

Introduction to the Basal Alignment Project (BAP) – Sets of Revised Materials.

You are reading the collected work of hundreds of educators who volunteered to revise the questions, tasks, and directions for your reading program. This set of questions, the vocabulary words selected for you to discuss with your students, and the new culminating tasks for each text selection have all been carefully aligned to the Common Core English Language Arts Standards (CCSS).

This work is still in progress, so more units will be available during the school year, but this is a solid start for you to begin your teaching year with your students. As the writing teams and reviewers learn more about what works best, we will also offer suggestions and corrections through the site. You can sign up to be notified when changes are posted.

Because different district teams worked on different units and texts, you will notice there is not 100% consistency in the approaches and styles of these materials even though they might look uniform. This was the nature of the cooperative project and cultivated by design, as we felt teachers who used these materials would learn more if they saw a variety of approaches. Nor are these materials perfect by any means! We all did this work while we did all our other work. We all learned from and taught each other, argued and conceded points as we worked hard. These materials are solid. They are materials better matched to the Common Core ELA Standards – a bridge to let you and your students use your existing materials while new materials are developed. While they are not perfect, they are better, and they will allow you and your district to be selective when you judge your next purchases of materials. BAP is designed to be a temporary solution, not a permanent one.

We all agreed that doing this work was the richest professional development we could have possibly received on the shifts the Common Core ELA standards need us to make. We encourage you to use these as “before and after” experiences with your colleagues too and to study the standards for the grades you work with to see why these revised units are better aligned than your existing materials. Then, use the training templates and support materials to do revisions as professional development in your own setting!

We are hosting these materials on an open platform. They are yours to take and modify. But we do want you to come back and tell us and each other about the changes you made! Please feel free to form subgroups and communicate right here on the BAP site to discuss these materials and what it means to teach reading this way.

One thing that has not changed with the Common Core Standards is that students need to work with ideas in a variety of active ways. This is even truer when those ideas are expressed in complex or unfamiliar text. Students need to read, hear the text read aloud, reread sections themselves, think about things, and discuss them in pairs or small and large groups. They need to write, write, write about their ideas to discover what they really think and where the evidence is really leading them. We *already* feel that we did not emphasize enough the variety of tools and approaches you should employ with these texts and in having your students work with these questions. Good

teaching is still good teaching, so don't abandon the excellent techniques you already use while you make these shifts your own.

That said, you will notice several major differences in approach in these aligned materials. These are driven by the shifts in instruction called for by the Common Core ELA Standards:

- *The questions and tasks all focus on the core text itself, not on having students make personal connections or respond personally to the text.* The reading and learning students gather from the text are the focus. This increased focus on how much the text has to offer means much more of your class time will be spent discussing the text and not students' personal experiences. This also means you will *always* have to read the core text and these revised question sets carefully as you prepare to teach the core material each week.
- *The questions demand that students provide evidence from their reading to support their answers.* To do this well, your students will have to reread the text several times, sometimes with you, sometimes alone, sometimes in small groups or pairs.
- *It is critical that students have a solid command of the evidence they are providing in support of their answer.* This means that the evidence is accurate, relevant, and complete. These revisions all offer guidance for the evidence students should be providing for each question or activity.
- *There is not much emphasis on pre-reading activities.* Because they are rereading and focusing on the text, students will understand what they read better for themselves. There will be little need to preview the texts before students start to read and work with them each week. Knowing your students, you will have to judge when to lend them a helping hand or to provide needed background. But you should pre-read each text carefully to see what a reader can extract from the text itself.
- *The core text has only one set of questions and one set of vocabulary for all your students.* This means you will need to support your readers in a variety of ways: by encouraging them in the rereading process, framing the questions in a different way, modeling the writing expectations and the use of academic language, and occasionally reading aloud to them. When reading aloud, it is critically important your students always follow in the text. This will support fluency for all students and keep them focused on the text.
- *The questions are not built around a specific strategy; strategies are not the focus of instruction.* The questions are built around the core reading and the Standards. Students will use strategies to find evidence for their answers to the questions, but what strategies they use will depend upon what reading challenge they face. They will need modeling and discussion from you to learn these habits of reading and how to connect the right strategy to various challenges.
- *There is an intensive focus on students learning more about rich words and language.* Each revised unit contains a vocabulary quadrant immediately after the new set of questions. The writing teams worked very hard to identify all the rich academic words and any specific content words the text contained. Then, they thought long and hard about whether or not there was enough support for students to learn the words from context. You need to insist that your students do this regularly. For all students to succeed with the level of rigor in the

Common Core, all students must grow their vocabulary. This means they must improve their ability to learn words in context and must have an understanding of far more abstract and rich words than they do now. There is more on vocabulary below.

