

Blue Ridge Middle School: Grade Level (Academic) and Honors Differentiation

Blue Ridge Middle School eighth grade English department differentiates instruction in three primary ways.

- **Instruction.** Instruction—the ways that teachers convey learning targets and assist students, as well as the ways in which students work to learn the course targets—are differentiated based on students’ interests, abilities, and readiness, rather than class selection. As the curriculum is the same for both grade level and honors level students, it is important for teachers to meet students where they are in assisting them to make progress toward learning targets and long-term skills and goals.

The primary means of differentiation of instruction in the 8th grade English classroom is reading and writing workshop, a classroom structure based on the work of Nancie Atwell. This differentiated model for reading and writing instruction tailors skill development to individual students’ needs.

- Pacing is individualized for all students to move from step to step as needed;
 - Students demonstrate mastery of learning targets through writing and discussion, which require synthesis (one of the most sophisticated forms of demonstrating understanding);
 - Teachers offer students appropriate degrees of challenge by working with students individually in frequent one-on-one conferences; and
 - Products are individualized and expectations are raised to appropriate, individual levels.
- **Assignments.** Long-term assignments (papers, tests, long-term projects; 85% of the class grade) will be differentiated for honors and academic levels unless there is an instructional reason not to do so. (For example, one long-term assignment will be students working to meet individual goals. This is differentiated by student readiness, skill, and interest, but not specifically for schedule selection. However, all students are working on goals that are challenging and complex *for them*.) Students in an academic section may choose either the academic assignment or the honors assignment, while students in an honors section will be required to choose the honors option.

In addition, many long-term assignments will include an option that goes above and beyond the expectations of honors-level work. This option is intended to challenge the gifted and/ or high ability learner who is looking for ways to extend his or her knowledge, understanding, and skills. Teachers will support students who select these options, either through classroom instruction or individual help in conferences. This “above and beyond” option will not be required of any student; it is entirely optional.

Short-term and formative assignments (homework, classwork, quizzes, short-term projects, writing to learn) may or may not be differentiated based on the task and the needs of the students. Differentiation of these assignments will be discussed in department meetings but will be left to the individual teacher's discretion.

- **Assessment.** As provided for in the LCPS Program of Studies, some assignments will be graded differently to reflect the increased level of challenge desired by students who selected honors English 8. This will occur in two different ways:
 - Different rubrics (grading guides) for honors and academic for some long-term assignments. These rubrics and the way that they convert to grades will be provided to students in advance. *(Please note: There will not be a separate rubric/ grading standard for "above and beyond" assignments, as this level is purely self-selected and not a part of the Program of Studies.)*
 - Additional questions on some in-class assessments. In general, these will not be labeled as "honors" questions; instead, while all students will answer the questions, only students who selected the honors level course will have their answers to those questions impact their grade. Teachers will use the answers of grade-level students formatively (that is, to help teachers understand what students know in order to better teach them).

Challenging All Students

The 8th grade English department works to design a curriculum that builds in challenge throughout the year. As a result, parents and students can expect developing challenge and complexity in two different ways.

- Rubrics and other evaluation tools that increase in difficulty level throughout the year. For instance, a performance that earns a top-level score on the honors rubric during first quarter may become a top-level score on the academic rubric in second quarter, while a new level will be instituted to become top-level honors.
- Assignments that address similar learning targets that increase in complexity throughout the year. For instance, students will complete several assignments that assess their ability to analyze literature, each building in length and difficulty (moving from one text to multiple texts, one paragraph to multiple paragraphs, etc.).