

come the threat—"transcendent" qualities such as courage, nobility, genius, ambition, energy, and creativity.

- Story form continues to be important for the Romantic Layer learner, with emphasis on realistic detail and real-life heroes and heroines.
- Although it may not seem evident, Romantic Layer learners are searching for and developing a sense of romance, wonder, and awe.

***The Philosophic Layer: Ages 14 to 15 through 19 to 20 Years***

- These learners have integrated their inner world with the outer world. They now understand the world to be a unit, of which they are a part.
- Learners in the Philosophic Layer try to organize the facts and details they collected in the Romantic Layer, creating their own systems for making sense of the world.
- Once they have developed a system of organization, these learners tend to believe that they have found *the* system, and they become (over)confident that they know the meaning of everything!

***The Ironic Layer: Ages 19 to 20 through Adulthood***

- The learner recognizes that no one system is adequate to organize all knowledge, but that systems are necessary to make sense of information. If one system does not work well, it can be discarded in favor of another one.
- This is the mature, adult learner.

## **Classroom Considerations for Elementary and Middle School Learners**

Several experienced pre-K to middle school teachers have added their observations about students in different grade levels, primarily from the point of view of the language teacher. They are:

Vicki Alvis, Fulton County Public Schools, Georgia

Myriam Chapman, Bank Street School, New York City, New York

Hal Groce, Anoka-Hennepin Public Schools, Minnesota

Alan Hans, NBCT Early Adolescent Science, Hilliard Tharp School, Hilliard, Ohio

Patty Ryerson Hans, The Wellington School, Columbus, Ohio

Jessica Haxhi, Maloney Magnet School, Waterbury, Connecticut

Ana Lomba, Ana Lomba Early Languages LLC, Princeton Junction, New Jersey

Hildegard Merkle, Bethesda, Maryland

Kate Naughter, Amman, Jordan

Joel Swanson, Mounds Park Academy, St. Paul, Minnesota

### **Preschool Students (Ages 2 to 4)**

Preschool children are in a sensitive period for language development. They absorb languages effortlessly and are adept imitators of speech sounds. Because they are very self-centered, they do not work well in groups, and they respond best to activities and learning situations relating to their own interests and experiences. Although they have a short attention span, they have great patience for repetition of the same activity or game. Preschoolers respond well to concrete experiences and to large-motor involvement in language learning.

*Ana:* Young children are very active and have short attention spans. It is important to plan your curriculum with that in mind. For a one-hour class I may have somewhere in the order of 10 to 15 different activities, but many of them are repeated from previous classes. Also, these activities are varied in nature to appeal to the diverse personalities of the students. It is a good idea to always carry an extra "life saving" activity. No matter how wonderful your activities for the day are and how great your expertise is, some days will be rough. In days like this I would take out a bag of play-dough or another tactile activity and postpone my wonderful plans to the next day. That's how it is.

Developing phonological awareness in preschool is a critical skill in alphabetic languages. These phonological skills transfer from one language to another. Therefore, by including activities that develop phonological awareness in—say—Spanish, you are also helping young children move forward in their path to building reading skills in English. Now, that's something all early language educators should know! By using rhymes, poems, stories, tongue twisters, and many other language-rich activities in your instruction you are not only helping young children acquire better communicational skills in the new language, but also taking them a huge step further in their path to becoming proficient readers in their first languages.

### **Primary Students (Ages 5 to 7): Kindergarten and Grades 1 and 2**

Most primary-grade children are still preoperational, and they learn best with concrete experiences and immediate goals. New concepts and vocabulary are more meaningful when presented as pairs of binary opposites. Children like to name objects, define words, and learn about things in their own world; they also have vivid imaginations and respond well to stories of fantasy. They need to know how to feel about something in order to learn it well. Primary-age children learn through oral language; they are capable of developing good oral skills, pronunciation, and intonation when they have a good model. They learn

well, especially beginning in first grade, through dramatic play, role-play, and use of story form with a strong beginning, middle, and end. Because of their short attention spans, they need to have a great variety of activities, but the teacher must keep in mind that children of this age tire easily. They require large-muscle activity, and they are still rather unskilled with small-muscle tasks. Teachers of primary students must give very structured and specific directions and build regular routines and patterns into the daily lesson plans.