This next section offers a brief rationale for the approach taken in these revised materials.

Pre-reading Activities and Basal Side Trips

Your basal series contains extensive pre-reading activities and extension activities connected to the core reading passage, often as many as 40 pages surrounding the core reading. Each activity takes time, a precious resource for elementary teachers and students. Since working with the aligned questions and tasks will take considerably more time, you are going to have to be choosier about what you decide to include and what you decide to ignore in this area.

Dr. Tim Shanahan recently noted that pre-reading “has run amok in America’s classrooms” (<http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/search/label/pre-reading>). We recommend you think carefully about whether your students really need the pre-reading and side activities provided and consider eliminating them entirely or thinning them considerably. Keep in mind that students will now be doing multiple readings of the central text. Ask yourself two related questions:

- Is this pre-reading *absolutely* essential to understand the text?
- Can careful reading and questioning support students to figure out much of the same information the pre-reading provides?

The information we often believe students need before reading a text can be provided *during* the questioning process. The benefit here is this: the same information can be provided if it is needed, but *after* students have had the opportunity to read the sections of text for themselves. That way, you and they can see what they could make of it through calling up the information from their own background or by inferring the information they needed through careful reading.

After all, if we want students to be able to read and learn for themselves eventually, we have to support them and offer them regular opportunities to learn how to be self-sufficient learners at all levels of their education. Learning to read independently and proficiently even when text is challenging is key to that self-sufficiency.

The revised questions, activities, and writing tasks will take longer than you are accustomed to spending on the core text. So, you need to consider the needs of your students carefully and allow yourself to be very selective about what side trips you make to the wide variety of extension activities the basal – and even these revisions – offer. We offer some concrete recommendations later.

Vocabulary:

The ability to determine a word’s meaning from context is essential to comprehending the increasingly complex text called for by the Standards. Only by developing the ability to learn words

from context will students develop the vocabulary they need to be successful readers. We considered the following when selecting words on which to spend time:

- *Words that need to be taught directly:* Words that are essential to understanding the text but are hard to determine from the context need to be provided directly to students. But you also need to spend time on words that are powerful academic (Tier 2) words likely to appear in their future reading *even if they are not* essential to understanding the text. In addition, words that are part of a semantic word family (base, basic, basically; or send, resend, sender) offer a bigger “bang for the buck,” as they provide a two or three to one payback. Most students will ignore these words unless you insist they develop the habit of noticing words and seeing what they add to the text.
- *Which words should be learned in context (often with the guidance of working in groups or with you, but sometimes on their own)?* Identifying these words is a challenge and worth time discussing specific words with colleagues and studying how they are placed in the text. Many of the liveliest discussions during our revision process were about whether or not the words selected could be figured out from context. The question is whether or not there is support in the text for getting a sense of how a word is being used and then whether or not your students should be expected to find and use that support. We did our best to point out these words and encourage this habit in your students by making questions that would send students back to gather the context clues and figure out a word’s meaning. But you will need to get good at this too and work with your students so they develop this skill more.
- *Which words should command more time and which less?* Abstract words (manage, incredible, fate, directly) require more time and attention than concrete words, even unusual ones (currents, docks, attaché case, souvenirs,). Abstract words have a variety of related meanings (it was an *incredible* game, his excuse was *incredible*, he is very direct, go directly to the office, she ignored a direct order) and, therefore, are likely to appear in a variety of contexts. They are also more complicated to explain and harder to grasp.
- *How should these words be taught?* Students need opportunities to use the words, to think about how the different meanings are in fact related, to wonder why an author chose this word and not another, to wonder how the text might be different with a different word, how the word differs from synonyms (how *incredible* is different from *unbelievable* or *amazing*). In sum, they need to think actively about the word and to hear and see it more than once before the meaning and nuances will stick. It is important to keep in mind that the appearance of the word in the text is the beginning of this learning. Because the student has been thinking about the text, it is likely the strongest avenue to this learning will be the discussion of how the word is used *here in this text*.

