

Resource: Using a Genre-based, Multilingual Approach to Prepare for the English Language Arts Regents Exam

Introduction: The New York State English Language Arts Regents Exam

In 2014, the Regents exam in English Language Arts (ELA) was redesigned so that it aligned with New York State’s Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy. According to these Standards, literacy is defined as “integrated comprehension, analysis, and communication of information gleaned from reading, regardless of text type” (Engage NY, 2014). In keeping with this definition of literacy, the redesigned Regents exam in English Language Arts (ELA) contained a “noticeable change in rigor and an increased focus on text” as well as questions that were “more demanding and complex than those found on prior assessments that measured the 2005 New York State grade-level standards” (Engage NY, 2014).

Even before the 2014 emphasis on rigor and increasingly complex questions, texts, and tasks, the ELA Regents exam has always been extremely difficult for Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs) in New York State (Menken, 2008). Though students can use [bilingual glossaries](#), they must take the ELA Regents without the assistance of a translated version of the test (neither a written translation nor an oral translation for lower incidence languages) and without the option of writing a response in the home/primary language (NYSED, 2018).

MLLs/ELLs must take the Regents exam in English Language Arts in order to graduate from high school. This means that educators must prepare these students for this exam in ways that build on their existing knowledge and linguistic resources. For this reason, this resource provides a *genre-based, multilingual approach* to preparing MLLs/ELLs to take the ELA Regents exam. We begin by describing this approach, namely (a) what it means to prepare students for a standardized test by viewing them as a *genre* that they must become familiar with, and (b) how students can draw on their *full linguistic repertoire* (García, 2009; García, Johnson & Seltzer, 2017) to make meaning of that genre. We then describe specific strategies for teaching the exam as a genre as well as strategies that encourage students to utilize their home language practices. Lastly, we provide real examples of how teachers can take up this approach and teach students such strategies when preparing for the ELA Regents exam.

Teachers can also refer to the [The Bilingual Common Core Initiative](#) as a guide for how Bilingual, English as a Second Language and teachers of Language Other Than English, can provide instruction that makes the standards accessible to students at various language proficiency and literacy levels.

Approaching standardized tests as a genre

In many ELA classrooms, students are often actively engaged in developing understandings about how genres – or different categories of texts – are constructed and then applying their thinking to any genre. It is through using genre understandings that young people think, talk, and read texts with deeper insights and write effectively. Yet, when approaching standardized tests, we often only think about the genres of the texts embedded in the tests and forget that the tests themselves have a particular purpose, organization, and set of language features that define them.

There are certain literacy skills that students need in order to perform well on standardized tests and these may differ from the skills that they are generally expected to use in the context of everyday classroom work. Thus, students need to develop a mindset for reading tests that it is different from what they develop for everyday reading. For example, while readers may engage with a book or story for pleasure, the purpose of reading passages in the context of the test is to answer a set of discrete questions and thus must be approached differently. It follows that a genre approach to standardized testing would support students in becoming familiar with how standardized tests are organized, their purpose, and the language features specific to this genre.

Approaching standardized tests through a multilingual lens

It's important to begin by investigating what your students know about standardized tests and what strategies they already use. While children in the United States are exposed to standardized tests early in their schooling experiences, this is not a standard practice in many other countries. As one teacher from a high school in the Bronx shared about working with a MLL/ELL identified as a Student with Interrupted/Incomplete Formal Education (SIFE) from the Dominican Republic, "I gave a multiple choice quiz to the class and Miguel filled in all the bubbles for each answer." She realized that he had not been exposed to this particular form of assessment, and because he wasn't familiar with it, he misinterpreted important information in the directions.

On the other hand, some students may already have strategies that they have used successfully in the context of test taking, as well as in other reading or writing tasks. In particular, they may be using their *full linguistic repertoire* (García, 2009; García, Johnson & Seltzer, 2017) in order to make sense of and perform on an exam. For this reason, it is important to learn whether and how students are using their home languages in reading and writing tasks (as well as in oral language tasks that are so critical to literacy) so that you can leverage them and build from the knowledge and skills that they bring.

What will I find in this resource?

The purpose of this document is to support teachers in expanding the repertoire of strategies that students use when they approach standardized tests. Specifically, this document provides several strategies that take up a *genre-based, multilingual approach* to test preparation,



helping teachers and students to understand the exam as its own particular genre and to draw on their full linguistic repertoire to encounter high-stakes standardized exams. This resource contains two interrelated sets of strategies. The first set of strategies is entitled, **Drawing on Home Language Resources to Understand the Genre of the Test**. In this section, we lay out several strategies that encourage students to use their richest resource – their full linguistic repertoire – to understand how the ELA Regents exam is organized and how to navigate each of the exam’s three major tasks. The second set of strategies is entitled, **Drawing on Home Language Resources to Prepare for and Take the Test**. In this section, we include strategies that encourage students to utilize their full linguistic repertoire to unpack the vocabulary of the exam, make meaning of its complex texts, and prepare for writing its required responses. Some of these strategies were taken from City University of New York-New York State’s Initiative on Emergent Bilingual’s (CUNY-NYSIEB) resource, [Translanguaging: A CUNY-NYSIEB Guide for Educators](#). Many others were taken from the ELA and ENL teachers we have worked with through the CUNY-NYSIEB project.

Each strategy is organized as follows: first, we describe the strategy itself and discuss why we believe it is an important one for MLLs/ELLs who are preparing to take the ELA Regents exam. Next, we explain how teachers can set up and use the strategy with their students. Lastly, we provide a classroom example of how high school teachers in New York State have taken up this strategy to prepare their MLLs/ELLs for the exam. At the end of this resource, we describe a multimodal project that one teacher designed for her diverse MLLs/ELLs who were preparing to take the ELA Regents exam. This engaging project not only incorporates many of the strategies explored in this resource guide, it develops students’ expertise in the genre of the exam.

