



Research-Based Curriculum

**TIME**  
FOR KIDS

Exploring   
**Reading**

Complete Supplemental Program  
Based on Respected Research and Literature

# Introduction

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*Exploring Reading* was created to support teachers in providing focused, inclusive reading instruction for all students, regardless of prior knowledge, primary language, or cultural background. The materials and strategies described serve to assist with reading instruction, effective interventions, and differentiation. In short, the *Exploring Reading* series provides teachers with a curriculum that is engaging and relevant in educating twenty-first century learners.

## Exploring Reading Contributing Authors

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### **Sharroky Hollie, Ph.D.**

Dr. Sharroky Hollie is executive director of the Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning, a nonprofit organization dedicated to stellar professional development in cultural responsiveness, and the author of *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning*. An educator for 25 years, Dr. Hollie has taught at the secondary level in English/language arts and at the university level in teacher education. He founded and directed for an exemplary 10 years a laboratory school rooted in the principles of cultural responsiveness, called the Culture and Language Academy of Success.

### **Robin Johnson, Ed.D.**

Dr. Robin D. Johnson has been an educator for over 22 years. Currently, she is an assistant professor of teacher education at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi (TAMUCC). Dr. Johnson is the coordinator of School-University Partnerships, the program coordinator for the TAMUCC chapter of Barrio Writers, and a faculty coadvisor for the TAMUCC Student Reading Council. She is also the 2016–2017 president of the Texas Association for Literacy Education, coeditor of the Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers Yearbook, and a diamond-level Abydos Literacy facilitator. Her publications include the teacher practitioner book titled *Time to Write*.

### **Eugenia Mora-Flores, Ed.D.**

Dr. Eugenia Mora-Flores is a professor at the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California. She teaches courses on first- and second-language acquisition, Latino culture, and literacy development for elementary and secondary students. Her research interests include studies on effective practices in developing the language and literacy skills of English learners in grades preK–12. She has written nine books in the areas of literacy and academic language development (ALD) for English learners. Dr. Mora-Flores also works as a consultant for a variety of elementary, middle, and high schools across the United States in the areas of English language development (ELD), ALD, and writing instruction.

### **Lori Oczkus, M.A.**

Lori Oczkus is a literacy coach, author, and popular speaker across the United States and internationally. Her accomplishments include extensive experience as a bilingual elementary teacher and an intervention specialist. She has been inducted into the California Reading Association Hall of Fame for her contributions to the field of reading in California and internationally. Oczkus is the author of *Just the Facts: Close Reading and Comprehension of Informational Text* and coauthor with Dr. Timothy Rasinski of the *Close Reading with Paired Texts* series.

# The Logic Model

The Logic Model in Figure 1 demonstrates how *Exploring Reading* is designed to develop fluent readers and critical thinkers. Evidence of this is suggested through its resources and activities, which are linked to positive outcomes for students. The goal of this table is to help visualize how implementing *Exploring Reading* can support and contribute to achieving school and district goals.

**Figure 1**

**Problem Statement:** There is a need for reading comprehension instruction at the K–5 level.

**Outcome/Goal:** To help students increase reading fluency and comprehension

Theory of Action					
Logic Model					
Assumptions	Resources/Inputs	Activities	Outputs/Metrics	Outcomes	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School districts are interested in and prepared to incorporate focused reading comprehension instruction.</li> <li>• Students improve reading comprehension through regular, focused instruction.</li> <li>• Identified reading comprehension strategies lead to an increase in reading comprehension.</li> <li>• High-interest texts engage students in reading.</li> <li>• Technology is accessible in the classroom.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best Practices Guide with key research</li> <li>• materials developed through collaboration of experts in the field</li> <li>• audio resources, Student Guided Practice Books, and Explorer Tools for each grade level (2-5)</li> <li>• yearlong program offering alternate pacing patterns allows for daily or three-times-weekly lessons.</li> <li>• eight interactive ebooks</li> <li>• 24 high-interest reading text cards for each grade level</li> <li>• audio recordings of text cards</li> <li>• assessments</li> <li>• student-guided activities</li> <li>• reflection opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30-minute daily or three-times-weekly lessons</li> <li>• exploration of essential questions</li> <li>• explicit instruction in comprehension strategies</li> <li>• explicit instruction in content vocabulary</li> <li>• teacher modeling of texts and think-alouds</li> <li>• collaborative reading and reflection opportunities for students with high-interest texts</li> <li>• daily text discussion and comprehension practice</li> <li>• engaging activities and structured practice for students to engage with text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• student engagement in texts and resources</li> <li>• meet or exceed expectations of ELA standards</li> <li>• completion of lessons</li> <li>• formative and summative assessments</li> <li>• improvement in reading comprehension</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of reading comprehension strategies</li> <li>• application of literacy skills to other more complex texts</li> <li>• greater achievement in ELA skills</li> <li>• engagement in reading, writing, speaking, and listening</li> <li>• consistent practice in reading a variety of texts</li> <li>• increased confidence in reading</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased interest in literacy among school-age students</li> <li>• creation of lifelong readers</li> <li>• development of critical thinking skills</li> <li>• prepared for secondary and post-secondary education success</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educators implement evidence-based <i>Exploring Reading</i> strategies and materials.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K–5 students engage in and utilize <i>Exploring Reading</i> content and strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K–5 students increase reading skills and comprehension.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K–5 students increase achievement in ELA/literacy/writing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K–5 students are prepared for secondary and post-secondary education success.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students become confident, fluent readers, able to comprehend at a high level.</li> </ul>

# Guiding Principles

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1. Direct reading comprehension instruction prioritizes literacy skills, engaging students in using habits of proficient readers and supporting all learners regardless of primary language.
2. Focus on reading comprehension encompasses the English language arts (ELA) standards of reading, writing, listening, and speaking effectively.

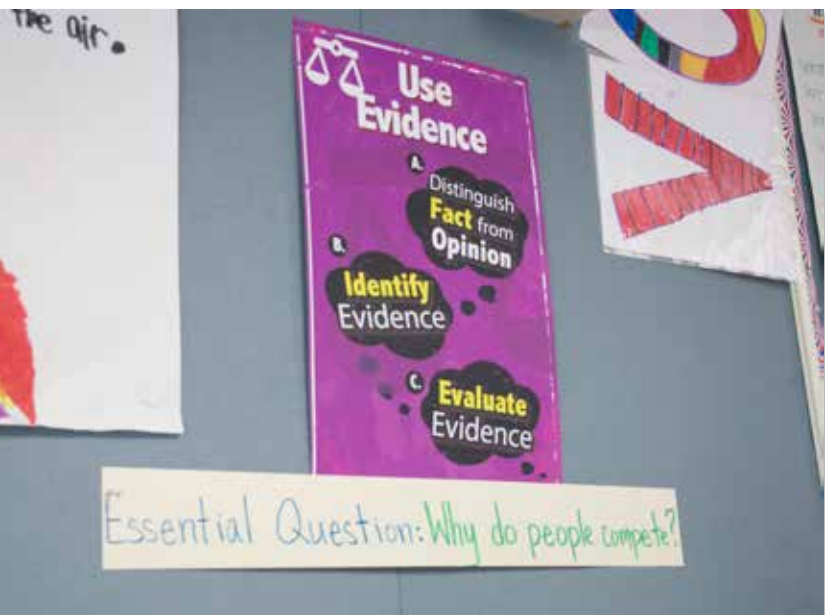
These guiding principles are the foundation of *Exploring Reading* and are embedded in every component of the product.

