

Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool

Core Knowledge Language Arts
Grades 3–5

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Non-Negotiables

Non-Negotiable 1

Anchor texts are worthy of students' time and attention: texts are of quality and are rigorous, containing rich academic language, meeting appropriate complexity criteria for each grade.

NN Metric 1A: Anchor texts* in the materials have the appropriate level of complexity for the grade as defined by the standards, according to quantitative and qualitative analysis. (Texts that are part of a series or chosen to build knowledge or for independent student reading should vary in complexity levels.)

* Anchor texts are texts used as the centerpiece of instructional time, distinct from varied texts students might read on their own for a variety of purposes.

All CKLA anchor texts are selected for both qualitative and quantitative complexity and have been analyzed for meaning, purpose, text structure, language clarity, and knowledge demands. In Grades 3–5, students are exposed to texts that are increasingly open to multiple interpretations and have many layers of meaning.

In Grade 3, student-read texts are intentionally literal and clear in language, and the form of writing is primarily contemporary. This reduces the level of cognitive demand required for reading so students can focus on comprehension. However, students simultaneously encounter above-grade level text through routine Read-Alouds. Grade 3 Read-Alouds have a quantitative complexity from Lexile 800L to 1100L, while texts in the Student Reader range in quantitative complexity from 540–860L.

In Grades 4 and 5, the language demands of texts increase. Students spend significantly more time considering the precise use of words, including figurative and ambiguous phrasing, starting with the first unit, *Personal Narratives*, and progressing throughout the year. In Grades 4 and 5, students exclusively read grade-level complex text that increases in complexity throughout the school year. Readers range in quantitative complexity from 610–1100L in Grade 4 to 880–1010L in Grade 5.

Anchor texts are worthy of students' time and attention: texts are of quality and are rigorous, containing rich academic language, meeting appropriate complexity criteria for each grade.

NN Metric 1B: Anchor texts in the materials are of publishable quality and worthy of especially careful reading; they include a mix of informational texts and literature.

CKLA provides high-quality original, authentic, and engaging texts. Student Readers in Grades 3–5 feature literary classics and specially commissioned, knowledge-rich texts by children's authors on topics such as the human body, world civilizations in the Middle Ages, chemistry, Native Americans, and U.S. history.

Informational texts build upon previous domains in earlier grades, asking students to delve into a topic with increasing focus. These texts also increase in complexity, both in terms of academic and domain-specific language. In these informational texts, students are increasingly required to analyze graphics and integrate information to understand scientific concepts or historical events.

CKLA students also read literary texts in various genres, including adapted fictional classics such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Treasure Island*, and *Adventures of Don Quixote*; personal narratives by authors such as Beverly Cleary, Rosa Parks, and astronaut Michael Massimino; poetry by William Carlos Williams, Langston Hughes, Pat Mora, and others. Literary texts range in complexity, offering students the opportunity to master figurative language, form, and other literary devices and preparing them to interpret and enjoy more advanced literary works such as Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which they encounter near the end of Grade 5.

Non-Negotiable 2

Materials provide opportunities for rich and rigorous evidence-based discussions and writing about texts to build strong literacy skills.

NN Metric 2A: At least 80% of all questions, tasks, and assignments in the materials are text-dependent, requiring students to draw on textual evidence to support both what is explicit as well as valid inferences from the text. The overwhelming majority of these questions and tasks are text-specific.

The overwhelming majority of questions, tasks, and assignments in CKLA materials are text-dependent. Students are asked in daily reading instruction, both in discussion and through short and longer-answer written responses, to answer text-dependent questions about literary and informational texts. These questions may be literal, inferential, or evaluative.

Literal questions assess students' recall of key details from the text. These are text-dependent questions that require students to paraphrase and/or refer back to the portion of the text where the specific answer is provided. Inferential questions ask students to infer information from the text and to think critically. These text-dependent questions require students to summarize and/or reference the portions of the text that lead to and support the inference they are making. Evaluative questions ask students to build on what they have learned from the text using analytical and application skills, often to form an opinion or make a judgment. These questions require students to paraphrase and/or cite the textual evidence that substantiates their argument or opinion.

Student writing frequently incorporates textual evidence. In many cases, students gather evidence from the text in graphic organizers or other tools that they consult when planning and drafting their work. Students also write in response to text in assignments that ask them to use textual evidence to support their argument or opinion. Activities that cover citation require students to identify the paragraph or page of the text on which they located the evidence for their work.

NN Metric 2B: Materials include frequent opportunities for evidence-based discussions and writing to support careful analyses, well-defended claims, and clear information about texts to address the analytical thinking required by the Standards at each grade level.