There will be times when vocabulary is directly integrated into a question or task. But we couldn’t do it for all the words worth your students’ time and consideration. We have identified many words worth students’ attention. They are worth all the time you can spend on them and more.

Each aligned set of replacement questions and tasks includes four boxes for vocabulary. Two boxes identify words that are essential to understanding the text; one includes words that students should be able to understand from context, and the other includes words you will probably have to tell

them the meaning of. The other two boxes contain words we think are especially worth more instruction, even if they aren't essential to the text you're studying. Again, these words are also separated according to whether you may have to provide the meaning or whether students should be encouraged to learn them from context. This may sound confusing, but the boxes are clearly labeled!

Finally, many of the texts contained in your basal do not meet the grade-level complexity called for Common Core Standards, but we have found that they all contain many words worth time and attention. For this reason, nearly all of the passages include between 20 and 30 words we have culled for instruction. The increased emphasis on vocabulary will help make up for the fact that these texts are not as complex as the standards call for. It will also improve your students' reading abilities.

Syntax (Sentence Structures):

Just as difficult and important as vocabulary is sentence structure (syntax). Syntax and vocabulary are the two features of text that most predict student difficulty (Nelson, Perfetti, Liben and Liben, in press 2012).

Hardly any of us have been taught to attend carefully to syntax with our students. But we have to, since that is the source of much of their struggle. The basals are silent on sentence structure, even when they address features of grammar and parts of speech. We have created questions and activities to address syntax in the revised question sets. But, just as we could not point out all the *words* that were worth time and attention, we could not point out every *sentence* in every text selection that was worth close study.

You will need to do more when you work with your students on the central text. Find those sections of the text that have the longest or most complicated/confusing sentences. If we did not provide a question that focuses attention here already, ask one yourself. Or ask your students to paraphrase the meaning of that sentence. At other times, you can ask your students to pull apart a long sentence and to revise it as two or three shorter sentences. Or you can take short, choppy sentences and have students combine them into one long sentence. These activities can all be done orally or in writing.

Another possibility is to ask what role that sentence plays in the paragraph or the whole passage: What would be different if that sentence were gone? As with vocabulary, the more time you can spend with these 'juicy sentences' (Lilly Wong Fillmore), the better off students will be as readers, writers, and speakers. While this is most true and important for your struggling readers and English learners, *all* your students will benefit from this work.

Fluency

As you know, struggling readers often need more work to achieve fluency. Their comprehension suffers greatly from their lack of fluency. You can use your central texts and the other materials in your reading program to work on improving fluency. Fluency improves best with repeated

readings of grade level text. It improves second best with students following along while they hear a fluent reader say the words and sentences they are seeing. We suggest that for each central text, you pick a fun or well-written section to use for multiple oral readings. This does not have to be done with students who are already fluent, but they would enjoy it too. Consider a dramatic reading of an exciting part, with students taking parts and practicing.

Culminating Assignments

Evidence-based text-dependent culminating assignments will, at first, feel new to you and your students. In every series, the culminating assignments were the most in need of revision to be aligned to the CCSS. All the strands of the ELA CCSS (reading, writing, speaking and listening, language) place a great emphasis on gathering evidence from what you read (or see or hear) and then presenting it as support for what you believe to be true about the subject or text being studied. Your students need lots of practice and modeling in how to do these sorts of tasks. Think of it as asking them to read like a detective and write like a reporter, and prepare to focus a lot of time and effort into these culminating assignments. We have tried to make them well worth that time and energy.

Using the Leveled Readers Provided:

As you know, the reading programs generally contain leveled readers for use in guided reading and additional practice. These texts tend to be far lower quality than the central text. The booklets designed for weaker readers are the thinnest and offer far too simple vocabulary. A steady diet of these words and sentences would starve any budding reader.