## Implementing Meaningful, High-Cognitive-Demand Tasks

One of the principal features of *Exploring Reading* is its high-quality, rich tasks. Meaningful, high-cognitive-demand tasks are often sprinkled through traditional core curriculum, omitted altogether, or provided as extension opportunities, thereby making them inaccessible to all students. Since evidence shows that problem-solving using academically challenging tasks with a focus on reasoning offers the greatest learning opportunities for students, it is critical that all students have access to these types of tasks (Smith and Stein 1998).

*Exploring Reading* can be used with ability, mixed-ability, and skill-specific groups. This program is designed to meet the needs of these flexible groups in the classroom so the teacher can differentiate based on the needs of the students during each intervention session. The Diagnostic Assessment can be used to group students with like needs and prioritize units. During each of the reader lessons, students will

examine text structures, text features, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies. Students will receive explicit modeling from the teacher before practicing the strategy independently or with partners. Each lesson concludes with a discussion and reflection on learning. The accompanying *Student Guided Practice Book* pages give students a chance to practice vocabulary, analyze text structure, record thinking, and assess comprehension.



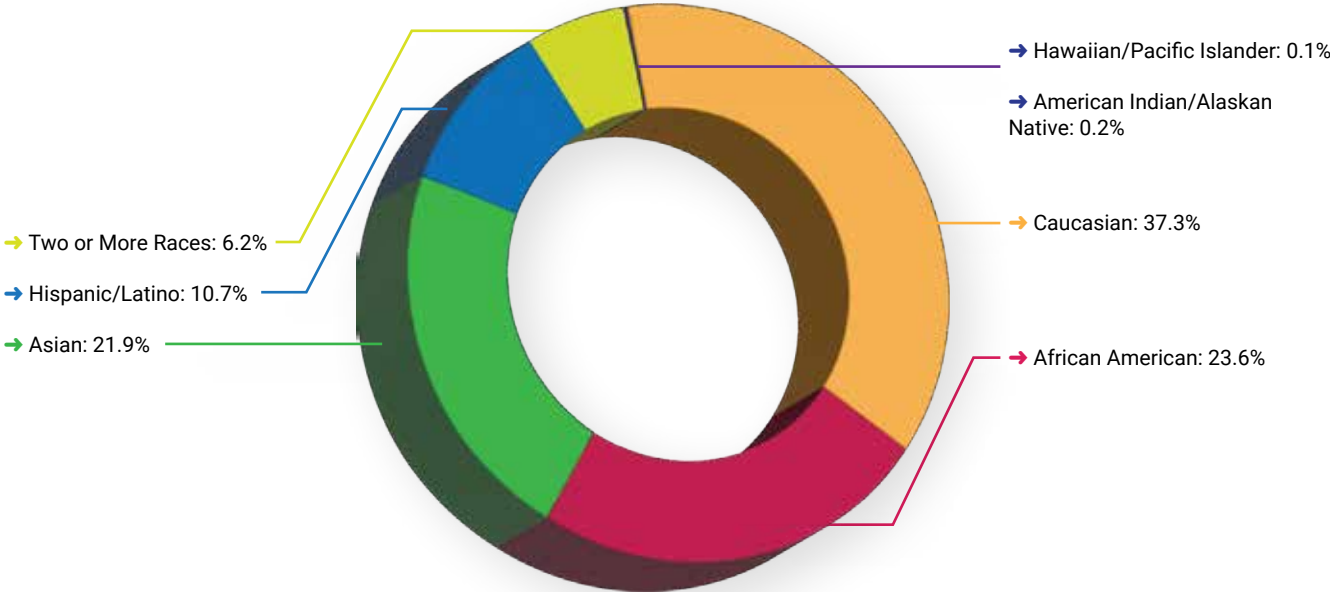
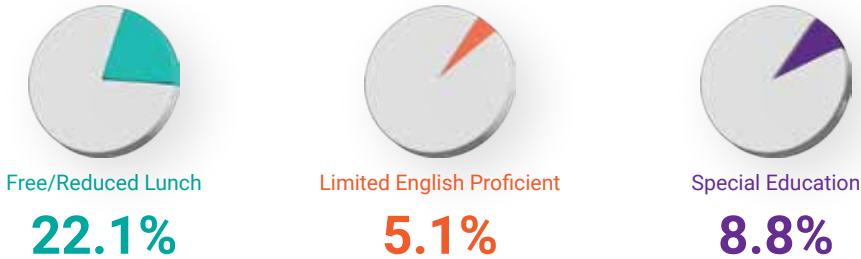
# Data Study Illustrating the Efficacy of the *Exploring Reading* Series

During the 2017–2018 school year, Teacher Created Materials partnered with Maryland’s Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) to implement *Exploring Reading*. Selected reading specialists and intervention students piloted the curriculum at 10 different elementary schools.

*Exploring Reading* provides 30 minutes of daily reading intervention for a full year. Ongoing professional development, lesson plans, and student resources were provided to the participating reading specialists and site administrators to support this implementation.

## Howard County Public School System Demographics

Enrollment:  
Elementary (K–5): 24,978



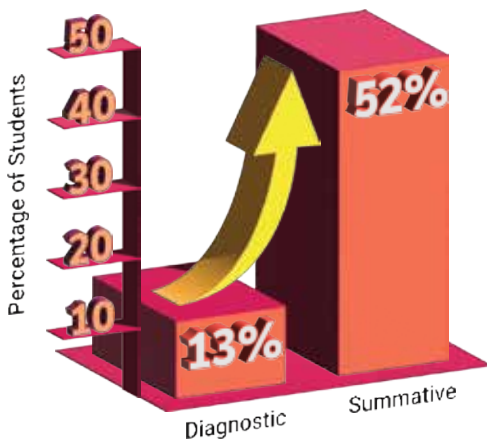
## Implementation

The goal of the *Exploring Reading* implementation is to purposefully build students' reading comprehension skills through 30 minutes of daily scaffolded instruction. The curriculum was piloted with 52 select students across grades 2–5 at 10 different elementary school sites in Howard County Public School System (HCPSS). At each school site, participating students received systematic instruction from the school's reading specialist. On average, students completed between two and four units of instruction during the field research. Scores from the assessments in *Exploring Reading* as well as Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading levels were used to measure students' progress and evaluate growth.

