

BRIDGING ELA CCSS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



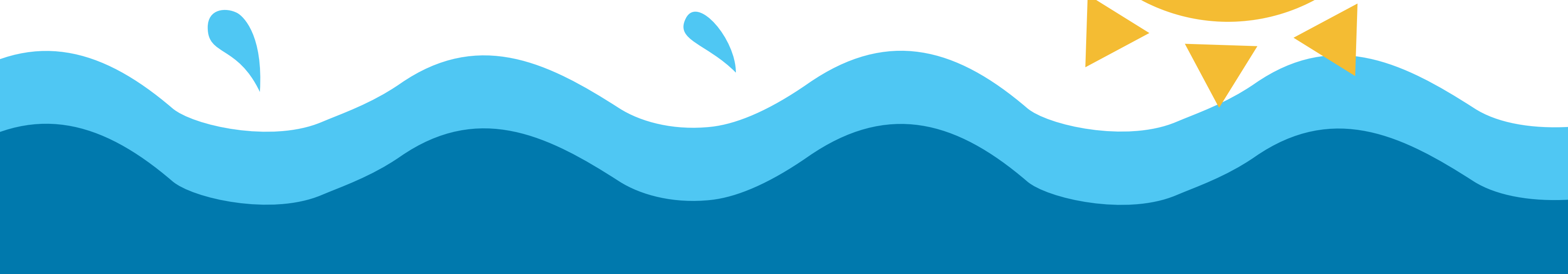
A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO INTEGRATING ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY IN INTERDISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTION



Integrating environmental literacy into elementary classrooms can feel challenging, particularly when faced with the pressures of state assessments and core literacy instruction.

However, environmental literacy enhances reading comprehension, critical thinking, and inquiry-based learning, making it a valuable addition to literacy instruction.

This guide provides concrete strategies, lesson plans, and templates for integrating environmental themes while meeting both ELA CCSS and NGSS environmental science standards.



INTEGRATING ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY INTO ELA

*** Lesson ideas- more details on additional pages

1

EXPLORING ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM IN LITERATURE

Standards: RL.5.2, W.5.1, SL.5.4

Essential Question: How can storytelling inspire environmental activism?



2

UNDERSTANDING INTERDEPENDENCE IN ECOSYSTEMS THROUGH INQUIRY

Standards: RI.5.1, W.5.7, SL.5.1

Essential Question: How do plants and animals depend on each other?

3

CRITICAL LITERACY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Standards: RI.5.4, SL.5.3, W.5.9

Essential Question: Who is affected by environmental change, and how can we take action?

4

READING THE LAND: OBSERVING AND WRITING ABOUT NATURE

Standards: W.5.2, W.5.7, SL.5.1

Essential Question: How does nature tell us stories?



5

“WHAT IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARD?” EXPLORING ACTIVISM THROUGH BIOGRAPHY

Standards: RI.5.1, W.5.1, SL.5.4

Essential Question: What does it mean to be an environmental steward? And how can kids make a difference?



LESSON PLANS: INTEGRATING ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY INTO ELA

Lesson 1: Exploring Environmental Activism in Literature

Standards: RL.5.2, W.5.1, SL.5.4

Essential Question: How can storytelling inspire environmental activism?

Text: The Mess That We Made by Michelle Lord

Activity:

- Read The Mess That We Made as a mentor text.
- Identify the problem (plastic pollution), solution, and call to action.
- Discuss how the author engages readers emotionally and encourages action.

Writing Extension:

- Students write a persuasive letter to a local representative about a community environmental issue.

Science Connection:

- Research the impact of pollution on marine life.
- Conduct a plastic waste audit in the classroom.

LESSON PLANS: INTEGRATING ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY INTO ELA

Lesson 2: Understanding Interdependence in Ecosystems Through Inquiry.

Standards: RI.5.1, W.5.7, SL.5.1

Essential Question: How do plants and animals depend on each other?

