Unit Summaries

- STATE-OF-THE-ART TOOLS AND METHODS
- RESPONSIVE, DATA-BASED INSTRUCTION
- EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

LUCY CALKINS
with Colleagues from the Teachers College
Reading and Writing Project

Units of Study
for Teaching Reading

A Workshop Curriculum, Grades K–5

LUCY CALKINS
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KINDERMGarten UNIT 1: WE ARE READERS

Your biggest message in this, your children’s first-ever unit is that yes, indeed, they can read! You’ll know that this unit has succeeded if, by the end of it, your kindergarten students declare, “We are readers!” While you will be teaching reading strategies and habits, the most important teaching will be about desire and identity.

The first bend of the unit invites kids to read information texts and the second adds storybooks to the mix, so that by the second half of the unit, reading time for your kindergarteners will include time to reread and storytell familiar storybooks as well as time to study the pictures and figure out words (as best they can) in concept books and other nonfiction books.

At the start of kindergarten, you won’t be able to teach a minilesson, say “Off you go,” and expect your kindergarteners to sustain involvement with a stack of books. As a result, shared reading, read-aloud, and word study will be especially important to this unit. Your kids will be able to sustain one kind of reading for five or ten minutes, another kind of reading for another ten minutes, so that is how reading workshop will proceed. The predictability of the different kinds of reading will help your youngsters know that yes, indeed, they can do this thing called school. The routine matters, the predictability matters, and the crystal clear structure and transitions between parts of the workshop all matter.

Of course, most of your kids will be doing emergent rather than conventional reading, which doesn’t mean that their skills won’t develop in leaps and bounds—they will. Children will develop concepts of print (that is, an understanding that books are read from cover to cover, left to right, top to bottom), phonemic awareness (learning to rhyme, to hear component sounds in a word), phonics (learning letter names and sounds), and the knowledge necessary to use story language to support their approximations of reading. Children will meanwhile pore over texts with flaps and mirrors and creatures with weird noses and trucks with big cranes. They’ll also read “Old Favorite” storybooks, returning to books that you’ll read over and over to them. The constant refrain of kindergarten— “Do it again!” – means that kids are primed to learn from rereading, and in this unit you lean heavily on that. Your children take comfort in and also love familiar texts. One aim will be to draw them toward conventional reading. By the end of this unit, many of your students will reach a point where they want to read a text conventionally but can’t, when they are craving the skills and powers to read conventionally. The next unit, Super Powers, will move them another big step closer to the reading that they desperately want to do.
KINDERGARTEN UNIT 2: SUPER POWERS: READING WITH PRINT STRATEGIES AND SIGHT WORD POWER

At this point in kindergarten, most of your children are 4 and 5 years old, still so young! But they’re also brimming with energy and desire to read. And they are familiar enough with the daily rhythms of reading workshop that things work with a hum rather than in spurts and starts. This means that you are poised to do some important teaching. To do this, it is important to remember that young children learn through play, through drama, through exploring.

This unit glories in children’s love of play. You’ll dramatize the idea that to read, people call on super powers, just like superheroes do, thus imbuing this unit with a spirit of fun and accessibility. Instead of conveying, “Let me instruct you in how to read,” you’ll say, “Oh my gosh, we have to use our super-strength, extra special powers to read this book!” Equally important will be the message that “Superheroes don’t give up in a jam!”

This is also the age where your children are begging anyone and everyone to “Read it again!” They can read the same text a hundred times over, and that eagerness to reread beloved texts characterizes the kinds of work you’ll do and the kinds of material you’ll use. You can make dramatic strides with kids by channeling them to practice their reading superpowers with books you’ve read over and over to them, songs you’ve sung repeatedly, and charts you’ve made together. Your kindergartners’ introduction to paying attention to print will be with familiar and beloved texts, and this will allow them to bring their energy and enthusiasm to the work of one-to-one matching.

At this stage in the year, children at benchmark will read emergent storybooks, shared reading texts, and unfamiliar level A and B books. “Unfamiliar” books are ones you’ve read only once or twice during shared reading or books you’ve introduced to kids, perhaps reading just the first few pages of the book.

In the first bend, you’ll announce that children have “super powers” for reading, and you’ll spotlight “pointer power,” helping children point as they read, tapping each word just once, checking that their reading makes sense, and anchoring their pointing by noting the words they know “in a snap.”

The second bend rallies kids to move from familiar to unfamiliar ones and adds to students’ repertoires of super powers (reading strategies), teaching them to search for meaning, use picture clues, and to use the sound of the first letter of a word to help them read.

In the final bend, you’ll invite students to draw on all of their super powers as they work to make their voices smoother (fluency), and to communicate their understanding of the text (meaning). Partners will share favorite parts of books during book talks.
KINDERGARTEN UNIT 3: BIGGER BOOKS, STRONGER READERS

At this time of the school year, your kindergarten readers are at an important juncture. They are moving from rereading mostly familiar texts to attempting more difficult books with greater independence. Whereas in the Super Powers unit, texts such as “The Itsy Bitsy Spider” feature heavily in children’s book baggies after repeated reading and singing of the song, in this unit they’ll be shopping for unfamiliar books, and doing so on their own. Many will have made the leap from reading levels A/B books to reading books at levels C/D, and some will be beyond. This is a significant time in reading development.

At level C, readers must use the initial consonant or consonant cluster (blend or digraph), along with meaning and syntax to read the correct word. Many of your readers will be approaching level D, and these books are written so that readers must use meaning and syntax, and check the beginnings and endings of words in order to understand what is happening. With all of this learning to do, it’s not only the children who have their work cut out for them!

Since your children will need to carry forward the reading behaviors that they worked on in the previous unit, it makes sense to uphold the metaphor of super heroes using their reading super powers. You will help students to grow their banks of super power reading strategies to help them face the challenges of their new books. As the unit progresses, you’ll teach readers that as their books get even bigger, their regular super powers need to get bigger, too. You’ll ask readers to turn their powers up to “Extra Strength!”

In the first bend of the unit, you’ll invite readers to study the ways books are becoming harder, so they’ll be prepared for the new work they need to do as readers. You’ll teach them that they can use their knowledge of how patterns go—their pattern power—to read texts with longer, more complex patterns. You’ll equip them with strategies for tackling breaks in patterns, and you’ll teach them to use their pattern power to think more deeply about what a book is really saying.

In the second bend of the unit, you’ll rally students around the work of using their knowledge of letters and sounds—their sound power—to read tricky words. You’ll teach children first to attend to the initial letter, then to look to beginning consonant clusters (blends and digraphs), and finally to move their eyes to attend to the end of unknown words. By the end of this bend, your students will be using more visual information, in addition to meaning and structure, to solve tricky words.