We did *not* make text-dependent questions for the leveled texts. We suggest that these texts be repurposed as much as possible for independent student reading to develop fluency and some vocabulary (though given the simplicity of the lower levels this would not be much). The reduction in instructional time spent with these texts could allow more time with the weaker readers on the more complex central passage, in building fluency, and in developing grade appropriate facility with vocabulary and complex syntax.

What else we did *not* do in the Basal Alignment Project:

As we mentioned earlier, basal reading programs contain far more than text passages and questions: many include grammar, word study (including phonics and spelling), science and social studies connections, authors' bios, and more. This project did not address any of these; it is up to each district or school to determine which of these features to include in instruction. This, of course, is nothing new. Very few schools or teachers were ever able to do everything in the basal.

Another note on the leveled readers: Leveled readers have been central in many classrooms. We believe they still have an important role to play, but in a Common Core aligned classroom they cannot be the main tool of reading instruction. This is because of Standard Ten, which requires that *all* students be able to read and understand grade level complex text (with scaffolding as

necessary). Leveled books for weaker readers are not generally at grade level, so they cannot be all students are exposed to.

But as we noted just above, your students will need plenty of access to a wide range of texts of all types and difficulty in order to provide them with the volume of reading they need. So, the leveled readers can be a great source to fill this need.

We also could not do anything to help you address the new balance of informational and narrative text called for in the CCSS. Elementary school students are supposed to read 50% informational text and 50% narrative. This is not the current balance in most classrooms or in your basal.

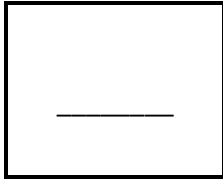
You will have to work with your colleagues at the school and district level to locate and develop more informational text. There *is* a source built in to some of the basal reading programs: the read aloud section. We noticed these texts were generally of high quality. They were usually recommended to read aloud, but we did not feel this would be necessary, as all the texts we examined fell within the grade level of complexity and were appropriate for students at that grade to read in a guided situation with you.

We are taking a clear stand on what work is most important. Working with these aligned questions and tasks will mean you will spend much more time with the central text each week than you probably did before. Again, you will have to work with your district and school curriculum teams and with colleagues to decide what other activities can be lessened or eliminated.

What Makes this Text Complex?

1. Quantitative Measure

Go to <http://www.lexile.com/> and enter the title of your text in the Quick Book Search in the upper right of home page. Most texts will have a Lexile measure in this database.



2-3 band	420-820L
4-5 band	740-1010L
6-8 band	925-1185L
9-10 band	1050-1335L
11-CCR band	1185-1385L

2. Qualitative Features

Consider the four dimensions of text complexity below. For each dimension*, note specific examples from the text that make it more or less complex.

Meaning/Purpose	Structure
Language	Knowledge Demands

3. Reader and Task Considerations

What will challenge my students most in this text? What supports can I provide?

How will this text help my students build knowledge about the world?

4. Grade level

What grade does this book best belong in?

*For more information on the qualitative dimensions of text complexity, visit http://www.achievethecore.org/content/upload/Companion_to_Qualitative_Scale_Features_Explained.pdf