Part I: Drawing on Home Language Resources to Understand the Genre of the Exam

In this section, we include six strategies that can help MLLs/ELLs to draw on home language resources to understand the genre of the exam. This means that these strategies actively leverage students' home languages in order to become acquainted with and understand the expectations laid out for them in this English-medium exam. These strategies include:

1. Navigating the Format of the Test
2. Familiarizing Students with the Tasks
3. Working Backwards in Part 1: Reading Comprehension Task
4. Using Anchor Papers to Understand Writing Tasks: Parts 2 and 3
5. Using Debate to Understand Part 2: Argument Response Task
6. Using Interview to Understand Part 3: Text Analysis Response Task

Strategy 1: Navigating the Format of the Test

Why is this strategy important?

Students often struggle to understand the format of the ELA Regents. It is important to explicitly orient MLLs/ELLs to the test by helping them make connections to other genres with which they are familiar. MLLs/ELLs have been exposed to a range of genres in their daily lives as well as in classroom contexts. Therefore, they can bring their knowledge about what makes other genres unique to understand the features that distinguish a test as a particular kind of genre. When students are learning about poetry or about news articles as a genre, they do so by reading poetry or reading an article and examining important characteristics that distinguish them as genres. Simply telling students facts about the format of the test does little to help them learn how to approach it. Students need to be involved in the process of discovering and building knowledge about how the ELA Regents is constructed if they are to tackle it.

How can I use this strategy?

You can begin by having groups of students look through different kinds of texts, both in English and in their home languages, both oral and written (poems, podcasts, short stories, newspaper articles, speeches, history books, tourist guides, etc.), then ask them to brainstorm about the format of those texts. What makes those genres unique? What are the features that help the reader navigate them? For example, a non-fiction book would have a table of contents, while a newspaper article will start with the main idea.

When they are done sharing their ideas about other genres, ask each group to look through the ELA Regents exam. They should not try to “do” the test. They should simply browse through each section and take notes. You can provide them with guiding questions, such as how many parts does it have? How is each part organized? What are some of the elements that they notice in the test (e.g. directions, titles, sections, layout)? Organize the groups with students who share the same home language, so they can discuss their ideas in the language in which they feel most comfortable.

After they are done exploring the test, ask the groups to share and discuss as a class: How is reading a test different than reading a poem or listening to a speech? How is it similar? How is this test its own kind of genre? What are some strategies they might use to approach the test?

Classroom example

An 11th grade teacher from the Bronx asked her students to go on a “Regents Scavenger Hunt” to familiarize themselves with the test (see Figure 1). The students worked with home language partners, and while some of her students chose to do the scavenger hunt in English, others used both their home language and English.

After they had done the scavenger hunt, they discussed their “discoveries” as a class. Then the teacher asked each of the home language partners to create a short guide to the Regents’ exam in their home language. She told them that they should write it as if they were guiding a tourist through a new city: What are the main things that they need to know in order to navigate the test? What are some key aspects of how it is organized? How does the formatting of the test help someone read it and understand it? What are some surprising things that a reader might find in it?

Figure 1. Handout: ELA Regents Exam Scavenger Hunt.

English Regents Exam Scavenger Hunt

Name: _____
 Date: _____
 English 5

Your Task: Using the English Regents exam you've been given, work with your group to complete all of the tasks below and answer all of the questions. You can answer them in English or in your home language.

1. How many multiple choice questions are you required to answer on the exam?  _____
2. Reading Comprehension Passage B is what kind of passage? _____
3. Look through the multiple choice questions and identify 4 words you don't know:

4. What do you notice about the length of the passages you are required to read?

5. What is the topic of the argument essay you are asked to write in Part 2? How did you figure it out? |
6. What are 5 related words/ideas that have to do with this topic? (Remember that you can write these in your home language)
7. Where in the reading passages does it tell you the author and title of the passage?
8. Where should you write your response for Part 2 of the exam?

9. Where should you write your response for Part 3 of the exam?
10. What part of the exam looks most difficult to you?
11. Why?

Strategy 2: Familiarizing Students with the Tasks

Why is this strategy important?

One of the most difficult aspects of standardized tests for MLLs/ELLs is understanding what they are expected to do. It is important to deconstruct each task and familiarize students with the language used to describe it. If they do not comprehend what they are asked to do, they will not be able to complete the task, or they will miss important steps. It is essential to encourage students to use their home language to make meaning of the directions for each task, using oral language to talk through and familiarize themselves with how the literacy task is presented in the exam.

How can I use this strategy?

Ask students to circle and label in their home language all the information about the task that they find on the instruction page. Note that, while Part 1 has only one short paragraph, Parts 2 and 3 have a more complicated set of directions. There is a difference between understanding what the directions say, what you are being asked to do, and being able to plan how to do it. When students first encounter each task, they need to be guided in deconstructing it. Here are some different ways in which you can help students deconstruct the task:

1. In small groups or with a partner, ask them to talk about the following:

- Why are some words in bold or italic format? What information about the task do they provide?
 - Why are there subheadings in the task? What kinds of information do they find under each heading? How will you use it?
2. In small groups or partners, ask students to translate the directions for each task into their home languages (this can be done orally or in writing). If you have more than one pair of students who share a home language, they should compare their translations with another group to check for accuracy and understanding. You can also ask them to write the directions using their own words in English and compare them.
 3. It is important to also make sure that students are familiar with the key terminology that appears in the directions and make connections when they might have encountered a similar task. In order to do this:
 - Highlight and deconstruct with the students each key term that appears in the directions. For example, in task 2, it is important that students understand what a “source-based argument” is. You could discuss: What’s the difference between a source-based argument and another kind of argument?
 - When have you encountered this term in your classwork previously? Students might remember other times when they’ve encountered a similar task and how they tackled it.
 4. After you have clarified each key term, ask students to go through the task and discuss, using their own words:
 - What are you being asked to do?
 - What steps do you need to take to accomplish this task?

After students are done deconstructing the tasks, they are ready to learn strategies to help them accomplish them!