The third and final bend of the unit supports students in orchestrating all the strategies they’ve developed to read more complex books with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. This bend places a particular emphasis on reading high-frequency words with automaticity. You will also emphasize the importance of thinking and talking more deeply about books.
KINDERGARTEN UNIT 4: BECOMING AVID READERS

Kindergarten children at this time of year are blooming, right along with the crocuses and the daffodils. Springtime of kindergarten is a time of unparalleled growth, both physically and intellectually. Your children are taller, leaner, and better able to control both gross-motor and small-motor skills and they are ready to put their growing literacy powers to great use. In this unit, you’ll help them to get an image of what it means to be a truly avid reader—talking deeply about books, envisioning the drama of a story, sharing responses with friends, and pursuing ideas. This unit bookends the first unit, We Are Readers, as once again you help your youngsters role play their way into being the readers you want them to become. Back then the rallying cry was “You are readers!” Now it’s “You are avid readers!” and helps them believe that there are few pleasures in life that are more special. Your children will continue to engage in playful interactions, with reading now a part of this play. As they engage in “reading playdates,” children will try out and even invent fun literacy things to do with their friends.

Your children have also grown as conventional readers and many will come to this unit already able to attend to the various patterns and pattern shifts that exist in the books they are reading. They know that not only is there often a twist at the end, but that the pattern might also change in the middle or from one page to the next. They have learned to pay attention to what is happening in each book and to use multiple sources of information—phonics (visual information) as well as the whole picture (meaning)—to help them problem solve their way through these tricky pattern changes with increased accuracy and comprehension.

The next bend parallels the work of Bend I, but now you’ll support children in becoming avid readers of nonfiction texts. They will become experts on a chosen topic as they read alongside others in reading clubs. You’ll show your students how to read like professors, how to teach each other what they are learning, and how to incorporate keywords that go with their topics into their talks.

The final bend of the unit has a celebratory feel as students explore poetry, play with rhyme and rhythm, and innovate upon existing poems and songs. All the while, they’ll be developing their fluency as they continue to read alongside others in their clubs. The grand finale brings together the best aspects of poetry—illustrating, performing, singing, and creating copycat poems—as you and your students celebrate the language of poetry and books.

Your children will end kindergarten not only enacting the role of an avid reader, but believing they are avid readers as they play their way into a powerful reading identity that will help them transition to first grade.
GRADE 1 UNIT 1: BUILDING GOOD READING HABITS

The start of the school year is a time for you to fall in love a new class of children, noticing each child’s quirky little self. You’ll notice Theo always carries a tiny toy skateboard in his pocket and you’ll note Pokemon cards spilling out of Max’s desk. You are going to want to help your children find the same passion for reading that they have for collecting seashells and action figures.

The start of the year is also a time for dusting off the skills and habits that children learned during kindergarten. It’s tricky to recap what kids learned last year in a way which doesn’t lead you to inundate your youngsters with a laundry list of forgettable reminders. The solution we came to in this unit is to suggest you begin by saying, “You’ve grown up so much that I bet there are things you do all the time, without anyone having to remind you. Thumbs up if you always remember to turn the lights off at night, even without reminders. Thumbs up if you remember to brush your teeth every morning. Holy Moly—this class has so many good habits.” Of course, the point is that first graders have lots of things they do by habit as readers as well. The emphasis on habits is, in a way, an emphasis on working with more independence and automaticity.

The theme “readers have good habits” unites all the disparate reminders you will be giving kids so these reminders are more easily remembered. In Bend I, you remind readers about the good habits they already use at the beginnings, the middles, and the ends of books. For example, because it is easy for early readers to turn all their attention to breaking the code, you’ll remind students to preview books so their work with words happens within the frame of an awareness of the entire story.

First graders work to become more efficient and flexible word-solvers. In Bend II, your rallying cry about good habits will encompass word solving as you suggest that first graders have good habits for getting themselves unstuck as they read. First graders not only need to attend to all the parts of each word, they also need to begin to be more flexible with letters and sounds, particularly vowels, trying both the long and short sounds for vowels within words.

If it were possible, children would love to have a teacher sit beside them each and every time they read, coaching them through tricky words or confusing parts of their books. In this unit, you’ll establish ability-based partnerships that outsource that support to students. In turn, you tap into the social power of peers working together to help children become more strategic as readers.

Jerry Harste, a prominent literacy researcher, once said, “Our job is to create in the classroom the kind of richly literate world that we believe in and then to invite children to role play their way into being the readers and writers we want them to be.” Keep this concept front and center in your thinking as you launch this year.
GRADE 1 UNIT 2: LEARNING ABOUT THE WORLD: READING NONFICTION

If there is one defining characteristic of the young child, it is curiosity. Think of a youngster on the morning after a rainstorm, out on your driveway, crouching alongside one of the worms that has washed up in the rain. The child will ask, “Why did he come out?” “Where is his mouth?” The questions will be incessant, and they will last all day.

At the start of this unit, you’ll build on that natural curiosity by telling your children, “We’re going to learn about the world. We’re going to swim with sharks. We’re going to travel back in time. We’ll hold baby monkeys and crystals in our hands!” When the kids wonder how that can be true, you’ll unveil a new section of your classroom library, filled with books that teach about these topics and more.

This unit on nonfiction reading comes early in the year because it is important for children to know, right from the start, that books can teach them about submarines and thunder, dinosaurs and ipads. The Common Core and other world class standards suggest that there should be a 50/50 division between fiction and nonfiction across the whole day, across all grades. Whether your district adheres to those standards or not, their guidance on this front is solid. Think of how much of your reading is nonfiction: train schedules, restaurant reviews, websites, newspapers, blogs, professional books. Think of how much children need to learn about the world! Even to understand any one thing—say, how clouds form—they need to learn about weather, rain, the water cycle, evaporation, gravity, forms of water, rain, air, forecasting. All that, just to mull over the grey clouds rolling in overhead.

It’s early in first grade and your children have a lot of growing to do as readers of any text, not just nonfiction texts, so this unit balances support for nonfiction with support for reading processes. Children think of the first bend of the unit as being all about how nonfiction readers become super smart about topics, but you’ll know that as you rally children to learn all that they can from their books, you are also teaching comprehension strategies such as previewing the text, predicting, noticing text structure and synthesizing information from multiple sources (the picture, the print, the text boxes).

The second bend of the unit spotlights word solving and vocabulary. First graders need to make extraordinary progress over the course of this year. Many will move from a level D all the way to J. To move between those levels, students must integrate sources of information and develop flexibility at word solving on the run. You’ll teach readers to fix up their reading at, or close to, the point of error and to use all three sources of information to do so. Many of your students will be working on using parts of words to word solve, breaking longer words into parts, and using inflectional endings such as ‘ing’. It’s important to support their enthusiasm for this work, because as their books become more complex, words will become longer and they will need stamina for working through the hard parts. Some of those hard parts will involve unfamiliar, domain-specific vocabulary words. It will be important for your children to incorporate these words they encounter into their talk.

In the final bend you’ll shift your emphasis to building fluency and studying craft, teaching students to reread, to sound like an expert, and to notice craft moves.
GRADE 1 UNIT 3: READERS HAVE BIG JOBS TO DO: FLUENCY, PHONICS, AND COMPREHENSION

This unit, all about the reading process, comes at a time in the year where your readers will need to develop the independence necessary to make it to the finish line. That finish line encompasses so much more than a reading level—it’s also about the level of processing kids are doing in their reading and the mindset they have about what can sometimes feel like hard work. This unit sets children up to be able to read increasingly complex texts with accuracy, comprehension, and fluency, all of which require the development of great problem-solving skills. Think of this as the unit that helps you dismantle the training wheels. “Watch out for the bumps,” you’ll say, “But I know you can do this!”