Text Complexity: Qualitative Measures Rubric

INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

Text Title _____

Text Author _____

	Exceedingly Complex	Very Complex	Moderately Complex	Slightly Complex
PURPOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Purpose: Subtle, implied, difficult to determine; intricate, theoretical elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Purpose: Implied, but fairly easy to infer; more theoretical than concrete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Purpose: Implied, but easy to identify based upon context or source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Purpose: Explicitly stated; clear, concrete with a narrow focus
TEXT STRUCTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Organization of Main Ideas: Connections between an extensive range of ideas or events are deep, intricate and often implicit or subtle; organization of the text is intricate or specialized for a particular discipline <input type="radio"/> Text Features: If used, are essential in understanding content <input type="radio"/> Use of Graphics: If used, extensive, intricate, essential integrated graphics, tables, charts, etc., necessary to make meaning of text; also may provide information not otherwise conveyed in the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Organization of Main Ideas: Connections between an expanded range ideas, processes or events are deeper and often implicit or subtle; organization may contain multiple pathways and may exhibit traits common to a specific discipline <input type="radio"/> Text Features: If used, greatly enhance the reader's understanding of content <input type="radio"/> Use of Graphics: If used, essential integrated graphics, tables, charts, etc.; may occasionally be essential to understanding the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Organization of Main Ideas: Connections between some ideas or events are implicit or subtle; organization is evident and generally sequential <input type="radio"/> Text Features: If used, enhance the reader's understanding of content <input type="radio"/> Use of Graphics: If used, graphics mostly supplementary to understanding of the text, such as indexes, glossaries; graphs, pictures, tables, and charts directly support the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Organization of Main Ideas: Connections between ideas, processes or events are explicit and clear; organization of text is clear or chronological or easy to predict <input type="radio"/> Text Features: If used, help the reader navigate and understand content but are not essential <input type="radio"/> Use of Graphics: If used, simple graphics, unnecessary to understanding the text but directly support and assist in interpreting the written text
LANGUAGE FEATURES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Conventionality: Dense and complex; contains abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language <input type="radio"/> Vocabulary: Generally unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic language; may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading <input type="radio"/> Sentence Structure: Mainly complex sentences often containing multiple concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Conventionality: Complex; contains some abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language <input type="radio"/> Vocabulary: Somewhat complex language that is sometimes unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic <input type="radio"/> Sentence Structure: Many complex sentences with several subordinate phrases or clauses and transition words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Conventionality: Largely explicit and easy to understand with some occasions for more complex meaning <input type="radio"/> Vocabulary: Mostly contemporary, familiar, conversational; rarely unfamiliar or overly academic <input type="radio"/> Sentence Structure: Simple and compound sentences, with some more complex constructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Conventionality: Explicit, literal, straightforward, easy to understand <input type="radio"/> Vocabulary: Contemporary, familiar, conversational language <input type="radio"/> Sentence Structure: Mainly simple sentences
KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Subject Matter Knowledge: Extensive, perhaps specialized or even theoretical discipline-specific content knowledge; range of challenging abstract and theoretical concepts <input type="radio"/> Intertextuality: Many references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Subject Matter Knowledge: Moderate levels of discipline-specific content knowledge; some theoretical knowledge may enhance understanding; range of recognizable ideas and challenging abstract concepts <input type="radio"/> Intertextuality: Some references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Subject Matter Knowledge: Everyday practical knowledge and some discipline-specific content knowledge; both simple and more complicated, abstract ideas <input type="radio"/> Intertextuality: A few references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Subject Matter Knowledge: Everyday, practical knowledge; simple, concrete ideas <input type="radio"/> Intertextuality: No references or allusions to other texts, or outside ideas, theories, etc.