Classroom example

An 11th grade English as a New Language (ENL) teacher in Brooklyn was working with her MLLs/ELLs on Part 2 of the ELA Regents exam, which requires students to write an argument essay. In order for them to make sense of the guidelines in the directions, she used flexible groupings to divide the class and gave each group one of six guidelines. Each group had ten minutes to create a short skit to demonstrate what the meaning of their guideline was. After each group presented their skit, the rest of the class had to guess what guideline they were demonstrating. The students could plan and act out their skits in English and/or in their home languages.

This activity provided a collective peer scaffold. The students had to make sense of the meaning of the guidelines with a group and present their interpretations. In trying to act out words such as “establish” or “distinguish,” they had to communicate the nuances of what they were asked

to do and be precise in how they interpreted each guideline. For example, for the guideline that states, “Maintain a formal style of writing,” one group decided they would emphasize the word “formal” by acting out a “tea party” complete with mock British accents! The students in the class identified the “formality” of the skit immediately, which led to a fruitful whole-class conversation about the differences between “formal” and “informal” writing within the genre of the ELA Regents.

Strategy 3: Working Backwards in Part 1 – Reading Comprehension Task

Why is this strategy important?

The first task in the ELA Regents exam is a reading comprehension task. In their classes, MLLs/ELLs have generally learned to read different kinds of texts, such as poems, short stories, or magazine articles and then discuss their ideas, interpretations, and feelings about them. One of the challenges of this task is that, while the directions ask students to read the texts and then answer multiple choice questions, a good approach is often to first understand the questions and then read the texts, looking for evidence to support the answers. It is important for students to understand that unlike reading texts in other genres, in the genre of an exam, the approach to reading has to shift in order to accomplish the task at hand.

How can I use this strategy?

You can use a gradual release of responsibility model (I do, we do, you do) for this strategy so that students can feel confident when they approach this task individually. Using a document camera, SMART Board, or other interactive piece of technology, model each step as you share your thinking process.

1. Preview the multiple-choice questions to pick out key words and underline them. Clarify the meaning of the key words, writing their meaning in English or using words in students’ home language. What is the question asking you to do?
2. Read the entire passage aloud with the questions in mind. As you read and students listen and read along, annotate the text as you talk through your choices:
 - Underline key words and write them in your home language.
 - Circle key words or phrases to identify what to answer.
 - Brainstorm other words or phrases that might help you understand.
3. Read the questions aloud again and read the answer choices. As you read the answer choices, talk about whether each response is supported by the text or not and add a + (in support) or – (not in support) next to it.
4. Read the questions again and talk through your process of elimination to cross off incorrect answers.

5. Students can also try answering the question without looking at the multiple-choice answers provided. (Students may take notes using their home languages, if that is more comfortable for them.) Then they can find the answer that most closely matches what they came up with.

After the teacher has walked students through your thinking process in answering one of the questions, engage them in doing other questions with you and then ask them to do so with a home language partner/home language small group, so they can use their full linguistic repertoire to negotiate and work through the thinking process of making a decision about the correct answer.

Classroom example

An 11th grade ENL teacher in Queens who was working with her MLLs/ELLs on Part 1 of the exam asked her students to model for each other in small groups how to strategically answer multiple choice questions. First, she modeled a few different strategies for the whole class. Then she divided the class into heterogeneous language groups and gave each group three questions about one of the reading comprehension passages. She asked each group to create a poster that demonstrated the strategies they used to answer the questions, particularly those that drew on students' home languages.

One group's poster illustrated the key words they underlined and their rationale for choosing those words. The group had annotated the key words from the English passage with translations of the words in their different home languages. For example, when they encountered the word "resilience" in the passage, a student in the group whose home language was Portuguese was able to make a connection to the cognate "resiliência." Having each group share their strategy posters and explain their thinking process to the rest of the class helped break down the steps to answer each question and solidified students' understanding of how to use their home languages to help them understand multiple choice questions in English.

Strategy 4: Using Anchor Papers to Understand Writing Tasks – Parts 2 & 3

Why is this strategy important?

It is often difficult for MLLs/ELLs to gauge how their performance on standardized exams will be evaluated. For example, students who are Newcomers might not have encountered standardized tests in the past, so it is important for them to have explicit models that demystify the process. While they might understand what they need to do and the steps that they need to take, the expectations for what their work should look like is not always clear to them. It should not be mystery to students how their work is assessed on these tests. For this reason, in the context of preparing for the ELA Regents exam, it is essential that students learn to deconstruct how each task is assessed in order to better understand the expectations for their own performances. This is particularly important for Parts 2 and 3, for which some of the expectations of the exam might seem vague. To engage students in the process of deconstructing the genre of the ELA Regents exam, you can engage them in analyzing both the *rubric* and the *anchor papers* provided with past exams.

How can I use this strategy?

In order to implement this strategy, begin by reviewing the given prompt on the exam: What are students being asked to do? What are the guidelines? Create a collective list with the class, using English and students' home language.

For example, Part 2 of the ELA Regents requires students to write an evidence-based argument, using a collection of authentic texts that relate to a specific event, topic, or issue. After students understand the demands of the task, divide the class into small groups. First, review the rubric for Part 2. Help students understand the expectations laid out in that rubric, including the often subtle changes from one column to the next. For example, you might ask students to find 3 key words that signal that a response should receive a "4" vs. a "5." After delving into the details of the rubric, provide each group with two examples of anchor papers from a past exam. Ask guiding questions for each paragraph to help the students understand how the writer of the essay structured it: How does this writer's argument essay begin? How does the writer end the introduction? How does the writer begin the first body paragraph? What does this writer do after incorporating text evidence? What does the writer include in the conclusion? (See Figure 2 for an example of a handout that encourages this inquiry) You also want to direct students to specific details in the writing. For example, you can point to signal words that the author used: What does the word "although" signal to the reader in paragraph two?

Students can discuss and answer the questions in their home languages or in English.

After they are finished, ask students to work together to score the work using the rubric. You can model this scoring before students do it independently/in pairs, engaging students in discussion about a particular score and the reasons it earned that score. Each group should then share their own scoring and their rationale for the score. When everyone has presented, share with them the scoring from the exam sample and deconstruct it by going back to the papers.

When they write their own practice essays, the students can work in pairs and score each other's work. They can also practice scoring their own essays. It is important that, as they review their peers' work and their own work, they train themselves to ask similar kinds of questions as the ones that you asked while they read the anchor papers.

Figure 2. Handout – Deconstructing an ELA Regents Exam Anchor Paper.

<p>Elementary schools is a pivotal time for the development of today's youth. A child's brain, emotions, and skills are very rapidly developing and evolving. Without all of the structure and classroom education forced into children at that age, a time to unwind and grow in personally is crucial. Recess is a very important part of child development, and should be a time for free, unlimited and expression - not structured play.</p> <p>Anyone who watches children play freely can see that they are completely capable of creating games and physical activities on their own. Studies have shown that during this free playing time, intellectual and cognitive growth, emotional intelligence, and social interactions are all benefited and promoted (Text 2, Lines 71-74). At the time when the brain is most delicate and vulnerable, the implementation of these factors is crucial. Structural play is forces a burden onto children who may just not enjoy or feel comfortable in group sports. At a school practicing structured recess, the children "were bored, had tired feet, were not good at running" (Text 4, Line 7). Children are told they have no choice, and are thus apt to develop negative emotions and concerns towards physical activity and group play if they are forced into it as children. Unstructured recess allows for children to period of time to make their own choices and freely express themselves in a safe environment, while structured play takes away from this freedom and restricts the developing minds of young children.</p> <p>Although structured recess shows potential benefits, the existing negative implications are too contradictory. Supporters of structured recess claim that "significantly less bullying and exclusionary behavior during recess" occurs with</p>	<p>How does this argument essay begin?</p> <p>How does the writer end the paragraph?</p> <p>How does the writer begin this first body paragraph?</p> <p>What does this writer do after incorporating text evidence?</p> <p>How does the writer end this body paragraph?</p> <p>What does the word "although" signal to the reader?</p>	<p>structured play programs. However, there is no shown reduction in more general aggressive behaviors (Text 6, Lines 55-57). The lower aggression level solely during recess will remain only during that period of time. Children will still find a way around to bully and hurt others. Therefore, a simple reduction in immediate bullying is not worth the further taking away from the freedom and expression of children. Child obedience is another objective on supporters' minds. However, structured children in elementary school are already offered a physical education class, which they regularly fulfill. The option to pursue more physical opportunities should then be left up to the students, and not mistakenly forced upon them.</p> <p>Structured recess is an unnecessary stressor on young children. This form of play takes away children's expression and initial exposure to freedom. Children should be allowed freedom, and structured play should not be implemented.</p> <p>BASED ON ALL THIS, what score (out of 6) do you think this essay deserves? Why?</p> <p>4</p>	<p>How does the writer REFUTE the idea that structured play programs reduce bullying?</p> <p>What does the writer include in the conclusion?</p>
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Classroom example

In preparing her MLLs/ELLs for Part 2 of the ELA Regents exam, a teacher from the Bronx provided each student with a sample task from a previous year. The question for the argument essay was: Should school recess be structured play? First, she asked her students to discuss with a language partner and take notes on the following questions: What are some related words or ideas related to this topic? What is your initial response to this question? What are some reasons that support your response?

Next, she gave students a graphic organizer so they could gather evidence for and against the question while reading the articles on the exam. After they had read the texts and filled out the graphic organizer, she then gave her students an anchor paper for the exam and asked them to analyze it and take notes. When they were done, she asked them to compare the evidence that they had included on their graphic organizer with the evidence used in the anchor paper (See Figure 3). In doing this task, students were able to compare their own work with the work used as the anchor key and understand how the authors had used the evidence successfully or unsuccessfully in the context of the task.

Figure 3. Handout – Comparing student text evidence to anchor paper evidence.

COMPARING RESPONSES:

Your Task: Use the sample response on Pages **9-10** to compare the evidence you selected with the evidence this student response incorporated.

How many pieces of text evidence did this student include in his/her response? _____

How many different texts did he/she refer to? _____

How many pieces of text evidence **that you included in your T-chart** did this student include in his/her response?

0

1

2

3

4

Why do you think this student author chose these specific pieces of evidence?

How did you choose the evidence you picked out?

Strategy 5: Using Debate to Understand Part 2 – Argument Response Task

Why is this strategy important?

Part 2 of the ELA Regents exam asks students to build an argument and predict some of the possible counterpoints to their argument based on a set of provided articles. One pre-writing strategy to prepare students for this task is to have them debate, as a class, the topic from the exam. This leverages the oral language, speaking and listening skills that are critical for preparing students for grade-level reading and writing. In order to prepare for a debate, students need to understand the two sides of an argument, find evidence to support their ideas, and predict the counter arguments.

How can I use this strategy?

To set up a debate in your classroom, provide students with the reading materials from Part 2 of a past exam. Divide the class into two groups that represent the two sides of the topic. For example, if the prompt in the exam is: “Should school recess be structured play?” one group should prepare an argument in favor of structured play and another against it. Using flexible groupings (depending on their needs, students can work with a language partner, in a heterogeneous group, etc.), ask students to go through the following steps:

- Brainstorm a list of words and ideas related to the topic
- Read each text and label each text title as YES or NO
- Use paper to create a T-chart for “In Favor” vs. “Against”
- Read and underline text evidence
- Label the text evidence YES or NO and explain why you labeled it this way
- Add the “Why” to the “In Favor” vs. “Against” T-chart and provide students with key words/phrases and sentence frames that can help them express their points

When the students are done preparing, review some basic debate rules and ask each team to plan out its strategy. Make sure that in the rules you include the need to refer to the evidence from the articles to support the argument. After the two groups debate, debrief with the whole class:

- Do you think that your group provided enough evidence to support your argument? How do you know?
- Did your ideas change throughout the course of the debate? In what ways?
- How could you use the evidence presented in the debate to write an argument?

When they are finished, you can ask students to choose a side and use the text evidence presented by their group or the opposing group to write their own argument essays.