## Kindergarten

**Patty:** Prekindergarten and kindergarten students need to know that there will be daily opportunities for moving, wiggling, manipulating objects, and using songs and/or rhythm. They love to share their favorites (favorite color, animal, fruit, etc.). They love to use every available sense and to experience “magic” (using colored water, magic boxes, [and noticing] the appearance of unusual things in the classroom). It is crucial for them to “have a turn.” When playing games, they are most comfortable when they can see the system for assuring that everyone will have a turn (cards or Popsicle sticks with each child’s name).

**Hildegard:** I often “forgot” that my kindergarten students were not German, they followed my commands and instructions with such ease. They need to feel accepted, liked, part of the group, and to be noticed and smiled at by the teacher. Feeling uncomfortable in class makes them physically sick (tummy ache). They like to move constantly, manipulate three-dimensional things, put things together and take apart, be enchanted by stories.

**Jessica:** Kindergartners are capable of much higher levels of conversation and content than we ordinarily assume. They enjoy short dialogues (name, likes, etc.) performed with puppets—especially talking about themselves! They are engaged when making predictions and experimenting, such as with “sink and float” lessons. They also like being able to comment at every stage of the class, using expressions such as “I’m done!” “Look at this!” and “I did it!”

**Joel:** These kids are a lot of fun. They will tell you what they are thinking and will not hold back. If you’ve gone too long someone will ask when the class is over. If they need to move, they will. When I am planning for kindergarten, I shoot for 9 to 10 activities in 35 minutes. Of course the “new” activity might just be a slight variation. You can throw in a twist on your song, or start making mistakes in a poem, but you have to plan ahead to keep them where you want them.

## Grade 1

**Patty:** First-graders still crave structure and routine, but also like more surprises within that routine. Using chairs to help define each child’s space is more

helpful by this age. A system for turn taking is also still important. My first-grade students enjoy creating and playing games that reinforce whatever language elements we are working on. Games that involve closing eyes and hiding objects are especially successful. I generally have one bulletin board dedicated to whatever the first-grade students are learning about and they love seeing mysterious changes on the board and trying to figure out what caused them (i.e., What animal broke the branch off our apple tree?). They enjoy songs with big motions and the opportunity to add a silly twist to a song or game. Pretending is still very well received as well.

**Hildegard:** They need to feel successful. They like to take things home, tell endlessly about themselves, move, make things (crafts), draw, and label. They are interested in almost everything—holiday celebrations, fairy tales, themselves. Play, play, play! It is a good age to introduce and practice partner work and cooperative learning. Have a take-home folder for the parents to see.

**Jessica:** Our first-graders have enjoyed cultural activities that they can participate in physically, such as a summer festival dance, tea ceremony, or pretend “flower viewing” picnic. As fifth-graders, they often remember these early cultural experiences. They also respond well to carrying out classroom tasks, such as handing out and collecting scissors, crayons, pencils, and glue while using the target language.

**Joel:** They are learning to read and write and love it when they can do those things in the target language. I take advantage of that every time that I can. They love to be read to and are amazed that they can read some things in the target language. Don’t forget the short attention span. You will still need to plan a lot of activities for a 30- to 35-minute class.

## Grade 2

**Jessica:** The energy of second-graders must be cherished! They are most willing to participate in story-form pretending, physical acting out of adventures [TPR], and even repetitive dialogues. As with each grade, though, units must be meaningful and have a driving purpose. Since second-graders get so excited, it is helpful to have a “cool-down” song or chant that leaves them quiet at the end of class.

**Joel:** Every day they remind me that they may be bigger than the kindergartners, but developmentally they have a lot in common. They can do a lot in the target language, but watch out for expecting too much. They still aren’t to the point where they can deal in abstracts. They also have difficulties with too many instructions at once. Don’t forget to break complicated instructions down into easy chunks.

**Patty:** Second-graders enjoy silly, surprise endings and having the opportunity to pretend that they are in a variety of situations. They also like to get specific

when learning about various animals and enjoy a scientific twist to a lesson whenever possible.