Your main goal then, is to help your students move past the initial impulse to say, “Help me!” when faced with a tricky word or when meaning breaks down. You’ll teach them that when this happens, they can take a deep breath, have a little courage and say, “I can solve this myself!” To this end, you’ll help your readers to develop a repertoire of strategies they can have at their fingertips when the going gets rough. The good news is that first graders are collectors. And so in this unit, you will invite them to spread out not their baseball cards, but their reading strategies.

In the first bend, you’ll help your readers develop the mindset to take charge of their own reading. Children will learn to stop as soon as they encounter difficulty, draw from the strategies they’ve been accumulating all year, and then check to see that what they’ve done makes sense. In the second bend, you’ll focus on strengthening and expanding students’ word-solving strategies, reminding them to draw from multiple sources of information. The third bend shifts the attention toward monitoring for meaning. Children will learn strategies for maintaining meaning across large parts of text, as well as strategies for understanding new vocabulary. In the final bend, you’ll help readers pull together everything they’ve learned to problem solve on the run and read with fluency.

In this unit, as in many, partner work plays an important role. It will be important that your readers feel what it’s like when they understand the story, and are able to solve words—in other words, it’s important that they feel what it’s like when their reading is going well. A partner can help them to do this, getting a sense of what it will be like to eventually do this independently. There is something incredibly powerful about sharing learning as a classroom community. Learning together builds a sense of identity as a community. Now your readers belong to a community that sees themselves as the kind of people that watch out for problems and try to solve them.
GRADE 1 UNIT 4: MEETING CHARACTERS AND LEARNING LESSONS: A STUDY OF STORY ELEMENTS

As you are getting ready to send your first-graders off into the rest of their lives, the very best gift you can give them is the knowledge that books can truly function like the rabbit hole in *Alice and Wonderland*; or like the tornado in *The Wizard of Oz*, lifting readers off their feet and setting them down in new places, new times. This unit helps you do just that. After a sequence of units focused tightly on reading process, this one spotlights the nuts and bolts of story elements and the skills that are foundational to literal and inferential comprehension. It teaches empathy, imagination, envisioning, prediction—all of those key comprehension skills that add up to engagement.

You’ll start by leaning toward your kids, looking them in the eyes, and telling them, “Today, we are starting a brand new unit that will take you on lots of adventures. Every time you open a storybook, you’ll meet a character who is going places and doing things—and you’ll get to go, too.” As students travel with beloved characters to museums, zoos, imaginary islands, or the Jurassic Age, you’ll help them to each bring along a suitcase of strategies for making sense of these longer, more complex books.

The first bend invites readers to track the events of the story—using pictures and words to keep track of the plot and journey along with the character. Along the way, they’ll make predictions by anticipating what might come next. You’ll also teach readers strategies for holding onto longer and more complex stories and determining importance to retell key details in sequence.

The second bend shifts to a closer study of characters, helping readers learn all they can about main and secondary characters. You’ll teach children to draw from the details in the text to grow ideas about these characters and to read in a way that brings them to life.

You’ll also pave the way for interpretation work by showing students how to consider the messages in stories. In the third bend, you’ll teach children that stories contain life lessons, using the metaphor that cracking open a book is like cracking open a fortune cookie and finding a message hidden within. As first graders try on this deeper thinking, you won’t expect them to master this analytical work. Instead, celebrate their approximations and trust that by opening the door to thinking about the bigger message a story hopes to teach, you’ll help them to begin to think beyond what’s on the page—work that will continue well beyond first grade. The unit comes to close with readers recommending favorite stories to others, passing along those life lessons.
GRADE 2 UNIT 1: SECOND GRADE READING GROWTH SPURT

Second grade is a year in which children grow by leaps and bounds, not just on the playground, but also in the classroom, as readers. To cement children’s expectations for a year in which they’ll grow and grow and grow as readers, you’ll remind them of the beloved tale, “Jack and the Beanstalk,” explaining that researchers who study young kids as readers say that during second grade, readers grow just like that beanstalk.

You’ll suggest to your students that whereas first graders spend more of their mental energy on reading the words, second graders can often read more words, more easily. And, this growing ease with word reading leaves more energy for thinking more deeply about books. The move from a “little-kid” focus on print to a “big-kid” focus on meaning is a challenging one, and yet it is necessary if your children are to develop into avid readers. This unit is written to create the mindset needed to rally them around the hard work of outgrowing themselves as readers.

In the first bend of the unit, you point out that in order to grow, readers need to take charge of their growth. Readers choose not only what to read, but also how to read. This portion of the unit highlights the importance of goals and the magical combination of fluency and comprehension. In Bend II, you’ll let your children know that grown up readers don’t wait around for others to help them with the hard parts. You’ll say, “When second-grade readers come to a tricky word, they don’t just say, ‘Help me, help me!’ Instead, second-graders roll up their sleeves and get to work! They draw on everything they already know to figure out that hard word.”

As your students progress towards reading more complex texts, they’ll be working with texts that contain longer parts (chapters, sections, paragraphs) and this will require more retention across the entire book. And it is not just that the books and the sections of the books that are longer, the sentences will also be longer and will contain more complex language structures. Meanwhile the number of poly-syllabic words increases dramatically, requiring readers to read across the word, breaking the word into syllables, in order to use parts of words they know to figure out the difficult words. This requires students to reach for new strategies.

In the third and final bend, readers learn to read like writers. You’ll start by letting your children know that every time they react in their books—every time they giggle or gasp or sigh—it’s because the author did something special in the writing to evoke that reaction. Each time they have a reaction, they can ask themselves, “How did the author do that?” The three bends, then, focus on fluency and comprehension, word solving, reading like a writer, and making reading-writing connections.

It will be critical to make reading as social as possible this year. Second-graders are, in a way, like a young version of adolescents. Just as this is the age when they need to push away adults, saying, “I can do it on my own!” This is also the age when they want to be with their peers. Throughout this unit and this year, you’ll use partners, and eventually clubs, to invite readers to share their opinions, to debate with each other, to figure out things together, to prove their points—that is, to collaborate.
GRADE 2 UNIT 2: BECOMING EXPERTS: READING NONFICTION

By the time you start this second unit of second grade, your reading workshop will be off and running. Your kids will be matched to books, and hopefully reading up a storm. For those who are flourishing as readers, this unit will offer them an important new challenge, and for those who may not yet have self-identified as readers, this unit offers a new way to connect with reading. They may find that reading suits them better when they’re studying text boxes, cross-sectional views and charts, and learning about dinosaurs, the Milky Way, and race cars.

So as this unit begins, you will tell your students that for a time, they’ll shift from reading fiction to reading nonfiction. For now, they’ll say goodbye to Ivy and Bean, and to Captain Underpants—and hello to nonfiction. And that’s a big deal. Research suggests that first-graders read nonfiction for only 3.6 minutes a day. Chances are good that most second-graders don’t get much more access to nonfiction than that. So this unit will put you on the cutting edge of primary language arts instruction.