Every CKLA unit is based around key texts, and students are expected to refer to these texts consistently and coherently in their writing and discussions. Arguments, whether oral or written, must be founded in a clear understanding and analysis of text. For example, Grade 3 students learning about sea exploration write a paragraph from the perspective of a sailor on John Cabot's ship, stating their opinion of whether or not the hardships they experienced are worth the adventure or glory and citing examples from the text to support their response. Grade 5 students studying *Adventures of Don Quixote* write a four-paragraph persuasive essay arguing whether they believe Don Quixote's good intentions justify his often calamitous actions, using reasons and evidence from the text to support their claims.

Non-Negotiable 3

Materials build knowledge systematically through reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language study.

NN Metric 3A: Materials provide a sequence or series of texts that build knowledge and vocabulary systematically through reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These texts are organized around a variety of topics at each grade level.

CKLA is built upon a coherent Knowledge Sequence that is the result of years of research and consultation with content experts, educators, cognitive scientists, and others. The sequence is designed to build upon earlier content so that students become generally knowledgeable in the early grades and are able to rely on a robust web of prior knowledge when encountering new complex texts and material later in elementary school.

Students spend several weeks at a time learning about topics as varied as astronomy, geology, chemistry, Viking and ancient Roman civilizations, medieval empires across Europe and the Middle East, early American civilizations, and Native Americans. Knowledge about the topic is built up over the weeks, with a diverse range of speaking and listening, writing, and reading activities, providing repeated exposure to new vocabulary and ideas.

Units progressively increase in the complexity of language, content, and the demands on student responses through and across grade levels. Students build upon knowledge in prior domains both within and across grades. For example, Grade 3 students learn about Native American tribes and their connection to the environments in which they live, which offers Grade 5 students excellent background for learning about challenges Native Americans faced during Westward expansion and subsequent eras in American history. In this way, CKLA systematically structures knowledge domains so that students gain an increasingly deep understanding of topics.

NN Metric 3B: Materials provide instructions, clear design, and lightweight student accountability that guide instructors regarding how students will regularly engage in a volume of reading both assigned (related to the anchor texts) or texts of their own choosing, in or outside of class.

Students regularly engage in a volume of reading both assigned texts (related to the anchor texts) or texts of their own choosing, in or outside of class. Discussion questions and activity pages provide a source of accountability for independent reading, both in and outside of class. The CKLA Trade Book list provides a listing of recommended trade books that provide content and vocabulary reinforcement, along with fluency practice.

Alignment Criterion

Alignment Criterion 1

Materials reflect the distribution of text types and genres required by the Standards and are at the right text complexity for grade level, student, and task

AC Metric 1A: In Grades 3–5, materials shift the balance of texts and instructional time to 50% literature / 50% informational high-quality text.

CKLA includes a balance of texts and instructional time across Grades K–5. While the emphasis in Kindergarten is on familiar, literary text, the amount of informational text gradually increases, reaching at least 50% by Grade 3. CKLA students in the upper grades continue reading rich, robust works of literature—including poetry, drama, and fiction—but also read substantial, serious informational text, including primary sources.

AC Metric 1B: A large majority of texts included in the instructional materials reflect the text characteristics and genres that are specifically required by the Standards at each grade level.

CKLA units, designed around the Core Knowledge Sequence, expose students to a series of carefully sequenced, increasingly complex texts organized around rich domains of knowledge related to history, geography, science, world cultures and societies, and the arts. The knowledge sequence’s breadth of content ensures that students encounter authentic, relevant texts that reflect the text characteristics and genres specifically required by the Standards at each grade level. Throughout CKLA, students encounter both literary text—including fiction, poetry, and drama—and informational text—including technical diagrams and graphics; historical artifacts such as letters and diary entries; scientific writing that explains concepts in geology, astronomy, chemistry, and other scientific fields; and literary nonfiction such as personal narratives.

Although every grade includes units with an extensive literary focus (such as G3U1, *Classic Tales: The Wind in the Willows*; G4U8, *Treasure Island*; and G5U4, *Adventures of Don Quixote*), many units synthesize informational text and literature to offer a multi-genre approach to the unit’s domain content.

AC Metric 1C: Support materials for the anchor text(s) provide opportunities for students to engage in a range and volume of reading to achieve reading fluency of grade-level complex text as required by the Foundational Skills Standards.