### **Intermediate Students (Ages 8 to 10): Grades 3, 4, and 5**

Intermediate-grade students are at a maximum of openness to people and situations different from their own experience. For these children, a global emphasis is extremely important, because it gives them an opportunity to work with information about countries in all parts of the world. As intermediates develop the cognitive characteristics of the concrete operations level, they begin to understand cause and effect. Students in intermediate grades can work well in groups. They can begin a more systematic approach to language learning, but they continue to need firsthand, concrete experiences as a starting point and to benefit from learning that is embedded in context. The phenomenon of “boy germs” and “girl germs” begins to develop during these years, and children may resist partner situations with children of the opposite sex. They continue to benefit from experiences with imagination and fantasy, emphasis on binary opposites, and strong emotional connection to what is learned, as well as story form with distinctive beginning, middle, and end. In addition, they will benefit from themes based on real-life heroes and heroines who display transcendent qualities in overcoming the challenges of life.

Jessica points out that learners in these grades are bringing together much of the vocabulary and functional chunks learned in earlier years and can apply them in more complex situations. In assessment, they should be given meaningful contexts in which to use the language they already know and to create new language, such as when designing commercials or skits, responding to picture prompts, or writing letters to pen pals. Students can work readily with rubrics and they usually enjoy peer editing and scoring activities. Teachers can balance their picture of students’ language progress through keeping a record of mini-assessments that check for understanding during a unit, along with larger, rubric-scored assessments at the end of the unit.

### **Grade 3**

**Patty:** My third-grade students enjoy legends, geographic facts and details, drama, and dressing up. By this age they appreciate the addition of gross details from time to time (as with the hole in the skull of St. Aubert in the legend of Mont St. Michel). They still need structured dialogues and writing tasks (like postcards) but crave an increased amount of choice within that structure. Math tasks incorporated into our lessons are also well received at this age. For example, during our study of the Loire Valley the students prepare floor plans on graph paper of a dream château. We then spend some time finding and comparing the area and perimeter of each student’s château and the various rooms.

**Joel:** Most of the kids can read and write in their first language. Working on the same skills in the target language (TL) is a lot easier at this point as well. They

love fairy tales and I have yet to meet the third-grader who doesn't enjoy trying to make up their own in the TL. They are also at a point where they can help with younger kids because they have such strong language skills. I like to combine classes and have the third-graders read to the kindergartners.

**Jessica:** Our third-graders always seem more settled down and academic than the previous year. They enjoy more complicated story-based themes but still love pretending. They can also handle more independent activities, such as making charts and illustrative pictures for presentations, surveying others, and working in pairs or groups.

**Hildegard:** They like to collect (the water museum, where students collected all kinds of water and labeled it, was very successful), create with language, write their own texts with the help of word banks, work with a partner (help each other, "proofread" and correct for each other, create together). Competitive games! They love humor, riddles, jokes. They are interested in everything about the country [of] the language they are learning—geography, foods, and climate.

## Grade 4

**Joel:** You have a new kind of learner in fourth grade. They are getting into a new developmental level. Abstract thought is coming into play. So are hormones and a new kind of peer pressure. In many schools there is pressure to start "dating." Try to push yourself to see what the kids are really capable of. They will surprise you.

**Hildegard:** They need to feel like little scientists, discover, cook, make models, write creatively, perform and memorize plays. I used a "Let's Eat!" and "Let's Be Healthy!" unit with great success. We cooked and baked with each different food group, put on three different plays for the younger students and the parents, planned a healthy meal that everybody liked, cooked it, and served it to the community. After the meal we danced to traditional (live!) German music. The music, physical education, and art teachers were involved, as well as the classroom teacher.

**Patty:** My fourth-graders enjoy a bit more friendly competition within games than my younger students do. They are fascinated with history, facts, and legends. They are more eager to do written tasks and actually appreciate the responsibility of a little homework as long as it is a clear part of the routine. (I give homework every Wednesday that is due every Friday. The parents and homeroom teachers are aware of this from the beginning of the year.) Students this age seem to enjoy putting themselves in other people's shoes, so we create imaginary families as we visit French-speaking countries across the world. In this way they choose a new name and must share their likes and dislikes based on research they have done about the country in which they now

“live.” We do more activities in the computer lab at this stage. We don’t do free Internet searches (not allowed in most elementary schools), but with book-marked sites the students can do guided research as we explore various topics.

**Jessica:** Students in this grade seem to be more metacognitive about their language learning. They ask questions about “why” the language is used in certain ways and they see patterns and differences. I begin doing some direct strategy instruction in this grade to help them see how to extend their conversations and really respond to other speakers, as well as how to find meaning in context (while both reading and listening).