This unit is an opportunity not only to teach your students skills, but also to support them in developing broader and richer understanding of reading. Think of the topics they have yet to explore. For most of your students, books about other nations or what happens underground or Congress or volcanoes will all open whole new horizons. By teaching kids to read nonfiction, you teach them to explore and to construct for themselves a knowledge of the world. It’s a big world out there, waiting for your students to read it!

In the first bend of this unit, you send your readers off to read lots of different books on different topics. You’ll challenge them to live wide-awake lives, setting themselves up to learn more about topics that are in their schema, as well as to allow books to take them to whole new topics.

Meanwhile you’ll teach your children that nonfiction readers put pages of text together. They study, they notice details, they question the text. You’ll help children approach nonfiction texts with questions and ideas in mind, and to navigate and read nonfiction in voices that match the content.

As you move into the second bend, students continue to read nonfiction books of their own choosing and to do all the intellectual work you’ve taught them to do, only now you also highlight resourceful word solving and vocabulary development. The books your children are reading will be far more challenging than those they used to read, and they’ll definitely encounter unfamiliar vocabulary words that will pose challenges for them. They need to be ready to use context to help them figure out what a word is apt to mean. To engage in that sort of figuring-out work, readers need to monitor for sense and to stop at the point of error, rather than just skipping past or mumbling over the tricky words. As readers do this work, one of the challenges will be for them to zoom in and pause to solve a challenging word, while not dropping their grip on the larger content that is being taught in the book.

Once you move into the third bend, students will begin to read from text sets, choosing a topic to read about and connecting, comparing, and contrasting information inside and across texts. It is a big deal to teach readers that they can read to take in new knowledge. They need to know that part of what they will do in their minds as they read is to compare new knowledge to known knowledge, and to compare and contrast information they learn from one text, another, and another. The important thing is that you’ll help your children read nonfiction to learn. You are teaching your kids that they can actually learn about a topic in the world without needing a teacher. Books can be their teachers.
At the start of this unit, you’ll say, “Readers, you know how there are scientists who study bees, and there are scientists who study hurricanes? Well, there are also scientists who study reading. There are professors of reading; to study reading, they go into classrooms just like ours, with their clipboards and their pens behind their ears, and they watch and listen to kids reading.” You go on to say that these research scientists have found that second grade is a time for readers to experience an enormous growth spurt.

This is an important message to communicate because too often, second-graders get into a holding pattern. As expectations on third-graders sky rocket, it has become especially important that second-graders maintain the growth curve that characterizes first grade.

Each of the first three bends focuses on an important foundational reading skill. In the first, the focus is on fluency—what researcher Timothy Rasinski refers to as the bridge between phonics and comprehension. A solid body of evidence suggests that kids can be taught to get better at fluency, and this improvement leads to overall improvements in reading. In this unit, you’ll teach phrased reading and rereading, as well as fluent expressive reading. Children who read slowly—fewer than 70 words per minute—may have a hard time accumulating text. They may be able to tell you what’s happening on the page but they may be less able to talk about how that page fits with earlier pages in the book. You’ll teach students to work at a just-right reading rate, doing so in ways that improve comprehension.

In the second bend, you’ll help children explore figurative language. As students move into more sophisticated texts, the language becomes more complex. They’ll be reading passages such as this one: “I love my hair because it is thick as a forest, soft as cotton candy, and curly as a vine winding upward...” or this: “Her baby wings were as limp and useless as wet paper.” You’ll teach students to read closely and to monitor for sense so that when they reach passages like these, they stop to ponder over what the author may have wanted them to think and feel by choosing those images.

When most of your children’s books were episodic, comprised of a sequence of mini-chapters such as one sees in *Frog and Toad*, they didn’t need to keep as many characters, events, and places in mind as they need to do now. In Bend III, you will teach comprehension strategies that help them capture what has happened in one part of a text and carry that forward as they read on. Finally, in the fourth and final bend, children will choose goals for themselves from all that you have taught and work with a club in pursuit of that goal.

Your second graders are ready to be challenged in new ways, tackling longer and harder books. This unit focuses on three aspects of reading: fluency, literary language, and tracking longer texts. We encourage you to bring your own new energy and resolve to this unit on building foundational skills, so that the work feels interesting, fresh, and challenging—yet within your readers’ grasp.
GRADE 2 UNIT 4: SERIES BOOK CLUBS

Your second graders have now blossomed into almost-third-graders, and will now be tackling chapter books in this last unit. Many young readers will be more able now to orchestrate all the sources of information and to get through tough words with increasing ease. However, this confidence can also cause children to fall into the habit of whizzing through their reading, not monitoring for sense. You may find that some readers need encouragement to slow down so as to read more closely. This unit provides many opportunities to engage children in looking at the text carefully, thinking about what the text is saying and about how the writer is saying it.

In the first bend of this unit, students will begin reading a series with their partners, collecting information about the main characters of their books. As this part of the unit progresses, you’ll encourage them to think and talk together about the similarities and differences that they find across the series. Then, you’ll form clubs by joining sets of two partnerships to continue to study the series together. Your students will likely relish the chance to talk to clubmates about the beloved cast of characters in their shared series, and in so doing, they will develop bigger ideas than they would have developed on their own.

As students move forward into slightly more challenging books, the recurring characters in a familiar series and the predictability of these books will provide support for their comprehension. Your students will become far more adept at the foundational skills upon which all fiction readers rely: previewing, envisionment, prediction, monitoring for sense, inferring, and understanding characters and other story elements.

In the next bend, students will start rereading a book in their series and engaging in inquiry, thinking about the craft the writer uses. They will study ways authors use word choice, figurative language, punctuation, and even patterns to construct their series. Students will uncover the craft that the author uses to hook readers into the series and link the books together. Then they will come together in their book clubs to read parts aloud, and to talk across the series, comparing similarities and differences from book to book.

In the final bend, you’ll teach students to invent ways to share their books with others. They will think about ways to share their opinions about the series books that they most love with others. They will swap books within and across a series, and this will give them lots of opportunities to talk together about why they fell in love with a particular book. At the end of this bend, they will also begin to learn how to hold debates inside their clubs as another way to share and grow bigger ideas about books.
GRADE 3 UNIT 1: BUILDING A READING LIFE

This unit launches not just this year, but also your kids’ lives as upper elementary school readers. The unit helps your students see themselves as people who care about reading. Your students will collaborate with each other and with you to turn the classroom into a good place for reading, devising systems for book recommendations and plans for organizing the classroom library.

Right from the start of third grade, your emphasis will not only be on getting students to love reading, but also on helping them work with resolve to ramp up their reading skills. This will begin with them reflecting on performance assessments and using new learning progressions to ratchet up the level of their work on those assessments. You’ll show your students that with deliberate effort, they can accelerate their skills in ways that are visible to them, to each other, and to you. This first bend in the unit gets readers started keeping track of their reading and studying their data to set goals and make plans.

Over the rest of the unit, you’ll continue to fan children’s love of reading as you read aloud Stone Fox (or another book of your choice) and your children read within-reach fiction books they’ve chosen. You’ll equip your kids with ways to check on their literal comprehension and to use fix-up strategies when they’ve lost the thread of the story. You’ll also stress key foundational skills such as synthesis. As books get longer, it is important for readers to grasp how a new part of a story fits with earlier parts.