Students practice fluency throughout Grades 3–5, both formally and informally through daily lesson activities. Students routinely read in different configurations, including independently and in small- and whole-group settings. Each student’s fluency is first evaluated in the Beginning-of-Year Assessment, and appropriate interventions are available to help teachers support students according to their specific need. The online unit-by-unit Assessment and Remediation Guide (Grade 3) and Decoding and Encoding Supplement (Grades 4 and 5) provide targeted remedial instruction for students struggling with foundational skills. The online Fluency Supplement consists of selections from a variety of genres, including poetry, folklore, fables, and other selections. These selections provide additional opportunities for students to practice reading with fluency and expression (prosody).

Alignment Criterion 2

Materials support students in building reading comprehension, in finding and producing the textual evidence to support their responses, and in developing grade-level academic language.

AC Metric 2A: High-quality sequences of text-dependent questions are prevalent in the materials and build to a deep understanding of the knowledge and central ideas of the text.

In daily reading instruction students are asked, both in discussion and through short and longer-answer written responses, to answer text-dependent literal, evaluative, and inferential questions about literary and informational texts. Students frequently return to the same passages multiple times for deeper analysis.

CKLA includes explicit instructions for utilizing a close reading approach with particular excerpts from the Student Readers. These lessons are carefully crafted to focus students' reading and help them derive deeper meaning through close examination of the text. Throughout CKLA, but particularly in close reading lessons, students consider the precise choices that have been made in texts and the effect these have. This varies from precise analysis with clear correct answers (such as the use of particular technical terms) to more subtle interpretations (such as the effect of literary devices in poems and plays). Students often return to the same text multiple times to further their understanding, including in specific close reading lessons.

AC Metric 2B: Questions and tasks in the materials support students in understanding the academic language (vocabulary and syntax) prevalent in complex texts.

CKLA exposes students to rich domain-specific vocabulary and general academic vocabulary. The texts and associated instructional materials within each unit provide repeated exposure to, and experiences with, selected vocabulary words embedded within domains of knowledge related to history, geography, science, culture, and the arts. Each domain-based unit spans approximately three weeks of instruction, during which students read a variety of unique texts. This approach allows for the domain immersion needed to acquire new vocabulary as well as breadth and depth of domain knowledge. Through repeated exposure to words in each unit, students implicitly gain a greater understanding of many different words.

Tier 2 academic vocabulary has been targeted for intentional focus in each unit. Academic vocabulary words support reading comprehension and may appear across a variety of materials in language arts and in content areas. Understanding academic vocabulary may contribute to improved performance on assignments and assessments, as these words appear often in directions to students. Where applicable, these words are used throughout the unit, not just as they might refer to reading selections but also with regard to spelling, grammar, morphology, and comprehension. They may also appear in directions, assessments, spelling lists, and discussion questions, among other places. Such appearances reinforce student mastery of these words.

Materials support students in building reading comprehension, in finding and producing the textual evidence to support their responses, and in developing grade-level academic language.

AC Metric 2C: Materials focus on argument and informative writing in the following proportions. Alternately, they may reflect blended forms in similar proportions (e.g., exposition and persuasion):

Grades 3–5

Exposition 35%

Opinion 30%

Narrative 35%

CKLA students write multiple texts in each major text type, and writing instruction is integrated with reading instruction. Writing projects vary between rapid daily writing (e.g., in journals), single-sitting writing prompts, and long projects taught and implemented over multiple sittings. Although some assignments do offer blended forms, the program asks students to produce writing in the required text type proportions.

AC Metric 2D: Materials support students' developing writing skills over the course of the school year. This includes writing opportunities that are prominent and varied.

CKLA students routinely write over a single sitting or two as well as over extended time (including research, reflection, and revision) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences. Writing lessons include multiple opportunities for peer collaboration and teacher scaffolding. In addition to specific writing lessons, there are numerous writing opportunities throughout the CKLA program. For example, students regularly engage in writing short answers in response to text-based questions. In these writing opportunities, students focus on the use of evidence from the text and individual sentence construction. Students in each grade also work on longer, multi-lesson writing projects in each major text type, which allows them to practice working on the various steps of the writing process and to take a piece from the research and planning stages through drafting, revising and editing in response to feedback, and publishing their work.

AC Metric 2E: Materials integrate speaking and listening into lessons, questions, and tasks and build in frequent opportunities for collaborative discussions.

One goal of the CKLA program is fostering “wonderful conversationalists.” While discussing engaging, content-rich texts, students develop the ability to present, debate, and build upon each others' responses. Their excitement in mastering content fosters intense curiosity. CKLA integrates speaking and listening into lessons by providing numerous opportunities to engage in rich, structured, text-based conversations in a variety of settings and group sizes. For example, during writing lessons, students often take turns presenting their writing to partners, small groups, or the whole class, and they follow those presentations with rich and constructive conversations about the writing.