Text: Berry Song by Michaela Goade

Activity:

- Read Berry Song and discuss how Indigenous knowledge emphasizes environmental stewardship.
- Students identify key relationships in ecosystems (e.g., pollinators and plants).

Writing Extension:

- Create “Reciprocity Journals” where students write daily reflections on how they interact with the environment.

Science Connection:

- Explore pollinators and biodiversity through interactive research stations.
- Design a native plant garden proposal for the school.

LESSON PLANS: INTEGRATING ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY INTO ELA

Lesson 3: Critical Literacy and Environmental Justice

Standards: RI.5.4, SL.5.3, W.5.9

Essential Question: Who is affected by environmental change, and how can we take action?

Text: Saving American Beach by Heidi King

Activity:

- Read Saving American Beach and analyze how race and environmental justice intersect.
- Discuss environmental racism and explore real-life case studies.

Writing Extension:

- Students write narratives imagining they are activists working to protect a local environment.

Science Connection:

- Investigate local land use policies and their environmental impact.
- Conduct a community survey on environmental concerns.

LESSON PLANS: INTEGRATING ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY INTO ELA

Lesson 4: “Reading the Land: Observing and Writing About Nature”

Standards: W.5.2, W.5.7, SL.5.1

Essential Question: How does nature tell us stories?

Text: None required; students will observe their environment directly.

Activity:

- Nature Walk (or Virtual Exploration): Take students outside or show images of different environments.
- Nature Observation Notes: Students use a Sensory Chart (See, Hear, Smell, Touch, Feel) to record observations.
- Descriptive Writing: Students write a short paragraph or poem personifying nature, describing it as if it had a voice.
 - Example: “I am the old oak, watching the seasons change...”

Science Connection:

- Discuss local plant species and the interdependence of living things in an ecosystem.

LESSON PLANS: INTEGRATING ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY INTO ELA

Lesson 5: “What is an Environmental Steward?” Exploring Activism Through Biography.

Standards: RI.5.1, W.5.1, SL.5.4

Essential Question: What does it mean to be an environmental steward?

Text: Greta and the Giants (Zoe Tucker) or Wangari’s Trees of Peace (Jeanette Winter)

Activity:

- Read-Aloud & Discussion:
 - What problem did this person notice?
 - What actions did they take?
 - How did their efforts make a difference?
- Brainstorming: What are local environmental issues students care about?

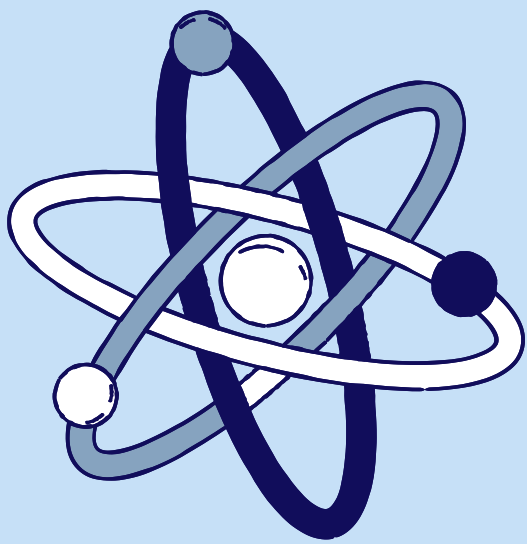
Writing Extension:

- Students write a short response: “If I were an environmental activist, I would...”

Science Connection:

- Research local environmental problems (air pollution, endangered species, deforestation).

SAMPLE UNIT PLAN



“READING THE WORLD THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL STORIES”

Duration: 4 Weeks

Focus: Using environmental children’s literature to analyze real-world issues, engage in inquiry, and build literacy skills.

Week	Focus Question	Text	Activity
1	What is environmental activism?	The Mess That We Made	Persuasive Letter Writing
2	How do different cultures care for the environment?	Berry Song	Reciprocity Journals
3	How does environmental change affect communities?	Saving American Beach	Environmental Justice Inquiry
4	How can I be an environmental activist?	Can You Hear the Plants Speak?	Action Project