Classroom example

An ENL teacher in Manhattan who was preparing students for the ELA Regents divided her class into two debate teams so they could debate on a topic from a past Regents exam: whether or not algae could be the solution to our energy problems. She divided each of the two groups into smaller groups to do a “jigsawed” reading – i.e.: different groups of students read differently leveled and sometimes excerpted portions of the articles provided in the test. Each small group read one article and created a T-chart to note the arguments “In Favor” and “Against” the claim, adding quotes from the article as evidence. Though the evidence they added to their chart was in English, they negotiated which evidence to choose and wrote their rationale for including that evidence using their home languages. After each small group finished the jigsawed reading and multilingual graphic organizer, they shared with the larger debate team what they had learned from the article they were assigned. As a team, they then selected the best arguments to support their position using evidence from the texts and anticipated counter-arguments. This strategy emphasizes cooperative learning by providing students with an opportunity to actively help each other build comprehension and create an argument. It also encourages students to use their home languages to craft their argument before writing it in English.

Strategy 6: Using Interview to Understand Part 3 – Text Analysis Response Task

Why is this strategy important?

Part 3 asks students to read a text and write a text-based response that identifies the central idea. The students must analyze how the author uses one writing strategy (a literary element, literary technique or rhetorical device) to develop the central idea. Examples include writing strategies such as characterization, conflict, denotation/connotation, metaphor, simile, irony, language use, point-of-view, setting, structure, symbolism, theme, tone, etc.

Though the exam asks students for written text-based responses, a helpful first step for MLLs/ELLs to develop their writing is using oral language, especially if they can move fluently between their home language and English. One strategy is to engage students in role playing by

asking them to become the authors of the pieces and explain their thinking in the genre of an interview.

How can I use this strategy?

In order to use this strategy, students first need to be familiar with a variety of writing strategies. A good way to introduce these strategies to students is by finding parallel texts in students' home languages and helping them identify instances of an author's strategy use in a language they are more comfortable with (i.e.: you might look at past Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish or AP World Languages exams). In fact, for this reason, some schools have chosen to conduct English Regents preparation courses in languages *other* than English. In addition, since many students may never have heard or watched an interview with an author, you can model the task by showing a short interview with an author or listening to a podcast interview. These interview examples also help illustrate how authors intentionally construct the stories that they create.

Next, divide the students into pairs and ask them to read a Part 3 text from a past exam. As they read, ask them to put themselves in the shoes of the author and think about:

- What is the central idea of the text?
- What literary strategies does the author use? Why do you think he/she chose it?
- Find some examples from the text that show that literary strategy at work and demonstrate the central idea.

When they are done taking notes and discussing their findings, ask one student to be the interviewer and come up with questions and another student to be the author. These interviews can be done in English or in their home language. Each pair should role play the interview in front of the class. When they are finished, debrief:

- What new connections did you make as you were answering the questions?
- What new ideas might the audience have learned about this author's craft from your interview?
- What ideas from the interview could you use for your writing?

When they are finished role playing, you can ask students to write a text-based response from the text that they used to prepare the interview, or to use someone else's interview to write a text-based response.

Classroom example

In an 11th grade classroom in the Bronx in which an ENL teacher worked with a group of students who speak multiple home languages, the students role played author interviews, with one student taking on the role of the author and the other playing the interviewer. Some of the students decided to do the interviews in their home language and asked for a third student to join and act as the translator for the audience. For some of the students, it was more comfortable to begin their analysis using their home language. As the students navigated between the two languages, they were able to make metalinguistic connections – finding cognates, discovering similarities or differences in syntax, or discussing language-specific idioms – that helped them later on in writing their own papers.

Part II: Drawing on home language resources to prepare for and take the test

In Part II, we include four strategies that can help MLLs/ELLs to draw on their full linguistic repertoire to take the ELA Regents exam. These strategies include:

1. Using a bilingual dictionary (word for word) or [bilingual glossary](#).
2. Using multilingual graphic organizers for writing
3. Multilingual annotation
4. Using cognates and etymology

Strategy 1: Using a Bilingual Dictionary

Why is this strategy important?

Because bilingual dictionaries are the only external home language resources MLLs/ELLs can use on the ELA Regents exam, it is important that we teach students to use them strategically and efficiently. Even though these students are entitled to extra time to take the exam, using bilingual dictionaries without a clear sense of purpose can lead to wasted time and lots of frustration. In order to help MLLs/ELLs use bilingual dictionaries in strategic ways, you can teach students to find and look up **anchor concepts**, or the key words they need to learn to understand critical concepts.

Please note that, on the NYS English Regents, bilingual dictionaries and glossaries may provide only direct one to one translations of words. Bilingual dictionaries and/or glossaries that provide definitions or explanations are not permitted. Bilingual glossaries in the content areas are available for download via <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/resources/glossaries>.

How can I use this strategy?

You can model how to find the anchor concepts and key words using older versions of the ELA Regents exams and then build students' independence so they can use the bilingual dictionaries in this way during the exam. For example, you can model and then make time for students to practice the following steps:

- If there is a word that repeats multiple times in a text, it's an indication that the word is important.
- Continue reading, and if the meaning of the text is still unclear, then look up the unknown word.
- In informational texts, know that key words are often found in headings, and at the beginning or end of paragraphs (where the main idea is often expressed). There could also be text clues, such as bold words, underlined words, or italicized words. If there is an unfamiliar word in one of these places, it could be a key word to look up.
- If there is an unfamiliar word that gets in the way of understanding a whole paragraph (or section of text), then it's an indicator that the word is important.

You can also do an analysis of recent Regents exams and come up with a list of key words and/or anchor concepts that have appeared multiple times on the test. This can include words that are important for understanding *the exam itself* and those that relate to common *topics* that have been included on the exam. Then, you can have students look up those words using bilingual dictionaries and create a list of those words in both English and the home language. These words can become part of students' own "personal dictionaries" that they can keep in their notebooks and use to practice their bilingual dictionary skills. These can be shared and used by other students, and are especially useful for a teacher to save a copy for the next year's class and newcomers.