## Grade 5

**Jessica:** Fifth-grade is a challenge! The “newness” of learning another language has worn off long ago, and the language students can use is becoming more difficult. Some students may have decided that they don’t like learning the language. The key is to provide experiences that reignite students’ interest in the language and culture while building on their language ability. They enjoy Internet-based activities, dialogues that they can manipulate to be funny and interesting, assignments with multiple intelligences-based choices (a song, a drawing, a written piece, etc.), and learning about teens in the target culture. Some recent student interviews in our schools showed that they are most interested in being able to choose their own groups and partners at this age and throughout middle school.

**Hildegard:** They like to sit in their chairs (surprise!), memorize lists and poems and plays, write extensively, create books and projects, and perform. They like to work seriously and be seen as “adults.” They used the Internet to research about Germany. They are interested in German peers and their social life; they like to display posters with writing and art. Successful strategies: Give clear expectations at [the] beginning of [a] unit; make students responsible for their own learning. Allow time before or after school (or by email) for extra help and questions. Give directions in written form, in the target language, of course. Students had German pen pals, and many kept them until graduation.

**Vicki:** Fifth-graders are often the oldest students in an elementary building. They are eager to serve as school and classroom leaders so it makes sense to involve them in leadership roles where they can show off their skills in the target language. My fifth-graders enjoy using fun props to report the weather and give the lunch menu in Spanish for the school’s daily newscast. Teachers and administrators appreciated fifth-grade students using their language skills to promote special emphases during the school year. For D.E.A.R. Day (Drop Everything And Read) my students read books from the school media center in Spanish or about Spanish language cultures, and then wrote and shared mini-book reviews for broadcast on the TV news. A good way to wrap up the

school year is to have fifth-graders write letters to tell incoming students what to expect in Spanish class. The next year's crop of new students loved receiving the letters, and writing them gave my fifth-graders a chance to reflect on their journey as language students. Provide fifth-grade students a chance to shine beyond the school day by performing songs or skits for PTA meetings or International Night and entering foreign language association spoken language and poster contests. Making your oldest elementary-age students and their language skills visible will result in leadership opportunities for students as well as a valuable advocacy tool for your program.

In the classroom set routines and procedures that will allow students to assert their growing sense of independence constructively. For example, early on in the school year have students practice moving into groups quickly and efficiently by saying something as simple as "You have one minute to form groups of \_\_\_\_ (two, three, five, etc.)." Keep in mind that older students may have extended seat time in their other classes, so build in opportunities for students to move in every lesson. Fifth-grade students are school-savvy enough to consciously begin to develop a sense of how they learn. Create self-assessment checklists and offer students choices between various products for assessments. Children at this age are developing literacy skills in the target language as they fine-tune the skills in their first language, and they are quite empathetic and social. Consequently, it is a good time to introduce pen pals/e-pals or just exchange hand written and personally illustrated postcards between "secret classmates" in the same building. Be sure to recycle vocabulary and structures from prior grades, but not activities, unless the activities can be made more challenging, meaningful, engaging and developmentally appropriate for this age. Above all, keep in mind that fifth-graders may be the "seniors" in the building, but they want to have fun as they learn.

### **Early Adolescent Students (Ages 11 to 14): Grades 6, 7, and 8**

During the middle school and junior high school years, students are undergoing more dramatic developmental changes than experienced at any other time in life, and on widely differing timetables. The early adolescent must learn to deal with a variety of experiences: emerging sexuality in a changing and often unpredictable body; reaching a cognitive plateau for a time, and then finding new, adult intellectual tools; multiplying and rapidly shifting interests; a fluid and flexible self-concept; a need to rework interpersonal relationships with adults; turbulent emotions; extreme idealism; a need to assert independence; and a powerful peer group. A major goal of all schooling for children of this age is the encouragement of positive relationships and positive self-image. Middle school learners need the opportunity for broad exploration, as well as an introduction to the demands of academic disciplines.



Because exploring the limits of the real world is very important at this age, students will respond well to opportunities to learn in exhaustive detail about subjects that interest them. Heroic figures with qualities that transcend threats are especially good choices for emphasis, and middle school-aged children need learning experiences with a strong affective component. Students show high interest in the unusual and the extremes in the real world.

Myriam describes middle school students in loving terms: "They have not yet become disaffected with school; they wear their hearts on their sleeves as long as it doesn't show too much; and they can be 'won over' if what you want from them doesn't interfere with their friendships or humiliate them in any way. They want to succeed in school, they enjoy mastery ('Hey, we really learned a lot today'), and they'll do just about anything so long as the expectations are clear and within the range of their abilities. I love their complexity and their struggles. I dislike their pettiness (squabbles over what seem to adults to be silly issues), their defensiveness ("She started it!"), and their occasional thoughtless cruelty to each other (especially among seventh-grade girls). I find that the hardest thing to keep in mind is that they are children. As their teacher, I can become so identified with them that I forget that they are still at the beginning of their lives as learners and developing human beings."

Myriam also notes: "Content-based units with a definite culminating product work very well with all these groups. In every case, students must have something to show at the end of their unit of study: a book, a skit, a video presentation, a poster, a mural."

## Grade 6

**Alan:** What motivates a sixth-grader? Extremes—things that are really outrageous or gross. Hearing stories about real life and real problems. Personal tales of challenge and triumph, especially from the teacher's own life. The safety of working and presenting with others. Integrating elements from television, pop culture, and general teen *angst* (remember what it was like to be 11?) into the curriculum in some way. Don't assume they are adults when giving directions and tasks, but remember they love to be treated as if they are grown up. They need and want someone to lead, to look up to, even if they don't act that way at times. They love challenges, to beat a certain score, time, or amount of something—make this attainable and you'll get more out of them. Pets, music, and team sports are good topics from which to draw activity ideas, especially helpful when trying to connect with students who are frequently disengaged.

Give them opportunities to assess their own learning. Have them grade their own rubric before finishing a project or task, then verify. This will yield valuable information on the students' perceptions of themselves and the clarity with which you communicated expectations.

Provide sixth-graders with structure—they need it. Partner tasks work well. We often assume they can do more than they are able to, and we tend to

get frustrated when they don't understand things in which we should provide them more guidance. Yet within this structure, they have the freedom to create, to share their funny, creative, outrageous, and unpredictable side. They'll typically share experiences of a painful injury, a "disgusting" thing they did, or sometimes will show a part of themselves which reveals wisdom and reflection beyond their years. These unpredictable behaviors, their ups and downs of everyday living and their outward expression of these feelings makes teaching young people of this age eternally fresh and interesting.

**Hal:** Sixth-graders want to know the "weirdities" in their own culture, as well as in others. They love to compare and contrast. Venn diagrams work extremely well, and prove to be beneficial at proving similarities. They love to research other cultures and find the "strange" points of interest. They also like to determine what would be "strange" to others about American cultures.

Activities must change about every 10 to 15 minutes. Transition is very important. It's hard to keep kids on task when they can't use what they've just learned in the next activity. They like partner work, but still want to work with same-sex groups. They don't seem to mind when partners switch every 2 to 3 minutes, such as with interviews, however. Activities are always timed. When I give them less time than I think they will need to complete an activity, it becomes more of a challenge for them and it keeps them on task. If they're working and on task, I extend their time. I've found with all language students, including English Language Learners, accountability is imperative. They must have something produced, and quality is important.

The teacher is a "monitor." The students must be given information to use. Once they have enough, they need the opportunity to be creative with it and explore their world. They don't want "peer" teachers—teachers who act like they do. They do want teachers who can relate to them and understand their vocabulary and interests. The adult role is extremely important.

Learners at this age level love to create new things and show them off. They especially like making menus and doing projects that can be displayed. They love supplemental language that doesn't appear in books and that "only they" know.

**Vicki:** Sixth-graders are willing to take chances and try out new language and cultural experiences, but at the same time they need the security of regular classroom routines and well-established procedures. They can be very empathetic toward others, which makes them willing to accept and appreciate cultural differences. They are very social, so I provide frequent and meaningful partner and small group activities. They like games, not so much for the competition as for the opportunity to try out the language while they play. Sixth-graders are eager to participate when tasks are based on real-life situations, such as expressing and supporting their personal opinions in creating a "Best and Worst of" brochure to introduce visitors to business in their community.

## Grade 7

**Hildegard:** [Seventh-graders] like to go outside the classroom to conduct interviews, and help with and teach the younger grades. They learn (and even study hard!) when it is for a reason.

They like to read authentic texts and discuss them. Nobody liked our textbook. The best-liked unit was “Besuch im Zoo,” where groups of students created posters and prepared presentations for the rest of the school and the public, and then talked about their animal at the German Day at the Zoo. It was a good opportunity to use correct spelling and grammar and to work on precision.

**Hal:** This age is more concerned with getting their point across than correctness of language, although accuracy is starting to develop. They are interested in what kids their own ages are doing in the target culture, and the vocabulary they use in everyday speech. They’re more willing to work in mixed partner activities, depending on the time of year. The teacher is more “instructor.” Information is still given for immediate use. Students are more intimidated to use it creatively, though.

Seventh-graders are beginning to prefer age-appropriate activities, such as telephone conversations, or shopping, or TV prompts. [They are] a bit more self-absorbed than sixth-grade students. As with sixth-graders, however, all language learning must have a purpose. These students aren’t concerned with register, the grammar, or whether or not the language is totally correct. Their concern is using the language and having others use it with them in return.

**Myriam:** The common assumption is that seventh-graders are ready to look at language as a system, but this is the case for only a very few. I try to teach the language before I get students to analyze it, and I make grammar fun with all sorts of approaches, balls thrown in the air, magical sentences, etc. But in the end, I have concluded—teach grammar if you must, but don’t expect it to stick!

**Kate:** Seventh-graders are both playful and intellectual. They need to be motivated by doing something that has meaning for them. They appreciate routine and clear guidelines (e.g., . . . homework is [assigned] every day). They need to have the teacher say things over and over again. When you have 20+ kids, they’re not all hearing you at the same time. I like how they surprise themselves. They really do like to learn, even though they put on this persona that maybe it’s not cool, or pretend they’re not smart.

## Grade 8

**Hal:** The “real” world starts rearing its head in the eighth grade. Students are interested in technology and how to communicate with others. As with seventh-graders, these students like to use the language in realistic situations,

such as giving and taking direction, asking and denying information, and so on. This age group still likes to explore, but a little more outside their “safe” world. This is where technology makes teaching profitable. They’re curious about what they don’t understand, but are hesitant (at times) to pursue it without guidance. An abundance of vocabulary, especially slang, is a must. Most cultures are interested in music, and modern music plays a vital role at this age level.

Students in eighth grade want more direct answers. They also want to learn things and share with their peers in an “informal” setting. Since seventh- and eighth-grade culture focuses so much on school and peers, much time should be devoted to this study in the target culture as well. The emphasis should be on similarities rather than on differences. Partner work is much easier at this age level (in comparison to sixth grade). Activities must change about every 20 minutes, depending on interest level. Students begin writing notes and postcards to others at this level as well.

Eighth grade is a good time to “reintroduce” fairy tales and other things kids learned while growing up. They like to be teachers for others (younger students or brothers and/or sisters). They especially love to compare and contrast fairy tales of their own culture with those of the target cultures, as well as rewriting fairy tales as much as their language level permits.

**Hildegard:** They need to feel grown up and almost equal to the teacher, respected—their opinion has to count. They like to do their own things their own way. They become self-motivated (some). They are interested in justice, global awareness, world peace, religion(s), and they are out to better the world. The teacher needs to tell students what needs to be done, give them strategies to accomplish the task, and then give them time to do it independently. Give clear descriptors of expectations and grading procedures; rubrics worked best for me. Unfortunately, many students come to our classes with loads of problems, so be gentle with their feelings.

**Myriam:** My eighth-graders keep journals. They must write 12 sentences in French every week. I respond to their entries, commenting and keeping a conversation going. I also point out simple errors and I may include information that is not in the curriculum but which can be useful to the writer. I do not correct all grammatical errors since this journal writing is about self-expression and experimenting with language and not about being grammatically correct. Some students like to share their journals with friends or with the whole class, and some want to write continuing stories. These are collected and become class books that everyone can read.

**Kate:** Eighth-graders are more receptive and more socially aware. They are finding out about themselves; they can be reflective and see their own growth. When even one or two have political or social savvy, they can lead the class into a great place—sharing opinions, asking questions. Like seventh-graders, they are very curious and very vulnerable, despite the façade.