Speaking and Listening activities in Grade 3 focus on engagement with Read-Alouds: students hear and discuss complex texts that the teacher reads aloud, encountering and practicing sophisticated conversations using an ever-expanding vocabulary. Throughout Grades 4–5, Speaking and Listening activities become substantially more varied and complex. Although some lessons still include Read-Alouds, students also deliver complex presentations, engage in class debates, develop acting performances from texts, and pitch new inventions.

Materials support students in building reading comprehension, in finding and producing the textual evidence to support their responses, and in developing grade-level academic language.

AC Metric 2F: Materials include explicit instruction of the grammar and conventions standards for grade level as applied in increasingly sophisticated contexts, with opportunities for application both in and out of context.

The units in Grades 3–5 include explicit language instruction. Students learn and apply the conventions of English grammar, punctuation, and spelling through explicit instruction, targeted practice activities, and daily writing. Students apply concepts both in and out of context, and they learn to implement these concepts in drafting, revising, and editing their own writing.

AC Metric 2G: Materials address grade-level standards for foundational skills by providing instruction and diagnostic support in phonics, word recognition, and fluency through a research based and transparent progression to develop proficient readers.

By Grade 3, students in CKLA have learned all basic and advanced code spellings. In Grades 3–5, students continue to apply these skills daily, decoding words and reading with accuracy. The online unit-by-unit Assessment and Remediation Guide (Grade 3) and Decoding and Encoding Supplement (Grades 4 and 5) may be used to provide targeted remedial instruction to students who are struggling with foundational skills.

In Grade 3, students review key Foundational Skills. Students are also given opportunities throughout the unit to practice reading independently and with partners, as well as to demonstrate oral fluency.

Alignment Criterion 3

Materials build students' knowledge across topics and content areas.

AC Metric 3A: Materials regularly ask students to complete culminating tasks in which they demonstrate their knowledge of a topic.

Because CKLA instruction focuses on knowledge domains, students gain deep, sophisticated awareness of many diverse topics spanning literature, culture, history, and science. Students demonstrate and extend the knowledge they have gained through CKLA lessons through culminating tasks for each unit, which regularly integrate student learning about writing and speaking while developing a deeper understanding of the content. For example, after studying *Treasure Island*, Grade 4 students compose their own adventure narratives, while Grade 5 students complete a codex that reflects the information they have learned about ancient Maya, Inca, and Aztec communities.

AC Metric 3B: Materials require students to engage in many short, focused research projects annually to develop students' knowledge in a range of areas and to enable students to develop the expertise needed to conduct research independently.

CKLA students engage in a variety of research projects. Low-stakes research activities instill best practices that students will apply for longer projects; for example, students often complete graphic organizers to collect information from sources, then incorporate research in their writing. Students learn to gather information from print and digital media; they also use a variety of sources. Students practice recording source information and creating reference lists to document those sources.

AC Metric 3C: Materials include a cohesive, year-long plan for students to interact with and build academic vocabulary and increasingly sophisticated syntax.

The Core Knowledge Sequence has been intentionally developed to further deepen students' vocabulary. CKLA students receive explicit vocabulary instruction, but because they are immersed in rich content domains, they also encounter a wide range of vocabulary related to those domains. As CKLA students acquire knowledge of diverse topics in science, social studies, and the arts, they also inevitably acquire the vocabulary necessary to speak about those topics with clarity, depth, and nuance.

In Grade 3, students in CKLA are exposed to above grade-level Read-Alouds daily. These allow students to encounter, use, and practice domain-specific vocabulary on a topic over several weeks. Academic vocabulary is also learned implicitly, with opportunities and instructions to use Tier 2 vocabulary throughout the lessons. Much of this vocabulary is then encountered in written text in the Grade 3 Student Readers. By Grades 4 and 5, students gain most of their vocabulary through reading complex texts. Again, they encounter new academic and domain-specific vocabulary in context through knowledge-rich, engaging texts.

A brief Word Work activity (based on research of Beck, McKeown, and Kucan, 2002) follows most reading lessons. This activity provides in-depth focus on a specific vocabulary word from the text. Students review the word, its meaning, its part of speech, and an additional context for using the word. Finally, students complete a follow-up activity to extend their understanding of the targeted word.

Alignment Criterion 4

Materials are designed to provide thoughtful supports/scaffolds to support all students in accessing the CCSS.

AC Metric 4A: Teachers and students can reasonably complete the core content within a regular school year to maximize students' learning.

CKLA is appropriately paced for school schedules, with a reasonable number of lessons and some flexible instructional components. For example, through additional Pausing Point days included in every unit, CKLA builds in time teachers may use at their discretion to review, reinforce, extend, and/or assess content and skills.

