



Creating
Culturally Responsive
and Engaging

Integrated Learning Experiences

GRADES PRIMARY-2

Creating Culturally Responsive and Engaging Integrated Learning Experiences: Grades Primary–2

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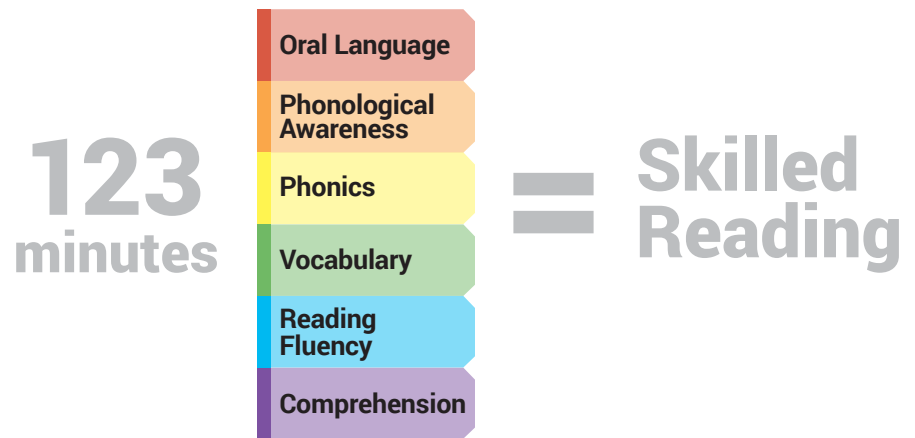
Introduction

This guide is intended to support teachers in planning, developing, and delivering culturally responsive and integrated learning experiences during the 123 minutes of Integrated English Language Arts. Integrated learning helps students make meaningful connections across subjects, promoting deeper understanding and more effective skill development. By explicitly teaching vocabulary, building background knowledge, introducing new ideas, and developing comprehension strategies and oral language skills, teachers can support student achievement in a connected and purposeful way.

In grades primary to 2, picture books used for read-alouds are powerful tools for engaging all learners. These texts, which combine visual and written elements, provide meaningful opportunities for students to explore content across disciplines. This cross-curricular approach deepens understanding, builds critical thinking, and strengthens foundational skills that extend beyond language arts.

Effective reading instruction is a key component of integrated literacy. The **Six Pillars of Effective Reading Instruction** (EECD 2022) include: oral language, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, which form the foundation for developing skilled, confident readers.

“Skilled reading” is not the result of mastering a single skill, but rather the integration of many literacy components. When these pillars are purposefully embedded within rich, integrated learning experiences, students are better equipped to make sense of what they read, think critically, and transfer their learning across subjects.



Note: The 123 minutes of Integrated English Language Arts instruction, recommended in [Plan for Instruction: Revised Time to Learn Strategy: Grades Primary to 3](#) (EECD 2015), should include 30 minutes dedicated to explicit and systematic teaching of phonological awareness skills, including phonemic awareness and phonics.

Planning a Culturally Responsive and Engaging Integrated Learning Experience

When planning a culturally responsive and integrated learning experience, it is important to set aside adequate time for preparation to support the best outcomes for students.

The steps below are designed to support teachers in developing culturally responsive and engaging lessons that align with curriculum standards and strengthen students' language comprehension..

1. Identify curriculum outcomes and indicators

Begin with the Nova Scotia Teacher's Guide and At-a-Glance documents to select relevant outcomes and indicators that align with your lesson topic or theme. These will guide your lesson's direction and serve as the foundation for planning the lesson.

2. Develop learning goals

Create learning goals from the selected outcomes and indicators. These goals describe what students should understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson.

3. Develop learning targets (objectives)

Build on the learning goals by breaking them down into specific, measurable learning targets or objectives. These are often written as "I can" statements helping students understand what they are expected to learn.

4. Select an engaging text

Choose a text that captures the interest of your students and deepens their content knowledge. The text should be thoughtfully selected based on what you know about the students in your classroom and should not be one they are expected to read independently. This allows you to model fluent reading and guide comprehension. Such texts can include challenging vocabulary and abstract ideas, making them excellent tools for teaching grammar and building background knowledge through discussion, and integrating other subjects.

The **Nova Scotia School Book Bureau** is responsible for the distribution of learning resources and related products to support teaching and learning in Nova Scotia schools. Visit the NSSBB website to access the catalogue of Authorized Learning Resources and online order form:

<https://edapps.ednet.ns.ca/nssbb/>.