Text Complexity: Qualitative Measures Rubric

LITERARY TEXTS

Text Title _____

Text Author _____

	Exceedingly Complex	Very Complex	Moderately Complex	Slightly Complex
MEANING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Meaning: Several levels and competing elements of meaning that are difficult to identify, separate, and interpret; theme is implicit or subtle, often ambiguous and revealed over the entirety of the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Meaning: Several levels of meaning that may be difficult to identify or separate; theme is implicit or subtle and may be revealed over the entirety of the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Meaning: More than one level of meaning with levels clearly distinguished from each other; theme is clear but may be conveyed with some subtlety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Meaning: One level of meaning; theme is obvious and revealed early in the text.
TEXT STRUCTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Organization: Organization is intricate with regard to elements such as narrative viewpoint, time shifts, multiple characters, storylines and detail <input type="radio"/> Use of Graphics: If used, minimal illustrations that support the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Organization: Organization may include subplots, time shifts and more complex characters <input type="radio"/> Use of Graphics: If used, a few illustrations that support the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Organization: Organization may have two or more storylines and occasionally difficult to predict <input type="radio"/> Use of Graphics: If used, a range of illustrations that support selected parts of the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Organization: Organization of text is clear, chronological or easy to predict <input type="radio"/> Use of Graphics: If used, extensive illustrations that directly support and assist in interpreting the written text
LANGUAGE FEATURES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Conventionality: Dense and complex; contains abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language <input type="radio"/> Vocabulary: Generally unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic language; may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading <input type="radio"/> Sentence Structure: Mainly complex sentences often containing multiple concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Conventionality: Complex; contains some abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language <input type="radio"/> Vocabulary: Somewhat complex language that is sometimes unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic <input type="radio"/> Sentence Structure: Many complex sentences with several subordinate phrases or clauses and transition words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Conventionality: Largely explicit and easy to understand with some occasions for more complex meaning <input type="radio"/> Vocabulary: Mostly contemporary, familiar, conversational; rarely unfamiliar or overly academic <input type="radio"/> Sentence Structure: Simple and compound sentences, with some more complex constructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Conventionality: Explicit, literal, straightforward, easy to understand <input type="radio"/> Vocabulary: Contemporary, familiar, conversational language <input type="radio"/> Sentence Structure: Mainly simple sentences
KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Life Experiences: Explores complex, sophisticated themes; experiences are distinctly different from the common reader <input type="radio"/> Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge: Many references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Life Experiences: Explores themes of varying levels of complexity; experiences portrayed are uncommon to most readers <input type="radio"/> Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge: Some references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Life Experiences: Explores a single theme; experiences portrayed are common to many readers <input type="radio"/> Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge: A few references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Life Experiences: Explores a single theme; experiences portrayed are everyday and common to most readers <input type="radio"/> Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge: No references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements

Generating Questions from Considering Qualitative Dimensions of Complexity

_____ Grade/ Band

Question maker: _____

Name of Text: _____

Narrative/Poetry/Hybrid/Informational/other _____

Category	Notes and comments on text features in each category	What questions could you ask students here?
Structure: (both story structure or form of piece)		
Language Clarity and Conventions (including vocabulary load)		
Knowledge Demands (life, content, cultural/literary)		
Levels of Meaning/ Purpose		
	What trumpets to you when you consider this text?	Culminating Question or Task follow from this?

Generating Questions from Considering Qualitative Dimensions of Complexity

_____ Grade/ Band

Question maker: _____

Name of Text: _____

Narrative/Poetry/Hybrid/Informational/other _____

Qualitative Dimensions of Text Complexity Chart

Version 3 – 2nd – 3rd grade Band

Reviewer: _____

Name of Text: _____

Narrative/Poetry/Hybrid/Informational/other _____

A Guide to Creating Text Dependent and Specific Questions for Close Analytic Reading

Text Dependent Questions: What Are They?

The Common Core State Standards for reading strongly focus on students gathering evidence, knowledge, and insight from what they read. Indeed, eighty to ninety percent of the Reading Standards in each grade *require* text dependent analysis; accordingly, aligned curriculum materials should have a similar percentage of text dependent questions.

As the name suggests, a text dependent question specifically asks a question that can only be answered by referring explicitly back to the text being read. It does not rely on any particular background information extraneous to the text nor depend on students having other experiences or knowledge; instead it privileges the text itself and what students can extract from what is before them.

For example, in a close analytic reading of Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address,” the following would not be text dependent questions:

- *Why did the North fight the civil war?*
- *Have you ever been to a funeral or gravesite?*
- *Lincoln says that the nation is dedicated to the proposition that “all men are created equal.” Why is equality an important value to promote?*

The overarching problem with these questions is that they require no familiarity at all with Lincoln’s speech in order to answer them. Responding to these sorts of questions instead requires students to go outside the text. Such questions can be tempting to ask because they are likely to get students talking, but they take students away from considering the actual point Lincoln is making. They seek to elicit a personal or general response that relies on individual experience and opinion, and answering them will not move students closer to understanding the text of the “Gettysburg Address.”