Without foundational skills in word solving and vocabulary, third graders will not be able to do the work expected of them in literal comprehension, interpretation, or analytic reading. You’ll support kids who need to strategies for tackling multi-syllable words and figurative language. Fluency is also a very big deal for third-graders. The unit will not only help children who read robotically, in two- or three-word phrases, but it will also help proficient third-grade readers who are finding that as the sentences they’re reading become longer and contain more subordinate clauses and parenthetical phrases, they again need some support with fluency.

The unit also supports envisionment and prediction—two foundational skills that are almost extensions of each other and that when taken together, allow readers to walk in the shoes of a character. When readers do this, it is almost impossible for them not to predict—they read, anticipating, worrying, co-constructing the story line. For readers to predict what will happen next in a story, they must draw on their theories about characters’ traits, about the theme of a story, about the unfolding story structure. Prediction and envisionment, then, require that readers move beyond reading with blinders on, and instead keep in mind both the page at hand and the entire book—that which is behind them and that which lies ahead. The commitment to support prediction and envisionment, then, is a commitment to helping youngsters engage in minds-on-fire reading.
GRADE 3 UNIT 2: READING TO LEARN: GRASPING MAIN IDEAS AND TEXT STRUCTURES

This unit is one of many in this series that supports students in developing a rich life of nonfiction reading. In fact, this unit could be titled, “Foundational Skills of Nonfiction Reading,” because it addresses skills that are essential to reading nonfiction.

You will teach youngsters that readers of nonfiction read a long stretch of a nonfiction text, then pause after reading that long chunk of text to grasp what the author highlighted as especially important. The little facts that matter are those that support, illustrate, and embody the big ideas, and readers aim to construct a mental summary, complete with big ideas and supporting details. You’ll help your third graders know that it is important for them to be able to read an informational text in such a way that they can turn around and teach the main idea and the supporting points to someone else. That will be easiest for them to do if they approach a new expository text anticipating that it will follow the template that they’ll soon refer to as “boxes and bullets.” If your third-graders expect an infrastructure of big ideas followed by supportive information, and if they learn to use text features, white space, and transitional phrases to help discern that infrastructure, they will be able to glean what matters from texts.

The main work in Bend I involves teaching children to read expository nonfiction with eagerness, interest, and fluency, ascertaining the main ideas and recognizing the infrastructure of a text. Bend II helps readers go beyond that work to compare texts, think critically, and apply the information they learned. You’ll encourage readers to ponder over what they have read—agreeing with it, disagreeing, and comparing it to other texts and to prior knowledge. You remind them that they read differently when they know they are going to participate in conversations about their reading, and you’ll help them know they can have conversations in their own minds as a way to grow ideas.

Finally in Bend III, you will help children navigate narrative nonfiction texts, using their knowledge of story structure to help them determine importance. You’ll be amazed at how your children’s grasp of biographies improves when they stop recording minor facts—the name of the subject’s elementary school—and look instead for traits, motivations, challenges, and ways of overcoming challenges. Students will also be taught how to shift between reading with a lens of story and reading them with a lens of gleaning information.

This unit not only spotlights nonfiction, it also provides students with skills that are foundational to reading nonfiction in our 21st century world.
K-5 UNIT Summaries

GRADE 3 UNIT 3: CHARACTER STUDIES

Talk to any avid reader about the book he or she is reading, and that reader will tell you about the characters. It is characters who lure us into books, and characters who keep us reading. How much we love a character affects how much we love the book. A deeply unsatisfying character often leaves us with a sense of something lacking, whereas a character who grows and changes leaves us oddly proud, as if we had something to do with it!

This unit begins with a close study of characters. In the first bend, you invite children to get to know characters by studying them deeply, first observing, then coming up with ideas, then investigating patterns that reveal deeper traits and motivations to articulate evidence-based theories. Readers will use those theories to make predictions as they follow their character on his or her journey across the story—a journey that follows the shape of a predictable story mountain, as they will learn in the next part of the unit. This focus on story arc and on the interaction between character and other story elements, is part of the work of seeing the character as part of the larger story. Students will learn that what characters do in stories influences both other characters and the events that unfold.

This work brings with it new challenges. In second grade, your students may have found it relatively easy to point to the problem and the solution in a story, or to a character’s traits, or to the way a character changed. All of that becomes vastly more difficult as children begin to read longer and more nuanced books. It can sometimes take a fair amount of thinking for a third-grade reader to figure out ways in which the character changes across a book. Has the character come to a new realization? Did the character’s behavior change? And what key moments contributed to the change?

Of course, to truly grasp the essence of stories, students need to deepen their interpretation skills and consider what big lessons a character might be learning through the problems that he or she faces, and this relates to the larger messages or ideas a story aims to convey. The big new work for third grade is that children will learn to express a lesson at some length and support their thinking with details from the story.

This unit will continue to support students in the foundational skills that were front and center during the first fiction unit of the year. You’ll assess your students’ abilities to be resourceful word solvers, drawing both on context clues and on their knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, and some common root words to figure out new words. You’ll notice whether your kids’ abilities to envision and predict are strong. Pause at a spot in a read-aloud when most readers would predict, and then say to your students, “Jot what you think will happen next!” Ask students to assess their predictions against the learning progression that they came to know well earlier this year. By doing this, you will not only check in on your students’ abilities to predict, you’ll also remind students that all of your teaching is meant to make a lasting difference.

Finally, the third bend of this unit directly supports students in doing the important compare and contrast work that is expected of them. They will compare and contrast not only characters, but also the problems characters encounter and how they react, the settings, and the lessons characters learn (the themes authors convey).
GRADE 3 UNIT 4: RESEARCH CLUBS: ELEPHANTS, PENGUINS, AND FROGS, OH MY!

This unit is one of our favorites. Teachers who piloted it were flat-out astonished at the level of energy from their kids, and at the growth the children made. One of the minilessons preaches the importance of approaching a topic with zeal, and that rallying cry became a mantra for many of the classes that piloted the unit.

To begin Bend I, your kids form clubs, and each club studies an animal. You’ll teach your children to preview the collection of texts on their animal and then to each take a subtopic at a time and read across books on that subtopic, starting with an easier book so as to develop the background knowledge needed to handle more detailed and challenging texts. As one club member researches the animal’s habitat and another, the animal’s life cycle, you’ll teach them all to synthesize and organize what they are learning. Your budding researchers will also use the learning progression to ratchet up their skill levels as they engage in reading for the main idea and cross-text synthesis.

In Bend II, clubs transfer what they learned into the study of a second animal. Eventually you’ll teach children to compare and contrast across animals—you and the children will be surprised to learn that yes, spiders and tigers actually are the same in some ways! The unit will end with children applying their knowledge of animals to solve real-world problems, such as creating a better habitat for animals in zoos or investigating why certain animals are no longer thriving in their environments.

This unit, then, is more than a unit on information reading. It is a unit on research. Information is exploding at a breathtaking pace and the young people in your care need to turn to texts as their teachers, learning from them as they learn from you. This unit has the power to change your students’ lives, not because they will learn about dolphins or turtles, but because they will learn to learn—perhaps the single most important academic skill we can offer our students as we set them out into the world.