AC Metric 4B: Materials regularly provide all students, including those who read, write, speak, or listen below grade level, or whose first language is other than English, with extensive opportunities to work with and meet grade-level standards.

Access supports are integrated into each lesson segment and offer in-the-moment strategies teachers may use to support English Learners at five different levels. These supports align to the lesson objectives and are therefore specific to the mastery of standards for the lesson. Lesson segments also include frequent Support sidebars for providing additional support for the lesson content. The Universal Access section of each lesson's Advance Preparation component includes additional strategies that go beyond the instructional materials to support the needs of all students.

In addition, the online unit-by-unit Assessment and Remediation Guide (Grade 3) and Decoding and Encoding Supplement (Grades 4 and 5) may be used to provide targeted remedial instruction to students who are struggling with foundational skills. Fluency Packets provide additional practice for fluency and expression.

AC Metric 4C: Materials regularly include extensions and/or more advanced opportunities for students who read, write, speak, or listen above grade level.

CKLA provides multiple opportunities for challenge and enrichment. In-lesson Challenge sidebars offer stretching questions and activities within the lesson. Lessons provide frequent suggestions for students to delve more deeply into the material. These include guidelines for independent and small group research that can be extended by asking for alternative sources or deeper analysis. Writing tasks provide additional opportunities for extension, including prompts to use more complex and descriptive vocabulary; incorporate figurative language into their writing; write multi-clause sentences with more complex joining words; create longer or richer opinion, explanatory, and narrative pieces; and evaluate the use of informational textual characteristics and implement them in their own writing (e.g., headers, bullets).

Student Readers frequently include additional stories/chapters which may be used for enrichment, practice, and/or assessment. The Student Activity Books offer a large range of additional activities, with instructional guidance in the Pausing Point section of Teacher Guides. Extension activities within the Pausing Points provide a large range of additional independent and collaborative learning opportunities. These include large group activities such as rehearsing and performing Read-Alouds, plays, and other literary works in front of an audience.

Materials are designed to provide thoughtful supports/scaffolds to support all students in accessing the CCSS.

AC Metric 4D: Materials regularly and systematically build in the time, resources, and suggestions required for adapting instruction to allow teachers to guide all students to meet grade-level standards (e.g., alternative teaching approaches, pacing, instructional delivery options, suggestions for addressing common student difficulties, remediation strategies).

CKLA lessons provide suggestions for small group and partnering opportunities that can be arranged based on student need. Within daily lessons, supports designed to give all students in-the-minute support to access activities are provided in sidebars. Specific supports designed to support reading comprehension and effective expression in writing accompany Reading and Writing lesson segments.

Tiered Access supports are integrated into each lesson segment. These supports are both specific to the mastery of standards for the lesson and aligned to Primary Focus objectives. They provide suggestions for adjusting the pacing of instruction, including specific guidance and instruction for academic and domain-specific vocabulary, and offering deeper support for syntactic awareness; and suggest instructional tools to adjust required modes of participation, expressive language demands, and timing/immediacy of support.

Lesson segments also include frequent Support sidebar suggestions that provide guidance for offering additional support for accessing lesson content. Additional strategies that go beyond the instructional materials to support the needs of all students are included in the Universal Access section of Advance Preparation, where applicable.

Additional resources are available in the online Assessment and Remediation Guide and Encoding and Decoding Supplement. Teachers may use flexible Pausing Point days to reteach and differentiate as needed. These Pausing Point days occur with every unit, ensuring that students may receive remediation before the class progresses to another unit of study.

AC Metric 4E: Materials regularly and systematically offer assessment opportunities that genuinely measure progress on reading comprehension and writing proficiency as well as on mastery of grade level standards. This progress includes gradual release of supporting scaffolds for students to measure their independent abilities.

CKLA has a progression of moment-by-moment to benchmark assessments. In-lesson checks for understanding are designed to adjust instruction within the context of the lesson. Formative assessments range from in-the-moment adaption to opportunities for individual, small group, and whole class reteaching and review. These also provide information to decide whether additional support and practice are appropriate.

Mid-unit, end-of-unit, and benchmark assessments can be used to direct remediation and differentiate instruction. Assessment and feedback give the necessary inputs to differentiate instruction effectively, from informal and minute-by-minute opportunities, to lessons designed to remediate, enrich, and offer targeted practice. The program also includes materials to record, track, and evaluate student progress.

Students complete three benchmark assessments in Grades 3–5: beginning-of-year, middle-of-year, and end-of-year. Students are offered additional support and remediation depending on their performance. The program also includes materials to record, track, and evaluate student progress.

Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts

