

Building Knowledge Now

A Guide for Choosing Reading Resources
for Today's Objectives

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“Reading comprehension, then, is not a skill that you teach but a condition that you create.”

—Robert Pondiscio, “[Literacy Is Knowledge](#),” *City Journal**

Today’s discerning educator is looking beyond a skills-centered curriculum. A renewed focus on knowledge is urging us to honor what we know about reading comprehension: The more you know, the more you learn. The best classroom “condition” we can create is one where lots of happy, independent readers find their joy in both the wonder and the work of reading for discovery and knowledge development. In short, the best path to reading is reading—along a curated series of coherent texts that are rich, compelling, and accessible.

Most readily available review tools are built for yesterday’s outcomes. This set of criteria is intended to augment any commercially available or district-developed review guide when choosing new reading resources for classroom and curriculum use. When present, these elements support a content-rich culturally and linguistically responsive classroom with appropriate student-facing scaffolds for content equity. This list is tailored to guide good purchase decisions for comprehension components taking a lead role, supplemental libraries, and multimedia resources—all of which are valuable contributing streams to knowledge development.

Knowledge



Curated passages serve big ideas in science, social studies, and humanities through both informational and narrative texts in a variety of genres that invite deep thought, questioning, and peer discourse:

- Passages are grouped together by topic and show a clear connection, broadening understanding through related aspects across lessons.
- Knowledge development is served equally through fiction and nonfiction, establishing the richness of human stories in authentic voices as a blueprint for self-discovery, connections, and empathy.
- Passages clearly identify the topic/content and suggest “tangential potential” that may be implicit in each read through a big question or other means of engagement as it activates or deepens knowledge.
- Academic language and rich vocabulary illustrate the topic across and within texts for practice opportunities in service to fluency, comprehension, and transfer.
- Ample time is given in the instructional plan for exploring and advancing understanding through rereads, research, text analysis, discourse, and written reader response, immersing students in the rigor and reward of discovery.
- Foundational research includes citations aligned with the pursuit of knowledge.
- Guidance from experts in the field of knowledge development was sought and embedded in the architecture of the collection.

*Pondiscio, R. (2014). Literacy is knowledge. *City Journal*. <https://www.city-journal.org/html/literacy-knowledge-13623.html>

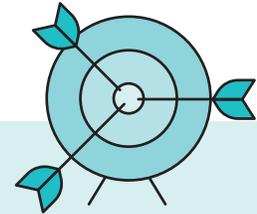
Cultural Relevance



Curated passages and anchor texts have been coordinated with an eye on cultural authenticity that reflects our diverse world, while instruction supports an asset-based mindset that validates and affirms students as they build their bank of deep and transferable knowledge of the world and of themselves.

- Readers will engage with texts as mirrors and windows that represent the stories, cultures, and identities of themselves and others in a global community.
- Academically challenging texts are supported by appropriate scaffolds when needed and are the vehicle for reading, writing, speaking, and listening as students develop and substantiate their evolving point of view.
- Both classic and emerging authors represent a global citizenry and experiences that foster human connections, empathy, and respect.
- Foundational research includes citations aligned with the pursuit of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy.
- Guidance from experts in the field of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy was sought and embedded in the architecture of the collection.

Expectations



Access to grade-level content is an equity issue: A carefully curated library of passages and anchor texts is only as good as each student's access to it. The following scaffolds are proven to work and hold the promise of grade-level reading and high learning expectations for all. To maximize increasing independence over time, materials embed formative means for knowing students deeply through both data and disposition.

- Lessons launch with a brief opportunity for building background, exploring key vocabulary and posing questions to inspire curiosity.
- Each grade-level text can be chunked into sections of 75–100 words to build reading stamina.
- Materials welcome student preferences and reflections through inventories and other means.
- Routines include well-matched partner reading for fluency and comprehension checks through questions, conversations, and the expansion of ideas.
- Foundational research includes citations aligned with the pursuit of making text accessible to all readers.
- Guidance from experts in the field of equitable practices was sought and embedded in the architecture of the collection.

“The mistaken idea that reading is a skill may be the single biggest factor holding back reading achievement in the country. The knowledge-base problem must be solved.”

—Daniel Willingham, author of *The Reading Mind: A Cognitive Approach to Understanding How the Mind Reads**

In our march toward the best-case scenario of strategic, sustained, and systematic knowledge building, creating coherence across texts by topic is a great first step in balancing skills/strategy/standards instruction and learning the world. Serving both objectives will create an academically rigorous and fruitful environment where all readers thrive. A comprehensive overhaul of the culture of reading will take some time, but another year should not go by without a recentering of content as the allure—and the reward—of reading. Let’s not let the perfect dissuade our forward motion to the better, or a pattern that others have made may prevail in the world. If we are “. . . following the wrong god home, we may miss our star.”**

*Willingham, D. (2017). *The reading mind: A cognitive approach to understanding how the mind reads*. Jossey-Bass.

**Excerpt from William Stafford’s poem “[A Ritual to Read to Each Other](#)”
Stafford, W. (1998). *A ritual to read to each other. The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems*. Graywolf Press.



About the Author

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Elizabeth Bassford is associate vice president of content and implementation at Curriculum Associates, with a fruitful tenure in teaching, research and development. Focused solely on literacy for the majority of her 40-year career, Elizabeth consults with districts nationwide as they advance their implementation of high standards toward equity. Elizabeth has contributed to a number of gold-standard core and intervention programs with an emphasis on the transformative power of data and speaks nationally on trending topics of import to the education community. Elizabeth holds a B.A. in Education from New York University and an M.S. in Education from Fordham University.

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