

Aligning Unit Plans with Common Core ELA and Literacy Standards

Note: A “unit” is a series of lessons, usually linked by a common concept, often resulting in a summative assessment.

Major Shift	Emerging Alignment	Meaningful Alignment	Exemplary Alignment
Balancing informational and fictional text (Pre-K through 5)	Students read both fiction and non-fiction, mostly from basals and textbooks, throughout the day. Content-based units incorporate meaningful reading and writing tasks.	Students read a variety of trade books and text books along with a variety of literature during reading lessons and content-focused lessons. Students are assigned related or paired fiction and non-fiction in the classroom and they access it in the library and on the Internet.	Students read not only text books and trade books during reading lessons and content-focused lessons, but a variety of authentic, real world texts. In addition to traditional school texts, students read scientific field guides, primary sources, artists’ statements and the like in order to explore big ideas and grapple with essential questions. Students are surrounded by the opportunity to learn from all kinds of text.
Building Knowledge in the Disciplines (6-12)	Students read both fiction and non-fiction, mostly from textbooks, anthologies, and novels, throughout the day. Students read more non-fiction than fiction.	Students read a variety of trade books, non-fiction, and textbooks along with a variety of contemporary and classic literature, throughout the day. Students access both fiction and non-fiction in the classroom, the library, and on the internet. Eighty percent of students’ reading is non-fiction.	Students read not only traditional school materials, but position papers, scientific journal articles, field guides, original research, primary sources, and the like to explore big ideas and grapple with essential questions. Students are surrounded by the opportunity to learn from and analyze the impact of all kinds of text. Eighty percent of students’ reading is non-fiction.
Staircase of Complexity	Teachers determine the difficulty of text they plan to use and ensure that all students read grade level texts at least some of the time. Students are supported through strategic instruction to actually read challenging texts.	Teachers determine the difficulty of texts they plan to use and purposefully increase the complexity of texts, over the course of each unit/across the year. Students are supported to actually read challenging texts through strategic instruction planned following diagnostic assessment.	There’s a school wide system for leveling texts, determining complex core texts for each grade level, and ensuring that core texts become increasingly and appropriately rigorous over grade spans. Students are supported to actually read challenging texts through differentiated strategic instruction based on diagnostic assessment. Students show increasing independence with challenging text.
Text-Based Answers	Students move away from simplistic connections, questions, and inferences and begin to justify responses, reactions and understandings with evidence from text.	Students justify their reactions and responses to text with evidence. Questions for discussion are carefully crafted to ensure that students must read closely for what the text does and does not say.	Following close reading, students engage in meaningful discussions and written analyses in which they support their opinions and ideas with evidence from text.
Writing from Sources	Narrative writing is assigned less and is replaced with persuasive pieces and arguments incorporating information from sources.	Students begin to expand on the persuasive form to develop all kinds of arguments and justifications for their ideas and responses to texts. These arguments are strengthened by information from a variety of sources.	Students read a variety of sources and write persuasive arguments for an authentic audience or to serve a real need (example: to share the findings of original research or to convince a constituency to take action).
Academic Vocabulary	Students acquire academic vocabulary (“Tier 2” words such as consequently, or intermittently) through wide reading and direct instruction planned within the context of multiple units.	Students acquire academic vocabulary as a result of teachers’ careful identification of important conceptual and “high power” Tier 2 words within the context of multiple units. Direct vocabulary instruction goes beyond rote memorization.	Teachers use rich, research-based strategies to engage students in exploring, acquiring, and assimilating academic vocabulary into their speaking and writing on an ongoing basis.