Classroom example

An ENL teacher in Queens who worked with a group of 11th grade MLLs/ELLs gave her students three paragraphs from a reading comprehension passage. Since all the students in her class shared Spanish as a home language, she provided them with a list of words in Spanish and told them that they had to use the dictionary and/or the state-approved bilingual word-to-word glossaries with direct translations to replace the English word in the paragraph with a Spanish word from her list. The students were asked to look for the words in the dictionary and find the matching word in English in the paragraph. For each word, the dictionary offers multiple meanings. In order to complete the task, the students had to find the correct meaning. In the process of doing this activity, the students learned to understand the importance of context in order to find the appropriate translation in a bilingual dictionary.

Strategy 2: Using Multilingual Graphic Organizers to Prepare for Writing

Why is this strategy important?

Graphic organizers are highly effective tools to use with MLLs/ELLs in everyday classroom instruction, and particularly when preparing them to take the ELA Regents exam. First, graphic organizers can be used in classroom test prep to help students formulate their responses to the tasks set out on the exam. Second, graphic organizers – especially those that students can easily reproduce themselves – can be used independently *during* the exam itself to help students organize their ideas and formulate responses to the tasks. To encourage students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire using graphic organizers, you can tell them that even though they are reading in English and will eventually create their final piece of writing in English, they should fill in their graphic organizers using both English *and* their home languages together. In using graphic organizers, you are equipping students with tangible resources and organization skills that they can bring with them into the exam.

How can I use this strategy?

Different graphic organizers can help students prepare for the two different writing tasks on the ELA Regents exam. For Part 2's argument task, you can create graphic organizers that enable students to:

- Compare different sides of an argument
- Come up with a general thesis statement, specific claims, and supporting evidence

- Develop a counter-argument

For Part 3’s text-analysis task, you can create graphic organizers that enable students to:

- Find the central idea of a text
- Identify different writer’s strategies (i.e.: literary element or rhetorical device) that develop the central idea
- Find text evidence that supports the central idea

There are many types of graphic organizers that can help you develop these skills in your MLLs/ELLs, but the important part is that you make it clear and explicit that students can and *should* draw on their home language resources when they are filling the organizers out during in-class test preparation and during the exam itself. There are many ways you can make this part of the process of test preparation. For example, you can:

- Include in the directions of the graphic organizer that students can fill it out in *any language* in preparation for writing a response in *English*.
- Translate the directions and the graphic organizer itself into the home languages of your classroom.
- Have students work in pairs/small groups to fill out the graphic organizer, and explicitly tell them that they should use English *and* their home languages to discuss, negotiate, and complete it.

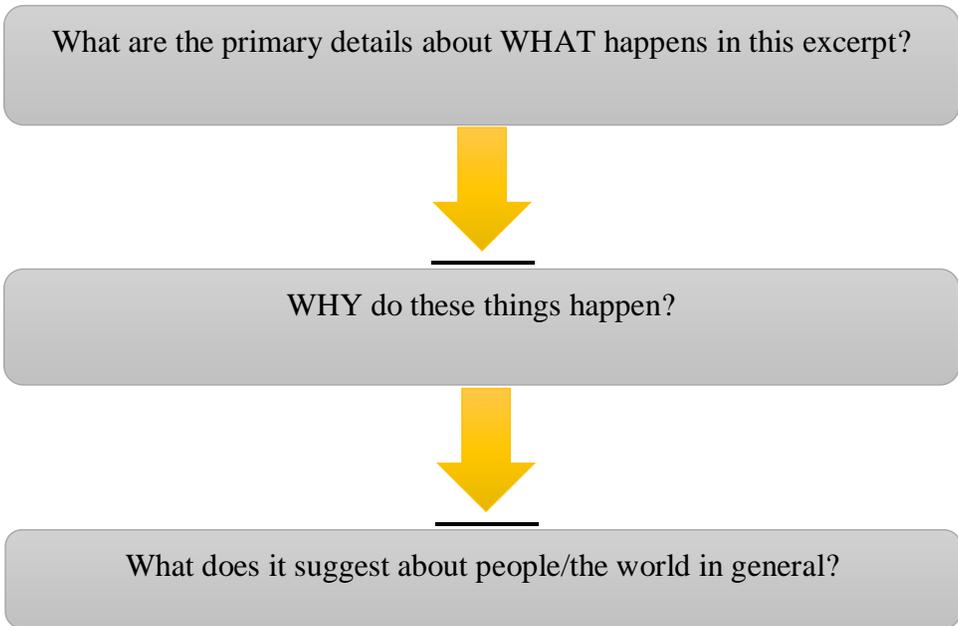
Classroom example

An 11th grade teacher in the Bronx was working with her students on Part 3 of the ELA Regents exam, which requires students to find the “central idea” of a text. In addition to many other reading comprehension strategies, the teacher gave her students a graphic organizer that would help them (a) practice locating the important moments in the text that might lead to their identification of a central idea; and (b) practice coming up with their own central idea statements for a given text, which was an excerpt of the novel *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri. As they read the excerpt, students worked in pairs with those who shared their home languages to fill out the following graphic organizer:

This graphic organizer not only gave students the opportunity to find text evidence that either supported (“for”) or refuted (“against”) each of the three sample “central idea” claims (found in the center column); it also gave them the opportunity to use their home languages to better understand the claims themselves. The skill of translating – not word for word, but using students’ own words and interpretations of the phrase – was a valuable one that students could bring with them into other tasks on the exam. After students had read the excerpt, they worked with their home language partners to fill out the second page of the graphic organizer:

FOR/AGAINST EVIDENCE ORGANIZER		
FOR:	Statement/Claim:	AGAINST:
(P. ____)	There is no significant reason for Gogol's parents to want him to have a new name. (T/F)	(P. ____)
	<i>Translate the phrase into your home language using your own words.</i>	
(P. ____)	Gogol does not want to have a new name. (T/F)	(P. ____)
	<i>Translate the phrase into your home language using your own words.</i>	
(P. ____)	Gogol's name is important to him. (T/F)	(P. ____)
	<i>Translate the phrase into your home language using your own words.</i>	

Getting to the Central Idea



As they filled out this simple graphic organizer that helped them negotiate their own central idea about the excerpt, students collaborated using their full linguistic repertoire, which they did in a mixture of English and their home languages. The teacher encouraged them to set up a



similar graphic organizer – and to use their home languages to fill it out – on their exams when they would eventually take Part 3 of the exam.