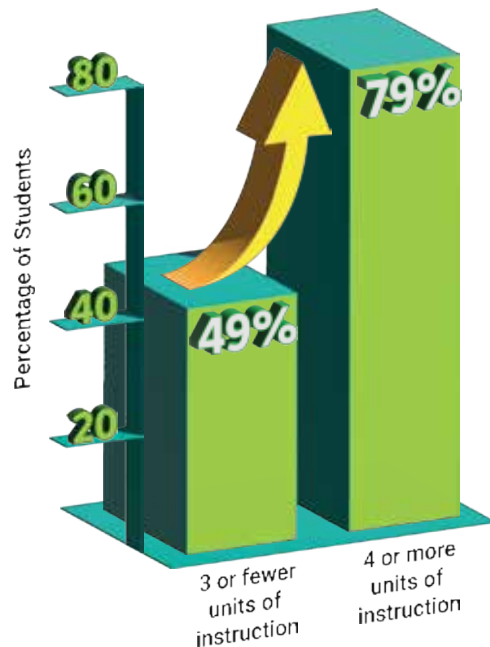
## Results

At the start of the program, 13 percent of students scored a passing grade on the Diagnostic Assessment from the *Exploring Reading* curriculum. At the conclusion of the implementation, 52 percent of students scored a passing grade, an increase of 39 percent. (See Figure A.) Furthermore, students who were taught three or fewer units of instruction had a passing rate of 42 percent, while students who received four or more units of instruction had a passing rate of 79 percent. Thus, the more time spent using the curriculum, the higher the likelihood of student improvement. (See Figure B.) Because of the success of the curriculum implementation, HCPSS implemented *Exploring Reading* across all 43 elementary campuses for the 2018–2019 school year.

**Figure A**  
Percentage of Students  
Who Scored "Passing" Grades  
on *Exploring Reading* Assessments



**Figure B**  
Summative Assessment  
"Passing" Grade Rate



## Testimonials

Not only was the program highly successful, but also all students and reading specialists were enthusiastic about *Exploring Reading* and felt it had many positive effects.

“The materials are high quality, engaging, and ready to go. I liked the explicit modeling and teaching of the strategies. I also liked the varied ways students interact with each other and the culturally responsive strategies included. Students LOVED the text cards.”

—Reading Specialist, Fulton Elementary

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“I thought the reading materials were both relevant and engaging for the students. Current news topics and age-appropriate themes allowed for the students to make connections to themselves and their community.”

—Reading Specialist, Guilford Elementary

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“The *Exploring Reading* program improved my understanding and teaching of comprehension strategies. The sentence frames were especially helpful when ELs needed to speak [in full sentences] and write a clear, accurate response.”

—Reading Specialist, Worthington Elementary

“The overall organization of the curriculum made it easy to follow and helped the students to create a routine so that they quickly knew the expectations as well. My students are excited to be continuing the program next year.”

—Reading Specialist, Forest Ridge Elementary

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“By using the strategies [in *Exploring Reading*] there was a high carryover to the classroom. The classroom teacher saw improvements in students’ daily reading assignments as well as an increase in their assessment scores.”

—Reading Specialist, Veterans Elementary

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# The Importance of Instruction in Reading Comprehension

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The body of research that paves the way for reading instruction is immense. Several models are consistently used to define a framework for reading instruction. Gough and Tunmer (1986) originally proposed the Simple View of Reading (SVR), which says that reading comprehension has two basic components: language comprehension and word recognition (decoding). Hollis Scarborough (2001) further delineated the components of skilled reading—language comprehension and word recognition and their respective subsets of skills—as woven strands in a rope. In recent years, Kate Nation’s (2019) work layers the idea that students’ language skills have an effect on their ability to decode and comprehend text. And still more recently, Duke and Cartwright (2021) expanded SVR to take into consideration what they call *bridging processes* (e.g., concept of print, reading fluency, graphonological-semantic cognitive flexibility) that bring together students’ word recognition and language comprehension skills. They also call attention to students’ active regulations skills, such as motivation, engagement, and executive functioning skills, as being key to support reading development.

While the general purpose of reading is to gain meaning from text, supporting students in improving their comprehension skills impacts students far beyond simply understanding what they read. In the quest to improve overall comprehension in K–5 students, multiple strategies should be employed in daily practice. Teaching students to use reading comprehension strategies is one of the top recommendations put forth by the Institute of Education Sciences in their practice guide “Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade,” in which the panel of researchers concluded that there is strong evidence to support the effectiveness of instruction in comprehension strategies (Shanahan et al. 2010).

The importance of reading comprehension for the student is well beyond that of performance on ELA standards. It is clear that successful reading comprehension correlates to success across disciplines. But these skills reach beyond academic achievement in the classroom as well. Supporting students with reading comprehension also serves to address inequities within our communities. Studies show that historically marginalized and underserved students are especially at risk of failing to attain proficient reading comprehension skills (Connor 2016). In fact, instructing students on how to “decode and understand the text they read to improve their reading comprehension, while strengthening their vocabulary and oral language skills should also improve children’s linguistic and social-cognitive regulatory skills over time and, in turn, further support developing reading comprehension skills” (Connor 2016). Improving reading comprehension supports “literacy development [which] can help children who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and at risk for



developing weaker social-cognitive regulation” (Connor 2016). In short, incorporating reading comprehension practice in elementary classrooms sets the foundation for academic success as well as serves to close opportunity gaps in our communities.

## Defining Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is an understanding of the meaning of the text being read. “Comprehension is the reason for reading. If readers can read the words but do not understand what they are reading, they are not really reading” (Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn 2001, 48). Good readers are both purposeful and active. It is a complex process that begins through listening to texts read aloud even before children can decode words on their own.

Reading comprehension includes activating prior knowledge, making connections to the text based on experiences, understanding the language used by the author and the text structure, recognizing the author’s purpose, identifying the differences between facts and opinions, and drawing conclusions through predictions and inferences (Duke and Pearson 2002; Keene and Zimmerman 1997; Harvey and Goudvis 2007).



**Research to Practice**

**Tier 1 Evidence**

Routinely use a set of comprehension-building practices to help students make sense of the text.

**Exploring Reading units focus on eight key comprehension strategies.** As recommended by the Institute of Education Sciences, these strategies are taught through a gradual release of responsibility model (Shanahan et al. 2010).

Another recommendation from the Institute of Education Sciences that has been identified as ESSA Tier III for improving reading comprehension is instruction in identifying text structure and organization (Shanahan et al. 2010). **In Exploring Reading, students are taught to identify five types of text structures: description, cause and effect, problem and solution, sequence, and compare and contrast.** Students use graphic organizers for each structure.

The graphic displays eight comprehension strategy cards: Summarize, Monitor Comprehension, Use Text Features, Ask Questions, Determine Meaning, Make Inferences, Use Evidence, and Synthesize Elements.

The use of cognitive strategies for monitoring comprehension and metacognition (thinking about thinking) must take place before, during, and after reading for true comprehension to occur. Students must be taught and provided opportunities to practice which strategy is best to use and when to apply it while reading. This is the purpose of reading-comprehension instruction. Environments that value reading and writing contain a wide variety of texts, provide opportunities and time for reading aloud and reading independently, and allow students to take risks by collaborating and questioning. These settings effectively promote the construction of meaning for readers (Keene and Zimmermann 1997; Dole et al. 1991).