This unit is a precursor to a similar unit that is taught in fourth grade, when children study different forms of extreme weather in groups. This unit also sets the stage also for independent research projects that students tackle in fifth grade. Expect, then, that the work your kids undertake will be challenging, and they won’t entirely master it. The only way in which our children will possibly be ready for the challenges of the 21st century is if we invite them into heady intellectual work.
GRADE 4 UNIT ONE: INTERPRETING CHARACTERS: THE HEART OF THE STORY

In fourth grade, you’ll help your students read deeper, seeing more in texts. A character study is a perfect venue for getting your students to read with this sort of deep engagement. You will rally students’ enthusiasm for building substantial ideas about characters—ideas that are grounded in evidence, not lightweight ideas.

Many students will enter fourth grade reading to grasp the sweep of a story, so it will be important that as they move into more complex texts, you teach them to read more closely and to see significance in the small details. You’ll read aloud a text that invites this work; the unit is built around DiCamillo’s The Tiger Rising, but you could substitute another text if you prefer.

Whereas in third grade, students learned to pay attention to what characters say and do, recognizing how this gives them windows into character traits, they’ll now give special attention to the complexity of their characters, realizing they are people with complications and flaws. By helping children see the bigger issues with which characters are grappling, you lead them to build on their work with characters in order to think also about themes. Fourth-graders are expected to read, developing and testing ideas on the run, in addition to being able to look back and trace a theme through different parts of the story.

As your students develop skills that are essential for interpretive and analytic reading of fiction—skills such as inference, interpretation, and thinking about craft and structure in texts—they’ll rely on the performance assessments and learning progressions to help them grasp concrete, accessible ways to lift the level of their work. They’ll learn that with deliberate goal-driven effort, they can form interpretations that are supported across a whole text and find meaning in recurring images, objects, and details.

Although you’ll be reading aloud realistic fiction, your students will devour fiction books of every genre. Your instruction will help them to draw on their knowledge of different fictional genres to position themselves to read actively and intensely from the start. If the story is a mystery, they’ll be trying to collect enough clues so they solve it before the crime solver does. If the story is fantasy, they’ll expect to learn about a quest. Whatever the genre, your students to be more alert to the structure of a story than ever before, because at this level, stories are not always told sequentially.
This unit continues the effort across the series to equip students to engage in the nonfiction reading work that is highlighted in every iteration of 21st century standards. In third grade, your students learned the importance of previewing nonfiction texts, asking, “How does this text seem to be structured?” and then using that sense of text structure to orient their reading. They learned that if the text is a traditional expository text, it pays off to look for the main idea and supporting points. If the nonfiction text is a narrative nonfiction text (as most biographies are, for example), it pays off to use a story frame to determine importance, looking for the main subject’s traits, motivations, problems, responses to problems, and eventual resolution. Although students were taught that basic work in third grade, it is work that requires a lot of continued instruction.

Bend I of this unit continues the work of helping students read texts with an awareness of the text structure—work that becomes more challenging as the texts become longer and more complex. The unit goes further, suggesting that when expository texts are organized into specific text structures such as problem-solution and compare and contrast, readers who discern this can use their knowledge of text structures to figure out what is and isn’t important in the text. For example, students reading an article about California’s drought can think, “This looks like a cause and effect text!” and then be alert for a list of effects. Those finding cue words such as “Similarly, . . .” and “However, these differ because. . .” can set up mental or physical note taking systems which prepare them to list ways things are similar and ways they are different.

The reader who can distill the main ideas and important points of a nonfiction text is able to summarize. Learning to summarize requires not only that students can informally outline a text, but that they can be selective, as summaries should be brief. This work is highlighted in the Common Core and other global standards. It is important intellectual work because readers need to get their mental arms around a text in order to think about and off-from that text, critiquing and applying the contents of it.

During Bend I, students read far and wide, picking up any nonfiction text that interests them. They start reading easy texts and doing important work with them. Then they choose more challenging texts, and with your help, do similar work with those texts. Within this context of high-interest engagement, you bring kids backstage to show them that reading as a researcher is well within their grasp. Research is poking and prying with a purpose in mind, not unlike what they did when they were little and found an earthworm lying sprawled across the sidewalk.

In Bend II, children will form research teams to poke and pry into topics related to extreme weather and natural disasters. One group will take on hurricanes. Another will study tsunamis, earthquakes, drought, floods, and tornadoes. You’ll help each team and each reader to research one subtopic and then another, reading across their source material to learn about the causes or effects of the event, or the ways of measuring, forecasting, and preparing for it. Your teaching will support cross-text synthesis, channeling kids to think about how new information can add to or challenge information they have already learned, and the learning progressions will function as co-teachers, helping to show students concrete ways that with elbow grease, they can improve their work. You’ll also teach readers to adjust their reading strategies when reading dense scientific portions of their texts, such as scientific explanations and the graphs.

Bend III will have students taking on a different, yet related topic of extreme weather or natural disaster. Students will practice close reading and comparing and contrasting content between texts, as well as aspects of authorial intent, such the tone and craft. Readers also practice evaluating sources to determine their credibility. This unit ends with several options for celebration, one which calls students to live their lives differently in the light of what they have learned: to be activists for awareness around extreme weather and natural disaster events.
GRADE 4 UNIT 3: READING HISTORY: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

This unit is about the American Revolution and the beginnings of this country. It’s about the Sons of Liberty, the Minutemen, and Constitutional Convention. But actually, if you are teaching this unit in Singapore or Finland, or if you are teaching from a state that teaches the American Revolution in fifth grade (not in fourth), the unit would still stand as a unit on researching history.

This unit builds on the work of the first fourth-grade nonfiction unit, Reading the Weather, Reading the World, and guides students on a journey of learning to read like historians. In the first bend, students embark on a research project about the events leading up to the American Revolution. You’ll teach them how to begin building knowledge by reading accessible texts, showing them how researchers lean on text structures to organize their notes and their thinking. As students focus on a subtopic, you’ll teach them how to synthesize new information with what they already know, paying special attention—as historians do—to the people, geography, and chronology. You’ll also teach students strategies for tackling more difficult primary sources.

Bend II moves the chronology to the eve of the American Revolution. Students continue their research, preparing to debate the question of independence from Great Britain. You will teach them that historians study multiple points of view to gain a complete picture of past events. Students will prepare to take sides on this great question, with some researching the Patriots’ viewpoint, and others researching the Loyalists’ perspective. As they gather evidence and angle it to support their side, they will hone their skills of supporting a position with reasons and solid evidence. The bend culminates with a reenactment of the Second Continental Congress, with your students debating the question of independence for America.

In Bend III, students work in partnerships to begin a new research project on the time period after the Second Continental Congress. After students orient themselves to their new topics by reading accessible texts, you will teach them strategies for tackling increasingly complex texts. You will teach them to preview and paraphrase, and to study all parts of a text to extract the main ideas. Vocabulary will have a special emphasis, as you teach strategies for learning the definitions of new domain-specific words and using those words at a deeper level. Approaching the end of the bend, you will teach students how to draw on their growing body of knowledge to consider new questions and answers about their topic. Your students will begin to see how the past and the present are connected, and how the past continues to affect us today.
GRADE 4 UNIT 4: HISTORICAL FICTION CLUBS

In this final unit of study in fourth grade, readers dive into historical fiction book clubs. These clubs invite students to begin reading analytically right from the start, to synthesize complicated narratives, to compare and contrast themes, and to incorporate nonfiction research into their reading. It’s a beautiful intellectual journey, and the stories themselves sweep the children along with their exciting dramas. No matter your readers’ levels, this unit of study will deepen their comprehension, their text analysis, and their knowledge.

The unit is structured so that children are divided into small clubs. Each club will read several novels set within a historical time period, and research nonfiction, including primary sources such as historical images. Anchoring the work will be an all-class immersion in Number the Stars, Lois Lowry’s award winning book about a young girl in Denmark coming of age during WWII. It’s a story of courage and awakening. The minilessons in the unit of study use this text as a demonstration text. Children, meanwhile, will practice and extend the work in their club novels. You’ll see an emphasis on transfer across the unit, as children consider how work that was introduced in Number the Stars plays out in other historical fiction. Children will also read several novels, as well as a picture book, so that the unit is truly a study of this literary genre, not one book.

At the start of the unit, in Bend I, you’ll help readers to read analytically, inviting them to analyze complicated settings and multiple plotlines. The emphasis here is on monitoring for comprehension in harder books, and on synthesizing more complex story elements. Readers learn to consider how one part of a text is related to the rest of the text, which means thinking and talking deeply about craft and structure. This work is crucial as your readers move up levels of text complexity, and your conferring and small-group work will also focus on helping children make their reading practices more complex as they read more complicated novels.

Bend II shines a light on interpretation, helping students to engage in ambitious intellectual work and building on the work in Unit 1, Interpreting Characters: The Heart of the Story. Your readers will learn to assess their own interpretations of theme by holding in their mind an internalized sense of the qualities of a strong interpretation, and comparing their work with this list. Indeed, working to raise the level of their thinking work is the main work students will do in this bend, and you’ll see that the focus of your teaching will be on moving children to do more intellectual work with more independence.

In Bend III, you’ll invite readers to think between relevant nonfiction texts and their novels. They will think about how the information from nonfiction texts enlarges their understanding of the characters, their struggles, their perspectives, their insights, and their knowledge of history. Students will call on strategies for reading nonfiction to glean knowledge and to apply it to other texts. This bend has a strong cross-text emphasis, with children learning to think across fiction and nonfiction, across story and history, and across the books they have read now, in the past, and their own life.
GRADE 5 UNIT 1: INTERPRETATION BOOK CLUBS: ANALYZING THEMES

Right from the start, this unit goes for the gold, teaching students the best of what it means to read literature. Teachers who piloted this book said they’d never seen such extraordinary work from their children. The quality of work probably comes, in large part, from expectations. The fact that students work in clubs within a week or two of the start of fifth grade is emblematic of the way this unit conveys that fifth grade will be a time for intellectual independence and heady expectations.

In Bend I, you’ll set students up to participate in an intellectual growth spurt by rallying them to take seriously the challenge to write well about their reading. For now, your children will read fiction books of their own choice. Meanwhile the strategies you teach to lift the level of their writing about reading will remind them to draw on a repertoire of ways for reading closely and thoughtfully, alert to the interaction of story elements and aware of details that seem to represent big ideas. You’ll help them look at the text through the lens of their first tentative ideas and questions, so that as they read on in a text, they develop evidenced-based accountable theories. You’ll demonstrate this work using a rich read aloud text—

we’ve built the unit around Home of the Brave but you could substitute another text if you prefer.

Then in Bend II, you organize the class into clubs, each of which convenes around multiple copies of a shared novel. You’ll channel those clubs to study novels with nuanced characters and multiple subplots, and then you’ll help students read asking, “What might this book be REALLY about?” Fifth-graders are at an age when almost everything stands for something else. Sneakers can be a symbol of fitting in or of individuality, an overheard comment can mean (at least for the moment) the ending of a friendship. Asking your students to take seriously the challenge of reading interpretively in the company of friends is a perfect way to start fifth grade!

After your students name the most important thing a text teaches, you’ll teach them to think, “Okay, and what else might this teach?” The expectation that a novel supports more than one theme will nudge them to take up aspects of the text that aren’t accounted for by the theme that springs first to mind. As this bend unfolds, you will help students know that their job is not just to think about more than one overarching idea, but also to weigh which details from the text best support each of those themes and which theme is most important in this story. Sorting, categorizing, and ranking details needs to become a natural part of the interpretive process.

By Bend III, you’ll lift the level of students’ thinking about texts by helping them notice the ways different authors develop the same theme, and you’ll help them compare and contrast several texts that develop a similar theme. How do these two texts—both of which deal with the issue of loss—develop their theme differently? As students approach middle school, expectations for analytic reading increase. Think of analytic reading as the sort of intellectual work that a scholar does, pulling back from a text and surveying it with dispassionate objectivity, hoping to understand how the pieces fit together. This is work that the Common Core and other global standards highlight, and it is work that students who write and who read like writers have long done. When students step back from a text and think, “How does this part contribute to the whole text?” or “What is the work this portion of the story does for the whole story?” or “Why might the author have done this?” the payoff is immense, both in reading and students’ own writing.
GRADE 5 UNIT 2: TACKLING COMPLEXITY: MOVING UP LEVELS OF NONFICTION

The nonfiction texts your fifth-graders are reading are complex; they raise significant challenges. Gone are the supportive headings and subheadings, as well as the pop-out sentences that highlighted main ideas in the passages your students used to read. What’s more, engaging visuals and catchy fonts can make these texts appear deceptively simple, leaving readers to gloss over complexities and lose track of meaning.

This unit teaches students to embrace complexities in their high-interest nonfiction texts. Across Bend I, you’ll rally students to join you in a giant investigation into the ways nonfiction texts are becoming complex, and you’ll equip students with skills and strategies that help them tackle these new challenges. You’ll teach students that readers of nonfiction come to texts expecting to encounter multiple main ideas, some implicit. Then, rather than listing all the details that support each main idea, you’ll teach readers to think, “What are the strongest supportive details?” and to sort and rank those details.

Reading complex nonfiction requires strong foundational reading skills, so this bend emphasizes fluency, orienting to texts, and word solving. A particular spotlight is placed on increasing vocabulary demands, and you’ll teach students to look around words and look inside words to determine the meaning of new words. Taken together, this work supports students as they summarize complex texts.

If your fifth-graders expect to encounter complexities in their texts, and if they learn that instead of becoming discouraged they should turn to strategies for support, then they will be able to independently tackle challenges in texts. The far-reaching impact of what you teach in this bend will show itself in the ways your students deal with the difficulties they encounter in texts long after they have left you.

Across Bend II, your fifth-graders will pursue independent inquiry projects on the topic they are most interested in, be it infectious diseases, outer space, or their favorite pop star. You’ll rally students to first learn through primary research, conducting surveys, interviews, and observations, and to use that research to identify main ideas, so they return to texts on their topics with expert eyes. The first unit for fifth grade, Interpretation Book Clubs: Analyzing Themes, placed a special emphasis on writing about reading from fiction texts, and your teaching now will help students write about their nonfiction reading in ways that are similarly engaging and productive. Across this work, you will support students in transferring everything they’ve learned about making meaning from complex texts to texts on their inquiry topic.