Strategy 3: Multilingual Annotation

Why is this strategy important?

When MLLs/ELLs take the ELA Regents exam, they are expected to engage with highly complex texts in English. In addition, they are asked to *respond* to what they read through well-organized and well-developed academic writing. Simply, if students do not comprehend what they read, they will not be able to answer multiple choice questions or respond in writing to the tasks set forth on the exam. For this reason, we should encourage students to make meaning of the English texts on the Regents (and across academic contexts) using their full linguistic repertoire. By providing students with the opportunity to practice *multilingual annotation* – or strategically and purposefully marking up the text as they read – they can (a) make meaning of the texts using their home language resources, and (b) use their home language resources to help prepare them to respond to the writing tasks.

How can I use this strategy?

There is not one “right way” to teach students how to engage in multilingual annotation. In fact, part of what teachers must do is make space for MLLs/ELLs to engage with the text in ways that make sense to *them*. With that said, teachers can provide MLLs/ELLs with ideas for how to respond to English texts through an integration of their home language practices and underlining, starring, circling, and other text-based signals. Here are some ideas for annotation strategies that enable students to use their home languages to engage with English texts. It is important to remind students that while their annotations can be in any language, their written response to the texts they read must be in English. You can have a conversation with students about how they can translate or rephrase their multilingual annotations or simply use them as references and notes when they are answering multiple choice questions and writing their responses on the test.

For Part 2’s argument task, you can encourage students to go through the following annotations steps as they read both the *task* and the accompanying *texts*:

- As you read the task, find and circle the topic
- Brainstorm a list of words and ideas in your home language that are related to the topic
- Identify the two possible “answers” to the question posed in the topic
- As you read each of the four texts, label each as YES (i.e.: supports an affirmative answer to the question) or NO (i.e.: refutes an affirmative answer to the question)
- Use scrap paper to create a T-chart for YES vs. NO
- As you read, underline text evidence that supports a YES or a NO answer
- Label the text evidence YES or NO and use your home languages to briefly jot down WHY
- Add the WHY to the YES vs. NO chart

For Part 3’s text-analysis response task, you can encourage students to go through the following annotation steps as they read both the *task* and the accompanying *text excerpt*:

- Read the excerpt and, using your home languages annotate *Who, What, Why, How*, asking yourself:
 - Who is the passage about?
 - What is happening to them?
 - Why is it happening?
 - How is the writer telling the story (writing strategy)?
- Decide what you think the big idea or message is (i.e.: the central idea of the excerpt)
- Underline text evidence that helps convey the central idea and use your home languages to briefly jot down why this text evidence supports the central idea
- Decide what the most important writing strategy is and put a “star” next to any parts of the excerpt that demonstrate that writing strategy. Use your home languages to briefly jot down what this writing strategy accomplishes and how it relates to the central idea.

Classroom example:

In order to help her MLLs/ELLs prepare for reading complex texts on the ELA Regents, an 11th grade teacher in Queens, NY posted the following annotation strategies on her wall:

ELA Regents Annotations

Circle key words and put a translation/synonym in your home language
Write the *Meaning* of the word in English or your home language
Underline main ideas that relate to the topic
Putting a ★star★ next to possible text evidence
Jot down quick summaries of each paragraph in English and/or your home language

As they prepared for the exam using past versions, of the text, the teacher would ask students to show the class their annotations using a document camera. In addition to discussing the content of the text itself, students also used both English and their home languages to talk about why they made certain annotations and how they helped them understand the text. In this way, students were able to articulate their thinking and share their own multilingual strategies with one another. When a student’s strategy resonated with the rest of the class, the teacher added that strategy to the posted list of annotation strategies.

Strategy 4: Using Cognates and Etymology

Why is this strategy important?

Developing students’ awareness about similarities and differences across English and their home languages is a highly important reading comprehension skill, one they can take with them into the ELA Regents exam. In the process of preparing for the exam, you can teach students

about *cognates* as well as elements of etymology such as *word origins* (roots, prefixes, suffixes), *word sounds* (phonetics), and *word usage and expressions*.

Cognates are words that look and/or sound similar across different languages. English shares many cognates with other Indo-European languages, but less so with other language families, such as African and Asian language families. Teaching students to notice cognates, as well as teaching them the links between different languages' roots and affixes will help them in all content areas, as well as specifically on the ELA Regents exam. By giving students the “tools” to figure out new vocabulary, you enable them to understand those unknown words they may encounter on the exam. Many languages share common word parts. For example, teaching students about the roots of words can help them to see inter- and intra-language connections.

It is also important for MLLs/ELLs to recognize *false cognates*, or those words that look and sound similar in multiple languages but do not have the same meaning. These words are also referred to as “false friends”—they don't relate the way we think they do. For example, the word *decepción* in Spanish does not mean deception—it means disappointment. Students need to learn how to recognize false cognates so that they don't get confused as they read and write.

How can I use this strategy?

Here are some of the ways to develop MLLs/ELLs' ability to recognize cognates and etymology and to draw on them during the ELA Regents exam:

- If you teach students whose home languages do not share cognates with English, try to find entry-points for other etymology conversations or linguistic comparison. Look at CUNY-NYSIEB's [Languages of New York State](#) guide for information on the top 10 languages spoken in New York State.
- If you teach students whose home languages share etymology with English, begin by pointing out cognates, root words, and affixes during whole-class reading activities (i.e.: read-alouds, shared reading, reading a passage from a practice test, etc.). Ask students the following questions:
 - “Does this look like a word I know (in my home language)?”
 - “Does this word sound like a word I know (in my home language)?”