# Reading with the *Exploring Reading* Explorer Tools

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Students of all ages remember strategies when teachers apply visual representations to them (Wormeli 2009). In *Exploring Reading*, the eight key strategies are represented by a backpack of Explorer tools. Read more about each strategy below.



**Monitor Comprehension:** To keep track of meaning as they read, good readers monitor their own progress. Teachers prompt students by asking questions related to the text and progress to opportunities to self-check their comprehension through responding to written questions or through oral discussion. When readers discuss strategies for monitoring comprehension, their reading improves (Allington 2001).



**Summarize:** Summarizing involves sorting main ideas and details and then putting them in a logical order. Overall comprehension and reading improve when students learn to summarize (Duke and Pearson 2002). When summarizing fiction, students identify events in the order they appear, which will ultimately result in better understanding of the overall meaning of the work. Informational texts demand that students grasp text structures such as description, compare and contrast, sequence, cause and effect, and problem and solution (Roehling et al. 2017, 72).



**Use Text Features:** When students are aware of how texts are structured, their comprehension improves (Duke and Pearson 2002). It is much easier to follow a text when the reader knows how the author has organized the information or is familiar with the genre. If the story is a mystery, then the reader hunts for clues to solve a problem. When reading informational text, it is helpful to determine if the text is organized sequentially, offering a problem and solution, or is comparing and contrasting items or ideas, for example. Good readers also glean information from text features such as headings, captions, graphs, and visuals when reading nonfiction texts to aid in their overall comprehension.



**Ask Questions:** Students who ask questions during reading stay engaged and experience deeper comprehension (National Reading Panel 2000). Students need opportunities to discuss and question texts with other students and to clarify what they have read. Questions help students infer and predict and challenge the author or text. Asking questions increases engagement with the text and fosters intellectual curiosity. Questioning the text forces students to dig deeper into the reading to come up with the answer.



**Determine Meaning:** Students decode language as they read. As they journey through complex text, students employ skills to determine meaning for vocabulary and figurative language. To negotiate complex language, students must use context clues and understand shades of meaning, figurative language, and multiple-meaning words. Prompting students to identify and explore the meaning of new words also leads to increased comprehension. Texts that may seem too difficult are accessible with teacher and group support (Ensley and Rodriguez 2019, 225). The nuance of word meanings and connotations can present a break in meaning for the reader.



**Make Inferences:** Good readers combine prior knowledge with clues from the text to infer deeper meanings as they read. Readers who infer are the strongest readers (Anderson and Pearson 1984). Inferring involves visualizing, thinking about the characters' motives and feelings, themes, and the author's perspective or purpose. As students read, they make connections to other readings, experiences, and observations. Inferring allows students to draw meaning from the text and see how the ideas may connect to the world around them. Explicitly teaching inferencing helps to prepare students for standardized tests and is particularly important for struggling readers as well as historically marginalized populations (Fritschmann et al. 2007).



**Use Evidence:** Students need to be able to evaluate the texts they read in a variety of ways. Students study evidence presented in a text to decide whether they agree with the author's stance and the ideas presented. They learn to distinguish fact from opinion and identify and evaluate text evidence. It is important that "students . . . learn how texts function within a discipline and understand the inquiry frames and purposes that readers bring to texts" (Goldman 2012, 105). Good readers evaluate ideas in the text, the author's craft, and characters' actions and motives as their own understanding of the text progresses (Oczkus 2004).



**Compare/Synthesize Elements:** The ability to compare two texts, or to synthesize the information gained from reading one text with multiple components, is a powerhouse skill. In fact, "successful learning, problem-solving, and decision-making at school, at work, and in personal situations rely on analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information from multiple sources of traditional text" (Goldman 2012, 90). Students need to learn to answer questions using multiple texts, compare information found throughout one text, and resolve conflicting details in texts.

# Framework Supporting Access to Complex Texts

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## Reading Widely

Researchers agree that students need to read extensively to improve their ability to read (Kempe, Eriksson-Gustavsson, and Samuelsson 2011; Stanovich 1986). The more students are exposed to high-quality texts, the better. Studies about the reading volume of advanced and struggling readers showed that fifth-grade students achieving in the 10th percentile on reading achievement tests read an average of just 1.6 minutes per day, but students achieving in the 90th percentile read 40.4 minutes (Nagy and Anderson 1984). Hence, students need the opportunity for wide reading to provide the chance to develop strong reading habits.

Part of reading widely is the exposure to a wide range of genres and types of texts. When introduced to narrative texts, students learn the literary elements needed to understand most fictional story lines, which include characters, settings, problems, and resolutions.

Informational texts have multiple structures (e.g., cause-effect, compare-contrast, problem-solution, procedural writing) that readers must be introduced to for meaning-making to take place.

Robert Marzano (2004) suggests reading widely as a strategy for building academic background knowledge and stresses that it must be intentionally planned in classroom instruction. Marzano's research has demonstrated an increase in students' motivation and comprehension when they are provided uninterrupted time to read, engaged in writing about their reading with either structured or free responses, and interacting with what they have read through collaboration and discussion.

There are many benefits to wide reading, including an increase in vocabulary development. Reading widely increases listening comprehension and contributes to increased reading comprehension. It can be done through independent reading or teacher read-alouds.

Richard Allington (2003, 2006), when discussing struggling readers, writes that if students are to continue to develop as readers, they need to be readers—his guiding principle being that the more one reads, the better one reads. Teachers must help facilitate time, opportunity, and resources for reading widely in their classrooms.

Biographies, plays, and other types of writing have their own features and structures that can be taught through teacher read-alouds and direct instruction. To scaffold comprehension for



students, wide reading should be encouraged through modeling. In addition, time and opportunity must be given for exploring text.

To better comprehend complex reading material, students need to access texts in different ways. Scaffolding complex text with read-alouds is one way students can gain access to these types of texts. Teachers can also use shared-, guided-, mentor-, or close-reading models when teaching complex texts. In doing this, the teacher provides a rich variety of reading experiences that transition from teacher-led to student- and teacher-led. This gradual release of responsibility (Pearson and Gallagher 1983) ensures that students move from observing the teacher read (read aloud), to reading together with the teacher and in partners (shared reading), and finally to reading on their own (independent reading). “The interaction between oral language skills and the development of written language suggest[s] that early oral language weaknesses place children at risk of later reading comprehension impairments” (Nation, Cocksey, Taylor, and Bishop 2010).

### **The Importance of Reading Informational Text**

In an increasingly global and information-rich society, students need to be eager to learn, seek answers, and have the necessary skills to navigate the various informational texts they will come across in school, the workplace, and everyday life. According to Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis in their book *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding*, “interesting, authentic nonfiction fuels kids’ curiosity, enticing them to read more, dig deeper, and search for answers to compelling questions” (2007, 156).

Aside from the long-term goal of developing skilled readers, nonfiction text also has a role in standardized testing. Because students are most often tested on their abilities to comprehend nonfiction text, it is important to provide readers with explicit instruction for the ways in which nonfiction text is organized, along with specific skills and strategies for comprehending nonfiction text. In their article featured in *The Reading Teacher* (2000), Broadus and Ivey suggest that familiarity with nonfiction text will add to students’ depth of content-area knowledge and understanding, which may increase standardized test scores.

### **The Importance of Reading Literature**

Recommending that children read “literary wholes” may seem like a contemporary criticism of basal programs, but this quotation is taken from a 1908 work on the teaching of reading in the United States, *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading* by Edmund Burke Huey. Huey’s observations highlight what every parent and teacher of young children knows—children love a good story. And the discussion that extends from the story is just as important. Speaking and listening strategies are critical during preschool and primary grades, during which time oral discourse provides the primary context for learning. Numerous correlational studies indicate that frequent high-quality reading experiences benefit preschoolers in vocabulary acquisition (Lawrence and Snow 2011). Further, primary students who are learning decoding skills benefit from

discussions that set a purpose for reading, activate prior knowledge, ask and answer thoughtful questions, and encourage peer interaction. Reading fiction provides rich opportunities for oral-discourse development and vocabulary acquisition.

## The Importance of Intertextuality

Using fiction and nonfiction texts together is a natural way to explore themes. In an article in *The Reading Teacher*, Deanne Camp poses this question: “Given children’s natural tendencies to ask questions about the world around them, why not focus on both fact and fiction to answer those questions?” (2000, 400). Fiction books can be an engaging way to introduce a topic to students; however, instruction does not need to begin with the work of fiction. Reading a nonfiction text before a fictional text on the same topic can build or strengthen background knowledge that may be required to successfully comprehend the fictional piece (Baer 2012; Soalt 2005). Additionally, students who prefer nonfiction texts will be more motivated to read a related fictional text when the informational piece is presented first (Soalt 2005). According to research by Sylvia Read, “interacting with nonnarrative texts may be the best path to overall literacy” (2005, 36).



## Research to Practice

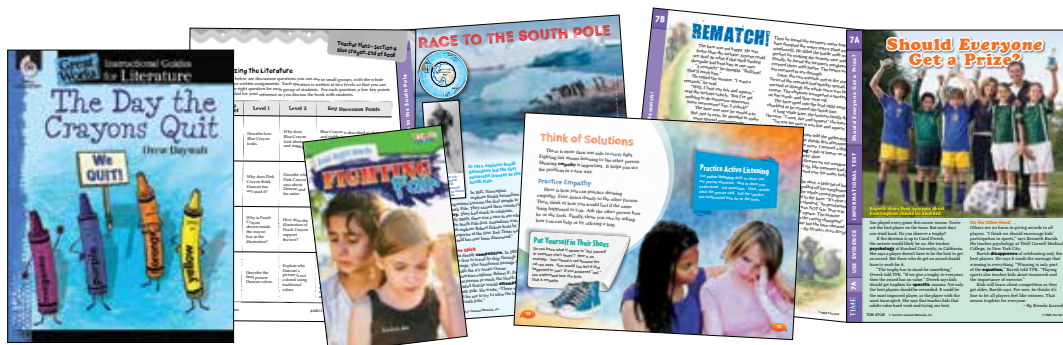


Ensure that each student reads connected text every day to support reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.

Within each *Exploring Reading* unit, students read a nonfiction reader and three TIME FOR KIDS® text cards. The readers provide students the opportunity to read full-length nonfiction texts. The TIME FOR KIDS® text cards provide **short fictional and informational text across many genres**. Students learn and practice one comprehension strategy across all four texts. This creates the opportunity to interact with each comprehension strategy multiple times and in the context of multiple types of texts.

The *Great Works Instructional Guides for Literature* included in each *Exploring Reading* kit encourage teachers to engage in modeled reading of rich, diverse texts. The selections include a variety of characters and stories meant to be **culturally relevant and engaging** to all students.

With the variety of texts across genres and the instructional activities that support them, *Exploring Reading* provides the opportunity for students to read widely and explore the relationships between texts.



# Comprehension Strategies for Complex Text

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## Shared Reading of Complex Text

In the age of standards and rigorous reading materials, students need different levels of support for digging deeper into texts. Reading challenging material helps students build robust reading skills (Shanahan, Fisher, and Frey 2012). Texts with challenging complexity may be difficult to comprehend due to their concept load, structure, length, ease of readability, unfamiliar vocabulary, number of visual supports, or even the size of the font (Oczkus 2004). Teachers can help students develop the reading skills they need to encounter any text by arming them with proven comprehension strategies and providing scaffolded instruction and a range of texts.

Each student needs a set of tools to employ as they make their way through a variety of challenging texts. Experts agree that students benefit from explicit comprehension instruction using the “good reader strategies” (Duke 2005; Duke and Pearson 2002). But which strategies are the most critical to teach our students? As students explore reading, the following strategies arm them with the tools necessary for unlocking challenging texts, thinking critically, and discussing their understandings with others. The comprehension strategies include the ability to monitor comprehension, summarize, use text features, ask questions, determine meaning, make inferences, use evidence, and compare or synthesize sources.

In their research into “Text Structure Strategies for Improving Expository Reading Comprehension,” Roehling et al. explain that when teachers identify the structure of the text prior to engaging with it, it provides “students with a mental framework for thinking about it” (2017, 71). *Exploring Reading* includes specific references to identifying text structure in the Scope and Sequence for each level.

Reading mentor texts with students and applying the strategies good readers use are effective methods for teaching comprehension strategies. The text should be a good fit for the strategy and provide students with multiple opportunities to practice the strategy.

During shared reading, the teacher models the use of the strategy, students practice together in teams or pairs guided by the teacher, and then students work independently. Later, the shared text is referred to when students encounter the strategy in other reading experiences. Shared texts help students to internalize the use of the comprehension strategies. The goal is for students to transfer the use of the strategies when they read on their own.

In this way, teachers can ask guiding questions, which is a key strategy to help students focus on “structure-related elements of the text” (Roehling et al. 2017, 74).



Teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes.



## Research to Practice

*Exploring Reading* embeds **many opportunities for students to write about what they are reading**. Each lesson asks students to reflect orally, write about the essential question, and complete extension activities that include written responses. Graphic organizers, which can “aid in the selection of important information . . . and can illustrate how information can be organized in a meaningful way” (Roehling et al. 2017, 74) are provided in the student materials. In addition, levels 3–8 include Think Marks, a convenient tool that students cut out and use during each unit. The Think Marks allow students to stop and jot questions, connections, and ideas as they are reading.



### Complex Text and Leveled Text

Authentic reading experiences do not always fit the model of traditional leveling systems because there are so many text features to take into consideration. Consequently, students learn to read captions, headings, subheadings, text boxes, graphs, charts, and other text features that increase comprehension across a wide range of genres. It is important to provide students with a variety of texts, including challenging material that is explored with teacher support.

