routledge.
3. Derewianka, B. & Jones, P. (2018). *Teaching language in context*. 2nd edition. Oxford.

About the Author:



Ruslana Westerlund, Ed.D., is a Ukrainian-born educational consultant at CESA 2 specializing in using the WIDA Standards for equity through rigorous and culturally relevant teaching, providing access to disciplinary genres for all students, and designing equitable instructional practices for English Learners. She is driven by the vision to transform schools where all teachers are equipped with the knowledge to meet the needs of English Learners at both systems and classroom levels. Her unique area of expertise and research is writing in the disciplines through an apprenticeship pedagogy called the Teaching and Learning Cycle.