5. Choose vocabulary words to explicitly teach

Select content-related words that most students do not already know and whose meanings are essential for understanding the text and the subject content. Remember that both explicit (direct teaching of word meanings) and implicit instruction (such as learning new words through listening to stories) help build word knowledge, support reading development, and enhance content learning.

6. Provide or activate background knowledge

Ensure all students, regardless of their prior knowledge, have the necessary background to better understand the text. This can include connecting new information to what students already know or introducing key concepts in advance.

7. Intentionally plan opportunities for student interaction with the text

Design purposeful opportunities for students to interact with the text. This may include explicit vocabulary instruction, exploring the meaning of phrases and sentences, and teaching reading comprehension strategies. This approach supports the development of language comprehension and aligns with the Six Pillars of Effective Reading Instruction.

Integrating Grade Primary English Language Arts and Social Studies (Here's How)

Step 1. Identify the outcome(s) and indicators

Use the Nova Scotia Teacher's Guide and At-a-Glance documents to select relevant outcomes and indicators that align with your lesson's topic or theme. These guide your lesson's focus and ensure your instructional decisions support learning objectives.

For example:

The following outcomes and indicators have been selected for an integrated lesson exploring how:

"People have their own unique and meaningful ways to celebrate important aspects of their culture which, over time, develop into traditions, rituals, and celebrations. It is important for learners to appreciate the roots of their traditions, rituals, and celebrations, and to also understand and respect those of others on a local level." (*Social Studies At-a-Glance*, p. 3)

English Language Arts

- **A1** Learners will apply listening, speaking, and non-verbal communication skills and strategies to understand and communicate meaning for various audiences, purposes, and contexts.
 - Use explicitly taught vocabulary, syntax, and grammar to communicate ideas.
- **A3** Learners will apply knowledge of sentence structure, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation when reading and writing.
 - Compose simple sentences orally and in writing, using syntax and sentence structure.

- **B1** Learners will apply knowledge of text structures, features, and styles to comprehend texts in a variety of genres that represent diverse perspectives and experiences.
 - Identify simple narrative and informational text.
- **C1** Learners will apply pre-writing skills and strategies to create various texts for a range of authentic audiences and purposes.
 - Use various strategies to generate ideas orally.

Social Studies

- Learners will investigate how local people including Acadians, African Nova Scotians, Gaels, and Mi'kmaq, and various cultural groups, have varied traditions, rituals, and celebrations.
 - Ask questions about people and traditions, rituals, and celebrations.
 - Investigate varied traditions, rituals, and celebrations, including those of Acadians, African Nova Scotians, Gaels, Mi'kmaq, and additional cultural groups.

Step 2. Develop learning goals

Align your learning goals with the social studies and English language arts curriculum. These goals should describe what students should understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson.

For example, students will:

- understand that people celebrate important aspects of their culture in unique and meaningful ways, which develop into traditions, rituals, and celebrations
- appreciate their own cultural practices and respect those of others in their local community
- explore cultural traditions, rituals, and celebrations, such as hair wrapping as a practice rooted in African Nova Scotian and African Ancestry traditions
- make meaningful connections between their own experiences and the experiences of others

Step 3. Develop learning targets (objectives)

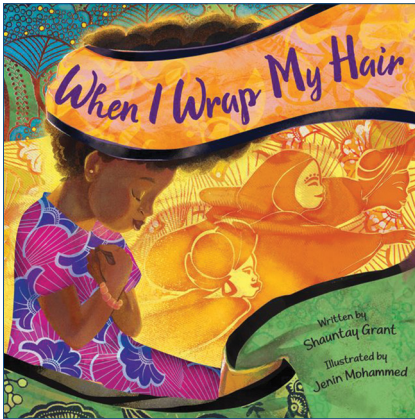
Develop clear learning objectives to help focus instruction and ensure students know what they are expected to learn. These objectives should be specific, measurable, and aligned with curriculum outcomes.

Writing “I can” statements on the whiteboard or chart paper helps students communicate lesson goals in student-friendly language.

For example: Objectives: By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:	Targets: “I Can ...”
ask and answer questions about traditions, rituals, and celebrations featured in the text or shared by a classmate	I can ask and answer questions about celebrations and traditions.
make personal connections by sharing something meaningful their family or community celebrates	I can tell about a special tradition in my family or community.
identify and describe how a specific tradition is meaningful to a group of people (e.g., hair wrapping in the African Nova Scotian and African Ancestry culture)	I can tell why a tradition is important to some people.
communicate what they have learned using drawings, oral language, or simple writing	I can show what I have learned by drawing, talking, or writing.