Fountas and Pinnell (2012) offer educators 10 text characteristics with which to measure text difficulty. Adding complexity to one of these characteristics may increase the Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading Level. Conversely, a text that is rigorous in one area but simple in another may have a lower Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading Level.

Lexile® levels are measured with an algorithm that places greater emphasis on syntactic and semantic challenges presented by a text. Consequently, word choice and sentence structure influence the Lexile level of a text.





## Research to Practice

The Lexile® range for each *Exploring Reading* level is listed below. The range of text for each level was determined through a combination of grade-level expectations for college and career readiness and actual student performance as measured by the Lexile scores of the 25th to the 75th percentile student (Metametrics 2017). This organization supports struggling readers as they access complex text.

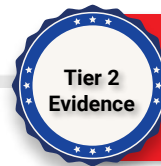
Exploring Reading Texts: Lexile Levels			
Exploring Reading Level	Lexile Range		
	No lower than	Target	No higher than
K	BR20L	60L to 130L	160L
1	BR	190L to 280L	530L
2	230L	420L to 580L	650L
3	360L	520L to 720L	820L
4	480L	740L to 830L	940L
5	620L	830L to 950L	1010L
6	690L	925L to 1020L	1070L
7	780L	970L to 1090L	1120L
8	820L	1010L to 1140L	1185L

## Multiple Reads

Marilyn Jager Adams (2009) writes, “to grow, our students must read lots, and more specifically they must read lots of ‘complex’ texts—texts that offer them new language, new knowledge, and new modes of thought” (182). Students must reread the same texts to focus on the different components that make it complex. Fisher and Frey’s (2008, 2012) body of research discusses the fact that to comprehend complex texts, students must read the same text multiple times with multiple purposes. Their research suggests that those purposes include reading for meaning, structure, language, and knowledge. Within these four purposes, teachers scaffold each of the multiple readings through questioning, collaboration, discussion, and writing. When discussing meaning, teachers must assess what the theme or main idea of the text is, whether there are multiple meanings of words or concepts within the reading, and whether the overall text will be understandable to the reader. This is also the time when the author’s purpose is included in discussions.

The complexity of structure depends on the genre, organization, and features of the text. This could be formatting issues, such as word placement on the page, graphics and captions, dialogue, or bulleted and bolded information. Vocabulary and language used in texts sometimes requires rereading to understand. The analysis of speech patterns, dialects, sentence structure, syntax, the use of figurative language, and academic vocabulary sometimes confuse the reader and must be addressed before another read is attempted. Comprehension research for teachers by Keene and Zimmerman (1997) and Harvey and Goudvis (2007) also addresses the fourth purpose of multiple reads: building schema and background knowledge for understanding.

For example, Bui and Fagen note that “students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may not be familiar with the mainstream narrative text structure” (2013, 66). To be culturally responsive, students should also be given opportunities to connect what they read to their personal experiences (Bui and Fagen 2013, 66). Engaging in multiple reads of a text allows teachers to build on prior knowledge, fill in gaps as needed, and give students the chance to more deeply connect with the concepts in the texts.



Provide students with opportunities to practice making sense of stretch text (i.e., challenging text) that will expose them to complex ideas and information.



## Research to Practice

The brevity of the TIME FOR KIDS® text cards provides students the opportunity to **read the same text multiple times**. Repeated routines guide students to read the TIME FOR KIDS® text cards for the following purposes:

### Levels K-2

- First Read: Apply the comprehension strategy to make meaning.
- Second Read: Read aloud to build fluency and notice text structure.
- Third Read: Remember important details, and prepare for discussion.

### Levels 3-6

- First Read: Apply the comprehension strategy to make meaning.
- Second Read: Annotate the text to focus on language, author’s craft, and deeper meanings.
- Third Read: Analyze text structure, and prepare for discussion.

# Engaging Higher-Order Thinking Skills

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## Learning to Read and Reading to Learn

Foundational skills, under the context of learning to read, include a basic understanding of print awareness, such as reading left to right and top to bottom, along with decoding words (Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn 2001). Once students have mastered the basics of identifying and calling out words, they move into what is often referred to as *reading to learn*. This involves simultaneously choosing and using comprehension strategies and metacognition as students interact with text (Harvey and Goudvis 2007; Keene and Zimmerman 1997).

Regardless of reading level or fluency, it is critical that teachers intentionally incorporate higher-order thinking skills into their instruction. Strategies such as those recommended by the Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governors Association Center for Best Practices include “close reading of text segments, to the interpretation and synthesis of multiple texts, to the questioning and challenging of authors’ arguments, and to citing specific textual evidence to support readers’ responses to the texts” (Afflerbach, Cho, and Kim 2015, 205). As teachers scaffold the practice of deep critical thinking, students gain confidence and skill in this practice and become increasingly more willing and competent at engaging in higher-order thinking on their own or with peers. In turn, this leads to helping them understand the world they reside in and to becoming successful critical thinkers and problem solvers.


## Thinking Through Discussion

Jim Burke (2001), in *Illuminating Texts*, discusses the confusion of students as they encounter text in society today. They must navigate biased news sources and unfiltered social media reports. Students in an ever-changing global society must be taught to read critically, think through the words they see and hear, and evaluate the evidence provided in the text by the author. This can happen as they simultaneously learn to read. Teachers can help students use higher-order skills and critical thinking from an early age by engaging students in asking questions and having collaborative discussions.

According to Harvey and Daniels (2009), “few kids can actually demonstrate their understanding of a concept if they have not been taught to think about the information” (28). They go on to write that “finding information means little if students cannot evaluate the usefulness of the information” (2009, 102). They, like Burke, believe that teachers must have students talking about what they are reading and working with others to develop the skills necessary to understand the complex text they will encounter as they become more thoughtful readers.


If teachers start discussions with students at a young age when reading aloud and discussing texts in whole-group contexts, students will begin to think about these

strategies at a higher level as they begin to read independently to gain new knowledge. Through collaborative discussions of what they read, students acquire skills that lead to improvement in comprehension of new texts. Lightner and Wilkinson report that studies have found that “discussion-based approaches to literacy instruction accompanied by high academic demands helped students internalize the knowledge and skills necessary to engage independently in challenging literacy tasks” (2017, 436).




## Research to Practice

*Exploring Reading* links fiction and nonfiction text through themes, called “big ideas.” These ideas are explored in each level as “essential questions.” **The big ideas and essential questions increase in sophistication across the levels.**



**Tier 1  
Evidence**

Consistently provide students with opportunities to ask and answer questions to better understand the text they read.



## Using Technology to Improve Reading

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It is important to integrate technology into purposeful instructional objectives. Technological tools, when used appropriately, support sound instructional practices. For instance, research has shown that listening while reading is an effective strategy for improving reading fluency (Hawkins et al. 2015, 49). Use of audio recordings with the written text provides two means of input for students.