Reading analytically is a very big deal for fifth graders. You’ll support students in analyzing differences in perspective across texts, particularly differences that tie into craft or structure decisions an author makes. You’ll also support skills such as cross-text synthesis. As students read across texts on their inquiry topics, they need to not only form categories that capture their learning as they read deeply within a subtopic, but they also need to notice contradictions within texts and think deeply about what might be causing those contradictions. Then, too, growing ideas matters. You’ll encourage your fifth-graders to move beyond reading a text and taking its ideas at face value, to instead thinking deeply about a text, to make their own connections and spark their own ideas, so they are ready to contribute their own thinking to the grand conversations on their topics.

Your students do not need to wait until they are adults to see the power of embarking on a learning journey, one that feeds a passion or question of their own. John Dewey wrote, “Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself.” Across this unit, you will communicate to students that following interests of their own matters and is valued in your classroom. Being a strong reader of nonfiction and an independent researcher leads you to live more deeply.
GRADE 5 UNIT 3: ARGUMENT AND ADVOCACY: RESEARCHING DEBATABLE ISSUES

This unit continues to take students along the path of the ambitious reading work in which it is necessary for them to engage in order to meet the expectations of global standards, as well as to live as active, critical citizens. The standards call for students to read across multiple points of view on topics or issues, comparing ideas, information, and perspectives. This is also work that is at the heart of being an informed citizen—understanding different positions on issues and the reasons behind these positions, analyzing the strengths and merits of each of these positions and ultimately, forming one’s own thoughtful viewpoint on an issue.

In Bend I of this reading unit, you’ll rally students into work that is foundational to the unit—the work of analyzing arguments—with a one-day argument intensive in which students read and analyze a variety of arguments. With this experience in mind, students will then work in research clubs, each club studying a debatable, current issue. (Should we ban or support zoos? Are extreme sports worth the risks?) To study the issue, students will read text sets included in the unit which are designed to offer different perspectives on each issue. Students will read a variety of informational and argumentive texts, and then debate the issue, work which will push their cross-texts synthesis skills to new heights, as well as support their abilities to make their own arguments. Across the bend, they will continue to engage in debates, while you ramp up the level of their research, teaching them that research is a cycle of reading and thinking in response to that thinking and showing them how to summarize arguments.

This start of the unit, then, rallies students into work that the researcher Gerald Graff (2003) calls “central to being educated”—the work of listening closely to others, summarizing them in a recognizable way, and making your own relevant arguments” (p. 2).

In Bend II, you will continue to push students to dig deeper into research. They’ll develop deeper questions and new ideas on their issue, and they will engage in more complicated conversations. You will teach them to read and reread more difficult texts with a critical eye, showing students that they can consider and compare perspective, craft, and strength of argument, in addition to the information and ideas of the author as they read across texts on a topic. By the end of the bend, the debates you hear should be deeply informed and nuanced, showing students’ firm grasp of the complexity of the issues they have been studying.

In Bend III, you’ll rally students to study a new issue, reminding them to use all they have learned about research, reading informational and argumentive texts, and using conversations as tools for understanding. You’ll push them into higher-level critical literacies work by asking them to consider why texts were made and who benefits from them. Students will continue to apply critical and analytical lenses to the texts they read as they work to understand their new issue, debate these issues and formulate thoughtful, ethical, evidence-based, logical positions. By the end of the unit, you’ll show them the relationship between argument and advocacy and students will apply their argument writing practices to raise the awareness of others on the issue. This unit is intended to accompany The Research-Based Argument Essay Unit (Heinemann, 2013), though both units can be taught as stand alone units.
In this fourth and final unit of fifth grade, you’ll find an emphasis on developing students’ knowledge of literary traditions, encouraging students to read with more maturity and independence. The unit reflects an acute awareness that students will be going on in middle school and the rest of their lives as truly independent readers. We need to ensure they are ready to make their own way through longer and more complicated books, to form their own study groups around reading, and to work through hard parts with a toolkit of strategies and a sense of resiliency.

The unit is structured so children work in small book clubs, reading fantasy series. They’ll read several novels so they become deeply immersed in this literary genre, and also so they can develop the kind of higher level thinking skills needed to study how authors develop characters and themes over time. Indeed, whether students are reading Dragon Slayers’ Academy or The Harry Potter Series, they’ll synthesize details and make connections across hundreds of pages in this unit of study.

There is a tremendous emphasis on transfer in this unit. The teacher introduces new work through a read aloud of a riveting fantasy novel for children (we suggest The Thief of Always), as well as a few short texts. Meanwhile, students will practice this work across the several fantasy novels, each time exploring how the work differs slightly in different texts.

At the start of the unit, students will find that they need to read analytically right away, as they consider the work authors do at the very beginning of a novel to develop the setting as a physical place and a psychological one. Comprehension work really matters in more complex narratives. You’ll alert students to ways that novels become more challenging and lead your readers through more tricky narratives, teaching them, for instance, to learn alongside the main character, and to suspend judgment as they carefully analyze scenes that introduce new and complicated characters and places.

In Bend II, you’ll lead students to think metaphorically and analytically, teaching them to explore the quests and themes within and across their novels. You’ll also lead students to engage ever more deeply by considering the implications of the conflicts, themes, and lessons in the stories they read for the lives students lead and want to lead.

As you move into Bend III, you’ll focus students on dealing with the challenges that harder novels pose. Part of this work will involve really working on kids’ habits as readers—getting them, for instance, to go outside the book to build knowledge, or to not ignore hard words but to study how authors introduce them, and to use a variety of strategies to actively learn new vocabulary as they read.

Finally, in Bend IV, readers learn to capitalize on their expertise by investigating fantasy as a literary tradition—and studying how the thinking work developed through reading fantasy novels will pay off in other genres. Expect students to read hundreds of pages, to think and talk like young literary theorists, and to fall ever more in love with reading.
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A WORKSHOP CURRICULUM  ◆  Grade-by-Grade, K–5

Lucy Calkins and Colleagues from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project

“This series builds on decades of teaching and research—in literally tens of thousands of schools. In states across the country, this curriculum has already given young people extraordinary power, not only as readers, but also as thinkers. When young people are explicitly taught the skills and strategies of proficient reading and are invited to live as richly literate people do, carrying books everywhere, bringing reading into every nook and corner of their lives, the results are dramatic.” —Lucy Calkins

Following on the success of the Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing, the new grade-by-grade Units of Study for Teaching Reading, K–5, will:

▶ provide state-of-the-art tools and methods to help students move up the ladder of text complexity
▶ build foundational reading skills and strategies
▶ support the teaching of interpretation, critical reading, synthesis, and main idea
▶ offer classroom structures to support inquiry and collaboration
▶ help teachers use learning progressions to assess students’ reading work, develop their use of self-monitoring strategies, and set students on trajectories of growth
▶ give teachers opportunities to teach and to learn teaching while receiving strong scaffolding and on-the-job guidance.

Learn more at unitsofstudy.com/teachingreading