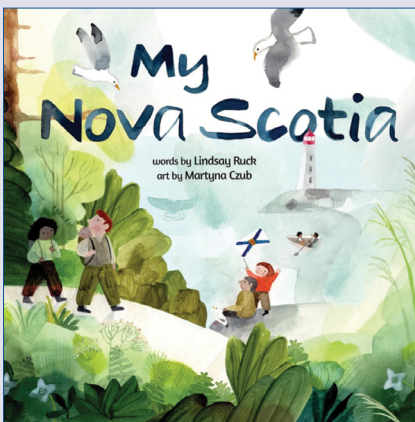
Step 4. Select an engaging text

Choosing the right text is key to engaging students and enhancing their understanding of the lesson content. Select the text thoughtfully, considering your students' backgrounds and learning needs. A well-chosen text can support integration with other subjects and enrich the overall learning experience.



For example, *When I Wrap My Hair* by Shauntay Grant:

- aligns with Grade Primary Social Studies by exploring cultural groups such as African Nova Scotians and people of African Ancestry
- highlights the cultural significance of hair wrapping as a family tradition connecting past and present
- has illustrations that beautifully blend traditional African textiles with contemporary styles, supporting cultural awareness and learning
- provides rich sentence structures and patterns that support students' understanding of syntax, helping them build skills in English Language Arts



Exploring Additional Texts

Explore additional texts that reflect culture and traditions to deepen students' knowledge and reinforce key vocabulary.

For additional texts, visit the [Nova Scotia School Book Bureau](#) website.

For example: In *My Nova Scotia* by Lindsay Ruck joyful rhymes and whimsical illustrations celebrate all the diverse cultures, people, and traditions that make this province unique.

Step 5. Choose vocabulary words to explicitly teach

Select content-related words that are important for understanding the text and building subject knowledge. Introduce the new words clearly and explicitly, then provide student-friendly definitions using visuals (pictures or illustrations) and synonyms. Offer multiple opportunities for students to hear, say, and use the words during discussions and other classroom activities.

To support comprehension

- introduce key vocabulary before reading; provide simple explanations and ask students to repeat the words
- during reading, encourage students to give a thumbs-up when they hear the target words
- point to images in the book to reinforce meaning

Exploring vocabulary from the text in addition to curriculum-related tier 2 and tier 3 words (such as historian, museum curator, and anthropologist/sociologist) can deepen students' understanding and connect learning to real-world contexts.

Key vocabulary from the text and curriculum:

- **ancient:** very old; having existed for a very long time (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*)
 - "... and the past comes to carry me through **ancient** rivers that turn and tumble into playful pools."
- **roots:** the feelings or connections that you have with a place because you have lived there or your family came from there (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*)
 - "When I wrap, my **roots** run deep."
(The roots of the tree symbolize passage of time, connection to Africa.)

- **wrap:** to cover something/somebody in material, for example in order to protect it/them (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*)
 - “When I **wrap** my hair I feel new, like a golden sunrise sprinkling light across the clouds.”
- **ritual:** Something done regularly and always in the same way (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*)
 - “... wrapped in blue, black, violet, and rose.”
- **tradition:** A belief, custom, or way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people; a set of these beliefs or customs (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*)
 - “When I wrap my hair I feel a thousand grandmothers around me.”

Step 6. Provide or activate background knowledge

Provide or activate background knowledge necessary for understanding the text. Introducing key concepts and terms before sharing a text ensures all students, regardless of prior knowledge, can engage meaningfully with the text.

- Introduce key concepts and vocabulary in simple, student-friendly language before reading.
- Use visuals, such as pictures, to support understanding.
- Connect new content to prior learning by discussing related books, experiences, or ideas.
- Encourage students to share what they already know to build on existing knowledge.

Step 7. Intentionally plan opportunities for students to interact with the text

Create intentional moments during reading where students can actively engage with the text. This supports comprehension, vocabulary development, and oral language skills.