In addition to these strategies, teachers can apply the SAMR model (Puentedura 2009) to create lessons and assignments that integrate technology in meaningful ways. SAMR stands for *substitution, augmentation, modification, and redefinition*. To use this model, imagine having the students write stories. Traditionally, they would write with paper and pencils. Applying SAMR, the assignment would change to a story written with a word processor (substitution), adding digital illustrations (augmentation), adding a movie clip of student commentary or dramatization (modification), and changing the assignment altogether by having students use presentation software or creating digital story maps (redefinition).



## Using Interactiv-eBooks

Interactiv-eBooks offer educators the unique opportunity to integrate technology into their curriculum for reading or content-area literacy instruction. Interactiv-eBooks guide students toward independent reading while exploring core concepts.

Teachers can determine whether to use Interactiv-eBooks in place of the print versions of books or to use them as a supplement. The implementation of Interactiv-eBooks will depend on the electronic resources available to both teachers and students (e.g., the availability of a projector or the number of student devices) and the method of use (e.g., whole-class, small-group, or individual-learning opportunities).

Interactiv-eBooks can enhance student learning in a variety of instructional settings, support English language acquisition, and further content and literacy learning. They include annotation tools, embedded audio recordings to model language and intonation, and recording tools for fluency practice. Each Interactiv-eBook includes multiple interactive activities that can be used to strengthen and support student acquisition of essential concepts.



Using Interactiv-eBooks in conjunction with print books allows teachers to demonstrate and model reading skills and strategies or teach content using the interactive features while students read and follow along in their own printed texts.

Integration of technology is not a substitute for effective teaching practice, but rather can be used to enhance proven strategies. Devices, software, and learning management systems are effective tools to scaffold learning, allow for increased independent learning, and provide multiple means for students to interact with texts and demonstrate understanding.



# Fluency and Comprehension

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## Reading Fluently

Fluency is the ability to orally read text with accuracy (without error), automaticity (quick and accurate recognition, or decoding, of words and phrases), and prosody (appropriate expression). It includes being able to break words into meaningful phrases known as *chunking*. Fluent oral reading allows students to focus on comprehension rather than individual word reading. Fluency is important during reading for several reasons. One of the top reasons is that fluent reading frees up cognitive space necessary for text comprehension and meaning-making. In 1998, Reid Lyon stated that teachers should “consider that a reader has only so much attention and memory capacity. If beginning readers read the words in a laborious, inefficient manner, they cannot remember what they read, much less relate the ideas to their background knowledge. Thus, the ultimate goal of reading instruction—for children to understand and enjoy what they read—will not be achieved” (16).

Vaughn and Linan-Thompson’s (2004) research focuses on the importance of fluency instruction. They state that it helps young children achieve automatic letter/sound/word recognition, transition from word-by-word reading to meaningful phrase reading that more closely resembles oral language, comprehend and interpret text, and focus attention primarily on meaning. Their research shows that oral reading fluency (ORF) norms are highly indicative of reading comprehension ability.

A seminal research study by Timothy Rasinski (2003, 2006) over the years has focused on the importance of fluency to comprehension. As word reading becomes automatic, students become fluent and can focus on comprehension (Rasinski 2003). To engage in comprehension monitoring or self-questioning during reading, students need to be able to attend to what they are reading instead of spending time on struggling over high-frequency sight words or trying to decode words. Reading fluency provides students with the attention to text that they require to be successful with text comprehension.

Explicit instruction in fluency can provide the necessary bridge between word identification and comprehension. A student’s ability to comprehend written text has been proven to be directly influenced by their word-recognition skills and their effortless fluent reading (Rasinski 2006). Fluency instruction is what allows teachers to move students from word calling to understanding. Fluency is the bridge between decoding and comprehension.



Provide purposeful fluency-building activities to help students read effortlessly.



## Research to Practice

*Exploring Reading* levels K-2 include fluency annotation activities. The teacher guides students to mark elements in the text that affect how it should be read. For example, in a level 2 lesson, students circle all the *agree* and *disagree* words, then read the two arguments with appropriate expression.

# Differentiating for Diverse Learners

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## **Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction**

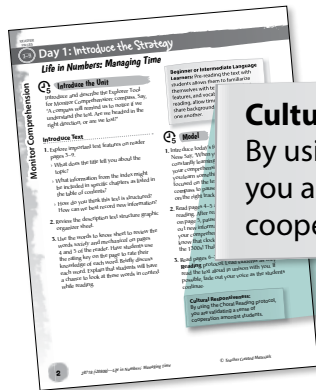
Culturally and linguistically responsive instruction refers to the practice of validating and affirming the cultural and linguistic behaviors of all students and then building and bridging those behaviors to success in academia and mainstream culture (Hollie 2018). This instruction allows teachers to respond to the diverse cultural and linguistic behaviors they may encounter in their classrooms, such as sociocentrism, communalism, and verbal overlapping (Hollie 2015). Including culturally and linguistically responsive instruction increases the probability of reaching all students, no matter their race, gender, age, economic level, religion, orientation, or ethnic identity (Delpit 1995; Hammond 2015).





## Research to Practice

The Cultural Responsiveness callouts in *Exploring Reading* support teachers in being culturally responsive during literacy instruction. The activities have been strategically selected to support **validating, affirming, building, and bridging** every lesson.



**Cultural Responsiveness:**  
By using the Choral Reading protocol, you are validating a sense of cooperation amongst students.

## English Learner Support

### Second Language Learning

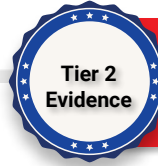
As students interact with the world they live in, they are exposed to language and the complexities of what constitutes a language. Language is how people communicate. Language as a form of communication is compounded by the lived experiences of children (Mora-Flores 2008).

The diversity of English learners makes the language-development process unique for each student. However, there are notable markers that can be identified as students progress from simple communication in a second language to a sophisticated articulation of academic language. Common patterns of language used as students progress through key stages of language development are described below.





## Research to Practice



Provide small-group instructional intervention to students struggling in areas of literacy and English language development.

In *Exploring Reading*, support for **Beginner or Intermediate Language Learners** is intended for students who are relatively new to the English language and have not yet mastered conversational English. This level may be described in some regions as *beginning* and *early intermediate*; *levels 1* and *2* (on a five-point scale); or *levels 1, 2, and 3* (on a six-point scale).

Support for **Intermediate or Advanced Language Learners** is intended for more experienced speakers of English. This level may be described in some regions as *early advanced* and *advanced*; *levels 3, 4, and 5* (on a five-point scale); or *levels 4, 5, and 6* (on a six-point scale). The Intermediate or Advanced group can also include students whose primary language is English but who struggle with academic language.

Teachers should review both levels of English-learner support in each *Exploring Reading* lesson to choose the differentiation options that best fit the needs of their specific students.

### Emerging

English learners at the emerging stages of second-language acquisition come into the language experience as effective communicators in primary languages other than English. The language process does not begin at this stage, but the emergence of a bilingual child can be noted. At this stage, English learners can express their needs and ideas through gestures and learned words and phrases. They engage in simple face-to-face conversations around familiar topics. Visuals help them both access information and demonstrate their ideas. Their understanding of the differences between their native languages and English is emerging as they are becoming aware of connections and differences across languages. English learners are speaking and writing in longer stretches of language that still contain frequent errors but use memorized and acquired vocabulary and syntax to begin to communicate their ideas with greater fluency.