Add examples to a chart. Over time, release this responsibility to students. When they find their own examples, encourage them to share with the class and add to the chart.

- When possible, have students create personal cognate charts for general academic vocabulary that they can use for reference in preparation for the exam.
- Create a chart (or find one already made) that lists common English roots, prefixes and/or suffixes. Encourage students to underline or highlight those roots and affixes that they know as they take the exam.
- Have MLLs/ELLs read a text in English with a side-by-side translation of that text in their home language(s). Instead of simply reading one side and referencing the other side when needed, have students read both texts, with attention to cognates and/or other elements of etymology you are emphasizing. Have students discuss where they see similar words, word parts, or phrases.



Classroom example:

An 11th grade ELA teacher in Brooklyn was preparing her MLLs/ELLs for the ELA Regents exam and did a close read of several recent exams to look for general academic vocabulary that might have cognates in the main languages of her students: Spanish, French, and Haitian Creole. As she read, she found many cognates, including some whole phrases from the exam, such as:

“Maintain a formal writing style”

“Mantener un estilo formal de escritura (Spanish)

“Maintenir un style formel d'écriture” (French)

“Kenbe yon style fòmèl nan ekri” (Haitian Creole)

Using what she found, the teacher created a cognate and etymology chart that she put up on the wall of her classroom. With the help of the MLLs/ELLs in the classroom, as well as several bilingual staff members, the teacher continued to find new cognates and shared word parts on the ELA Regents and added to the chart. In preparation for the exam, the MLLs/ELLs studied the cognates and shared word parts in the personal charts that they kept in their notebooks so that they would recognize them when they took the exam.

Part III:
An ELA Regents Exam Project – Students Teach Students through a Genre-based, Multilingual Approach

We often think of an exam as being separate from “real world” experiences. Integrating a project-based approach to preparing for the ELA Regents exams engages students as knowledge producers and capitalizes on the skills they bring to the classroom. Project-based learning engages students in social activity, integrates oral and print skills, fosters group work, and provides a structure for students to become creators (De Capua & Marshall, 2014). In this resource, we have put forth a genre-based, multilingual approach to learning in approaching the ELA Regents exam. From that perspective, it is important to involve students in leveraging their understandings of the exam as a genre by producing something new that they can share with others.

A teacher in the Bronx who was preparing a group of 11th grade MLLs/ELLs to take the ELA Regents exam designed a project in which students had to create short video tutorials for other students who would eventually take the exam. Before working on the project, the teacher had engaged her MLLs/ELLs in many explicit discussions about the importance of using home language resources to understand and prepare for the English-medium test. The goal of the project was for the MLLs/ELLs to review the strategies that they learned and to solidify their understanding by explaining how to apply them. The teacher also wanted students to create a set of short videos that other students could use to prepare for the ELA Regents exam in the future. Here’s how the teacher set up the project:

1. At the beginning of the project, the students brainstormed the strategies that they had learned and used in the context of the class, as well as strategies that they’ve used independently.
2. In pairs, students chose a strategy and outlined the different steps that they followed when they used it in a practice test. Some of them outlined the different steps English and others used their home languages.
3. The students created storyboards that included images, narration, and titles. As they worked on the storyboards, the students had to determine what images they needed to use to best illustrate the steps that they described in the narration. They made decisions about what language to use – either English or their home languages – and when. They planned how to include titles (i.e.: to introduce a new step, to reinforce an idea, or to provide “tips” that other students could use).

Names _____	Strategy _____
<p>Instructions:</p> <p>1- Draw or describe the picture that you want to include in your piece 2- Write the narration that you will use under each image.</p>	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 150px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> <p>Narration: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 150px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> <p>Narration: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 150px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> <p>Narration: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 150px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> <p>Narration: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

4. Students practiced reading their narrations. Because many of her MLLs/ELLs didn't feel comfortable speaking in front of an audience, recording a narration provided an opportunity to practice speaking skills in a low-risk setting.
5. Following their storyboards, each pair recorded their videos using iPads and reviewed them. In many cases after viewing the images or the listening to the narrations, students found ways to revise and improve their videos.
6. Using iMovie, the students edited their videos, adding titles and transitions.
7. Students screened their videos to the class and discussed how the videos could be used as resources for other students.

One of the most important features of this project is that it had an authentic audience and task that helped students become teachers. Most of the groups produced bilingual videos that also discussed using home language as a resource for taking the ELA Regents exam in a variety of ways. The project tapped into students' metacognitive and metalinguistic skills, which was beneficial because it helped students review what they knew and prepare themselves to take the exam. In addition, the project helped them to understand the underlying structures that organize the ELA Regents as a genre. It built on strategies for using their home language that students were already doing, and it inspired students to share these skills with others.

For two examples of student-created ELA Regents strategy videos see the following links:

- Video: "How to answer multiple choice questions":
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ft0C3dStEKc&feature=em-share_video_user
- Video: "How to write an argument essay":
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXDp839HMDs&feature=em-share_video_user

Conclusion

MLLs/ELLs are met with great challenges when they are faced with the English Language Arts Regents exam. The high level of text complexity on the exam, its rigorous literacy expectations, and its English medium make it the most difficult Regents exam for MLLs/ELLs. Unfortunately, too often we do not “demystify” the exam, framing it as a straightforward assessment that students either pass or fail rather than a genre that can be broken down into parts and made transparent. In addition, as we prepare MLLs/ELLs for the ELA Regents we often fail to draw on students’ greatest resource for encountering this exam: their home language and literacy practices.

This Resource Guide provides teachers with opportunities to prepare MLLs/ELLs for the ELA Regents exam in just these ways – by taking up a *genre-based, multilingual approach*. We have provided a total of 10 strategies, all of which provide teachers with ideas for how to set up activities that (a) break down the exam so that it is more understandable to students; and (b) encourage students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire – their English *and* their home language resources – to prepare for and take the ELA Regents exam. We hope that this Resource Guide helps you take on the task of preparing MLLs/ELLs for this rigorous exam in engaging ways that help students draw on their myriad resources to succeed.

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