For example:

- Show the cover and read the title of the book, inviting students to make predictions about the text.
- Introduce the author and illustrator and explain the purpose of the book in simple terms.
- Plan in advance where you will pause in the text and what questions you will ask. Choose moments that highlight important events, vocabulary, or emotional shifts in the text. This preparation ensures deeper engagement and purposeful discussion.
- Pause and ask questions that encourage students to think about the text and make connections.
- Invite students to repeat new vocabulary words and use them in discussion.
- Use dialogic reading techniques by turning book reading into a back-and-forth conversation. Prompt students with open-ended questions, expand on their responses, and encourage them to retell parts of the text's story. This interactive approach builds narrative skills and deepens comprehension.
- Design classroom centres that extend the text's themes, vocabulary, or characters. For example, a writing centre with prompts related to *When I wrap My Hair* can reinforce language and literacy skills.

Teacher Background Information

- **Book jacket:** “Shauntay Grant’s tender, lyrical verse is woven together with stirring art by Jenin Mohammed to create a beautiful tribute to the emotions, traditions, and heritage that are tied to the act of hair wrapping.”
- **Illustrations/artwork (by Jenin Mohammed):**

The illustrations play an important role in strengthening the connection to cultural roots, traditions, and expressions. They bring the act of hair wrapping to life, which is a key part of the story. The artwork also depicts the relationships between different generations—mothers, grandmothers, and daughters—showing how hair wrapping is a tradition passed down through families. This reflects that the practice of wrapping hair is not just a personal ritual but also a communal and familial tradition.

Let's Begin (Sample Lesson)

While the strategies outlined above can be used for P–2, the outcomes, indicators, and concepts chosen will change by grade level. The following example is designed using outcomes for Primary.

Before Reading

Prepare students for the story by building background knowledge, activating prior experiences, and introducing key vocabulary.

Introduction to Active Listening

Teachers:

- Tell students that they will be practicing their active listening skills during the story.
- Model active listening behaviours, such as facing the speaker, making eye contact (if culturally appropriate) or looking in the speaker's direction, and nodding.
- Emphasize that paying close attention will help them understand the rituals described and make it easier for them to answer questions afterward.
- Ensure all students can see the pictures and hear the text being read.
- Prompt students to give a thumbs up when they hear the key vocabulary words from the story.

Students:

- Listen attentively to the story.
- Look closely at the illustrations in the book.
- Give a thumbs up when they hear the key vocabulary words.
- Ask and respond to questions about the story.

Teacher Note:

Be mindful of the cultural backgrounds and experiences of the students in your classroom. For example, birthdays may be celebrated differently or not at all. Use examples of rituals and traditions that are familiar and meaningful to the students to make discussion more relevant and engaging. This approach fosters inclusivity and helps students connect personally with the concepts.

Support for Students with Limited Background Knowledge

- Acknowledge that some students may not know about hair wrapping.
- Use the book's illustrations to show examples of people wearing headwraps, helping students visualize and understand what hair wrapping looks like.
- Help students connect to this concept by referring to familiar routines like brushing their teeth or singing a birthday song before hearing the story.

Preview the Book

- Show the book cover and read the title: *When I Wrap My Hair*.
- Ask: What do you think it might be about?
- Explain: This story is about something special a girl does with her family—something they do over and over again. (Introduces ritual in familiar terms.)
- Relate: When we do something special many times, like a birthday song, it becomes a **tradition**. (Makes the connection to their own experiences.)

Build Vocabulary Before Reading

- Introduce key vocabulary words like **ancient**, **ritual**, **tradition**, and **roots** before reading.
- Use:
 - visuals (images and drawings)
 - gestures and body movements
 - student-friendly definitions
 - think-pair-share strategy
(let students try using the words with a partner)

During Reading

Engage students with the text and support comprehension.

1st Read: Read Aloud (Model Fluency)

Read the story aloud without interruptions to model fluent reading. Use expression, tone, and pacing to demonstrate how to read with fluency.

During reading, encourage students to give a thumbs-up when they hear any of the key vocabulary from the story.

2nd Read: Discussion Questions

After the first read, reread the story while engaging the students in a discussion about the story, such as:

- What do you think the ritual is in this story? What makes you think that?
- Can you think of an example of a ritual in your own life? (e.g., singing “O Canada”)
- What is an example of a tradition in your own life? (e.g., celebrating your birthday)

Syntax: Understanding Sentence Structure

Use the book’s structure to have students create their own sentences with the prompt:

“When I _____, I feel _____.”

This activity reinforces sentence structure and helps students understand word order (syntax).

Teachers may want to introduce additional vocabulary words to help students express themselves (e.g., proud, happy, excited).

For example:

- When I sing a song, I feel joyful.
- When I win a hockey game, I feel happy.

Teacher Note:

The activities listed here are suggestions to support student engagement with the text and development of language skills. You do not need to complete them all in one session. Select activities based on your instructional focus and students’ needs and spread them over multiple days or repeated readings to maximize learning and retention.