### Intermediate

Learned language is progressing quickly at this stage, in which English learners are able to speak in phrases and short sentences that draw on learned and expanded vocabulary. They are able to use language across content areas and comprehend text at a level of strategic thinking, forming personal opinions and ideas, and referencing the text as evidence to their thinking (Hess 2013). English learners are deconstructing more complex language and discourses, such as writing across written genres and drawing meaning from complex texts. Accessing complex texts and writing for various purposes is supported with teacher scaffolds and explicit presentations of language.

Seminal research on second-language acquisition by Jim Cummins (1981) identifies a level of language fluency where English learners acquire a conversational level of fluency, a level of language acquisition he referred to as basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). At an intermediate level of language acquisition, students can be seen and heard using English fluently when engaging with peers and engaging in familiar, everyday contexts in English.

As students progress through the Intermediate stage, though they sound fluent in familiar contexts, they continue to need high levels of support in accessing and producing academic English. As students in this level interact with complex text and produce a range of written discourse, they are still in need of explicit language support across the curriculum.

### **Advanced/Bridging**

Jim Cummins (1981) expands on the notion of BICS to establish a more sophisticated level of language whereby English learners are developing greater fluency in using language for academic purposes. As a level of language development in which students are able to access, interpret, and produce academic English, Cummins noted the concept of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). An English learner with strong CALP demonstrates a level of English fluency where they can read, comprehend, understand, and write in English within a range of academic purposes. They learn, recall, and use discipline-specific vocabulary while continuing to build academic vocabulary to connect their ideas and express more abstract, conceptual thoughts. Though students may continue to make errors at this stage, they are errors that do not interfere with meaning. English learners at this stage are working toward a conceptualization of academic English that includes the challenging features of language as it is used within the academic disciplines of school (DiCerbo et al. 2014).



# The Importance of Oral Language and Discussion

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Talk is a powerful tool when developing language. Talk gives students opportunities to try out language, make errors, self-monitor, and fix their language to communicate effectively. As with any new skill the body undertakes, there is a great need to practice and to have multiple and varied opportunities to use the skill. When English learners are provided an opportunity to use language orally and in written form, they can practice the act of transferring their thinking into understood expressions of their thinking. As important as talk is for English learners to develop fluency, it should be coupled with language interactions. Talk alone will not provide students with the oral rehearsals that demonstrate the complexities of becoming fluent in a language. Students need to use language for authentic purposes, where they exchange language with others through oral discussions. Talking with others gives students immediate feedback to know whether their ideas are being understood and their use of language is effective. Without this exchange, students miss out on valuable feedback to develop their self-monitoring skills (Swain 1985). Discussions further offer students opportunities to learn from one another, both in ideas and language. To hear other language models and gain greater exposure to how people think and how those ideas can be translated into comprehensible output furthers the language-development process.

The exchange of language exposes students to different discourse patterns. When English learners engage in discussions with others, they are developing what Ervin-Tripp (1991) refers to as *linguistic capital* for forms of language, such as negotiating, persuading, questioning, and encouraging. What must be coupled with these language exchanges and authentic oral discourse is access to language supports that students can use to successfully engage in the discussion. Saunders, Goldenberg, and Marcelletti (2013) found that “communication and meaning should be used to motivate and facilitate second-language learners’ acquisition and use of targeted language functions and forms” (21). They emphasize that students should be encouraged to engage in meaningful exchanges and need ongoing explicit support to do so.

## Accessing Complex Text

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Complex texts are rich in language. The syntax, vocabulary, functions, and forms of language are so diverse within complex texts that it offers English learners access to strong language models. When complex texts are used with English learners, the quality of language used is stronger, as are the ideas presented. For example, when specific vocabulary is used, students gain a deeper understanding of the content at hand. The complexities of text in language, content, and ideas provide access to academic English, but it can also present challenges for English learners as the language patterns, words, and usage may be unfamiliar. English learners need support

to access the information presented through rich language if they are to comprehend it. Without meaning, thinking and language are interrupted. If students are lost in the language, they cannot access the content, and vice versa. To support English learners' access to complex text, Lily Wong Fillmore and Charles J. Fillmore (2012) recommend taking time to look deeply at shorter stretches of language in a complex text. Deconstructing language for English learners helps them comprehend what they are reading and, in turn, produce language to explain their thinking.



## Research to Practice



Build students' world and word knowledge so they can make sense of the text

In each unit of *Exploring Reading*, English learners engage with and extend their learning of language through **How Words Work**. These activities highlight vocabulary words, figurative language, and roots.

## Creating a Language-Rich Environment

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Learning is influenced by affective factors that have the potential to create barriers to acquiring new knowledge. When developing language, the environment must be one in which an English learner feels comfortable enough to try out language. As an English learner develops a second language, they will make errors. Making errors is part of a natural language-development process. If students are to feel successful in the language-learning process, the classroom environment must be one of respect, support, and encouragement from all members of the class and school community.

Access to peers who engage in discussions, as well as exemplars in the environment, facilitate language learning. The classroom must have visual and aesthetic resources to which students can refer when trying to draw meaning from text and oral language (Mora-Flores 2012). Word walls that include both academic and discipline-specific vocabulary, labeled items around the room, and sentence frames that guide students' use of language can have a positive impact on language learning.

## Conclusion

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To meet high standards and comprehend rigorous reading materials, students need different levels of support for digging deeper into texts. Reading challenging material helps students build robust reading skills (Shanahan, Fisher, and Frey 2012). Teachers can help students develop the reading skills they need to encounter any text by arming them with proven comprehension strategies, scaffolded instruction, and a range of texts.



*Exploring Reading* is a strategic, yearlong intervention curriculum that provides students with a variety of texts to support a wide range of reading experiences. It helps students learn to:

- master essential reading strategies
- integrate strategies to successfully comprehend complex fiction and nonfiction text
- apply strategies across a wide range of text types and lengths
- make abstract connections across content areas and genres

Developing strong reading comprehension skills is the foundation for learning across disciplines. In our culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, reading, not just for content but for deep understanding, hones the skills necessary to progress through the educational experience. Reading all genres across many disciplines helps students excel not only in academics, but also in relating to their peers and communities. Since language is the primary way we communicate, supporting students in reading comprehension helps them navigate their world and connect with others.

The *Exploring Reading* instructional materials have several key components:

- Focused Reading Instruction
- Components of Effective Intervention
- Differentiating for Diverse Learners (including Culturally Responsive Instruction and English Language Learner Support)
- The Instructional Setting (including Managing Reading Instruction and Using Technology to Improve Reading)

To best prepare students to be active participants in a global society, it is critical that they can understand challenging texts and make connections between ideas. *Exploring Reading* gives students the tools they need to learn about a vast array of topics and to connect with the global community in which they live.

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