Good text specific questions will often linger over specific phrases and sentences to ensure careful comprehension of the text—they help students see something worthwhile that they would not have seen on a more cursory reading. Typical text dependent questions ask students to perform one or more of the following tasks:

- Analyze paragraphs on a sentence by sentence basis and sentences on a word by word basis to determine the role played by individual paragraphs, sentences, phrases, or words
- Investigate how meaning can be altered by changing key words and why an author may have chosen one word over another
- Probe each argument in persuasive text, each idea in informational text, each key detail in literary text, and observe how these build to a whole
- Examine how shifts in the direction of an argument or explanation are achieved and the impact of those shifts
- Question why authors choose to begin and end when they do
- Note and assess patterns of writing and what they achieve
- Consider what the text leaves uncertain or unstated

Creating Text-Specific Questions for Close Analytic Reading of Texts

An effective set of text dependent questions delves systematically into a text to guide students in extracting the key meanings or ideas found there. They typically begin by exploring specific words,

details, and arguments and then moves on to examine the impact of those specifics on the text as a whole. Along the way they target academic vocabulary and specific sentence structures as critical focus points for gaining comprehension.

While there is no set process for generating a complete and coherent body of text dependent questions for a text, the following process is a good guide that can serve to generate a core series of questions for close reading of any given text.

Step One: Identify the Core Understandings and Key Ideas of the Text

As in any good reverse engineering or “backwards design” process, teachers should start by identifying the key insights they want students to understand from the text—keeping one eye on the major points being made is crucial for fashioning an overarching set of successful questions and critical for creating an appropriate culminating assignment.

Step Two: Start Small to Build Confidence

The opening questions should be ones that help orientate students to the text and be sufficiently specific enough for them to answer so that they gain confidence to tackle more difficult questions later on.

Step Three: Target Vocabulary and Text Structure

Locate key text structures and the most powerful words in the text that are connected to the key ideas and understandings, and craft questions that draw students’ attention to these specifics so they can become aware of these connections. Vocabulary selected for focus should be academic words “(Tier Two”) that are abstract and likely to be encountered in future reading and studies.

Step Four: Tackle Tough Sections Head-on

Find the sections of the text that will present the greatest difficulty and craft questions that support students in mastering these sections (these could be sections with difficult syntax, particularly dense information, and tricky transitions or places that offer a variety of possible inferences).

Step Five: Create Coherent Sequences of Text Dependent Questions

The sequence of questions should not be random but should build toward more coherent understanding and analysis to ensure that students learn to stay focused on the text to bring them to a gradual understanding of its meaning.

Step Six: Identify the Standards That Are Being Addressed

Take stock of what standards are being addressed in the series of questions and decide if any other standards are suited to being a focus for this text (forming additional questions that exercise those standards).

Step Seven: Create the Culminating Assessment

Develop a culminating activity around the key ideas or understandings identified earlier that reflects (a) mastery of one or more of the standards, (b) involves writing, and (c) is structured to be completed by students independently.

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Unit 1/Week 1

Title:

Suggested Time: 5 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards

[ex. RL.3.1-5, RL.3.7, W.3.4, W.3.10, SL.3.1, SL.3.3, L.3.1-5]

Teacher Instructions

Refer to the Introduction for further details.

Before Teaching

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers, about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

]

Synopsis

]

2. Read entire main selection text, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
3. Re-read the main selection text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Vocabulary.

During Teaching

1. Students read the entire main selection text independently.

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2. Teacher reads the main selection text aloud with students following along. (Depending on how complex the text is and the amount of support needed by students, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.)
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions and returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e.: whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

Text-dependent Questions	Evidence-based Answers
A reputation is a belief or opinion that is generally known about someone or something . Using evidence from the text	[Insert response here]
What does the author tell us about Nicks reputation?	[ex. Electronics, robots, computer games, blowing up bad creatures]
What evidence does the author provide to show what Nick means about fifth grade?	It is a week before school and Nick is already dreading fifth grade because Ms. Granger has a reputation for sticking gum on your shirt with an index card, sending letters home to families, and using words from a dictionary.

Vocabulary

	KEY WORDS ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTANDING	WORDS WORTH KNOWING General teaching suggestions are provided in the Introduction
TEACHER PROVIDES DEFINITION not enough contextual clues provided in the text	Page A - reputation Page B - worshipped Page C - dictionaries Page D - monopoly Page E - procedures Page F - Assignment Page G - Guaranteed Page H - lexicography	
STUDENTS FIGURE OUT THE MEANING sufficient context clues are provided in the text		

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Culminating Task

- Re-Read, Think, Discuss, Write

[insert prompt here, in italics]

Answer: [insert 1-2 sentences outlining the key details each answer should include]

Additional Tasks

- [insert prompt here—*optional*]

Answer: [insert 1-2 sentences outlining the key details each answer should include.]