Inferring

Pause at key moments in the story, such as emotional moments or strong imagery, to guide students in making inferences.

For example:

- **schema + vocabulary + evidence = inference**
 - what I know + key words + evidence from the text = meaning
- **Introduce sentence stems like: “I can infer that ... ”**
 - “I can infer that the character feels proud because I know wrapping hair is a tradition, and I see her smiling in the mirror.”

Social Studies Primary:

Encourage students to support their answers using evidence details from the text.

Encourage students to support their inferences with evidence from the story.

For example:

- **Text evidence:** “I take shade beneath tall trees until the sky finds me wrapped in blue, black, violet, and rose.”
 - The changing colours of the hair wraps suggest a repeated ritual. When something is done regularly and holds meaning, it can become a tradition.
- **background knowledge + key vocabulary**
 - I can infer that hair wrapping is a meaningful tradition that happens regularly, perhaps as part of family **rituals** or cultural **celebrations**.

Guided Comprehension

Pause during the reading to ask questions and model a **“think-aloud”** (i.e., share what you are thinking) to support student understanding.

For example:

- How do you think being part of this ritual makes the girl feel? How do you know?
- Pause and model a think-aloud by rereading a line.
- “When I wrap my hair, I feel a thousand grandmothers around me.”
 - Say something like: “When I hear this line, I imagine the girl feeling deeply connected to her family. It makes me think she feels loved and supported.”
 - Show the accompanying illustration to help students visualize this connection.

Vocabulary Focus

Pause and revisit new vocabulary words in the context of the story. Encourage students to say the word aloud and explain its meaning in their own words using clues from how it is used in the story.

For example:

- Pause on the ritual and say, “Can anyone tell me what ritual means based on the story?” Provide support as needed, including immediate corrective feedback.
- Ask students to share their ideas and provide support as needed.
- Connect the words to students’ experiences or cultural backgrounds to deepen understanding.

After Reading

Reinforce vocabulary, summarize key ideas, and encourage personal connections to the story.

Review and Retell

- Briefly revisit the new vocabulary and summarize the key ideas of the story.
- Highlight how the ritual of the hair wrapping connects to traditions.

Discussion and Reflection

- Ask students to turn and talk to a partner about something new they learned, using the new vocabulary.
- **Sample questions:**
 - How do you think the girl feels when she wraps her hair?
 - What is a ritual or tradition that is special to you?
How does it make you feel?
Introduce additional vocabulary words to help students express themselves
(e.g., proud, happy, excited).
- **Morphology Activity**
Include a word study activity using words from the book to explore word parts:
Example: wrap + -ed = wrapped
 - root word: wrap (to cover something)
 - suffix: -ed (shows past action)
Explain that “wrapped” means the action has already happened.

Writing Activity

1. Prewriting and Composing

Review the concepts of rituals and traditions. Provide examples from the book or from students' own experiences shared in class, explaining how traditions make us feel special and connected.

Use the sentence prompt, "When I _____, I feel _____," to model thinking about rituals or traditions.

Example: "When I bake with Mom, I feel happy."

Invite students to write their own sentences using the prompt, and then illustrate their tradition or ritual with a drawing.

2. Revising

Students share their sentences with a peer or the class and ask for feedback focused on improving their writing.

Example: "When I bake bake with Mom, I feel happy."

Student feedback example (student to student):

- "You said bake two times. You have to erase one."

Teacher feedback example:

- Let's read that sentence again. Does it sound right?

3. Editing

Students check their writing for details like capitalization, neatness/appearance, punctuation, and spelling. Use a simple checklist to guide them.

Have students read their sentences four times, focusing on one element each time:

- **Capitalization:** Is the first word (or any name) capitalized?
- **Appearance:** Is the writing neat?
- **Punctuation:** Does the sentence end with a punctuation mark?
- **Spelling:** Are all words spelled correctly?

5. Publishing

Once students have completed their writing and illustrations, they share their work with the class or in small groups. Celebrate each student's tradition by displaying their work.

Assessment Suggestions

Checklist for Teachers

Did students

- identify the ritual in the story and explain its importance to the girl?
- relate a family or community tradition to their own life?
- use new vocabulary words in discussion?

“Look Fors” (Teacher Observations)

Did students

- contribute to discussions about rituals, traditions, and celebrations?
- use the vocabulary introduced during the lesson?
- create an illustration that represents rituals, traditions, or celebrations?

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