- [insert prompt here—*optional*]

Answer: [insert 1-2 sentences outlining the key details each answer should include.]

Note to Teacher

- [insert any helpful, relevant instructional suggestions here— *optional*]

Basal Alignment Project
Criteria for Evaluating a Set of Questions/Each Question in a Set

Text being reviewed (include page #s): _____

Basal Series/Edition: _____

✓if yes	Criteria:	Comments/Questions/Fixes (refer to specific questions!):
A. Text Dependent: These things must be true of every question in the set. When evaluating questions, discard all questions that get a “no” in Section A		
	A1. Does the student have to read the text to answer each question?	
	A2. Is it always clear to students that answering each question requires that they must use evidence from the text to support their claims? (Standard One should always be in play!)	
B. Important Considerations: These are design factors to keep in mind for the entire question and task set.		
	B1. Do students have an opportunity to practice speaking and listening while they work with these questions and tasks?	
	B2. Do questions include appropriate scaffolding so all students can understand what is being asked (Are the questions worded in such a way that all students can access them)?	
	B3. At tricky or key points in the text are there check-in questions for students to answer so that teachers can check on students’ understanding and use these sections to enhance reading proficiency?	
	B4. Do questions provide an opportunity for students to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary in context? When possible, do some of these questions explore some aspect of the text as well as important vocabulary?	
	B5. Does the mix of questions addressing syntax, vocabulary, structure and other inferences match the complexity of the text?	

C. Text Specific:	
	C1. Are the questions specific enough so they can only be answered by reference to this text?
	C2. Are the inferences students are asked to make grounded logically in the text (Can they be answered with careful reading rather than background knowledge)?
D. Organization of the Questions:	
	D1. Do the early questions in the sequence focus on specific phrases and sentences to support basic comprehension of the text and develop student confidence before moving on to more challenging tasks?
	D2. Are the questions coherently sequenced? Do they build toward gradual understanding of the text's meaning?
	D3. Do the questions stay focused on the text and only go beyond it to make other connections in extension activities <i>after</i> the text has been explored?
	D4. If multiple texts/different media are under consideration, are students asked to examine each text closely before making connections among texts?
E. Culminating Activity or Writing Prompt:	
	E1. Does the culminating task call on the knowledge and understanding acquired through the questions?
	E2. Does the writing prompt in the culminating task demand that students write to the text and use evidence?
	E3. Are the instructions to teacher and student clear about what must be performed to achieve proficiency?
	E4. Is this a task worthy of the student and classroom time it will consume?

Reviewer: _____ District Affiliation: _____

Date: _____ Approved as completed (Initials and Date): _____

Basal Alignment Project

Checklist for Completing the Template

✓	Check each step as it is completed.
	1. Read the Main Selection text closely.
	2. Conduct a qualitative analysis of the Main Selection.
	3. Write the Synopsis and clearly state the Big Ideas/Key Understandings in the template.*
	4a. Carefully re-read the Main Selection, and create Text Dependent Questions.*
	4b. Identify and categorize vocabulary using the Vocabulary Quadrant in the template (this can be done <i>while</i> creating text dependent questions, or while re-reading the text solely for vocabulary).
	5. Create Culminating Tasks and Additional Tasks. Add a Note to Teacher if necessary.
	6. Verify CCSS and insert into the template.
	7. Name the file with the following naming convention: <u>Series Title [space] Grade # [space] Main Selection Title [space] Version</u> (Ex: <i>Reading Street 3 Charlie McButton v1</i>)
	8. Email your revision to your district point person with any comments or questions you have about the revision.
	9. The district point person will send the revised unit to Farren Liben at fliben@studentsachieve.net . After review, it will get sent back to you from Farren.
	10. After final sign-off from your reviewer, create a Student Question sheet as the last pages of the template.

* Refer to the **Training Materials** folder on EdModo for planning tools and support.